"The news devalues me": (Mis)trust in the news and the significance of shared realities

A qualitative audience perception study of Sweden during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Abstract

Although news trust in Sweden is considered among the highest in Europe (Strömbäck, 2021, p. 6), there are perceptions it is today being challenged. This research aims to understand trust patterns and what motivates six individuals' levels of trust in the news. The study is based on qualitative interviews with individuals defined as news sceptics. The research questions deal with two areas. First, they are about which elements and dimensions informants consider concerning their motives for low trust in news. Second, they are about the importance of social context and shared reality.

A central finding is that all of the participants have experienced a feeling of being accused or devalued by the news. This feeling of being threatened as outsiders is suggested as a key to news scepticism. The shared reality theory, as explained by Higgins (2019) and Echterhoff (2012), has been of great value in understanding what motivates participants' trust. The results also show that the COVID-19 pandemic has decisively affected the participants' trust in the news.

Keywords: *media scepticism, mistrust, qualitative audience study, shared reality theory, traditional news, trust,*

We are not, of course, all required to think the same way about big questions, or believe the same things, or hold the same values; in fact, it is expected that we won't. But somehow or other, we need to have acquired some very basic, shared understanding about what causes what, what's broadly desirable, what's dangerous, and how to characterize what's already happened. (Rosenfeld, 2019)

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1. INTRODUCTION

Trust in media among Swedish audiences is among the highest in Europe (Strömbäck, 2021, p. 6). Nevertheless, there have been suggestions that media trust has been declining globally for at least a decade (ibid. p. 1). Furthermore, disinformation has increased globally during the COVID-19-pandemic, which was officially declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11th, 2020. The WHO refers to the phenomenon as an "infodemic", or the dissemination of too much information, including false or misleading information (World Health Organization, 2022).

During the pandemic, I noticed a significant change concerning trust in news in my networks on social media. There have always been some news-sceptical voices; however, during the pandemic they became more numerous and louder. This raised concerns and questions, and I wondered how to understand these people, which prompted a desire to study this phenomenon.

1.1. Journalism and democracy

Journalism arose simultaneously with the first modern democratic societies (McNair, 2009, p. 237). The narrative about journalism's contribution to democracy is based upon the duty to select (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 328) and produce unbiased fact-based news that citizens need to remain informed and participate in a democratic society (Ryfe, 2019, pp. 294–295). Journalism's democratic commitments are also central to the self-conception of journalists (ibid. p. 293).

Given the enormous amount of information circulating today, journalism has the essential role of filtering and identifying important information that the public needs to be aware of. This reduces the effort required for citizens to stay informed (van Dalen, 2019, p. 364). Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional media has played a crucial role in both communicating the new reality and constructing it (Kopecka-Piech & Łódzki, 2022, p. 2).

Furthermore, a certain level of distrust indicates a healthy democratic society (Engelke, Hase & Wintterlin, 2019, p. 66). However, to communicate about societal matters like the pandemic and fulfil its democratic obligations, such as being a watchdog vis à vis political institutions, trust is necessary for the legitimacy of journalism (van Dalen, 2019, pp. 356,

363). Furthermore, to inform people, media must be both widely used and widely trusted (Strömbäck, 2021, p. 1). Also, as suggested by Couldrys (2005), media has the role of "'stand[ing] in', or appear[ing] to 'stand in', for something wider, something linked to the fundamental organisational level on which we are, or imagine ourselves to be, *connected*, as members of society" (ibid. p. 4).

1.2. The aim, research questions and contribution

In this thesis, I will focus on qualitatively studying six individuals I perceived as sceptical of mainstream news because of what they shared on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic between spring 2020 and spring 2022. One goal is to understand their trust patterns and determine what motivates their trust in news published by traditional media. The four research questions (RQ) are:

RQ 1: What *dimensions* are informants considering concerning their primary motives for low trust in news? This will be analysed using Kohring and Matthes' (2007) four dimensions for trust in journalism: "trust in theme selectivity", "trust in fact selectivity", "trust in the correctness", and "trust in the weighing and evaluations of information".

RQ 2: What *elements* are informants considering concerning their main motives for low trust in news? This will be analysed according to the three possible elements influencing the evaluation of trustworthiness intention, integrity and competence (Blöbaum, 2016, p. 10).

RQ 3: What role do social context and other people play concerning trust in news according to the informants? This will be analysed using the shared reality theory (e.g., Higgins, 2019), which is based on the idea that people mainly create their perceptions with others.

RQ 4: What values are common to all people in society according to the informants? The point of this RQ is informed by media's role in standing for something broader that connects citizens as members of society (Couldry, 2005). It aims to determine whether there are any values, according to the interviewees, that are essential for news journalism to observe as narrators of a reality shared by all citizens. This will be analysed using the shared reality theory (e.g., Higgins, 2019).

The method used is qualitative interviews which took place in the spring of 2022. The motive for the research is to acquire more knowledge of what might increase confidence in news journalism. I hope this study will contribute to knowledge of trust patterns in news-sceptical individuals who, to my knowledge, have no other prominent channel for making their voice heard. The timing of this essay also adds qualitative insight into how the COVID-19 pandemic affected these individuals' trust in the news. Furthermore, the use of shared reality theory in this thesis to understand the role of other people and groups concerning trust in news is a previously unexplored area. As such, this thesis proposes a new theoretical model: the model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news. This model will be tested by applying it to the material acquired via the interviews.

1.3. Definitions

Traditional news

In this thesis, the term "news" refers to professional, traditional, quality and mainstream news journalism such as newspapers, television and radio. It can be used in its traditional forms, digitally or through different gates of social media. If alternative news is referred to, it will be noted.

News trust

Arjen van Dalen defines "news trust" with keywords such as "expectation", "societal function", "fourth estate", and "a relational concept":

> Trust in the press not only refers to the expectation that the media will provide reliable information but also to the expectation that they fulfil a broader societal function in a satisfactory way, such as holding other institutions accountable as a fourth estate and facilitating a well-functioning public sphere. Trust is a relational concept, as the degree of trust in the press is just as much determined by the news media (the trustee) and by the public (the trustor). (van Dalen, 2019, p. 357)

Objects of trust

Studies on trust should highlight the specific object of trust (Engelke, Hase & Wintterlin 2019, p. 76), and objects of trust can focus on distinguishing different levels. Blöbaum (ibid.), and Engelke, Hase and Wintterlin (2019, p. 76) suggest a differentiation between *the system*

(journalism), *the institution* (news media), *the person* (journalist) and *the journalistic pieces* (e.g., article) (ibid.).

Figure 1: Object of trust

Performance of the system	Representative of the system	Organisation of the system	System
Journalistic article	Journalist	Medium/ editorial department	Media/ journalism
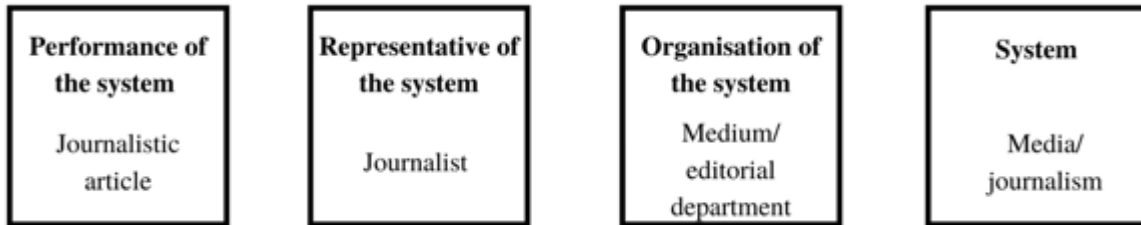
(Blöbaum, 2016, p. 8)

In this study, the object of trust under investigation is primarily news journalism, which generally refers to the "performance of the system: journalistic article", and secondarily "organisation of the system: medium/editorial department". Nevertheless, since this is a qualitative study and the interviews are conducted openly, the object of the different participants' address is also considered.

Mistrust and media scepticism

The opposite of trust can be conceptualized as mistrust, distrust or media scepticism (Strömbäck, 2021, p. 141; Engelke, Hase & Wintterlin 2019, p. 68). Media scepticism is a generalised negative attitude and feeling of alienation towards mainstream media, including the perception that journalists are not fair, that they do not tell the whole story and that they might sacrifice accuracy for personal or commercial gains (ibid. p. 70).

1.4. Delimitations

The qualitative nature of this study and its limited sample provide little space for generalizations. The focus is on Swedish media and a specific sample of individuals with lower trust in the news than Swedish news audiences overall. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the interviewees spontaneously focused on news of pandemic-related issues. Also, the concept of trust in the news had been widely discussed before the pandemic in the context of "fake news" and "alternative facts", and this may have affected how individuals think of the concept (ibid. p. 77). Furthermore, this thesis does not aim to quantify or compare different groups and countries and does not measure trust longitudinally. It also does not aim to take a normative stance.

1.5. Structure

First, the field of previous qualitative audience studies concerning trust will briefly be outlined. The concept of trust and the shared reality will then be explained from a theoretical perspective. Based on the theory presented, I propose a model that I have developed: the model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news. This model is a way to illustrate the relation between trust theories and the shared reality theory used in this thesis. Subsequently, the methodology, research sample and ethical concerns are introduced. In the Analysis and results-chapter the main findings are presented. The main findings will also be discussed and placed within the model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news as a way to test the model I have proposed. The main findings will be summarised in the concluding discussion, and the research questions will be answered.

2. EARLIER RESEARCH

Since this is an audience study on trust, audience studies will be described in the following subchapter. Previous qualitative audience research concerning trust will then be presented.

2.1. Audience research

Audiences are often taken for granted "as, implicitly, an invisible and indivisible mass" (Livingstone, 2015, p. 439). The audience tends to be "implied" instead of actively studied: "Implied audiences lurk behind a host of homogenizing nouns (market, public, users, citizens, and people) and nominalized verbs (diffusion, adoption, culture, practice, mediation, identity, and change) that mask their agency, diversity, life contexts, and interests at stake" (ibid. p. 440). Audience research puts human experience at the centre of the investigation. It allows researchers to "examine what people get out of the media, what people like (and don't like) and why" (Stokes, 2021, p. 226). Significantly, audience research can "represent the voice of the audience" by "evaluating media performance from an audience perspective", "charting audience motives for choice and use", and "uncovering audience interpretations of meaning" (McQuail & Deuze, 2020, pp. 442–443).

The communication between users and creators "generates the meanings that are at the heart of all culture" (Stokes, 2021, p. 226). The British Cultural Studies paradigm contributed to the view that audiences are "powerful interpreters of meaning" (ibid., p. 225), and the approach to audience studies closest to that of this thesis is the culturalist (reception) tradition (McQuail & Deuze, 2020, p. 446), which is characterized as follows:

- The media is read through the perceptions of an audience that constructs meaning.
- An understanding that audiences can comprise communities where people make sense of media together.
- The qualitative method accounts for reception and context together (ibid.).

Also, "much of the audience experience is personal, small-scale and integrated into social life and familiar ways" (ibid., p. 439). Some qualitative studies that take the personal and relational into account are presented below.

Qualitative audience studies related to news trust

In an audience study based on 35 semi-structured interviews of uses and users of anti-system alternative media, Schwarzenegger (2021) contributes to a deeper understanding of users of left-leaning, right-leaning, Russian-tied and/or conspiracy spectrum alternative media. He emphasises that "the audience and users of alternative media remain widely unknown" (ibid. p., 101) and notes "audiences still remain the neglected foster child of research into alternative media" (ibid., p. 102). His study found that the participants were not as "black or white" in their views as their media consumption might indicate. Instead, they are described as "grey", and the results highlight that "the users of alternative media cannot simply be classified based on the orientation or content of the platforms they tend to use. Instead, their motives, practices, and identification with the alternative media are varied and ambivalent" (ibid., p. 100). Schwarzenegger reminds us that anti-systemness can be, but is not necessarily, populist (ibid., p. 101). The informants had different motives for using alternative media, and they could not be classified based on the content they were taking part in; in terms of the relational aspect, media use did not necessarily convert to a community. However, "there are also cases in which the cosy experience of belonging and sharing commonalities is crucial, and can become even more important than the alternative news per se" (ibid.. p. 106). Furthermore, the author also found that scepticism of mainstream media rarely turned into hostility or reproaches of wilful manipulation. It was common that the informants also handled the alternative press with distanced scepticism (ibid., p. 104).

Another audience study conducted by Noppari, Hiltunen and Ahva (2019) based on 24 semi-structured interviews explored how and why Finnish users consume and engage with populist counter media, which was defined as alternative media with reactive and confrontational stances towards the dominant public sphere. This study demonstrated that the feeling of being marginalized or alienated by traditional media was a key to media distrust among interviewees who felt their views and opinions were not represented by traditional media (ibid., p. 33). The authors argued democratic corporatist media systems have an underlying tendency of political and societal consensus that traditional media have supported. In Sweden, there is discussion of a perceived corridor of opinion and a lack of certain kind of news (ibid.). Another conclusion is that scepticism and mistrust of traditional media journalism are typical motives for engaging with populist counter media (ibid.). However, like Schwarzenegger, they found that motives among the users of populist counter-media are varied, and the study distinguishes between three different user profiles. There are the *system*

sceptics, who see journalism as a tool for political and economic elites to maintain their power, the *agenda critics*, who think "media elites" have their ideological agenda projected onto journalism and the *casually discontent*, who think that individual journalists are causing biases in journalism and critique the tabloidization and commercialisation of journalism (ibid., p. 29). The authors suggest that how trust and mistrust in media are constructed among different audience groups needs further focus from media scholars to understand better how people navigate a complex media ecosystem (ibid., p. 34).

Swart and Broersma (2022) conducted 55 semi-structured interviews with young people in the Netherlands and developed a taxonomy of people tactics to approximate the reliability of news. They argue that an understanding of how individuals manage news trust in today's complex media landscape should not be based upon ideals of informed citizenship but on people's experiences and practices (ibid., p. 396). They also note that little is known about how individuals experience the complexity of trusting news or their practices of judging what feels credible (Noppari, Hiltunen & Ahva, 2019, p. 398). The authors, therefore, take a user-centric approach with in-depth interviews and an exercise with cards where other news can be graded. They aim to understand both the users' conscious and unconscious views and how these influence their opinions about how credible news is (Swart & Broersma, 2022, p. 398). Swart and Broersma emphasize that trust in news is intuitive and depends on feelings of inclusion and perceptions of inclusion and argue that scholars must take individuals' tacit knowledge into account to understand how trust in news is constructed in individuals (ibid., p. 400).

Notably, Noppari, Hiltunen and Ahva (2019) emphasize that the feeling of being marginalized or alienated by traditional media is a key to media distrust, and Swart and Broersma (2022) assert that news trust depends on feelings of inclusion and perceptions of inclusion. This finding will also be investigated in this thesis. Furthermore, like Schwarzenegger, I emphasise that the audience has different motives to justify their choice of news sources, and nuances and the diversity of motives concerning trust are essential considerations.

3. Theoretical framework

The following chapter will present the theories that are used in this thesis. First, some historical background and trends on trust are reviewed. Subsequently, some strategies of systematizing motives and elements for trust are offered. Relevant theories to encompass the relational and shared aspects of trust are then explained. Finally, the model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news is presented.

3.1. Trust

Trust is a process (Blöbaum, 2016) that mainly attracts attention when threatened (ibid., p. 3). The erosion of trust is a frequent theme throughout history As the antique writer Sophocles observed, "trust dies, but mistrust blossoms" (ibid.) This is not unusual considering that trust has a major significance for social life (ibid.). Social entities, like societies, require trust to function (Blöbaum, 2016, p. 4), and trust is also seen as a prerequisite to liberal democracy. The English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) proclaimed that men "live upon trust, which enhances their capacity to cooperate" (Misztal, 1996, p. 252). Previously, trust was primarily based on small-scale social relationships such as family and friends (Blöbaum, 2016, p. 4). During the nineteenth century, the notion of trust as a function of personal interactions became more abstract (ibid.), and Blöbaum has described the "process of trust" in the new digital conditions (Blöbaum, 2016).

In "Trust of Modern Societies: The Search for the Bases of Social Order" (1996), sociology Professor Barbara A. Misztal declares that the social consensus of the 1950s and 1960s has long been undermined (ibid., p. 209). Misztal conceptualizes trust "as a social mechanism explained by people's beliefs and motivations" (Misztal, 1996, pp. 18–19). She argues that in complex societies with individualistic, pluralistic and heterogeneous social networks, trust should not be taken for granted but must be actively produced. Since responsible conduct and trust hold people together, more attention must be placed on the relationships between people (ibid., p. 275).

Trends concerning trust
According to van Dalen (2019), three global societal trends raise questions for the study of trust and credibility of news and make it essential to investigate the potential increase of scepticism towards mainstream news (2019, p. 367). First, the rise of authoritarian populism

has led to growing anti-elitism toward the mainstream media. Second, the fragmentation and polarization of media audiences limit the reach of mainstream media. Third, fading boundaries around the journalistic profession challenge the position of professional journalism as the primary provider of information on the most important events (ibid.).

A decline in trust in news?

Concerns about a decline in trust in the press are present in different parts of the world, and it is has been asserted that fewer citizens trusting mainstream media creates a climate without agreement on what trustworthy information is (ibid., p. 356). In such a situation, conspiracy theories and misinformation might be perceived to be as credible as journalism (ibid.). Fletcher and Nielsen (2017, p. 13) argue that trust in news media has been decreasing globally for many years, and in many countries less than half of the population agree they trust most news most of the time. This decline is most clearly observed in the United States (van Dalen, 2019, p. 356). However, the United States is not representative, and Strömbäck (2021, p. 5) argues that there is no general trend toward a decline in media trust: instead, trust tends to be stable. Europe, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands have relatively higher media trust than most other countries (ibid., p. 6). Furthermore, Strömbäck notes concerns about scholars using broad measures of general news media questions, because this provides an inaccurate picture (Strömbäck et al., 2020, p. 140). People express lower trust when asked about unspecified media than when the press is specified, which suggests that studies with broad unspecific measures overestimate the decline in media trust and underestimate how much trust people have in media (ibid., p. 140).

Generally, low media trust does not seem to be related to age, gender or levels of education but is equally observed in all groups (Strömbäck, 2021, p. 6). However, there is evidence of a relationship between trust in politics, such as trust in the parliament, and trust in the news (ibid.).

Elements that influence trust in news

The complexity of modern societies requires trust as a form of "complexity reduction" (Blöbaum, 2016, p. 4). However, news journalism reporting on events occurring in other parts of society complicates the study of trust. When an article refers to political action, it is not only journalism that can influence trust but also political actors, politics as a whole and the institutions involved (ibid. p. 9).

When analysing trust in the news, the term *selectivity* is crucial, because news media cannot provide comprehensive information on all issues but must selectively inform citizens (Kohring & Matthes, 2007, p. 239). The following subsection presents some key features, elements and dimensions concerning trust that will later be used in the analysis.

Four dimensions of trust in journalism

Scholars including Blöbaum (2016, p. 7) and Engelke, Hase and Wintterlin (2019, p. 68) refer to recipients' trust in journalism as consisting of four dimensions, as Kohring & Matthes (2007) have suggested:

- Trust in *theme selectivity* refers to the selection of news relevant to recipients.
- Trust in *fact selectivity* concerns the notion that relevant information on selected themes, including background information, is provided.
- Trust in *the accuracy of descriptions* relates to the notion that facts are correct and reporting is credible.
- Trust in *explicit evaluations* refers to the classification and weighing of information communicated through journalism.

Three elements that influence the perception and evaluation of the trustor

Whether journalism is perceived as trustworthy depends on the perception and evaluation of the trustor (Blöbaum 2016, p. 13). Some elements that influence trust and are relevant to this study are *intention*, *integrity* and *competence*.

Intention. This neutral concept can both refer to good and evil motives. It is focused on whether the trustee is believed to have good intentions and honest objectives to do good (ibid. p. 11). For example, studies show that those who pursue commercial interests are less trustworthy than those associated with civil society (ibid., p. 11). Also, independent organizations appear more trustworthy than those serving individual interests (ibid.). Furthermore, informal messages have higher levels of trustworthiness than those delivered in a persuasive manner (ibid., p. 12).

Integrity. Among other factors, this concept is characterized by previous assignments that have performed well, positive reviews from others and the feeling that the trustee has a strong sense of justice (ibid., p. 11).

Competence. This concept concerns the groups of skills, competencies and characteristics that enable the relevant parties to fulfil their tasks (ibid.). It always refers to the specific situation, and "quality is a crucial feature of competence" concerning content and performances (ibid.).

Representations of reality

Finally, research demonstrates (e.g. van Dalen, 2019, p. 366) that distrust could also reflect concerns about representations of reality and the "feeling of being treated by the media as outsiders". Since this is relevant to the aim of this thesis, it will also be considered.

3.2. The relational nature of trust and the shared reality theory

Essential to consider is the relational nature of trust, as credibility assessments are often not a rational process (ibid., p. 367). Trust is a risk, since the audience cannot control whether the journalists will do what the audience expects from them (ibid., p. 357). Also, news has evolved from a genre of information into a social experience (Costera Meijer, 2019, p. 389). Moreover, citizens are not rational but social and often make choices based on "their understanding about how 'people like me' think" (Ryfe, 2019, p. 294), which is an essential element to consider when studying trust. Trustworthy media also provide the basis for a collective sense of community and citizenship (van Dalen, 2019, p. 364). Furthermore, research shows that, in the United States, distrust is related to polarization in the replacement of a shared reality (ibid.). The basics of shared reality theory are presented below.

The shared reality theory

In this thesis, the shared reality is understood according to the definitions of Higgins (2019) and Echterhoff (2012): "Humans are profoundly motivated to create shared realities with others, and in so doing they fulfill their needs to have valid beliefs about the world and to connect with others" (Echterhoff & Higgins, 2018). What makes people human depends on their motivation to create shared realities with others (Higgins, 2019, p. 79). Shared reality theory encompasses sharing feelings, beliefs, concerns, practices and shared realities as essential to societies and cultures with complex practices and technologies humans have developed and continuously created (ibid., pp. 2, 49, 85). The shared realities that people communicate with their group members become what is seen as the truth about what to feel and what to believe and is thus essential for individuals' lives and choices (Echterhoff, Higgins & Levine, 2009, p. 497).

The inner states of significant others are considered when forming political, moral or religious beliefs (ibid., p. 496). The shared social environment of individuals can significantly affect and alter their understanding of reality (Wan, Torelli & Chiu, 2010, p. 422). This thesis suggests that understanding the shared reality theory may improve journalists' perception of different groups' views and motivation for trust in the news.

Shared reality and the media

Central to this thesis is the fact that, in addition to human interactions with significant others, which are relevant from childhood, humans today also share their realities with the media. Consequently, news and social media are essential sources of social input concerning what matters to people (Higgins, 2019, p. 111). As Higgins observes, "through the media, we not only hear opinions about what matters from experts, including self-proclaimed experts, but the very fact that something is discussed and commented on the media creates a shared reality that it must matter, it must be relevant" (ibid., p. 111).

This thesis emphasizes that idea that people can share realities with traditional news, and citizens can be part of the same shared reality as the news. More specifically, the process of what happens when people turn their back on the traditional news is explored.

The motivation and subjective experience

According to shared reality theory, the motivation to create a shared reality with others is unique to homo sapiens (ibid., pp. 4, 5, 29). For example, infants want to share with others what they find interesting. Higgins speculates that this arises from the fact that human children depend on mature others for an extended period of time (ibid., p. 101). The subjective experience is crucial for sharedness, and it is also critical for understanding the concept of reality since, from a psychological perspective, it refers to perceptions of accuracy. In this sense, it is not a question of whether facts can be scientifically and objectively verified (Echterhoff, Higgins & Levine, 2009, pp. 497–498). People often prefer this stronger subjective sense of what is right to objectively verifiable facts, which is part of the power of political ideologies and religion (ibid., p. 498).

Fragmentation and a changing world

Shared reality theory reflects both the best of us, such as cultural achievement and the building of civilisations, and the worst, such as wars and killing those who are perceived as

enemies (Higgins, 2019, p. 4). The motivation to create shared realities is also radically dividing people (Higgins, 2019, p. 277), and it seems that in politics worldwide, not least in the U.S., people speak primarily to their own group (ibid., p. 26). Group members from different shared realities often must adapt messages to be polite and behave appropriately on a day-to-day basis. If change is to occur, a shared reality needs to be created between people from different in-groups (ibid.).

Trust and strangers

When Higgins (ibid., p. 277) describes different political groups, what the individual learns within their group is perceived as "*the* truth" and not "alternative facts" or "alternative news". It is other groups that "sadly, maddeningly" believe in incorrect things (ibid.). Societies require trust to function (Blöbaum, 2016, p. 4), and when it comes to trust in people one does not know, Higgins (2019, p. 90) refers to Harari (2015) who states that it is "very difficult to trust strangers" (Harari, 2015, p. 36). He claims that in the making of civilizations people have always used storytelling to address this problem to conduct trade and other types of cooperative actions. It is important that people agree on basic presumptions: "When two strangers in a tribal society want to trade, they establish trust by appealing to common god, mythical ancestor or totem animal. In modern society, currency notes usually display religious images, revered ancestors and corporate totems" (ibid.). Higgins believes the only way to connect different groups, and thus the solution to the problem of fragmentation, is to find means like storytelling to create a shared reality between different groups, which raises the concept of shared relevance (2019, p. 277).

Of relevance to this thesis is that people generally do not know those behind the news. Regardless, having a shared reality is essential to building trust. This thesis aims to identify what is needed to bridge this gap and construct trust and a sense of belonging to the same shared reality and, therefore, agreement on the storytelling with mainstream news, at least in terms of basic aspects essential to all citizens. As such, shared relevance is presented below.

Shared relevance and intersubjective consensus

Despite differences between groups, there is often a shared relevance between them that is overlooked. A shared relevance can occur when two opposing individuals face something that threatens their everyday shared relevance (ibid., p. 281). The shared relevance relates to what Wan, Torelli and Chiu (2010) call intersubjective consensus. The authors connect

shared reality research to an intersubjectivity consensus approach to cultural values. People agree with the sharedness of specific values and refer to shared reality "as the totality of the knowledge that is assumed to be known and shared by others" (ibid., p. 423). Higgins explains that the shared relevance for example can arise when two opponents argue since at least they have a common belief that the issue they are discussing is important. This often becomes obvious, for example, when a third person suggests what they are talking about is irrelevant (Higgins 2019, p. 281).

Wan, Torelli and Chiu's research (Wan, Torelli & Chiu, 2010) seeks to explain how shared reality plays a role in shaping cultural values and the self-perpetuation of the culture's normative shared reality. Their research shows that intersubjectively essential values are the heart of cultural identity, and these collective values are subjectively assumed and shared in a group. When an individual believes a value is shared in the group, it is also a subjective norm. Intersubjective consensus offers group members a set of shared assumptions for regulating their interactions with each other (ibid., p. 424).

Shared reality conceptualised
Echterhoff, Higgins and Levine's (2009, pp. 498–501) conceptualisation of shared reality presumes four main conditions:

1. The commonality between individuals refers to their inner states. People cannot simply replicate the observable behaviour of others to call it a shared reality. They need to obtain a sense of others' inner perceptions of the world (ibid.). In this thesis, this condition applies to the construction of individuals feeling this affiliation with the news.

2. It needs to be "about something". In other words, there must be a target referent (like a new colleague, a politician or a religious belief) about which people create a shared reality (ibid.). This study can be applied to other individuals who share views about the news (a target referent).

3. It cannot be divorced from the motives and the process through which it is attained. It has a motive of making meaning and understanding, and it has relational motives. Sometimes, the process of how an agreement is reached is more important than the outcome. An analogy for this is that democracy is both an outcome and a process (ibid.). To consider in this study is that trust is also both a process and an outcome.

4. Successful connections contribute to trust. Unless people experience a successful connection, there is no shared reality. Note that it is the subjective sense that is critical. The motivation to establish a subjective sense of reality by social sharing is powerful (ibid.). This is interesting to keep in mind in the analysis, since lack of connection can be a motive for lower trust and vice versa.

3.3. The model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news

Now I will propose my model, the model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news, to illustrate how this thesis suggests the theories described above are connected. It is a way to fuse trust theory and shared reality theory into one prism and illustrate the relationship between A) trust, B) shared relevance and C) shared realities. This is the first step when it comes to the work with this model, the model is built based on the selected theories. Step two comes in chapter 6, where the model is tested concerning the results in chapter 5. In the following subsections, the model is presented suggesting how it might appear when citizens have trust in the news.

Figure 2: The model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news
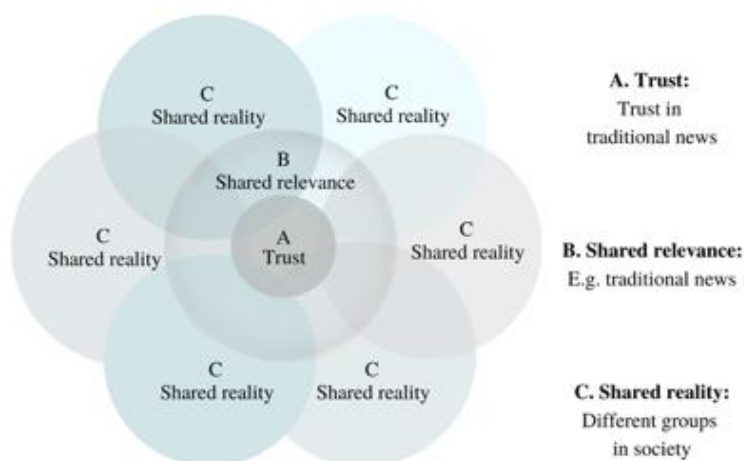
This model shows how trust in traditional news can be illustrated in a society where different groups of citizens are connected in a shared relevance as members of society. The news is perceived as relevant, and the citizens largely trust the traditional news.

A Trust

Trust is the kernel, or the circle in the middle of the society, according to Kohring's four dimensions of trust that recipients have in journalism (Blöbaum, 2016, p. 8). These are trust in theme selectivity, trust in fact selectivity, trust in correctness and trust in detailed evaluations. The elements that influence trust that are named in the theoretical framework, intention, integrity and competence, also have their basis here (ibid., p. 10). Trust is placed in the centre of shared relevance (B), which is explained in the following subsection.

B The shared relevance

The circle of shared relevance is where society's shared values and stories are located, and this is where events that concern all people in society take place. The shared relevance is, for example, all things that threaten society (Higgins, 2019, p. 281). Also, the intersubjective consensus, meaning "the totality of knowledge that is assumed to be known and shared by all others" (Wan, Torelli & Chiu 2010, p. 423), is placed here. This shared area is a place to smear the social glue manifested in the shared stories that characterize human societies, as shown by Higgins (2019) and Harrari (2015). Traditional news is a narrator of essential events in this reality shared by all citizens, and it is this area that this thesis argues traditional news belongs to. However, this is a shared space and consists of different shared realities (C) and different groups, which will be described further below.

C The shared realities

Shared realities are communities of people (i.e., different media audiences). Notably, in this ideal model, these shared realities overlap with other shared realities. It is essential to consider that one person can be part of shared realities beyond their primary one. For example, nationality can be crucial. However, one can also be part of a religious congregation that influences a large part of their understanding of life, while also working as a doctor and being part of a more scientific context that provides another perspective on reality. A shared reality can also be part of a digital community where people create a shared understanding of the world.

In this ideal theoretical model, each of these islands of people are connected to the kernel of trust (A). It is worth noting that all shared realities are also part of circle B, the shared relevance. The different shared realities are thus connected to all other groups by having at least some relevant aspects in common with other groups of society. The individuals in these shared realities may sometimes raise critiques towards the traditional news. However, they

most likely feel both included and represented in the news. All shared realities are part of a shared space that is created together in an ongoing process, they perceive traditional news as part of their understanding of reality.

This model will be tested and challenged concerning the results of this study. I aim to determine whether there is a shared relevance between individuals and the news and ultimately understand individuals' trust patterns. It is, therefore, relevant to clarify the relationship between trust, shared relevance (where traditional media narrate the news) and different groups of people, and this model will be used to illustrate the findings. Nevertheless, the method of the study will first be presented.

4. Method

In this chapter, the method of this thesis will be presented. Motives for the chosen research strategy, the design and the sampling will be transparent. Also, ethical concerns, reflections and critical concerns will be addressed in the following subchapters.

4.1. Choice of research strategy

As demonstrated in the theoretical framework, people create at least parts of their understanding of the world based on their experiences and interactions with other people. Therefore, this thesis adopts a constructivist approach that suggests reality is socially constructed, as argued by Berger and Luckmann (1967). The interviewee's perceptions about trust in the news cannot be isolated from how they perceive the world, and to understand what is perceived as real one needs to assess what is taken for granted in different social contexts. However, this does not mean that there are no objective facts. Besides facticity, society is "indeed built up by activity that expresses subjective meaning" (ibid., p. 51). This is also true for hermeneutic thinkers: people's standpoints always include a context of meaning, which is sometimes called the horizon (Zimmermann, 2015, p. 18). Consequently, "we arrive at truth because we already participate in something greater that conveys truth to us, such as the language and cultural tradition we inhabit" (ibid., p. 13). It is on this constructive and hermeneutic basis that the methodology of this research has been developed.

4.2. Qualitative interviews

Most studies on trust and distrust have used different quantitative approaches and attempted to develop, apply and replicate scales measuring aspects of trust (Engelke, Hase & Wintterlin 2019, p. 71). Quantitative approaches can compare respondents' levels of trust across different media types or countries (ibid., p. 75). However, quantitative approaches cannot capture the complexities of trust in journalism (ibid., p. 71). On the contrary, qualitative studies deepen the understanding of which antecedents determine trustworthiness (ibid., p. 75). As this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of a limited group of individuals and their motives for their level of trust in news, the study was conducted in the qualitative research tradition. Also, this thesis focuses on segments with little previous empirical research and thus has an exploratory character (Stebbins, 2001).

The aim was to qualitatively determine what motivates six individuals' level of trust in traditional news and ultimately understand if it is possible to identify dimensions that could increase their confidence in news journalism. As such, semi-structured interviews with a basic interpretation of the method from Bryman et al. (2021, pp. 425–444) were conducted. Semi-structured interviews allow more specific issues to be addressed than unstructured interviews. Also, the approach of so-called "responsive interviewing", which emphasises building a relationship based on trust between the interviewer and the interviewee (Flick, 2018, p. 217), was used. As such, questions were asked in a friendly manner through a give-and-take conversation (ibid.). The goal was to create a space for experience and understanding of each interviewee (ibid.) while maintaining some structure. If necessary, it was possible to change the order of the questions to follow the flow of the conversation. However, the prepared structure ensured that each interviewee had the chance to answer all the questions in the guide at some point (Clark et al., 2021, p. 433; Appendix 1).

Since Strömbäck et al. (2020, p. 140) pointed out that individuals express lower trust when asked about unspecified media than when the press is specified, ten pages of Dagens Nyheter, DN[1], were shown as an example. Due to time limitations, it is only one case and only a limited number of pages (ten pages). DN was selected since it is a well-known traditional newspaper. Participants did not have time to read the articles, the conversations focused on their overall sense of trust in the newspaper. The first interview was conducted on April 5, 2022, and DN from this date was subsequently used in all interviews so that everyone would have the same material.

4.3. Sampling

This study aims to understand individuals' trust patterns and determine what motivates media-sceptical individuals' level of trust in traditional news. It was clear at an early stage that one significant challenge might be encouraging individuals with low trust in journalism to share their views openly in this context. Schwarznegger (2021) had similar challenges when recruiting 35 interviews with users of alternative media, and student assistants were asked if they knew someone who used the identified alternative media outlets to interview. The student assistants then functioned as mediators by asking those they knew to participate

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[1] DN profiles itself by doing what they consider to be quality journalism. They say "DN's newsroom works impartially - we do not take a stand politically or on other issues. What we publish must be true, confirmed, not harsh and characterized by quality and credibility" (DN, 2016).

(ibid., p. 103). Also, Swart and Broersma (2022) used bachelor students to do the interviews, as they were said to relate to the participants' lives more easily, as they were close in age.

As this is a small thesis, there were no assistants. Furthermore, because the time frame was limited, the only reasonable way to attain interviews with relevant individuals was to look within my own networks. Consequently, the sample is individuals from my networks on Facebook and Instagram.

The overarching standard features of the interviewees was that they were selected either because they had been saying critical things about news media on Facebook and Instagram or because they had shared things that I perceived as critical of traditional news reporting. Their assumed news scepticism is stated according to my subjective perceptions. The participants are all female Swedish citizens born in the 1960s and 1970s. To my knowledge, they are not politically active and have no public platforms where they express their views, despite their interactions on social media. All of them avoid Swedish news to a certain degree. They watch some news if an event that they are interested in occurs, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic when the virus, restrictions, and sometimes vaccine passports affected their daily life. Of the six participants, at least four have an academic degree, three work with alternative health in some capacity, and five have children still living at home. To my knowledge, none are known to each other. From my perspective, they are not people who are easily put into categories with groups of other news-sceptical citizens.

All interviewees were given a pseudonym for integrity reasons, and so that they would feel free to speak. Following the order in which the interviews were conducted, each participant was given the corresponding name from the list of the most common names of Swedish children born in 2021: Alice, Maja, Vera, Alma, Selma and Elsa (Statistiska Centralbyrån, SCB, 2022). Since the interviewees' selection was based on my perception of their degree of trust, it was relevant to examine how they perceived their level of trust in news. They were asked two questions to rate their trust in the news:

- Question 2: How would you rate your general trust in traditional news 1-10? (1 = very low, 10 = very high.)
- Question 12: How would you rate your trust in DN on a scale of 1-10? (1 = very low, 10 = very high.)

The answers indicate how the respondents generally perceived their level of trust in the news media in general, respectively the case of Dagens Nyheter, which represents an example of traditional news media.

Figure 3: Self-rated level of trust in the news

Pseudonym	Self-rated level of trust in Swedish news	Self-rated level of trust in DN
1 Alice	2-3	Do not know
2 Maja	5	6
3 Vera	1	1
4 Alma	3-4	3-4
5 Selma	5	5
6 Elsa	7	8

Five interviewees perceived and defined their trust in Swedish news as low. However, one of the interviewees graded her trust 7, which is higher than the rest and indicates she largely trusted the news. It is, therefore, fairer to categorize her as a news avoider than a news sceptical. Nevertheless, she also spread information that I interpreted as news critical during the pandemic, and it is interesting to observe how her thoughts have developed, since trust is a process (Blöbaum 2016). Furthermore, she mainly searched for information from sources other than mainstream news. As such, her participation is relevant to this study, because an approach to news where professional journalism is not the (primary) provider of essential information is what van Dalen (van Dalen, 2019) considers the third societal trend related to mainstream news scepticism (ibid,. p. 367).

4.4. Ethical concerns

First, the dignity and rights of the participants have been taken into consideration. This is linked to consent, and that consent was given voluntarily (Flick, 2018, p. 139). The term *informed consent* means that participants understand both potential risks and benefits and are aware their participation is voluntarily (ibid., p. 140; Clark et al., 2021, pp. 117-122). Before the interviews were conducted in this study, participants were verbally informed that this study was about trust in news. They were informed that their participation was voluntary

even after the interviews began, and they could stop anytime without any pressure or consequences. Also, they were informed that personal data were handled with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and Södertörn University's guidelines for processing personal data (Södertörn University) were taken into consideration. In short, their personal data has been processed lawfully, fairly and transparently and was collected for this specified, explicit and legitimate purpose. The data will not be kept longer than necessary, and it has been processed in an appropriately secure manner (Clark et al., 2021, p. 116). The interviews did not begin until the interviewees clearly stated that they understood and desired to participate (i.e., informed consent). No information about the study was shared, and no questions were asked, via e-mail, SMS or social media. All information was exchanged over the phone or in person.

In qualitative interviews, it is difficult to predict what may arise. As a researcher, one way to assess which material is ethically justifiable to use is to consider the participants' perspective (Flick, 2018, p. 146). In this study, I have also striven to only collect data and the information necessary to answer the research questions.

Additionally, it is essential for research to guarantee participants' confidentiality (ibid., p. 139). For example, it should be impossible for others to identify participants (ibid.). As such, all participants were given a pseudonym. However, the pseudonyms are excluded in the case of possibly identifiable quotes. For the analysis, the recordings were transcribed. The recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a safety deposit box. Both will be erased and shredded after this thesis is approved.

Although the participants were selected because of views and perspectives they shared on social media, no material and no opinions published online are included in this study. This is because they were published on their own chosen online social network (Clark et al., 2021, p. 127) and were never intended to be disseminated to an audience other than their online friends. Also, quoting things they shared in this way could lead to participants being identified.

Furthermore, there will be some classifications and comparisons when analysing the data. *Doing justice* to participants when analysing means interpretations should be grounded in the data and should not include judgements on a personal level (Flick, 2018, p. 144). When

analysing the material, significant effort was made to avoid judgments and remain as close to the data as possible. Furthermore, there is no potential conflict of interest to declare.

4.5. The interviews

The interviews took between 49 and 68 minutes and were conducted in Swedish. Four of the interviews were conducted face to face, and two had to be conducted by telephone due to geographical distance. All interviewees agreed that the interviews were recorded with an Olympus LS-P1 dictaphone.

Figure 4: Duration and place of interviews

Pseudonym	Duration	In real life (IRL) or telephone
1 Alice	49 min	IRL
2 Maja	53 min	IRL
3 Vera	40 min	IRL
4 Alma	60 min	IRL
5 Selma	68 min	Telephone
6 Elsa	53 min	Telephone

The interview guide

An interview guide was created to ensure that the conversation moved within the scope of the purpose and research questions and to provide all interviewees with the same framework (Appendix 9.1). The interview guide was framed openly to encourage the interviewees to explain their social world, behaviour and patterns, with a few exceptions. In questions 2, 12 and 14, the interviewees were asked to grade their trust, and this approach was used to compare different examples, mainly as a backdrop for further discussion. Questions 15 and 16 are binary questions, and were intended to acquire straightforward yes/no answers as a background to the topic (Stokes, 2021, p. 234). All questions were framed concerning the aim, research questions and theory as follows:

- Questions 1, 2, 12, and 14 were primarily used as a background in the discussion and to compare the more generalised term "news" with the case of DN.
- Questions 3-8, 11, 13, 19 and 21 are related to research question 1 and 2 and aim to understand the motives of trust and distrust.

- Questions 17 and 18 are related to RQ 3, linked to shared reality theory and aim to understand the role of other significant people and groups in individual perception of news.

- Questions 9, 10, 15, 16 and 20 are related to RQ 4, linked to shared reality theory and aim to understand the relational aspects of trust, feelings of inclusion and sense of connection as members of society.

4.6. Reflections on sampling and data gathering

I asked ten people to participate. The first six answered yes immediately, but after that it became more difficult. The snowball effect was not effective, and I received an explanation from one of the interviewees that the topic is sensitive to discuss with a journalist and researcher if you do not know each other in person. The sample is small, but as I concentrated on meeting most of the people and placed great emphasis on bringing in layers, depth and nuances in the analyses, the size was reasonable considering the time frame and expected scope of the thesis. Also, the goal was to interview 6–8 people. As such, the number of interviews is within this plan. Before starting, a pilot study was conducted with one of the interviewees (Vera). Some minor issues with the questions required adjustments to be made.

It is also difficult to ascertain whether there was a difference in the result due to the varied forms of interview (i.e., meeting versus telephone). It is more accessible to decode the interviewee's feelings with the help of body language and eye contact. However, in some cases, telephone interviews may be more effective when asking sensitive questions, because interviewees may be less anxious to answer honestly if the interviewer is not physically present (Clark et al., 2021, p. 438).

4.7. Analysis of the material

Before the qualitative data (i.e., the interviews) could be used for research, they needed to be processed to make them amenable to analysis (Denscombe, 2014, p. 276). First, the interviews were entirely transcribed (ibid., p. 278). Informal annotations were made alongside the transcripts about gestures and hesitation or feelings of anger, sadness or joy (ibid.). One aim was to be thoroughly familiar with the data (ibid., p. 285) and look for hidden structures and dimensions, "unconscious aspects of individual or social activities" (Flick, 2018, p. 421) that may influence participants' experiences.

The analysis started as soon as possible after each interview. Results appeared in this way step by step. Data were systematically broken down into different components and given names. This analysis approach included a process of coding[2] and thus categorizing the text. This is a way to access the data and prepare it for interpretation (Flick, 2018, p. 425). The process involved primarily deductive codes, i.e. predefined codes, since there already was a clear focus on what themes would be studied concerning each research question. The deductive codes were a way to ensure that the areas of interest for the thesis were coded. A disadvantage of deductive codes is that research can become too focused on getting answers that fit into the codes, which can cause important things to be missed. To capture potential themes relevant to the study's aim but did not fit into the predetermined codes, the transcripts also were coded inductively, i.e. codes based on the data itself.

When the coding was done, the work started determining which codes were most significant for the interviewees. If there were recurring topics and if there were things that were consistent or stood out. The goal was to answer the interview questions and to put the results in context with previous research.

The following will describe how the four categories with deductive codes, the four research questions, the three themes and the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news are connected. It will also be described how the coding was carried out.

Deductive codes

The deductive codes were derived from the theory described in 3.1 and 3.2. The approach to developing codes and categories mainly from the theory instead of the material is derived from qualitative content analysis (Flick, 2018, p. 423). Using two steps, the deductive codes were systemised concerning theory, research questions and the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news.
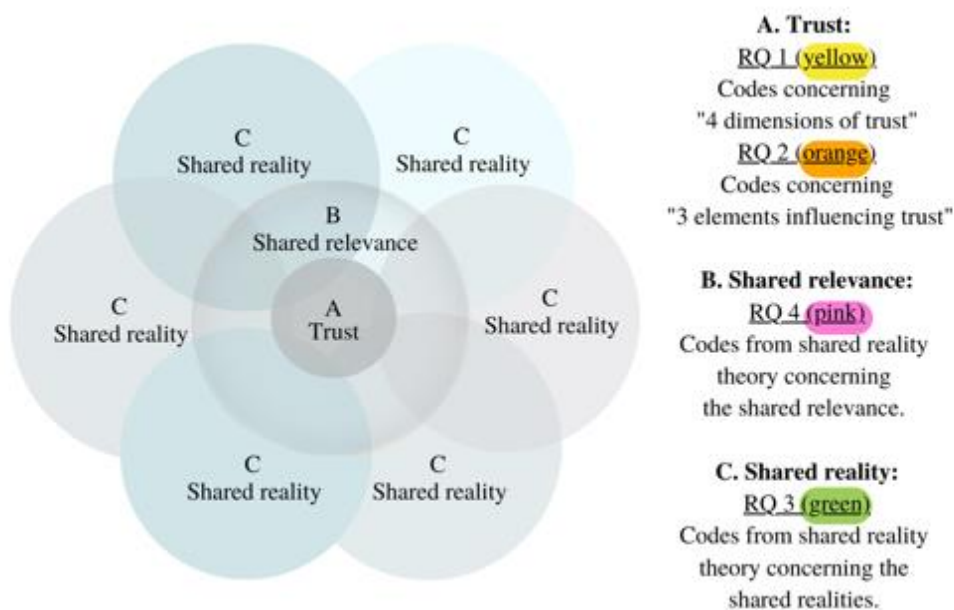
1. The deductive codes were, from the beginning, divided into four categories based on the four RQ questions. The four categories were given different colours using

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[2] Codes = tags that attach to the data and are, in this case, used to link pieces of data that relate to the analysis (Denscombe 2014, p. 286).

highlighter pens in yellow, orange, pink and green and respective research questions were given the corresponding colour. The parts of the transcriptions that received a deductive code were marked with the colour of the respective categorisation. Due to the limited material and the different colours linked to each research question, the colour-coded transcriptions were comprehensible and thus sufficient when the data were interpreted, and the research questions were to be answered in chapter 5.

2. Second, the four categories were divided into three themes, trust, shared relevance, and shared reality. The three themes already proposed a place in the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news (Figure 2) and later, when the results emerged in Figure 13.

Figure 5 The themes, categories of codes, coding colours and research questions concerning the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news

A. Trust:
RQ 1 (yellow)
Codes concerning
"4 dimensions of trust"
RQ 2 (orange)
Codes concerning
"3 elements influencing trust"

B. Shared relevance:
RQ 4 (pink)
Codes from shared reality
theory concerning
the shared relevance.

C. Shared reality:
RQ 3 (green)
Codes from shared reality
theory concerning the
shared realities.

    A. *Trust: Trust in traditional news.*

Codes are marked in yellow. This is related to RQ 1: What dimensions are informants considering concerning their primary motives for low trust in news?

Codes are marked in orange. This is related to RQ 2: What elements are informants considering concerning their primary motives for low trust in news?

    B. *Shared relevance. E.g. Traditional news.*

Codes are marked in pink. This is related to RQ 4: What values are common to all people in society according to the informants?

C. Shared reality: Different groups in society the individuals belong to.
Codes marked green. This is related to RQ 3: What role do social context and other people play concerning trust in news according to the informants?

A Trust: Trust in traditional news. (Yellow.)
From the four dimensions of trust (Kohring & Matthes, 2007), the codes "trust in theme selectivity", "trust in fact selectivity", "trust in the accuracy of description", and "trust in explicit evaluation" were used to determine which dimension, or dimensions, are relevant for the individuals. The components given these codes are related to RQ 1. The data marked with yellow helped answer RQ 1. When the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news were tested regarding the results, these data were primarily related to trust (A), i.e. the circle in the middle (Figure 5).

A Trust: Trust in traditional news. (Orange.)
To encompass the elements influencing the individual's trust (Blöbaum, 2016, pp. 11, 12, 13), the codes "intention", "integrity", and "competence" were used. The components given these codes are related to RQ 2. The data marked orange helped answer RQ 2. When the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news were tested regarding the results, these data are, like the former ones, primarily related to trust (A), i.e. the circle in the middle (Figure 5).

B Shared relevance. E.g. Traditional news. (Pink.)
The codes "shared relevance" and "societal function" from shared reality theory were used to access a shared relevance. These data were marked pink and helped answer RQ 4. When the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news were tested regarding the results, these data are related to shared relevance (B), i.e. the shared values of society (Figure 5).

C Shared reality: Different groups in society the individuals belong to. (Green.)
To access the relational aspects of trust, codes from shared reality theory were used, namely "significant others", "subjective sense of connection", "reality", "intersubjective consensus", "tearing apart", "shared irrelevance", "shared reality", "a relational concept" and "identification". These data were marked green, related to RQ 3, and this data helped answer RQ 3. When the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news were

tested regarding the results, these data are primarily related to shared reality (C), i.e. the different circles of shared realities to which individuals belong (Figure 5).

When the model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news should be tested concerning the results (Chapter 6), it became clear that it was not possible to bring in the various themes without the model needing to be adjusted. Since this thesis research question is based on the informants' horizons of understanding, all four questions are asked based on the premise that the answers are "according to informants", and when the data was analyzed using shared reality, it was deemed the most logical to move the circles with shared realities, i.e. the groups of individuals that participants belong to. The lower trust and shared relevance the interviewees expressed, the further away the circles of shared realities slipped from the circles of trust and shared relevance. Note that the different bubbles, the shared realities, are not illustrations of the different individuals. Instead, they are illustrated with rough brush strokes to illustrate the analysis results described above.

Inductive codes

As mentioned, codes were also added inductively during the process. Most during the process, to keep the focus strictly on the aim and research questions, opted out, but the code "COVID-19 pandemic as a tipping point" evolved inductively and proved to be of great importance to the participants. It did not fit into the research questions or in the model. However, it was still within the scope of the thesis's purpose and motivation. COVID-19 as a tipping point became subchapter 5.3.

By determining which codes were most significant for the interviewees, recurring topics, and things that were consistent or stood out, the research questions were answered through the analysis method described above (Chapter 5). The results were tested concerning the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance (Chapter 6).

4.8. Critical reflections on the method for the analysis

As mentioned in the introduction, this study has a small sample and is not designed to generalize. It is primarily intended to deepen the understanding of how these individuals' trust in the news is constructed with extra focus on the relational aspects of trust. However, if other individuals who are sceptical of news had been interviewed, the results might have been

different. I have strived to remain close to this essay's aim and research questions to make the results as reliable as possible. Nevertheless, more extensive research is needed to enhance its validity.

As previously discussed, a disadvantage of deductive codes is that research can become too focused on getting answers that fit into the codes, which can cause important things to be missed. It is a balancing act to relate to the purpose of the thesis, research questions, previous research and theory and stay open to unexpected results. In the analysis, however, which areas were essential to the interviewees became pretty clear. In this thesis, inductive codes proved not to be equally crucial to answering the research questions. It is difficult to say whether the result would have been different if the analysis method had only been inductive.

As mentioned under "Sampling", the interviewees are part of my network on Facebook and Instagram. This is problematic because it may have affected the interviewees' attitudes towards me. At the same time, the fact that they know who I am and a certain degree of trust existed was likely a prerequisite for them choosing to carry out the interviews, which is also explained under "Sampling".

The quotes from the interviews should be reproduced precisely. This becomes difficult when the interviews are carried out in Swedish and reproduced in English. In translation, some spoken language disappeared because it could not be translated directly. However, I have aimed to remain as close to the original as possible. Additionally, there is a risk that, during analysis, I omitted parts of the interviews that are not highlighted in this thesis and which could have been of value. Nevertheless, in the selection, I have strived to stay within the scope of the thesis' purpose.

In retrospect, when using DN as a case, it can be argued that it would have been more logical to use an issue focusing more on the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, before the interviews, there was no apparent reason to consciously direct the participants to the pandemic regarding the aim and research questions. Neither research questions nor interview questions were about the pandemic. This thesis gave the pandemic so much space because the interviewees spontaneously chose to focus on it in their answers. However, since the interviewees were selected based on the fact that they expressed news scepticism during the

COVID-19 pandemic, it was logical that the pandemic should be addressed. It is unclear whether it would have affected the result if a more pandemic-focused newspaper issue had been used as an example. However, an issue of DN focusing on the pandemic would have looked more logical in this thesis concerning the results.

The case, DN, consists of six pages of news, three pages of opinion and one page of advertisement. The pages that did not contain news were included so that the experience of looking through DN would feel as natural as possible. Nevertheless, it can be argued that it would have been more logical only to show the pages with news.

5. Analysis and results

In this chapter, the analysis of the material will be presented, and the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news will be tested based on the results. First, an overview of the proposed model is provided, since it is essential for understanding the following section where the results will be analysed concerning trust in the news, shared realities and shared relevance.

Figure 6: The model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news
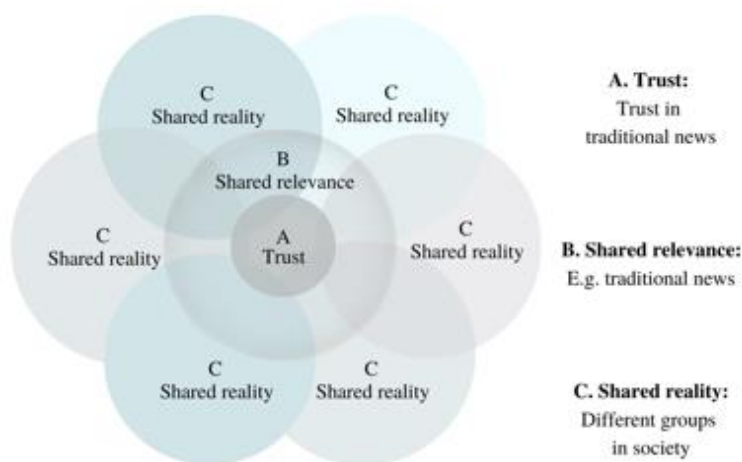
A. This circle represents trust in traditional news.

B. Shared relevance is the values and meanings that are common and of interest to all citizens in society. This thesis proposes it is upon this basis that news journalism primarily works.

C. Shared realities are the various groups where citizens create their understanding of the world. Note that they overlap and individuals can be part of several groups.

The analysis begins with the seven main arguments that participants noted for low trust in the news. Then, the analysis attempt to encompass the relational aspect of trust in the news. A short section on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on participants' trust in the news will also be presented, as it is an essential tipping point. Subsequently, the analysis will determine what the interviewees find needed to trust the news. If they think there are any values they share with most other citizens in society, or a shared relevance (Higgins, 2019, p. 277). Finally, the model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news will be tested concerning the results.

5.1. Seven themes concerning trust

This subchapter will outline the primary motives for low trust mentioned in the interviews:

1. "News is spreading fear".
2. "News increases polarization".
3. "The news should be both deeper and broader".
4. "Journalists do not understand better".
5. "I do not trust it is independent".
6. "The news is not about me".
7. "News excludes, accuses or devalues me".

These motives are related to RQ 1 and RQ 2, since they are the participants' primary motives for low trust in news.

Motives 1–3 will be analysed in largely similar ways. The first step is theoretically related to RQ 1 and connects the motives for low trust to Kohring's four dimensions of trust in journalism: trust in theme selectivity, trust in fact selectivity, trust in the correctness, and the trust in the weighing and evaluation of information (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). The second step is theoretically related to RQ 2 and connects the motives to three elements influencing trust, intention, integrity and competence (Blöbaum, 2016, pp. 11, 12).

Motives 4–5 is also theoretically linked to RQ 1 and 2. They will be analysed concerning the object of trust, which refers to four levels: the system, the institution, the person and the journalistic pieces (Blöbaum, 2016). However, they also partially concern Kohring's four dimensions of trust in journalism (Kohring & Matthes, 2007).

Motives 6–7, "news is not about me" and "news excludes, accuses or devalues me", will be theoretically analysed concerning shared reality theory, since these themes relate to the perspectives of the individuals in a more relational context. Theese themes is also suggested as keys to understand news scepticism as distrust in the media can be associated with concerns about representation as demonstrated by van Dalen (2019, p. 366).

Motive 1: "News is spreading fear"

Several participants asserted that a disproportionate amount of fear was spread in the news during the pandemic. A typical example was that there has been too much focus on death figures. However, some of the participants simultaneously expressed that they understood the situation was complicated and emphasised that what they miss is mainly the balance with more positive news, and they would have preferred a more constructive reporting focused on solutions. Some other participants expressed more significant scepticism and did not think the COVID-19 pandemic had been as severe as the news had reported, at least not to most people. News about the pandemic was, to them, a larger problem.

The motive "news is spreading fear" is, according to the interviews, significantly associated with theme selectivity and fact selectivity. For example, Vera described how news reporting about COVID-19 spread fear in society by focusing "too much on deaths and the number who were in the intensive care unit". This is a question of theme selectivity and fact selectivity, since news about numbers of deaths and people in intensive care units is about which themes and facts are opted in and opted out.

News spreading fear is also related to the evaluations. Vera added, "many people got so scared, often completely unnecessarily", indicating she does not trust the evaluations. She did not trust that the benefits of reporting exceed the disadvantages for citizens. Also, Alma emphasised problems with the evaluations but on a systemic level and highlighted that journalism has a built-in bias toward the negative: "it looks like the world is awful, but if you look at statistics, the world is not so awful".

Trust in the accuracy of descriptions is not a primary issue. Nevertheless, there are a few indicators that the perception of news as a disseminator of fear has also made some interviewees at least partly hesitant about how accurate some information is. Elsa did not generally think that the news is a disseminator of fear. However, she mentioned that, at the beginning of 2020, she saw a news documentary on public television about the outbreak in Wuhan. It made her "suspicious" because "it just showed panic and disaster, [and] it felt like it was fabricated", which may indicate that it is more difficult for her to believe in reports that are too frightening.

Regarding the elements that influence trust, some interviewees talk about intention and refer to news journalism having economic motives rather than upholding citizens' interests. For

example, Alice stated that "if you scare the audience, they will always watch". She is also raising concerns about the relation between viewer figures and money, which is related to integrity and journalists' sense of justice. Additionally, a few participants generally did not think journalists have enough competence, suggesting this is why the news is spreading fear.

Motive 2: "News increases polarization"
All the interviewees mentioned that there is a lack of nuance in the news. The perception that news increases polarization is significantly related to the participants thinking that news simplifies conflicts and portrays one group as evil and another as good. A recurring example in the interviews was that people who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19 are portrayed as opponents to the common good.

Both trust in theme selectivity and trust in fact selectivity are relevant when it comes to the motive that news increases polarisation, since journalism is always a matter of choosing and opting out. The participants often referred to this process in their assessments rather than criticising the accuracy of descriptions.

Nevertheless, this motive primarily relates to participants' trust in the evaluations. Maja stated that "the media incites what is so that you get a polarised conflict", and she found it "uninteresting" to read the news when all sides are not problematised. She believed that "the world is not black or white", and referred to the tension between advocates for alternative medicine and representatives of conventional medicine as an example of a conflict that has been polarised. "I think alternative medicine is an excellent complement to ordinary medicine. However, I am not against ordinary medicine. It is just two different things that should be used differently". She also explained that she thinks the media says if you are for alternative medicine you must be against ordinary medicine. More than ever, she thought the media had incited a polarising discussion during the pandemic regarding vaccines: "Either you are a devil against vaccines, or you are [for vaccines]. I think the journalists would have had a slightly more neutral voice".

The elements that influence trust are in this theme related to intention. Maja explained that she thinks the news wants to create this perceived polarisation "because of the need to sell single issues". This is also about integrity, meaning the sense of justice and the integrity needed to treat different groups fairly. Since the participants indicated the news is not

objective enough, the interviewees did not perceive that journalists have enough integrity to remain objective. This is also closely related to the perception of journalists as not having the skills, competencies and characteristics that enable effective news journalism, i.e., there is a lack of the element of competence.

Motive 3: "The news should be both deeper and broader"
The participants emphasised that the news should be more nuanced, that more perspectives should be included and, in some cases, that they desire greater depth. Statements about blind spots and norms that make the news predictable, uninteresting and superficial recurred during the interviews. Also, there were perceptions about a corridor of opinion: "There are blind spots; the news does not address everything people think is important" (Selma).

The interviewees' arguments mainly centre upon the dimension of trust in both themes and fact selectivity, as they all more or less argued that news has been taking the same party as "the establishment". Selma, for example, indicated a gap between "the establishment" and the citizens' understanding of reality, which makes the news unnuanced and lacking in different perspectives. She also emphasised a gap between the city and the countryside, because journalists generally live in large cities: "Ordinary people who live in smaller towns probably often feel that journalists live in another world". She also found that the media coverage of protesters against vaccine passports has portrayed them unfairly, as news journalism took the same stance as politicians and authorities against the ones protesting. She thinks the news focused too much on the story they wanted to tell beforehand and missed the nuances: "They [the media] tried to find the weirdest and most suspicious individuals they could find, instead of trying to understand people's opinions". Alma even laughed when she was asked to rate how effective Swedish news is at showing different perspectives: "If we take the last two years, there have been hardly any different perspectives in the news from what I have seen".

Elsa found it understandable that journalists listened to the public health authorities. However, she added that "I believe other perspectives could also have been given space without the risk of misleading people".

Regarding trust in the accuracy of descriptions, the main problem, according to the participants, remained selection in the news. Selma emphasised that her trust decreased largely because she felt that not all topics are being addressed. However, she "does not think

the Swedish media deliberately confuses, but it omits things, and that causes trust to fall". Nevertheless, this is related to trust in explicit evaluations. The participants did not think journalists believe citizens can handle the complexity of matters. Vera shared her opinion take on what kind of perspectives she perceived as missing and emphasised perspectives that provide existential depth: "I would like to see that more often, someone could convey a more existential; existential is the best word I can think of, someone who can give a deeper understanding of the events. Why not a priest?".

When Selma tried to understand how trade-offs are made in news reporting, she imagined that "if you make a versatile picture, there is a risk that it will be difficult for some people to absorb". However, she also added that "you [journalists] need to highlight different perspectives. I always react [negatively] when I think things are missing".

Concerning the motive that news should be more profound and broader its relationship to the elements influencing trust, intention is not the main element addressed. It is, instead, a matter of integrity and competence. Selma, for example, did not feel that news journalists manage to step out of their isolated role and "corridor of opinion" and act on behalf of all citizens. This is related to integrity and competence, since the interviewees did not think that journalists are fair or doing a proper job when it comes to reporting on different perspectives. This also makes the news predictable, according to participants: "It is the same thing repeatedly. They say almost literally the same regardless of whether it is the news on public service television or TV4 [a Swedish free TV owned by TV4 AB]" (Alice).

Motive 4: "Journalists do not understand better"
There were perceptions that journalists are not competent enough, as suggested by motive 4, "journalists do not understand better". Conversely, there were perceptions that the journalists want to do an effective job but are prohibited by powerful forces, as in motive 5, "I do not trust it is independent". Regarding motive 4, the object of trust is the journalist.

Some participants thought the main problem was that journalists do not understand what is relevant to the citizens. This relates to the element of competence. For example, Maja believed journalists have insufficient knowledge and thus cannot scrutinize power in a relevant way. Vera concluded that she does not distrust the intention behind the news: "I am

not a conspiracy theorist" and instead stating "I just do not think the journalists understand better".

Motive 5: "I do not trust it is independent"
In contrast to motive 4, where the scepticism is directed towards journalists' competence, there were also occasions during the interviews which hinted that a more extensive agenda and powerful forces control what is reported. Motive 5, "I do not trust it is independent", is on another level concerning the object of trust since it, more than the other themes, relates to the system or the institutions rather than the journalists or the journalistic pieces.

Selma believed that most individual journalists desire to do a more effective job: "I can imagine journalists are wanting to paint a broader picture of things, but they are limited from above". This statement suggests that she directs the object of distrust toward the organization or the editorial department rather than the journalist. Some participants also suggested there are actors, such as the government and owners of the news companies, controlling news reporting. This mainly centres upon the element of intention, the underlying objectives and integrity: "If you have someone who rules a country who wants a thing and you have a TV channel paid by the government, I feel you [the news] have to follow the government". She also says that "regardless of whether it is a family or the government that owns a channel or newspaper, I think what is conveyed is what the owners want". When Alma considered DN, she referred to a person who sat on the board of a major vaccine manufacturer and a multinational media conglomerate, and she believes it could work like that in Sweden too: "Yes, absolutely. We cannot know how controlled they [the journalists] are. I do not trust that this is independent". Also, Elsa thinks that, because the pharmaceutical business is a powerful actor, it could control society and the news, at least indirectly.

Motive 6: "The news is not about me?"
The participants in this study mainly did not think that the news is relevant in their lives, and only one felt that she was represented in the news without making any reservations. Four interviewees answered no, indicating they do not feel the news is about them. Since trust could reflect concerns about representations and feelings of being treated as outsiders by the media (van Dalen, 2019, p. 366), and trustworthy media are expected to provide the basis for a collective sense of community and citizenship (ibid., p. 364), this theme is of particular

interest. Higgins (2019, p. 79) asserts what makes people human depends on their motivation to create shared realities with others, and in modern societies humans also share their realities with the media (ibid., p. 111). However, what happens when participants do not think they are represented in the news?

When Alma received the question about whether she feels represented in the news, she asked a counter-question: "You mean if I think that my perspective would fit?". A clarification was then offered: "Yes, who you are and what you stand for?" She answered "no" and continued, stating that "the way I look at life I do not think is reflected very often". Shared realities are essential to societies with complex practices and technologies, and individuals involved perceive their inner states as agreeing with others (Higgins, 2019). Why does Alma, a middle-class and socially highly functioning woman, perceive herself as not represented in the news? Alma primarily refers to her work in alternative health, which is a branch she perceives as mistreated by the mainstream.

Alice had a related explanation to why she does not feel represented, asserting that "it is because I am unvaccinated". She claims that being unvaccinated is an exclusion, like belonging to another minority: "It is like being gay, immigrant or black."

Maja also felt poorly represented. She mentioned her interest in alternative health as one significant reason. However, she also does not feel represented, because the news does not cover other things she finds important, such as climate, democracy and peace issues.

Vera had another explanation for why she does not feel represented: "I think it is because I have a more spiritual, or a more existential perspective". She noted that "to me, the news is happening over there" and "it does not affect me." When she flipped through the first ten pages of DN, she said "I do not feel that I am part of this world, this view, this way of seeing life in the world and looking at the world. It may be my loss, but I am not". Previously, Vera alternated between subscribing to DN and Svenska Dagbladet (SvD). However, she has stopped with DN, because "it is too educational, critical, and very ... it is a voice that does not suit me. To come to the breakfast table and get a parenting whip in the face is not what I want".

Motive 7: "News excludes, accuses or devalues me."

The shared reality theory defines not only a shared reality but also suggests that shared realities are tearing people of different realities apart (ibid., pp. 4, 26). A feeling of being threatened as outsiders is evident in all interviewees who acknowledge they have felt excluded, accused or devalued by news media. This is especially interesting in the context of Higgins' (2019) explanation of media as a crucial source of social input about what matters (ibid. p. 111). Overall, this topic upset the interviewee's feelings. However, the lines between who is doing what, including the news, politicians and authorities, were sometimes blurred in these discussions.

One of the participants was sad. Tears were falling while she explained that she was scared concerning the media coverage of COVID-19. She found that unvaccinated people have been stigmatised in the news, which made her afraid that she would lose her friends. She referred to government officials and politicians asking citizens in the news not to hug the unvaccinated. "Imagine living in a democratic society, but you do not dare to say that you are unvaccinated", and "you are afraid that your friends will stop hanging out with you".

Another participant talked about a column in the newspaper arguing that the unvaccinated should pay for their healthcare. "Swap out vaccinated against any other group such as homosexuals, Syrians or others, and it would never be published". Selma also thought that the media had spread prejudices about what kind of people are not vaccinated: "I feel attacked and oppressed".

Elsa had another explanation for why she has felt left out, accused or devalued by the news: "I do not think it is so popular to be a Christian. I do not think the media like it. I have a feeling, but I have no example of it now".

Selma perceived that journalists scrutinise citizens rather than those in power: "Journalists scrutinise those who are critical of power, not power itself". She found it strange when "the media makes it negative when it is rather something good that people commit to things they find essential".

Concluding words of 5.1

This chapter is attempting to answer RQ 1 and RQ 2:

RQ 1: What dimensions are informants considering concerning their primary motives for low trust in news? Some participants think the themes covered are too narrow (theme selectivity). An example they provided was that during the COVID-19 pandemic there was a disproportionate focus on the exact numbers of people who died or were in intensive care units (fact selectivity). However, the opinion that news increases polarization is also related to the selection process. News is accused of deliberately reinforcing contradictions. There is a perception that the news belongs to the establishment rather than seeking to represent different perspectives among citizens or what citizens want to know about (theme and fact selectivity).

The problem, according to participants, is that the news does not provide a comprehensive picture, not that the information represented is incorrect (trust in the correctness). Some participants, for example, did not think it was reasonable to provide so much information about the number of deaths during the pandemic, since it spread fear in society rather than contributing to something reasonable (trust in the evaluations). The participants also demanded more nuanced reporting, where the news trusts, or changes its assessment of what audiences can handle (trust in evaluations). The participants emphasised that they want the news to be more nuanced, complicated and versatile, since this is how they think reality is.

RQ 2: What elements are informants considering concerning their primary motives for low trust in news? Some participants returned to the fact that they do not trust the intention. They believed ulterior motives, such as money, drive reporting. Some of the participants also talked about the fact that powerful forces control journalism. This is also related to integrity, because it concerns the journalists' sense of justice and ability to withstand possible pressure. The journalists' competence was also questioned by some participants, such as when it came to opinion corridors and single-track news. There was an opinion that competent journalists should be able to step back and provide a broader and more nuanced perspective on what is happening in society.

An interesting finding is that most participants did not feel represented and felt left out, accused or devalued by the news. The shared reality theory argues that the subjective experience is critical for people's perception of accuracy (Echterhoff, Higgins & Levine, 2009, pp. 497, 498). Considering shared reality theory, it is thus logical that the four

dimensions of trust (Kohring & Matthes, 2007), trust in theme selectivity, fact selectivity, accuracy of descriptions and explicit evaluations, are not sufficient. It is also reasonable that trust in intention, integrity and competence becomes insufficient. If one feels like an outsider and thus does not share realities or relevance with news journalism, one simply will not trust it. It is not a question of whether events in the news can be scientifically and objectively verified: one must share their reality with news journalism, at least partly, in order to trust it.

Figure 7: Questions 14 and 15

Pseudonym	Question 14: Do you feel represented in the news?	Question 15: Have you ever felt left out, accused or devalued by the news?
1 Alice	No	Yes
2 Maja	No	Yes
3 Vera	No	Yes
4 Alma	No	Yes
5 Selma	"In some roles, in others not"	Yes
6 Elsa	"I think so"	Yes

Figure 8: Motives for low trust in the news

The figure shows A) trust in the news and B) the shared relevance and values familiar to all citizens. This thesis argues that news journalism primarily works here. The seven quotes are the main motives the interviewees argue for low trust in news.

5.2. The role of other people concerning trust in news

This part will answer RQ 3, which addresses the role social context and other people play concerning trust in news. This question will be analysed using the shared reality theory (Echterhoff, Higgins & Levine, 2009; Echterhoff 2012; Echterhoff & Higgins 2018; Higgins 2019), which is based on the idea that people mainly create their perceptions with others. The shared reality theory claims that the inner states of "significant others" are considered when forming beliefs (Higgins, 2019, p. 496). It is apparent in the interviewees' responses that friends and other people with similar views concerning the news are essential for at least three different reasons (i.e., answer to RQ 3):

1. *To experience belonging.*
2. *To attain confirmation.*
3. *To obtain information.*

To experience belonging.

Several interviewees expressed that it is crucial to have friends with whom you share your opinion about the news. This supports the shared reality theory, since it argues that other people play an essential role in forming one's views about the world. Also, the inner states of significant others are considered when forming political, moral or religious beliefs, which is connected to shared reality theory (ibid.). Higgins proclaims that the motivation to create and belong to shared realities is what makes people human (ibid., p. 79). A few interviewees expressed that a community with friends sharing views becomes a free zone where you can talk openly without hiding your decisions and opinions: "Those friends mean a lot to me. It is with them that I can be myself. That is why gay people usually hang out with others who are gay. You can be yourself with like-minded people" (Vera).

Selma explained that she has different roles and in-groups to which she belongs. She actively avoids discussing news with her close friends who have different views concerning the news. However, she also has friends who share her views, and she emphasized that having them means a lot to her. This is an example of a participant talking about belonging to different shared realities.

To attain confirmation.

Humans want their subjective reactions to be verified by others (ibid., p. 180), and, according to the interviews, it seems desirable to at least have some people who confirm what the interviewees think and feel. Shared reality theory explains that being human is a motivational story of wanting, longing and acting to create joint attention to things the person finds attractive in a way that no other primates do (ibid., p. 5). From childhood, it is central for people to learn what to feel positive and negative about with others (Higgins, 2019, p. 5). One interviewee explained that when she thinks something is wrong in the news she often goes on Twitter to see if she can find other people with similar views: "It is essential to find others, so you are not an island yourself. I want confirmation that others think a bit like me" (Selma).

Alma also talked about the value of living with someone with similar views. She referred to her partner, who said concerning the news "if we had not had a joint view on this, we would not have been able to live together".

To obtain information.

Higgins argues that through the media we not only hear opinions about what matters, but the fact that something is discussed creates a shared reality that indicates it must matter and be relevant (ibid., p. 111). However, friends and other important people are also central to obtaining information concerning news. One of the interviewees emphasised the importance of feeling confident in the person she listens to. At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Elsa listened closely to a friend she trusted on Facebook. She explained that her friend became her preferred strategy for keeping herself informed, not the traditional news.

Figure 9: The role of other people concerning trust in the news

This figure shows why friends and people with similar views (people from a shared reality)
are essential concerning trust in the news. This also answers RQ 3.

5.3. The pandemic as a tipping point for trust in news

As one of the participants says "It became clear that things were missing. I have not felt that way before, perhaps because I have not been involved before" (Selma). It is evident from the interviews that the pandemic has been a tipping point for trust in the news, in some cases dramatically. The interviews thus support the view of trust as a process, as suggested by Blöbaum (2016). The COVID-19 pandemic has also significantly impacted the interviewees' sense of community with society (i.e., shared relevance) and the making of meaning within the shared realities.

First, relationships with other people (i.e., the shared realities) changed during the pandemic. One participant, for example, found it more difficult to identify with many of her friends from her yoga community: "Before, I could identify with them. Nevertheless, not anymore, when yoga mothers hook their arms with right-wing extremists". She also noted that "these are people with whom I have been very close for many years. Nevertheless, now they have become very extreme. I have several blocked on social media. They have entirely derailed when it comes to right-wing extremist and racist thinking".

One participant's story is significantly complex, multidimensional and emotional. Understanding how the pandemic restrictions affected her business and life is relevant to

understanding her trust in the news. Tears were falling as she described how she had to cancel events due to restrictions, and, at the same time, hatred was directed at her by people who wanted their money back. At the same time, people she met in her business started arguing with each other when someone got too physically close. She explained that all this has made her disillusioned. She even wanted to move countries but did not know how and where. At the same time, this example demonstrates how difficult it is to draw sharp lines between what is constructing trust in news. The media reported, for example, the distances people needed to keep to curb the spread of infection, but authorities and politicians made the decisions and were the primary sources of information. The lines are thus blurred regarding who is the object of trust. In any case, it is evident that, from this participant's perspective, the media on a systemic level has played a large part in the perceived polarisation problem. The interviewee's conclusion is clear: "I felt in 2020 that there was a change, and then I lost more and more confidence. Nowadays, it does not matter what they write because I have lost confidence, do you understand? I have lost confidence in the Swedish media".

5.4. Rebuilding trust?

The following will attempt to determine what the participants need to trust the news again. The participants generally have well-developed ideas about effective journalism. The main proposals for what they want are 1) better journalism, 2) balance of bad news, 3) trustworthy journalists, 4) existential perspectives and 5) more perspectives represented. Arguments 1, 2 and 3 relate mainly to Kohring & Mattheus' (2007) four dimensions of trust, since this is largely about trust in theme selectivity, trust in the fact selectivity, trust in the accuracy of descriptions and trust in explicit evaluations. Arguments 4 and 5 connect to shared reality theory, since it relates to a personal feeling or a perceived personal connection to the journalist.

"Better journalism"

As demonstrated in the results, some participants found more nuance and perspectives and less polarising storytelling in traditional news were needed. At least three also wanted more investigative journalism. When Maja explained what is needed, she offers *The Guardian* as a positive example concerning environmental issues: "They write several articles on the same topic for a long time, and you feel that it is written neutrally. They give different perspectives". Alma provides another example: "Göteborgs-Posten has had a more nuanced picture of the corona over the past two years than other newsrooms".

"Balance of bad news"

A few participants raised concerns that more constructive, solution-oriented and positive news is needed. Alice, for example, thought the news is "too heavy to listen to, especially in times of crisis", and notes that "when you are already having a hard time, you cannot bear to read the news or read a newspaper [as news looks today]."

"Trustworthy journalists"

Maja explained that individual journalists are an essential factor in her trust: "I have more confidence in individual journalists than in the media in general". Overall, she wants expertise and specialised journalists. She mentioned George Monbiot in particular, who is an acclaimed climate journalist at The Guardian. She also named war correspondent Magda Gad and theology professor Joel Halldorf as examples of the type of experts she likes to read in the Swedish daily press.

"Existential perspectives"

Vera said she does not desire to trust the news as it exists today. However, if the news had greater existential depth, she would consider it:

> I do not think the news is important. Nevertheless, if [the news] changed, if a few journalists woke up. When people who have worked in a certain way are involved in something intensely, they get new perspectives on life and realise things they have not seen before. If people working in the media industry would have that experience, maybe I would start to trust them more. (Vera)

"More perspectives represented"

Alma stated that "I want a lot more on the one hand and the other", and "probably that is what journalists think they do, but it is not enough". Furthermore, she thought investigative journalism should be more "curiously interested". It should not be about "throwing in the trash and closing the lid" but about "showing different perspectives". Elsa is one of the interviewees who expressed more confidence in the news. Nevertheless, she, too, thought there were improvements to be made when it comes to adding more perspectives and "articles where you have taken the time to delve into the subject increase my confidence".

Figure 10: How to increase trust according to participants

The figure illustrates what the interviewees found needed to increase their level of trust.

5.5. Common values (the shared relevance)

This subchapter answers RQ 4 concerning what values the participants think are common to everyone in society. The aim of this RQ is to determine if there are any values, according to the interviewees, essential for news journalism to keep in mind as narrators of a reality shared by all citizens. This will be analysed using the shared reality theory (e.g., Higgins, 2019), and, more specifically, the thoughts about a shared relevance (ibid., p. 281) illustrated by the result in Figure 11.

Vera believed the common denominator is that we are humans who share this time on earth together: "We are here together, and we will get out of it together". At the same time, she was unsure if all people feel that way: "I think everyone has a desire to avoid living in fear. Not having to worry all the time" (Alice). Selma believed all people want to be good and stated that "you draw different conclusions, like under the corona pandemic. But everyone probably could agree upon some basic things, and I have a hard time believing that anyone would ignore everyone else".

Maja believed that most people would say they believe in democracy and human rights. At the same time, she said that the knowledge of what it means generally is shallow: "I think many say they like human rights, but in practice, they probably do not know what it is". Alma laughed at the question of whether there are any shared values, noting that "two years ago, I

had said, of course". However, after the pandemic, she is unsure. She believed there probably are some shared values, but she could not provide any examples. Elsa said she believes that people might have had more shared values historically: "We probably still have some things in common, but it is becoming vaguer and vaguer what it is".

Nevertheless, when answering RQ 4, the general picture is that it is difficult to find and formulate something that the participants believe is common with everyone else in society.

Figure 11: The shared relevance concerning all citizens

The shared relevance according to the participants.

6. Testing "The model of news trust, shared relevance and shared realities"

Now I will test the proposed model towards the results. First, figure nr 12, is the ideal model, also presented in the theory chapter and repeated at the beginning of this analysis and result chapter. Second, figure nr 13, a more fragmented picture emerges when the model is adjusted according to the result.

Figure 12: The model of the model of shared realities, trust and shared relevance with the news
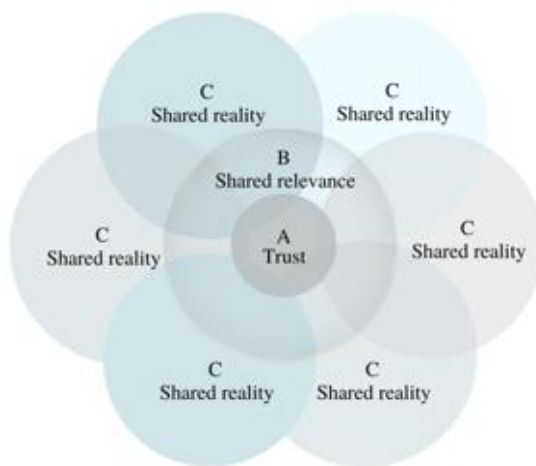
Figure 13: The model tested against the result
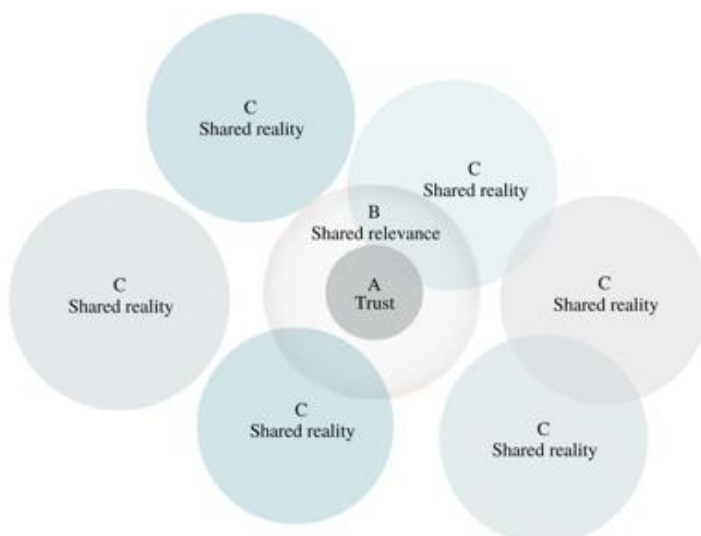
In the following section, the figures will be compared, explaining why Figure 13 is different from Figure 12.

A Trust

Trust is the circle in the middle of society for both figures and refers to trust in the news. The understanding of trust is based on Kohring's four dimensions of trust that recipients have in journalism (Blöbaum, 2016, p. 8). Figure 12 is the theoretical figure, and Figure 13 illustrates the model as tested concerning the result of this study. The participants have less trust in theme selectivity, trust in fact selectivity, trust in correctness and trust in detailed evaluations, and they also have less trust in the elements that influence trust, intention, integrity and competence, in a positive way (ibid., p. 10). This affects trust in the news; all shared realities are no longer connected to trust. Trust is in the centre of the suggested place for a shared relevance.

B The shared relevance

Traditional news is a narrator of essential events in reality shared by all citizens and is thus ideally part of the shared relevance. The circle of shared relevance illustrates the events that concern all people in society and the knowledge that is assumed to be shared by all others (Higgins, 2019, p. 281; Wan, Torelli & Chiu, 2010, p. 423). However, in this study, several participants expressed that it was difficult to find any values and concerns that they felt were shared by everyone else. In addition, they and their concerns did not feel represented in the news. They had even felt accused or devalued by the news. The shared relevance is not an apparent commonplace for the participants in this study, hence the groups of shared realities disperse.

C The shared realities

C, the shared realities, are communities of people. In the ideal model, the shared realities overlap with some other shared realities, with B, the shared relevance, and with A, the trust in news. In Figure 13, however, some shared realities appear more isolated.

According to the participants, journalism has failed to make news trustworthy, relevant, and inclusive and is thus more distant from shared realities. The participants experienced less shared relevance with other groups. Figure 13, for example, illustrates the perception that traditional news has failed to make most citizens feel "connected, as members of society" (Couldrys, 2005, p. 4).

The question remains of whether the space for shared relevance in Figure 13 still can be called a shared relevance, since there is no shared relevance if people do not connect there. Nevertheless, this thesis suggests that shared relevance is an ideal to strive for, because citizens need to have some fundamental values, narratives and news, as the shared reality has shown.

The models show that the greater the distance between the perceived reality and the feeling of being part of a shared relevance, the more distant the trust in the news becomes.

Note that the different bubbles, the shared realities, are not illustrations of the different individuals. Instead, they are an illustration with rough brush strokes to show the possible consequences of the results of the analysis.

7. Concluding discussion

This thesis has qualitatively studied six individuals perceived as sceptical of traditional news because of what they spread on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic between spring 2020 and spring 2022. This study contributes to the knowledge of trust patterns in news-sceptical individuals with no other prominent channel for making their voices heard. However, the qualitative nature of this study and its limited sample provide little space for generalizations.

The main findings from the six semi-structured interviews are that all participants have felt left out, accused or devalued by the news and at least four people did not feel represented in the news. Furthermore, with help from the shared reality theory (Echterhoff, Higgins & Levine, 2009; Echterhoff 2012; Echterhoff & Higgins 2018; Higgins 2019), this thesis proposes an explanation for these individuals' media scepticism: According to shared reality theory, trust is created within shared realities. If there is no shared reality, there cannot be any trust. This is in line with Noppori et al. (2019), who found that feeling marginalised or alienated by traditional media was key to media distrust. Swart and Broersma (2022) have shown that trust in the news is intuitive and depends on feelings of inclusion and perceptions of inclusion. Also, van Dalen (2019, p. 366) explains that distrust could reflect concerns about representations of reality and the "feeling of being treated by the media as outsiders" (ibid.).

This thesis proposes a model, the model of shared realities, trust and a shared relevance with the news, to fuse the shared reality theory with the theory of trust in journalism. The theories for trust used are Kohring & Matthe's (2007) four dimensions of trust in journalism and Blöbaum's (2016, p. 13) elements influencing trust. When this model is tested concerning the results, it illustrates that if the reality of the news (the narratives told on the news) and the shared realities (groups of people where the individuals belong) do not overlap, there is no shared space where a shared understanding can be created. This model aids the understanding of the relational and shared aspects of trust between different groups of people and the news. It also identifies potential weaknesses in the relational structure (e.g., when individuals do not feel represented in the news).

The results underscore trust as an ongoing process, since the COVID-19 pandemic has been a tipping point concerning some individuals' media trust. It is crucial not to feel secure just because previous studies on trust show a generally high news trust in Sweden. As the pandemic has shown, unexpected things that affect trust in the news can occur at any time.

The thesis has proposed four research questions. The first two research questions address the motives the participants use to justify their level of trust. The main motives that the interviewees mentioned for low trust in traditional news are "news is spreading fear", "news increases polarization", "news should be both deeper and broader", and "journalists do not understand better", "I do not trust it is independent", "news is not about me" and "news excludes, accuses or devalues me".

To answer RQ 1 about which dimensions the informants are considering concerning their primary motives for trust, some participants emphasised that the themes covered in the news are too narrow (they have insufficient trust in theme selectivity). One example was that during the COVID-19 pandemic there was a disproportionate focus on the exact numbers of people who died or were in intensive care units (insufficient trust in fact selectivity). There are also some perceptions about a gap between journalists and citizens. Instead of discovering different perspectives among the citizens, the news adopts the same perspective as the establishment (insufficient trust in theme and fact selectivity). This is in line with the findings of Noppori et al. (2019) supporting the view that democratic corporatist media systems have an underlying tendency of political and social consensus that traditional media support. Howvever, accusations about information being incorrect (trust in the correctness) were rare. Nevertheless, participants sometimes found the news evaluations (trust in the evaluations) problematic. The participants demanded more nuanced reporting where the journalists change their assessment of what audiences can handle. Most participants emphasised that they want the news to be more nuanced, versatile and complicated when needed.

RQ 2 concerns the elements informants consider concerning their main motives for low trust in news. There are some, though few, associations to potential conspiracy theories. However, more commonly, participants believed that ulterior motives, intentions, such as money, drive the reporting. This is also related to integrity, because it is about the journalists' sense of justice and ability to withstand possible pressure. The journalists' competence was also

questioned. There is an opinion that competent journalists should give a broader and more nuanced perspective on what is happening in society than they perceive in the news today.

RQ 3 asks what role social context and other people play concerning trust in news. The results show that other people are essential when constructing trust for at least three reasons. 1) The experience of belonging suggests it is crucial to have friends who share one's view: "you can be yourself with like-minded people". 2) To attain confirmation was also important, and the results show it is essential to at least have some people who confirm what one thinks and feels, since one does not want "to be an island to [one]self," as one participant observes. Finally, 3) to obtain information indicates people the participants know and trust are important sources of information, in some cases more important than traditional news.

RQ 4 concerns what values the informants find common to all people in society. Six main themes are highlighted: "we are here together", "to avoid fear", "not having to worry", "all people want to do good" and "democracy" and "human rights". Concerns are raised about whether it is possible to agree on what these themes truly mean. However, the motive for this research is to gain more knowledge of what could help increase news audiences', specifically news sceptics', confidence in news journalism. To do this, the shared reality theory has shown that finding a shared relevance concerning all citizens is crucial.

Since modern humans also share their realities with the media (Higgins, 2019, p. 111), it is also relevant to observe what the informants believe is needed to trust and thus feel a shared relevance with mainstream journalism. The main proposals are "better journalism", "balance of bad news", "trustworthy journalists", "existential perspectives", and "more perspectives represented".

This thesis raises many ideas for further studies. For example, it shows that representation and the feeling of belonging are central to trust in news. Swart and Broersma (2022) argue that scholars need to consider individuals' tacit knowledge to understand how trust in news is constructed. The findings of this thesis highly support this argument, since the relational process occurs naturally in groups of people: it is about feelings of inclusion more than absolute facts. I suggest more extensive research using shared reality theory to shed light on the relational trust process.

This study also raises questions about areas other than the theme of trust, which are worthy of further investigation in journalism. One topic is whether the news contributed to the stigmatization of unvaccinated people during the COVID-19-pandemic. If so, can this be justified within the framework of what is considered good journalism? Also, did the news have a devaluating or patronizing approach towards people with opinions outside the norm, as mentioned in the interviews? If so, can this be justified within the framework of quality journalism? Perhaps it is impossible to avoid that some individuals and groups of people are news sceptics. Nevertheless, it is not desirable that news journalism increase the distance to parts of their audience without understanding why.

Couldrys (2005) has suggested that the media has the role to "'stand in', or appear to 'stand in', for something wider, something linked to the fundamental organisational level on which we are, or imagine ourselves to be, *connected*, as members of society" (ibid., p. 4). Higgins argue the only way to connect different groups, and thus the solution to the problem of fragmentation, is to find means like storytelling to create a shared reality between different groups (2019, p. 277). Based on what I learned from working on this thesis, I argue that news journalism should strive to deepen the understanding of what connects people and help citizens feel connected with the news, with each other and with society as a whole.

8. References

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9. Appendix

9.1. Interview guide

The first question after each digit is the main question. The rests are clarifications and suggestions for possible follow-up questions to be asked if necessary.

1. How do you describe your trust in traditional regular Swedish news? This is exemplified by Rapport, Aktuellt (Svt), Ekot (SR) and daily newspapers such as Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet. They are told this is the type of news we will talk about in this interview, unless clearly stated otherwise.

2. How would you rate your overall confidence in news 1–10? (1 = very low, 10 = very high.) Do you have any comments on that?

3. How would you describe your expectations of news? Example?

4. Is it the intention or the competence (i.e., perceived competence, knowledge, expertise) that affects the level of trust most? Examples?

5. Are there any specific topics or areas where you trust the news less than others? Why? What are your main arguments?

6. How important are these topics in your life? Do you consider yourself to have knowledge about these topics?

7. Do you have experiences, tipping points, that have changed your confidence in the news? Examples?

Dagens Nyheter (2022-04-05 page 1–10) is shown on an iPad. During the telephone interviews, the pages are sent digitally in PDF format. The interviewees do not have time to read the whole article, but they get the opportunity to look through, read headlines, and introductions, view the photos and get a feel for the content. Dagens Nyheter is available for the interviewees during the rest of the interview to be used as an example.

8. How credible do you think this magazine is? Develop? Why?

9. What role do you think this magazine, and others in the same genre, play in society?

10. To what extent would you say you can identify with DN? Is it about things that affect your life? Examples? Do you feel represented?

11. Is there any difference between your trust in the source (DN) and when it comes to the actual information (message)?

12. How would you rate your trust in DN on a scale of 1–10? (1 = very low, 10 = very high.) Do you have any comments on that?

13. If I say the most important work of journalism is to examine power on behalf of citizens, to inform the public and to allow different perspectives and opinions to be heard, what do you say about this?

14. If you were to rate from 1–10, the news' ability to:

- Examine the power?
- Inform the public?
- Give different perspectives?

15. Do you feel represented in the news media in general? Examples?

16. Have you ever felt left out, accused, or devalued by the news media?

17. Do you know other people thinking like you when it comes to trust in the news?

18. Do you talk about trust in the news with them?

19. What is required for you to trust a news source (i.e., a newspaper, TV news or similar)?

20. Are there any fundamental human values you think you share with most other people in our society? (Does news have anything to do with it?)

21. What does it take to start trusting news?

The interviewees are asked if they have anything to add or any questions; if not, the recording is stopped after they have said what they like.

DAGENS NYHETER.

TISDAG 5 APRIL 2022 ● SVERIGES STÖRSTA MORGONTIDNING ● GRUNDAD 1864 ● PRIS 40 KRONOR

"Mandomsprovet".
Marie Richardson är
Mrs Robinson när film-
klassikern blir teater.
Kultur 8

Seger i premiären.
Djurgårdens nyförvärv
Victor Edvardsen sänkte
sin gamla klubb.
Sport 24

Minst nio svenskar har
rest till Ryssland för
att agera "oberoende
experter". I flera fall
har det handlat om
bjudresor.

Svenska "observatörer" hyllar valsystemet i ryska medier

Inbjudna av Ryssland. Nio svenskar har de senaste åren övervakat kritiserade val

DN granskar. Minst nio svenskar har sedan 2017 rest till Ryssland för att agera "oberoende experter" vid ryska val. Inbjudningarna har kommit direkt från ryska myndigheter.

Den internationella organisationen OSSE som brukar skicka ut valobservatörer har kritiserat de ryska valen för att varken vara fria eller rättvisa. Hösten 2021 fanns ingen

av deras observatörer på plats när duma- och kommunalvalen skulle hållas, däremot flera svenskar. Två av dem intervjuas i ryska medier. "Allting fungerar väl" säger de.

Fyra svenskar har också rest till den illegalt annekterade Krimhalvön för att agera valobservatörer.
– Jag skulle inte säga att jag ångrar mig, säger en av dem.

Enligt forskaren Anton Sjechovtsov används observatörerna som ett sätt för regimen att lura det internationella samfundet och den egna befolkningen. **Nyheter 6–7**

Dödandet i Butja kan skynda på skärpta sanktioner

Nyheter. De misstänkta krigsbrotten i Butja får EU att skynda på sitt arbete med fler sanktioner mot Ryssland. Frankrike är redo att stoppa rysk kol och olja.
– Världen kommer att klassa det här som folkmord, sade Ukrainas president Volodymyr Zelenskyj när

han på måndagen besökte Butja.
"Reaktionen på bilderna av döda civila i ukrainska Butja var snabb i Kreml. De tillskrevs genast 'ukrainska extremister' – en reaktion som främst är avsedd för rysk publik", skriver DN:s Anna-Lena Laurén. **Sidorna 8–10**

Jannike Kihlberg:
Makthavarna måste fatta tuffa beslut för klimatet – beslut som kan uppfattas som obekväma.
Nyheter 15

Forskare i Umeå avslöjar attacker med kemvapen

Nyheter. I Umeå finns ett av få laboratorier i världen som har i uppdrag av FN att analysera prover av kemiska vapen. Här har experter belagt att den ryska regimkritikern Aleksej Navalnyj förgiftades med nervgiftet novitjok.
– Jag förstår att det finns en oro för vad en alltmer pressad Putin kan komma att göra, säger Magnus Normark på Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut. **Sidorna 12–14**

Hanna Hellquist:
Att bli ansiktet utåt för sena missfall eller ofrivillig barnlöshet, det är ett jobb som aldrig tar slut.
Nyheter 17

LEDARE

Kriget i Ukraina.

Regeringen är oförmögen att att fatta de svåra besluten.

Foto: Paul Wennerholm/TT

Ledare: Våra vardagsbeslut kan slå mot Putins krigskassa

DN.
OBEROENDE LIBERAL

Slakten av civila i Butja kommer att gå till historien som ett av de avgörande krigsbrotten på europeisk mark. Mycket talar för att det bara är början. Putin har målat in sig i ett hörn, strategin är nu att terrorisera ukrainarna till underkastelse på samma sätt som i Tjetjenien under 1990- och 2000-talen.

För bara en månad sedan var uppslutningen i väst total. USA och EU införde de hittills skarpaste sanktionerna mot en stor ekonomi. Över 300 internationella företag lämnade Ryssland nästan över en natt. Den ryska ekonomin skulle kollapsa inom ett par dagar.

Det har den inte gjort. Rubeln är nu värd nästan lika mycket som före kriget. Det beror i huvudsak på att Europa fortsätter att importera rysk gas för 350 miljoner dollar om dagen – pengar som går rakt in i Kremls krigskassa. Så länge gasen flödar kan förbrytelserna fortsätta.

Pressen på de överlägset största importörerna Tyskland och Italien att helt enkelt stänga av den ökar för varje dag. De ekonomiska konsekvenserna skulle oftänkomligen bli enorma i hela Europa eftersom energimarknaden är gemensam. Priserna skulle stiga också i Sverige.

Mycket har skrivits de senaste veckorna om västvärldens pånyttfödelse – enigheten tog ju Ryssland på sängen och till och med Putinvänliga politiker som Ungerns Viktor Orbán sa rätt saker.

Men under ytan vibrerar det. På söndagen vann Orbán valet i Ungern. I sitt segertal beskrev han EU och Ukrainan president Zelenskyj som "motståndare". I Frankrike, där första omgången av presidentvalet äger rum i helgen, knappar Marine Le Pens Nationell samling in på Emmanuel Macron. Partiet har tagit emot miljoner från Putin. I USA hurar Republikanerna och Donald Trump, som i dagarna uppmanade den ryske krigsförbrytaren att läcka information om Joe Bidens son.

Stigande el- och bensinpriser är ett hot mot sittande regeringar överallt. Det är skälet till att Joe Biden i dagarna öppnade USA:s strategiska oljereserv, och det är skälet till att den svenska regeringen överöser bilägande villafamiljer med kontanter under ett valår.

Klimat- och miljöminister Annika Strandhäll (S) framträdande i SVT:s "Agenda" på söndagen gjorde det tydligt att regeringen inte ens är nära att fatta de svåra besluten, som att boj-

Putins krigsförbrytelser får bara kosta så länge det inte går ut över svenskarnas vardag.

kotta rysk gas. Putins krigsförbrytelser får bara kosta så länge det inte går ut över svenskarnas vardag.

Men det är en omöjlig ekvation. Europas bästa möjlighet att trycka tillbaka Ryssland – utöver sanktioner och vapenleveranser – är att strypa gasen och därmed sluta finansiera Kremls krig. En del kommer att kunna ersättas med import från Norge, USA och Nordafrika. Omställningen till fossilfritt måste därtill snabbas på.

Men de verkligt viktiga insatserna på kort sikt kommer att behöva ske på efterfrågesidan.

EU-kommissionen har till exempel redan uppmanat medborgarna i medlemsländerna att sänka inomhustemperaturen med en grad. Det låter kanske som en bagatell, men om unionens 200 miljoner hushåll gjorde det skulle effekten bli enorm. Samma sak om 450 miljoner invånare duschade en minut mindre på morgonen eller använde t-tröjan en extra dag.

Sverige exporterar 25 terawattimmar per år i snitt. Det motsvarar nästan hela Irlands årliga elkonsumtion. Varje insparad kilowattimme här hemma betyder en exporterad kilowattimme till kontinenten, och i förlängningen en utträngd kilowattimme rysk gas.

DN 5/4 2022

Klimatet.

Billigare teknik inger hopp

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På måndagseftermiddagen presenterades till slut IPCC:s senaste rapport. Deadline för arbetet var egentligen i fredags och lanseringen skulle ha skett på måndagsmorgonen. Men det hela blev försenat efter oenighet kring formuleringarna om hur snabbt fossila bränslen ska fasas ut.

Det är inte första gången länderna bråkar om åtaganden. Men det är talande att det sker med Rysslands invasion av Ukraina som fond.

Det räcker inte att vissa länder minskar sina utsläpp för att klimatförändringarna ska bromsas, alla måste göra sitt. Dessutom krävs ett ömsesidigt förtroende. Det måste gå att lita på att andra gör vad de har förbundit sig till.

Sådant blir naturligtvis svårare med länder som bedriver illegala anfallskrig – och struntar i allt vad internationella lagar och överenskommelser heter.

Faktum är att det internationella läget har försämrats dramatiskt sedan Parisavtalet undertecknades 2015. Det handlar inte bara om Ryssland, utan också om Kinas växande maktanspråk och de ökade spänningarna med väst som följt. Därmed blir klimatsamarbetet svårare.

Det betyder inte att det blivit mindre viktigt att ställa om. Tvärtom. Utsläppen måste kraftigt ner till 2030.

Finns det då något ljus i mörkret? IPCC slår fast att vi har verktygen för att klara omställningen. Framför allt: kostnaden för klimatvänlig teknik har sjunkit med 85 procent sedan 2010. Det är ingen liten sak. Omställningen behöver inte vara ett ok att bära. Den som går först skaffar sig kanske till och med konkurrensfördelar. Och skakar, som en bonus, av sig beroendet av gas och olja från Putin och andra diktatorer.

Kriget har gjort att Europas regeringar fokuserat på det som är allra viktigast. Stora investeringar görs i försvaret för att slå vakt om friheten. Nu krävs samma satsning på klimatet.

DAGENS NYHETER.

SVERIGES STÖRSTA MORGONTIDNING · GRUNDAD 1864

‹A4

LEDARE

Kolumnen.

Det är människorna som gör ett land värt att försvara – inte nationens ära

Liberal nationalism kännetecknas inte av att landet man älskar är liberalt. Det verkar många glömma bort i sina försök att förstå de starka känslor som lätt uppkommer i krig.

P å ena sidan en oansenlig bordsflaggstång med en antydan av blågult i den slokande tyglappen. På den andra sidan en jordglob i bruna toner. Däremellan en bokhylla, ett arkivskåp och en pipa.

Scenen är Intiman på Uppsala stadsteater. Rekvisitan hör egentligen till "Vansinnets historia", en pjäs om den unge Foucault i folkhemmets Uppsala. Men i kväll är den franska bildstormaren ersatt med Verner von Heidenstam. I stället för kylig esprit vankas jordiga rötter och varma klipphällar. Uppsalas internationella litteraturfestival ska invigas och temat är hemkänsla. Heidenstams 1890-talsdikt om hur han längtar hem till barndomens stenar citeras i programbladet.

Göran Rosenberg invigningstalar under rubriken "Hemat, hembygd och hem". Den mänskliga erfarenheten är alltid partikulär, säger han. Det betyder inte att lika barn leka bäst, men att vi lär oss att älska och ta hand om specifika människor på specifika platser. Sedan utvidgar vi cirklarna.

I vår tycks alla plötsligt tala om nationell anknytning. Kriget i Ukraina har fått många att fundera över sin och andras vilja att försvara Sverige. Redaktionsledningen på Liberal Debatt har kommit ut som liberala nationalister.

På denna ledarsida har liberalen Isobel Hadley-Kamptz skrivit om sin egen fosterlandskärlek (17/3). Men som Lisa Irenius påpekat skiftar även den goda nationalismen lätt skepnad (SvD 13/3).

Vad utmärker egentligen en liberal nationalism? Jag har forskat om detta sedan 2015 och skrivit om den även på svenska (Kvartal 15/9 2019). Länge tycktes många svenska liberaler ointresserade av frågan.

Gina Gustavsson
Fristående kolumnist

Gina Gustavsson är docent i statskunskap och fristående kolumnist i Dagens Nyheter.

Men i och med Ukraina har vinden vänt.

Jag välkomnar en diskussion som går bortom den utopiska "imagine-linjen", för att tala med John Lennon. Så länge demokratin, rättsstaten och välfärden främst äger rum på det nationella planet duger det inte att besjunga en värld utan gränser, befolkad av människor som bara lever för dagen.

I stället krävs en känsla av nationell samhörighet för att medborgarna ska acceptera demokratiska förluster och gå med på att betala skatt till det gemensamma. Att bara se sig som världsmedborgare och leva för dagen gagnar sällan rättvisan. I dagsläget är det ju fortfarande främst det nationella vi:et som kan ta ansvar för historiska övergrepp mot minoriteter och för det framtida klimatet. Det förutsätter en nationell gemenskap som spänner över flera generationer. Många människor behöver dessutom en sådan förankring för att blomstra.

Men det finns också gott om nationella vi-känslor som en liberal bör värja sig mot. Som det okritiska förhärligandet av det egna landet, impulsen att försvara dess anseende och hyllandet av nationell enighet. Sådana känslor blossar ofta upp i krig. De fyller en funktion när man slåss för sin överlevnad, jag begriper det. Men det gör dem inte liberala, inte ens om nationen de riktas mot fylls med liberalt och demokratiskt innehåll.

Hur mycket än man sympatiserar med de som nu skanderar "Slava Ukraini" (Ära åt Ukraina) så kan en nationalism som kallar sig liberal aldrig kretsa kring hjältar som offrar sig för den nationella hederns skull. Inte för att liberaler aldrig skulle offra sig. Utan för att liberala offer bara kan göras på altare som helgar människan, inte landets ära.

> Sådana känslor blossar ofta upp i krig. De fyller en funktion när man slåss för sin överlevnad, jag begriper det. Men det gör dem inte liberala.

Min och andras forskning har visat att en fixering vid landets rykte och en okritisk nationell stolthet ger upphov till illiberala impulser. Även i fredstid. Sådana attityder leder till att avvikare misstänkliggörs, minoriteter utesluts och att man sluter sig inåt och undviker internationellt samarbete.

Och det gäller alls inte bara etniska eller kulturellt krävande uppfattningar om den nationella gemenskapen. Utan även den nationella chauvinism och självgodhet som tar avstamp i, säg, Axel Oxenstierna. Eller feministisk snöröjning. För att ta två exempel på vad som tycks utlösa Hadley-Kamptz egen "grätmilt vardagliga fosterlandskärlek".

Allt fler forskare varnar numera för att även nationella identiteter med ett liberalt och demokratiskt innehåll kan bli illiberala, i synnerhet i Norden. Att undvika kulturen eller etniciteten och i stället rikta in sig på myndigheterna och medborgarskapet i sin patriotism garanterar alltså inte alls att denna är liberal.

Snarare är det förhållningssättet till det nationella som utmärker liberaler. En grämild vördnad inför nationella auktoriteter är inte liberal nationalism. Men en nyfikenhet på den egna kulturen och en aktiv nationell självkritik i kombination med en varm lojalitet kan vara det. Så länge lojaliteten gäller människor av kött och blod i stället för landets institutioner, symboler eller rykte. Grannen framför fanan och Försäkringskassan, helt enkelt.

Eller som Rosenberg säger, där han sitter mitt emellan flaggan och jordgloben. Platserna hör ihop med de människor vi knutit an till där. Jag tror att den ordningen är central för liberaler. Stenarna kan få fylla oss med värme, institutionerna med stolthet. Men först kommer alltid människorna.

Demokrati.

Politiker är ofta underbetalda, underskattade och underbara

Susanne Nyström
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M ed jämna mellanrum kommer unkna åsikter från lokalpolitiker upp till ytan. Senast handlade det om att en centerpartist i Sölvesberg skrivit på Facebook att kriget i Ukraina beror på att USA och EU har provocerat Putin. Han menar också att EU och Nato bör sluta mobba den ryska presidenten och be honom om ursäkt (BLT 28/3).

Förutom vikten av att markera mot

uttalandena, vilket C har gjort, ringar händelsen in två problem. Dels att partier ger medlemmar förtroenden utan ordentliga bakgrundskontroller. Dels att bara 5 procent av befolkningen svarar "ja, absolut" på frågan om de kan tänka sig att ta ett politiskt uppdrag, vilket kan förklara den förra punkten.

Med riksdagsledamoten Johan Pehrsons (L) ord tycker alltså 19 av 20 att andra ska göra jobbet med det demokratiska samhällsbygget – "det gör att urvalet blir begränsat". Det är sannolikt en delförklaring till varför en person med obegripliga åsikter har blivit ledamot i en barn- och utbildningsnämnd.

Lösningen för att höja nivån är tudelad. För det första behöver partier ta ett större ansvar för vilka de placerar

på valbar plats och i lokala nämnder. För det andra måste det bli enklare att bemanna stolarna.

I dag delar knappt 35 900 huvuden på cirka 60 800 kommunala uppdrag och 96 procent är fritidspolitiker, vilket innebär att de i regel sitter i möten, läser handlingar och fattar beslut utöver sina ordinarie jobb och utan att det märks nämnvärt i plånboken. Det är således inte särskilt konstigt att mer än var femte hoppade av under förra mandatperioden, framför allt eftersom uppdraget kändes svårt att förena med privatliv och arbete.

Därutöver uppgav 26 procent av de förtroendevalda att de utsattes för trakasserier, hot eller våld under 2020. Och nästan lika många var oroliga för att de själva eller någon anhörig skulle drabbas.

> Bara 5 procent av befolkningen svarar "ja, absolut" på frågan om de kan tänka sig att ta ett politiskt uppdrag.

I en sådan verklighet är det märkliga inte att partier på flera håll kämpar för att fylla kommunala listor. Inte heller att det hårda samtalsklimatet gör att allt fler tvekar inför att engagera sig politiskt. Det anmärkningsvärda är snarare att så pass många fortfarande ställer upp.

Förutom att jobba förebyggande mot hot och våld, och överväga att göra det mer attraktivt att vara lokalpolitiker, är det därför vettigt att många kommuner minskar antalet ledamöter i fullmäktige och slår ihop nämnder. Visst går det att invända att lokalsamhället då blir mindre demokratiskt, men det kan faktiskt även vara tvärtom. I alla fall om alternativet är att väljare röstar på partier som har fler uppdrag än lämpliga kandidater och därför släpper fram företrädare med motsatt politik.

DN DEBATT

Livsmedelsförsörjning.

"Hög risk för tvärbroms i svensk mjölkproduktion"

April är en avgörande månad för svensk livsmedelsförsörjning. Redan före kriget i Ukraina var kostnadskrisen i lantbruket ett faktum, och nu har priserna rusat för foder, gödsel, drivmedel och el. Såväl foderföretag och matvaruhandlare som politiker och konsumenter måste ta sitt ansvar, skriver **16 mjölkbönder** från hela landet.

DN. DEBATT
220405

Nu är Rysslands krig mot Ukraina inne på sin andra månad. Som bönder finns tankarna hos våra kollegor i Ukraina som förberedde sitt vårbruk när bomberna började falla.

Orden räcker inte till för att beskriva känslorna inför tanken på att behöva lämna djur och gård bakom sig för att fly, att inte kunna skörda djurens foder. Att såväl bönder som anställda blir inkallade i strid, och i detta läge känna ansvaret för att förse sina landsmän med livsmedel. Krigets värsta konsekvens är det mänskliga lidandet i Ukraina och det måste få ett stopp.

Kriget innebär också omfattande och långsiktiga konsekvenser för vårt svenska lantbruk som måste hanteras nu. Vi bönder är vana vid att ta risker, vi är vana vid att hantera både djuren, vädret och marknadens nycker. Men vi står just nu inför en situation som utan tvekan är den mest avgörande för svensk livsmedelsförsörjning under vår livstid.

Rysslands krig mot Ukraina förstör den viktiga ukrainska skörden och sätter stopp för handel med den stora jordbruksnationen Ryssland. Det innebär ett stort bortfall på världsmarknaden. Dessutom minskar utbudet och ökar kostnaderna på insatsvaror som mineralgödsel och foder.

I kombination med de höga priserna på energi och drivmedel är risken stor att vi får lägre skördar och minskad livsmedelsproduktion även i andra delar av världen. Det kommer utan tvekan att få dramatiska konsekvenser för livsmedelssektorn under en lång tid framöver. När befolkningen saknar livsmedel kan det leda till oroligheter på annat håll i världen.

Att vi behöver öka den svenska livsmedelsförsörjningen och satsa inom svenskt lantbruk tycks självklart. Men i stället är det en hög risk att vi får en tvärbroms redan nu i vår. Redan innan kriget drog i gång var kostnadskrisen i lantbruket ett faktum. Totalt har årskostnaderna för de viktiga insatsvarorna som foder, gödsel, drivmedel och el ökat med 3 miljarder kronor för mjölkproducenter jämfört med tidigare år.

Det säger sig självt att de ökade kostnaderna inte kan bäras enbart av de 3 000 svenska mjölkbönder som finns kvar. Vi vädjar därför till alla aktörer

Det säger sig självt att de ökade kostnaderna inte kan bäras enbart av de 3 000 svenska mjölkbönder som finns kvar, skriver artikelförfattarna. Foto: Lisa Mattisson

i livsmedelskedjan, såväl som politiken och konsumenter, att ta ansvar:

1 Hela livsmedelskedjan från foderföretagen till handlare och inköpare **kommer att behöva dela på risker och kostnader.** Det vore orimligt om varje led i värdekedjan gjorde procentuella påslag på kostnadsökningarna. Vi välkomnar att aktörer i handeln har öppnat upp för prishöjningar och att frångå vanliga processer för prisförhandlingar för att säkerställa att vi har svenska produkter på hyllorna.

2 Politiken behöver göra mer. Det krispaket som presenterades av regeringen innan kriget bröt ut betalas ut för sent och är för litet. Nu ska vi starta vårbruket. Likviditeten är mycket ansträngd på grund av kraftigt fördyrade inköp av foder och gödsel. Då kommer många mjölkbönder helt enkelt inte att klara utgifterna.

Nyligen var EU-kommissionen befriande tydlig med att europeisk livsmedelsproduktion nu måste prioriteras, och presenterade både åtgärder i form av att öka produktionen genom att odla på mark i träda och extra resurser. Det är hög tid att den svenska regeringen gör samma sak och ger både tydliga signaler och resurser för att svensk livsmedelsproduktion ska öka och inte minska i detta läge.

Ska det vara någon mening med den så kallade livsmedelsstrategin måste regeringen agera nu, annars kan den lika väl kastas i papperskorgen till sommaren.

3 Konsumenterna måste fortsätta välja svenska produkter även när priserna stiger. Vi kommer alla att behöva prioritera vår hushållsekonomi hårdare framöver. Det är en chans att tänka igenom vad som är viktigt på riktigt. Det är värt det både för din hälsa och en hållbar samhällsutveckling att lägga pengar på näringsrik mat och bra råvaror som gynnar det svenska lantbruket. Tänk även på att när produkten säljs av ett bondeägt kooperativ som Arla går pengarna direkt till bönderna och deras företag.

Vi representerar tusentals mjölkbönder inom Arla som varje dag fyller butiker, restauranger, skolkök, sjukhus och äldreboenden med näringsrika mejeriprodukter. Vårt arbete är helt

avgörande för svensk livsmedelsförsörjning.

Vi producerar tillsammans ett enormt värde både ekonomiskt och näringsmässigt för det svenska samhället. Vi och våra kor bidrar dessutom till öppna landskap och biologisk mångfald. Vi producerar mjölk till ett av världens lägsta klimatavtryck, samtidigt som vallodling och betesmarker bidrar till kolinlagring.

Men arbetsinsatsen är hög, marginalerna små och sårbarheten stor. Vi kommer att fortsätta ta stort ansvar, men det kan inte vara så att det är vi som ska ta hela risken när kostnaderna stiger.

Ska det vara någon mening med den så kallade livsmedelsstrategin måste regeringen agera nu, annars kan den lika väl kastas i papperskorgen till sommaren. Räddar vi inte vårbruket kommer svensk livsmedelsproduktion att ta skada under lång tid framöver i ett läge då behovet av en lokal livsmedelsproduktion är mer akut än på mycket länge.

Joachim Aaby-Ericsson, Arlabonde och ordförande, Sydsvenska kretsen
Hans Andersson, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Sörmland
Thomas Bäck, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Uppland
Anders Christenson, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Halland
Sandra Danielsson, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Öland
Daniel Halmsjö, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Västra
Emma Hultman, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Småland
Elin Johansson, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Sjuhärad
Johan Karlsson, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Kalmar
Mats Larsson, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Skaraborg
Ewa Lööw, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Örebro
Håkan Nilsson, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Jämtland
Kajsa Petersson, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Dalarna
Andreas Strandberg, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Värmland
Magnus Svensson, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Östergötland
Anna Vägermark, Arlabonde och kretsordförande, Södra Norrland

DN granskar.

Svenskar bjuds in av Ryssland som valexperter – hyllar regimens system

Nio svenskar har de senaste åren rest till Ryssland för att agera valobservatörer i ofria val. I ryska medier hyllar de regimens valsystem.

Det rör sig om tidigare riksdagsledamöter, forskare, företagare och personer från alternativmedier. Flera av dem har fram till nu varit okända.

Svenskar har också rest till illegalt annekterade Krimhalvön för att utföra uppdragen. I flera fall handlar det om bjudresor, visar DN:s granskning.

Tipsa vår granskande reporter

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I mitten av september 2021 hålls de så kallade duma- och kommunalvalen i Ryssland. Landets mest kända oppositionsledare, Aleksej Navalnyj, sitter fängslad drygt tio mil öster om Moskva. Flera av Navalnyjs nära medarbetare har redan flytt landet. De som ändå stannat kvar kan gripas när som helst – och tillåts inte ställa upp i valet.

Organisationen för säkerhet och samarbete i Europa, OSSE, är en internationell organisation med 57 deltagande länder. De skickar bland annat ut valobservatörer för att undersöka om olika länders val går rätt till. De har flera gånger kritiserat de ryska valen för att varken vara fria eller rättvisa. Inga observatörer från OSSE finns på plats i Ryssland under valet hösten 2021 på grund av begränsningar från regimen.

Trots det så befinner sig flera svenskar på plats för att bevaka valet. Innan vallokalerna hunnit öpp-

na pågår en konferens om just val och demokrati på Moskvas statliga universitet. En av svenskarna kliver upp på scenen. Han håller bland annat tal om "möjligt valfusk" i Sverige i riksdagsvalet 2018. Magnus Stenlund är programledare på Swebbtv, en webbkanal som spridit konspirationsteorier och bjudit in högerextrema gäster.

– Men mötesprotokollen från svenska Valmyndigheten visade ingenting, säger en upprörd Magnus Stenlund från scenen.

På samma konferens står även den tidigare riksdagsledamoten för Sverigedemokraterna, Erik Almqvist, uppskriven som talare. De två svenskarna är inbjudna till Ryssland för att agera "internationella experter" och "observatörer" – som ryska medier kommer att kalla dem. På en av vallokalerna, efter att ha besökt vallokaler i staden Krasnodar, intervjuas båda två i rysk tv och i tidningar. Där hyllar de det

ryska valet: "Allting funkar väl" och det saknas "svaga länkar" som kan leda till valfusk.

När DN kontaktar Magnus Stenlund säger han att han ville undersöka om valet gick rätt till:

– Jag har ingen formell utbildning eller någon speciell kompetens för det jag gjorde, men än att jag fick en möjlighet att själv göra en bedömning. Jag upplevde inte att någon försökte påverka min bedömning. Det är vad jag kan säga till dig.

Varför ska du bevaka ett val i Ryssland över huvud taget, om du saknar kompetens för det?

– Det är en fel ställd fråga. Jag har kompetens och det var därför jag gjorde det, säger han och lägger sedan på.

En tredje svensk medborgare befinner sig i Ryssland under samma val: Gregory Simons, forskare vid Uppsala universitet och Institutet för Rysslands- och Eurasienstudier. Han kommer ursprungligen från Nya Zeeland och har tidigare ar-

betat flera år på svenska Försvarshögskolan. Efter att ha besökt fyra vallokaler i staden Pskov konstaterar han i ryska medier att valet är transparent och funkar väl.

Det här är inte första gången som Gregory Simons och Erik Almqvist bjuds in till landet för att agera "utländska experter". Simons var på plats under regionvalen 2019, och Almqvist på flera platser när landet röstade om den nya grundlagsändringen 2020 – som resulterade i att Vladimir Putin kan behålla makten i ytterligare 16 år. Erik Almqvist medverkade även då i en rad ryska medier, bland annat en statlig nyhetsbyrå, och sedan i en av landets tv-kanaler.

– Det har varit okontroversiellt. Det jag sett är en rak och okomplicerad valprocess. Jag skulle till och med kalla det idiotsäkert.

Tv-kanalens utsända frågor om det är bra eller dåligt, att någonting är idiotsäkert.

– Det är inte dåligt, det betyder att det är supertydligt. Det finns inget utrymme för några mistag, svarar Erik Almqvist.

När DN ringer den före detta riksdagsledamoten uppger han att han utfört uppdragen för att granska valprocessen. Men också för att förbättra Sveriges relation med Ryssland.

– Om jag skulle ha en kriminell och farlig granne med stort våldskapital, då försöker inte jag provocera honom. Utan jag vill ha en god relation med honom för att det ska vara lugnt, säger Erik Almqvist.

DN har gått igenom hundratals ryska nyhetsartiklar, tv-sändningar och videointervjuer – och därigenom kunnat identifiera de svenska observatörerna.

Granskningen visar att minst nio svenskar rest till Ryssland sedan år 2017 för att agera "oberoende experter" vid ryska val. Åtminstone tre av dessa har också senare återvänt

9
svenskar som rest till Ryssland för att observera ofria val

Magnus Stenlund
Programledare på Swebbtv, en webbkanal som spridit konspirationsteorier och bjudit in högerextrema gäster. Stenlund var observatör i duma- och kommunvalet 2021. I ryska medier har han sagt att han inte kunnat se några "svaga länkar" i deras valsystem.

Kristofer Wåhlander
Svensk dirigent, skolchef och inspirationsföreläsare som under flera år bodde i Ryssland. Är nu hemmahörande i Skåne. Har varit valobservatör under presidentvalet 2018 – på annekterade Krimhalvön. Detta genom officiell inbjudan från Ryska federationsrådet.

Gregory Simons
Forskare vid Uppsala universitet och Institutet för Rysslands- och Eurasienstudier. Har arbetat flera år vid svenska Försvarshögskolan. Varit valobservatör 2021 och 2019.

Erik Almqvist
Tidigare riksdagsledamot för Sverigedemokraterna. Har suttit i partistyrelsen. Lämnade sina uppdrag efter den så kallade "järnrörsskandalen". Är chefredaktör för "Exakt24". Har bland annat agerat valobservatör på annekterade Krimhalvön 2020 och flera gånger hyllat valen i ryska medier.

Fyra svenskar har tagit emot uppdrag att bevaka ryska val på olagligt annekterade Krim: Kristofer Wåhlander, Ulf Grönlund, Alexander Grönlund och Erik Almqvist. Foto: Thomas Karlsson, Dialog.ru, Rossija Segodnja, Michael Winiarski

Den tidigare SD-ledamoten Erik Almqvist tycker att Rysslands valsystem är "idiotsäkert" och transparent. Han har varit på plats under två ryska val. Foto: Thomas Karlsson, Gov.spb.ru, St Petersburg Live, Pervyj kanal

vid ytterligare ryska val. Inbjudningarna kommer direkt från ryska myndigheter. Men också från en organisation som samarbetar med det ryska försvarsdepartementet.

Ett par observatörer vi pratat med berättar hur ryska medier väntat på deras ankomst vid vallokaler och även följt med sällskapen. Nästan samtliga har på plats medverkat i en rad lokala eller nationella medier. I alla medieframträdanden har de uttryckt sig positivt om regimens valsystem – ingen kritik har lyfts fram.

Flera av de svenska observatörerna bekräftar för DN att det rört sig om bjudresor där exempelvis boende, resekostnader och drinkar betalats av ryska myndigheter eller organisationer. Något som står i stark kontrast till hur officiella observatörer från OSSE arbetar, där det observerade landet aldrig ska stå för några kostnader. Detta för att säkra observatörernas oberoende.

Vår granskning visar också att fyra svenskar valt att resa till den illegalt annekterade Krimhalvön för att utföra observatörsuppdrag. Förutom Erik Almqvist handlar det exempelvis om den svenske dirigenten, skolchefen och inspirationsföreläsaren Kristofer Wåhlander, som under flera år bott i Ryssland. Den officiella inbjudan kom direkt från ryska Federationsrådet.

I den Kreml-trogna tidningen Komsomolskaja Pravda framgår det att han efter besök i tre vallokaler var nöjd: "Vi såg inga kränkningar någonstans. Allting sköts professionellt och anständigt".

När vi kontaktar Wåhlander berättar han att han inte ångrar uppdraget på Krimhalvön.

– Jag anser att även människor som bor i annekterade länder ska ha röstat. Jag tycker inte det är en extrem tanke alls, säger han.

Ytterligare två som agerat observatörer där är den svenska företagaren Ulf Grönlund och hans vuxne

Så tipsar du DN.

1 På tjänsten "DN granskar" kan du tipsa oss om missförhållanden och lämna information som kan vara känslig. Adressen är dngranskar.dn.se. DN skyddar sina källor.

2 Tjänsten är uppbyggd för att ge dig som tipsare största möjliga säkerhet. Därför krypteras ditt tips.

3 Du får vara anonym. Granskande reportrar tar hand om tipset.

dngranskar.dn.se

son Alexander Grönlund – som tillsammans reste till Krim 2018.

– Jag skulle inte säga att jag ångrar mig. Men jag blev ju svartlistad i Ukraina efter det här eftersom jag aldrig ansökte om att få komma in, säger Alexander Grönlund.

Bidrog inte en valobservation där till att legitimera Rysslands annektering av Krim?

– Jag kan på ett sätt se hur det bidrar till det. Men jag ville med egna ögon se om valet gick rätt till.

På bilder från valet syns Kristofer Wåhlander, Ulf Grönlund och Alexander Grönlund posera framför kameran i en myndighetslokal på Krimhalvön, tillsammans med inbjudna observatörer från andra länder.

Enligt statskontrollerade ryska medier befann sig 43 internationella observatörer på Krimhalvön under detta val. DN har – tillsammans med nordiska kollegor på Politiken, Verdens Gang och Helsingin Sanomat – identifierat sju personer hemmahörande i Skandinavien.

Anton Sjechovtsov är en ukrainsk forskare, författare och grundare av organisationen "Center for democratic integrity" i Österrike, vars syfte är att följa påverkansförsök från auktoritära stater. Han har tidigare intresserat sig för just personer som reser till Ryssland för uppdrag som "falska observatörer".

– De används för att försöka lura det internationella samfundet och förvirra riktiga valobservatörer. Det är ett sätt för auktoritära stater att få sina odemokratiska val att se äkta ut även inför den egna befolkningen, säger han.

Sjechovtsov menar att det här är ett sätt för den ryska regimen att rekrytera utländska politiker och experter på – som sedan kan utföra nya uppdrag som gynnar Ryssland.

– Många som gjort sig kända för att vara Kreml-trogna började faktiskt som just valobservatörer.

Enligt honom ska vissa "observatörer" ha fått pengar i kontanter efter att ha utfört uppdragen. Men de svenskar som vi pratat med säger att de inte fått betalt för att övervaka valen.

I en rapport från svenska Totalförsvarets forskningsinstitut står det att "ryska val kvalar inte in som demokratiska" och att valet i Ryssland snarare är en "bekräftelseprocess av Vladimir Putins politiska system". Men de svenska observatörerna tycker tvärtom.

I anslutning till folkomröstningen 2020, den som gav Vladimir Putin möjlighet att regera många år framöver, hölls en presskonferens. Medverkade gjorde Vavrinec Suk, mer

känd som Vavra Suk, chefredaktör för högerextrema Nya Tider. Presskonferensen sändes bland annat i ryska Kanal 5.

– I Sverige ifrågasätter svenska medier och etablissemanget den här folkomröstningen och dess legitimitet. Det är av politiska skäl eftersom de inte gillar innehållet, säger han.

Vavrinec Suk var även på plats vid det kritiserade presidentvalet 2018 – tillsammans med Sanna Hill. Hon är ansvarig utgivare för sajten Exakt24, med kopplingar till Nya Tider. Tidigare har hon också kandiderat för högerextrema partiet Nationaldemokraterna.

Hill återvände i sin tur till Ryssland året därpå, 2019, bland annat för att delta på en konferens om "internationell säkerhet och stabilitet". Talare var Vladimir Putin och utrikesminister Sergej Lavrov. På sin Instagram publicerade hon en bild på presidenten på scen. "Vilken vecka jag har i Moskva! Kan inte bli bättre, bokstavligt talat", skrev hon.

Några av svenskarna är sedan tidigare omskrivna. Bland annat skrev tidningen Expo om Sanna Hill och Vavra Suk. En annan är den före detta riksdagsledamoten för Sverigedemokraterna, Pavel Gamov, som 2017 medverkade i ett reportage i högerpopulistiska Nyheter Idag. Han hade bjudits in till Ryssland för att övervaka region-valet i Moskva.

DN har också kunnat se hur en tionde person ska ha varit valobservatör. Men inte i Ryssland – utan i Ukraina. Det rör sig om Martin Dahlin, som gått under flera identiteter i Sverige, men som främst är känd som Egor Putilov. Han arbetade en längre tid för den till SD närstående sajten "Samhällsnytt". Han har också nekats journalistackreditering till Sveriges riksdag då han enligt Säkerhetspolisen haft kontakter med rysk underrättelsetjänst.

I en nyhetsartikel från 2015 benämns han som observatör och kritiserar det ukrainska valet för att vara odemokratiskt. Det står även att han sett "många kränkningar" i Odessa där regionval hölls.

I en skriftlig kommentar svarar Egor Putilov: "Resan skedde i spåren av min rapportering om Majdanrevolutionen för Arbetaren samt flera ryska oppositionella medier. Att ukrainska regionala val 2015 hade stora brister fastställs av internationella organisationer däribland Freedom House".

DN har sökt den organisation Putilov uppges ha representerat utan resultat.

DN har sökt Ulf Grönlund, Vavrinec Suk, Sanna Hill och Pavel Gamov.

Ulf Grönlund
Svensk företagare som länge bott i Ryssland och driver företag där. Har agerat valobservatör på annekterade Krimhalvön 2018. I ryska medier uttryckte han sin förvåning över hur många som ville rösta och att det var som en "semester" för befolkningen på annekterade Krim.

Alexander Grönlund
Vuxen son till Ulf Grönlund och bor i norra Sverige. Har agerat valobservatör på annekterade Krimhalvön 2018. Har i ryska medier uttalat stöd för att det ryska presidentvalet hölls på Krim.

Sanna Hill
Ansvarig utgivare för sajten Exakt24. Varit valobservatör under presidentvalet 2018. Deltog året därpå i en konferens om "internationell säkerhet och stabilitet" i Ryssland – där Vladimir Putin var talare. Har kandiderat för det högerextrema partiet Nationaldemokraterna.

Vavrinec Suk
Chefredaktör för tidningen Nya Tider. Har tidigare varit chefredaktör för den högerextrema tidningen Nationell idag, som ägts av Nationaldemokraterna. Varit valobservatör 2020 och 2018. I ryska medier har han kallat valet för "väldigt transparent, effektivt och demokratiskt".

Pavel Gamov
Tidigare riksdagsledamot för Sverigedemokraterna. Var valobservatör i regionvalet i Moskva 2017.

Foto: Izbirkomkuban, Michael Winiarski, TT, Tutapressa, Dialog.org, Sanna Hills Instagram

NYHETER

Kriget i Ukraina.

Kremls ordval bara begripligt för en rysk publik

Sankt Petersburg. **Reaktionen på bilderna av dödade i ukrainska Butja var snabb i Kreml. De tillskrevs genast "ukrainska extremister".**

De flesta uttalanden från Kreml är obegripliga för väst – de är främst avsedda för en rysk publik.

KOMMENTAR. ANNA-LENA LAURÉN, DN:S KORRESPONDENT

De ryska argumenten verkar främst vara avsedda för rysk publik. Deras effekt på resten av världen kommer att vara närmast obefintlig, eftersom de upprepar gammal skåpmat om ukrainska "fascister" som inte är relevanta utanför Ryssland.

Orden fungerar i Ryssland, där befolkningen länge har marinerats i en specifik ideologi om andra världskriget och ukrainarnas roll där.

I väst faller de platt till marken. Att "ukrainska radikaler" skulle ha gått omkring och skjutit ukrainare i Butja låter bara obegripligt. Strängt taget är det heller inte exakt vad Ryssland säger. Man kallar fotografier och videofilmer av dödade civila i Butja en "provokation av radikaler" (i Ryssland används ordet radikal ungefär som vi använder ordet extremist), men man säger ingenting konkret.

Vad det handlar om är inte att lägga fram information. Det handlar om att använda vissa ord för att uppnå önskad effekt.

Efter att den statliga ryska propagandan i åratal har utmålat Ukraina som ett land lett av fascister – inte olikt den sovjetiska propagandan före vinterkriget – finns en färdig bild av Ukraina som en stor del av invånarna har vant sig vid att förhålla sig till. Alla kanske inte tror blint på att Ukraina leds av fascister. Däremot finns en utbredd föreställelse om att Ukraina har ett "fascistproblem".

– Ryssland ber om ett särskilt möte med FN:s säkerhetsråd för att diskutera ukrainska militärens och radikalers provokation i Butja, skrev Maria Zacharova på sin Telegramkanal sent söndag kväll. Zacharova är talesperson för ryska utrikesdepartementet.

I Ryssland förstår alla vad hon menar. I väst låter "ukrainska radikalers provokation" främför allt besynnerligt. Vad västvärlden tänker är dock inte huvudsaken för Kreml. Det viktiga är dels att få ut det rätta budskapet till sin egen publik, dels att frågan internationellt ska diskuteras inom en för Ryssland mer gynnsam krets. FN:s säkerhetsråd där Kina ingår är ett sådant organ.

Att Storbritannien blockerade frågan kallade Zacharova följdriktigt en handling "i enlighet med de sämsta engelska traditionerna". Enligt henne kommer Ryssland att fortsätta kräva ett särskilt möte i Säkerhetsrådet om Butja.

Samtidigt sipprar förstahandsinformation ut även i Ryssland om vad som ser ut att vara rena avrättningar. Oberoende ryska medier som till exempel The Insider har intervjuat flera invånare i Butja som konkret och i detalj talar om de ryska soldaternas våld mot civilbefolkningen. The Insiders sajt är än så länge inte blockerad i Ryssland.

De statliga medierna kör för sin del systematiskt ut budskapet att Butja är en "provokation" anställd av ukrainarna själva.

– Ukrainska nationalister anklagar våra soldater för krigsbrott och deras enda bevis är en video, säger nyhetsuppläsaren i Kanal 1:s inslag om Butja.

Rysslands president Vladimir Putin. Foto: Tass/Sipa

Kanalens teori är att Ukraina vill få till stånd ännu hårdare sanktioner mot Ryssland och därför har låtit placera ut döda kroppar i Butja.

– Väst försöker få fler länder med i sanktionerna mot Ryssland och dessutom stärka dem ytterligare, eftersom de sanktioner som införts inte fungerar, fastslår journalisten i inslaget.

Samtidigt spekulerar Kanal 1 i att verket är motståndare till ukrainska regeringen som har blivit skjutna. Det vill säga: man håller det samtidigt för möjligt å ena sidan att kropparna är utplacerade, å andra sidan att det verkligen handlar om mördade civila, men de har i så fall blivit skjutna av ukrainare.

Att samtidigt köra ut flera olika teorier är följdriktigt. Exakt så har Kremls propagandamaskineri alltid fungerat, enligt principen att det viktigaste är att inge folk känslan att sanningen inte går att fastställa.

I Ryssland sjunker den här metoden extra väl in just nu, eftersom det samtidigt är ett bekvämt sätt för individen att frånsäga sig skulden när det gäller invasionen av Ukraina.

Det ryska försvarsministeriet säger i sitt officiella uttalande att liken inte kan ha legat i flera dagar på gatan, eftersom de inte har stelnat och saknar de mörka fläckar som lik brukar ha. Det framgår inte hur ministeriet har kunnat upptäcka sådana detaljer i bilder på påklädda personer som tagits på avstånd.

Det är mycket troligt att statliga ryska medier inom kort lanserar nya teorier om vad som hänt de civilklädda personer som hittats döda på Butjas gator, flera skjutna i huvudet.

Precis som man gjorde om det nedskjutna Malaysia Airlines-planet i Ukraina 2014.

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Ukrainas president Volodymyr Zelenskyj besökte på måndagen Butja. "Världen

Misstänkt krigsbrott.

Bilderna från den ukrainska staden Butja där civilklädda dödsoffer hittats längs gatorna efter de ryska marktruppernas reträtt, väcker starka reaktioner från omvärlden. Det här vet vi hittills om händelserna.

1 Vad har hänt?
Den 27 februari intog ryska trupper Butja, knappt tre mil nordväst om Kiev. Efter en månads hårda strider med ukrainska förband drog sig ryssarna tillbaka med motiveringen att målen för centrala Ukraina uppnåtts. När journalister från flera redaktioner tog sig in i staden i helgen möttes de av en brutal krigsskådeplats. Utöver utbrända byggnader och förstörda ryska stridsvagnar hittades 21 mördade civila som lämnats liggande på gatorna. Journalisterna på plats beskriver det som rena avrättningar där offren skjutits i huvudet, flera med bakbundna händer. Några av liken tros ha legat på gatan i flera dagar, andra i veckor. I beskjutna bilar hittades även döda kroppar från hela familjer och på satellitbilder upptäcktes en 14 meter lång massgrav.

Butjas borgmästare Anatolij Fedoruk hävdar att 280 människor har begravts där, siffrorna är dock inte bekräftade.

2 Hur reagerar omvärlden?
Rapporterna i spåren av den ryska reträtten från Butja har fått omvärlden att fördöma vad som misstänks vara krigsbrott. "Ett slag i magen". Så kommenterade USA:s utrikesminister Antony Blinken bilderna från Butja.

Under måndagen sade även landets FN-ambassadör, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, att USA kommer att be FN:s generalförsamling att stänga ute Ryssland från FN:s råd för mänskliga rättigheter.

Frankrikes president Emmanuel Macron twittrade att bilderna var "olidliga" och att "ryska myndigheter måste ställas till svars för sina brott".

EU:s utrikeschef Josep Borrell sade på söndagen att han är "chockad över nyheterna om grymheter utförda av ryska styrkor".

Israel, som tidigare haft en mer försiktig hållning när det gäller kritik mot den ryska invasionen, fördömde tydligt grymheterna i Butja och den israeliska utrikesministern Yair Lapid sade att det är ett krigsbrott att medvetet skada oskyldiga civila. Däremot har det varit tyst från flera andra makthavare, som Indiens premiärminister Narendra Modi och Kinas president Xi Jinping.

kommer att klassa det här som folkmord", sade Zelenskyj enligt CNN.
Foto: Ronaldo Schemidt/AFP

Det här vet vi och det här vet vi inte

3 Vad vet vi inte?
Informationen bygger till största del ännu bara på bilder. Några analyser om vilka offren är eller under vilka omständigheter de har dött har hittills inte gjorts. The Guardian har dock pratat med lokalinvånare som säger att de civila offren dödades utan att ha provocerat de ryska styrkorna. Händelserna går i dagsläget inte att knyta till specifika föreslöve. Det finns även uppgifter om flera massgravar.

4 Finns det fler platser som Butja?
Human Rights Watch publicerade under söndagen en rapport som visar flera fall där ryska trupper gjort sig skyldiga till möjliga krigsbrott mot civila i ockuperade områden i Charkiv, Kiev och Tjernigov. Det handlar om våldtäkter och summariska avrättningar. Exakt hur många civila offer som har hittats i Butja och andra städer och byar från vilka de ryska trupperna dragit sig tillbaka från är i dagsläget oklart. Enligt ukrainska uppgifter är dödandet av civila i Butja bara toppen av ett isberg.
I helgen gick Ukrainas riksåklagare Iryna Venediktova ut med uppgifter om att man hittat lik efter 410 civila efter Rysslands reträtt i Kievs närområde.

5 Vad säger Ryssland?
Ryssland nekar till all inblandning i dödandet i Butja. I stället hävdar man att de hemska scenerna från Butja är iscensatta av den ukrainska regeringen och att Ukraina gjort det som en "provokation". Under måndagen sa den ryska utrikesminister Sergej Lavrov att Ryssland kräver ett särskilt möte i FN:s säkerhetsråd eftersom man ser "sådana provokationer som ett direkt hot mot internationell fred och säkerhet".

Förödelse i Butja.

6 Vad händer nu?
Efter vittnesmålen om mördade civila som lämnats på gatorna i Butja kan Ryssland räkna med hårdare straffåtgärder. Utökade sanktioner bör riktas mot den ryska energisektorn, enligt Frankrikes president Emmanuel Macron. Storbritanniens premiärminister Boris Johnson säger att man kommer att utöka sanktionerna mot Ryssland men även öka det militära och humanitära stödet till Ukraina.
Dessutom krävs det från flera håll en internationell undersökning av händelserna. Den Internationella brottmålsdomstolen i Haag har sedan tidigare inlett en utredning om eventuella krigsbrott i Ukraina och dödandet i Butja ingår där. Europeiska rådets ordförande Charles Michel har uppgett att unionen hjälper Ukraina och frivilligorganisationer att samla in bevis som kan användas i internationella domstolar.
Experter är ense om att den ryska invasionen i Ukraina kommer att leda till ett internationellt rättsligt efterspel. Däremot kommer det att ta tid. Man får räkna med flera år innan militära ledare ställs till svars.

Hanna Rydén
Hanna Grosshög

Bilderna från Butja skyndar på utökade sanktioner från EU

I söndags protesterade Berlinbor mot import av rysk olja och gas.

Tysklands förbundskansler Olaf Scholz.
Foto: DPA

Frankrikes president Emmanuel Macron.
Foto: Shutterstock

De brutala bilderna och vittnesmålen från ukrainska Butja får Europa att skynda på sitt arbete med fler sanktioner mot Ryssland. Frankrikes president Emmanuel Macron är redo att stoppa rysk kol och olja.
Flera EU-länder har redan beslutat att stoppa import av rysk energi.

● De baltiska staterna Estland, Lettland och Litauen importerar inte längre rysk gas, rapporterar Lettlands radio som intervjuat Uldis Bariss, vd för lettiska gaslagringsföretaget Conexus Baltic Grid. I stället hämtas gasen från ett stort gaslager i Lettland.
Polen stoppar sin import av ryskt kol. Planen är att till årsskiftet upphöra med all import av rysk energi, enligt premiärminister Mateusz Morawiecki.
Till skillnad från USA är Europa splittrat när det gäller import av gas, kol och olja från Ryssland. Flera länder, som Tyskland, Slovakien, Ungern och Polen, är beroende av ryska importen.

Men efter de misstänkta krigsbrotten i ukrainska Butja talar allt fler ledande politiker om att det är dags att klämma åt ryska regimen där det svider mest – pengaflödet från energin.
– Det som hänt i Butja kräver en ny runda med sanktioner och mycket tydliga åtgärder. Vi kommer att koordinera detta med våra europeiska partner, särskilt med Tyskland, säger Frankrikes Emmanuel Macron till radiokanalen France Inter.
Frankrike är ordförande för EU detta halvår. I intervjun framhåller Macron att Europa nu måste kunna komma framåt med sanktioner riktade mot kol och olja från Ryssland.
Liknande besked kommer från EU-kommissionen, som förbere-

der de sanktioner som medlemsländerna sedan beslutar om.
– Vi kommer att skyndsamt arbeta med ytterligare sanktioner mot Kremls mordiska krigsmaskin, säger Peter Stano, talesperson för EU-kommissionen.

Tysklands förbundskansler Olaf Scholz (S) har lovat att skärpa sanktionerna mot Ryssland.
Men vilka åtgärder det rör sig om är oklart. Socialdemokraternas partiledare Lars Klingbeil är emot ett omedelbart stopp av energiimporten från Ryssland.
– Trots brutaliteten, trots de starka känslorna som bilderna väcker – även hos mig – måste vi prata om konsekvenserna detta skulle ha för oss i Tyskland. Det handlar inte bara om industrin, det handlar också om vad detta skulle göra med vår sammanhållning, sade Klingbeil i ett debattprogram på tysk tv på söndagskvällen.
På onsdag ska EU-ländernas ambassadörer i Bryssel diskutera ett nytt sanktionspaket mot Ryssland.
Sverige kommer inte, likt Litauen med flera, att stoppa rysk energiimport.
"Sverige har ingen direktimport av gas från Ryssland, och kan därför inte göra på samma sätt som Litauen. Den lilla del gas vi har kommer via Danmark, och det går inte att särskilja gas med ryskt ursprung", skriver energiminister Khashayar Farmanbar i ett mejl till DN.
Ministern hänvisar i stället till arbetet som görs på EU-nivå, där ökad import av flytande gas (LNG) ska minska det ryska energiberoendet.

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Kriget i Ukraina.

Orbán vinner inte trots kriget – utan på grund av det

Kan nära förbindelser med Ryssland och Vladimir Putin verkligen vara en politisk fördel i ett EU-land 2022?

För Ungerns premiärminister Viktor Orbán tycks det vara det. På söndagen återvaldes han med stor marginal till en fjärde mandatperiod. I sitt segertal kallade han Ukrainas president "en motståndare".

KOMMENTAR

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● Europa står enat mot Ryssland heter det i högtidstalen, samtidigt som bilderna från Butja chockar världen. Men samtidigt vinner två av Putins närmaste europeiska vänner övertygande valsegrar.

I Ungern krossade Orbáns regerande koalition på söndagen oppositionen och ökade sin röstandel från 49 till 53 procent. I grannlandet Serbien återvaldes president Aleksandar Vucic med ännu större siffror.

Båda dessa ledare har i många år odlat nära personliga relationer med Putin, den man som nu är ansvarig för det blodigaste kriget i Europa på decennier. De har gjort respektive land starkt beroende av rysk energi.

Den öppet Rysslandsvänliga linjen har varit särskilt uppseendeväckande i fallet Orbán – eftersom Ungern till skillnad från Serbien är medlem i såväl EU som Nato.

Så sent som den 1 februari, när hundratusentals ryska soldater stod stridsberedda vid Ukrainas gräns, reste Orbán till Moskva för ännu ett hjärtligt möte med Putin. De båda ledarna kom överens om förlängning av gaskontrakt och ungersk tillverkning av det ryska covidvaccinet Sputnik. Orbán nämnde inte krigshotet mot Ukraina.

När invasionen kom rättade han in sig i EU-ledet. Ungern lade inte in något veto mot sanktionerna.

Samtidigt pågick en valrörelse hemma i Ungern, där Orbán för första gången ställdes mot en enad opposition med sex mycket disparata partier bakom en gemensam premiärministerkandidat, Péter Márki-Zay.

Kriget sågs som ett uppenbart trumfkort för Márki-Zay. Det ungerska valet kunde nu presenteras som ett val mellan krigsherren Putin och det enade Europa.

Det som har hänt är i stället att

Orbáns agerande vilar på en premiss som aldrig uttalas.

Den går ut på att trots att Ungern är ett Natoland, och därmed formellt Rysslands fiende, så skulle Putin aldrig attackera landet så länge hans vän Orbán sitter vid makten.

Strategin har uppenbarligen lyckats. I stället för att gå tillbaka ökar Orbáns parti Fidesz och ett litet alliansparti sin röstandel. De behåller den två tredjedelars majoritet i parlamentet som ger möjlighet att ändra landets konstitution.

I sitt segertal hävdade Orbán att han hade vunnit mot alla odds, trots alla mäktiga fiender:

– Vänstern här hemma, den internationella vänstern, Brysselbyråkraterna, internationella medier och till sist också Ukrainas president.

I själva verket är det Fidesz som har sett till att göra valet orättvist, till Orbáns fördel. Márki-Zay har haft extrem uppförsbacke i ett land där 90 procent av medierna är lojala med regeringen och där valsystemet har ändrats för att gynna den som sitter vid makten.

Icke desto mindre är resultatet en enorm besvikelse för oppositionen. Och för alla andra i Europa som trodde att högerpopulism i Putinstil inte var gångbar när kontinenten skakas av ett ryskt anfallskrig.

Viktor Orbán pekade ut Volodymyr Zelenskyj som en politisk fiende i sitt segertal. Foto: Shutterstock

Orbán har lyckats vända händelserna till sin egen fördel.

Han har gått en balansgång med följande beståndsdelar: Ja till sanktionerna mot Ryssland, men ingen kritik mot Putin personligen. Ja till utländska Natosoldater i Ungern, men bara långt från den östra gränsen. Nej till transporter av vapen till Ukraina över ungerskt territorium. Ja till fortsatta leveranser av rysk energi.

Ukrainas president Volodymyr Zelenskyj har flera gånger pekat ut Ungern som det enda land som vacklar i stödet för hans folk. Orbán har svarat med att kritisera Zelenskyj.

Och inför väljarna har den ungerske premiärministern lyckats med konststycket att måla upp bilden av oppositionen som krigshetsare, och sig själv som garanten för fred.

"Världen kommer att klassa det här som folkmord"

Ukrainas president Volodymyr Zelenskyj besökte på måndagen den ukrainska staden Butja där ryska styrkor anklagas för att ha begått krigsbrott under ockupationen.

– Världen kommer att klassa det här som folkmord, sade presidenten.

● Ryska styrkor har dragit sig tillbaka från Kievregionen efter flera veckors ockupation och anklagas för krigsbrott i flera ukrainska städer. Den ukrainska riksåklagaren har meddelat att 410 döda kroppar hittats i regionen och på måndagen visade nya satellitbilder en 14 meter lång massgrav i Butja, där den lokala polisen uppskattar att 150 personer kan ha begravts.

Iklädd skyddsväst och omgiven militär blev Zelenskyj visad en gata i Butja där ukrainska styrkor genomfört ett bakhåll på en rysk pansarkolonn, och upprepade sina anklagelser gentemot Ryssland.

– Det här är krigsbrott, sade presidenten enligt CNN.

På en fråga från brittiska BBC om huruvida det fortfarande är möjligt att förhandla om fred med Ryssland svarade presidenten att det är "väldigt svårt", men att diskussionerna mellan länderna kommer fortsätta.

FN:s människorättschef Michelle Bachelet meddelade på måndagen att alla eventuella krigsbrott kommer utredas. "Det är av yttersta vikt att alla kroppar grävs upp och identifieras så att offrens familjer kan informeras och att de exakta dödsorsakerna fastställas. Alla åtgärder bör vidtas för att bevara bevis", skriver hon i ett uttalande.

Samtidigt uppger EU-kommissionens ordförande Ursula von der Leyen att man är redo att skicka ett utredningsteam till Ukraina. Flera länder, som Storbritannien och USA, har också krävt att Ryssland ska uteslutas från FN:s människorättsråd, och USA:s president Joe Biden säger att han vill se Putin åtalad i en internationell krigsbrottsdomstol.

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Volodymyr Zelenskyj i Butja. Foto: AFP

● Område kontrollerat av Ryssland
● Område där ryska styrkor har attackerat*
● Område som Ryssland uppger sig ha kontroll över
● Område som Ukraina uppger sig ha återtagit
● Hårda strider senaste dygnet

Tjernobyl — Kiev — Lviv — Vinnytsia — Charkiv — Sumy — Dnipro — Zaporizzja — Cherson — Odessa — Mariupol — Krimhalvön — RYSSLAND — UKRAINA — DONBASS

200 km

Grafik: DN Källa: Institute for the Study of War (senast publicerad rapport från tisdag 2 april)

Inte ett ljud om dödandet från Peking

Peking. Medan resten av världen fördömer dödandet Butja är det tyst från Peking. Kommunistpartiet har inte kommenterat händelsen alls och i sociala medier florerar konspirationsteorier.

KOMMENTAR

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● Samma dag som världens medier uppmärksammade att 20 civilklädda låg döda på gatorna i Butja vidarebefordrade den kinesiska statliga nyhetsbyrån Xinhua ryska uppgifter om att det amerikanska försvarsministeriet finansierar utveckling av biokemiska vapen runt om i Ryssland, Belarus och Ukraina. Det var en helt okritisk rapport med Kreml som avsändare.

Det är typiskt för den kinesiska rapporteringen om kriget i Ukraina. Rysk propaganda vidareförmedlas okritiskt. Attacker på civila, sjukhus och barn får knappt något utrymme alls. Över huvud taget är den ryska invasionen oprioriterad och hamnar ofta långt ner, inbäddad bland andra nyheter.

Det är i linje med regimens hållning. Det styrande kommunistpartiet vägrar att kalla det ryska anfallskriget för en invasion och benämner precis som den ryske presidenten Vladimir Putin ofta kriget som en "begränsad militär operation". Ofta upprepas också att Ryssland har all anledning att känna oro för sin säkerhet. Skulden för kriget ligger på USA-ledda Nato, enligt den kinesiska rapporteringen. Den som läser kinesiska medier kan få intrycket att Ryssland inte hade något annat val än att gå in i Ukraina.

Måndagens Folkets Dagblad, kommunistpartiets propagandaorgan, hade inte en rad om Butja. På samma sätt såg det ut i flera andra statliga medier. De artiklar som nämner Butja är noga att understryka att Moskva förnekar att ryska trupper var involverade. De citerar också FN:s generalsekreterare António Guterres som har krävt en oberoende utredning om vad som hänt.

I sociala medier anklagar flera användare ukrainska "nazister" för våldet i Butja. Återigen den ryska historieskrivningen, alltså. En användare på Weibo, den kinesiska motsvarigheten till Twitter, frågasätter varför inte anhöriga hade hämtat de döda kropparna trots att ukrainska trupper tagit kontroll över området för fyra dagar sedan. Flera menar att hela nyheten är falsk. Men det finns också de som fördömer det som hänt i Butja. De menar att det inte är första gången ryssarna agerar brutalt och pekar på Katynmassakern i Polen under andra världskriget då över 20 000 polacker dödades på order av Sovjetunionens diktator Josef Stalin.