



Anne Kaun and Michele Madeleine Biendara

What is the state of public service media in Sweden?

1. Introduction and contextualisation

The role of public service media in the media system

Public service media (PSM) in Sweden is provided by three companies: Sveriges Radio (SR; English: Swedish Radio), Sveriges Television (SVT; English: Swedish Television) and Sveriges Utbildningsradio (UR; English: Educational Broadcasting). They are all owned by a separate trust ('Förvaltningsstiftelsen för Sveriges Radio AB, Sveriges Television AB och Sveriges Utbildningsradio AB').¹ The broadcasting license issued by the Swedish government describes the funding conditions for the three companies and provides a framework for their activities and obligations. The current broadcasting license is valid from 2020 to 2025.² The broadcasting license for 2026 to 2033 has already been approved and came into effect in autumn 2025. The commercial providers are considered to be market-driven complements to public service media, offering a broad range of

content on a profit-making basis.

Swedish public service media companies are required to ensure that their programming promotes diversity and helps to strengthen media production in Sweden.³ They play a key role in sustaining Swedish language and culture, as well as minority languages and cultures in Sweden. Since 2010, when the National Minorities and Minorities Languages Act was passed, the languages of Sweden's five official minority groups are especially promoted and protected. No official figures are available on this, however, as there is no census data on the size of the five minority groups, which include Jews (and Yiddish), Roma (Romani Chib), Sami (the Sami language), Swedish Finns (Finnish), as well as Tornedalians and Meänkieli. It is estimated that the Jewish population is around 20,000–25,000, the Roma 50,000–100,000 and the Sami population 20,000–35,000. Swedish Finns are the largest national minority in Sweden, with a population of somewhere between 400,000 and 700,000 people, and the Tornedalians are estimated to

¹ Förvaltningsstiftelsen. (n.d.). Available at: <https://www.forvaltningsstiftelsen.se/> (accessed 10 October 2025).

² Vad är public service? (22 January 2025). *Om Sveriges Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/vad-ar-public-service> (accessed 15 October 2025).

³ Swedish Media Authority (Myndigheten för press, radio och TV) (20 June 2024), Granskningsnämndens bedömning av public service-redovisningarna för 2023 (Stockholm). Available at: <https://mediemyndigheten.se/globalassets/rapporter-och-analyser/2024/granskningsnamndens-bedomning-av-public-service-redovisningar.pdf> (accessed 1 August 2025).

number around 50,000. Taken together, it is estimated that 10 per cent of the Swedish population belong to one of the official minority groups.⁴ Public service media institutions in Sweden are a major component in the production of both teaching and learning materials for the five national minorities living in Sweden. They produce a major part of the resources available in the respective languages of these minorities, as textbooks are almost non-existent. Additionally, such content also enables people outside these minorities to engage with them.⁵

According to Sveriges Television (SVT), their vision is 'to contribute to a more inquisitive, informed Sweden. Our aim is to create content that engages, entertains and enriches – in the service of the public.'⁶ Their programming is aimed at the Swedish population at large and includes information, culture and entertainment. SVT wants to provide shared experiences for their audiences at a time when media use is becoming increasingly fragmented and be people's go-to broadcaster when important events are happening. It is the only television company in Sweden tasked with providing a varied selection of Swedish-language content. As of 2024, 72 per cent of SVT's programmes were in Swedish.⁷ SVT offers five national television channels with a diverse focus in their programming schedules, one of them in cooperation with UR ('Kunskapskanalen'). Additionally, SVT offers digital and streaming content on their website, their own video streaming platform 'SVT Play' and other digital platforms.⁸ SVT employs approximately 2,100 people, with a varying number of fixed-term employees spanning 128 different roles. The gender distribution within the employees is almost equal (49 per cent women, 51 per cent men). Furthermore, SVT has offices in 50 locations around Sweden, as well as a correspondent network throughout the world.⁹ According to SVT's Public Service Report 2024, the company consistently reaches around 81 per cent of Swedish society with their channels and other services, the average user watching 41 minutes of content per day.¹⁰ Their streaming platform 'SVT Play' has a larger

audience in Sweden than Netflix.¹¹

Sveriges Radio define their vision as 'More voices and stronger stories for greater understanding'.¹² The company aims to reach the Swedish public with its services and to deliver independent and diverse journalism and cultural experiences. Additionally, SR provides information in terms of crisis.¹³ As Cilla Benkö, CEO of SR put it: 'Even those who believe that we don't need to be there editorially understand that we need to exist for the safety of the nation. If, God forbid, there should be a war in Sweden, SR might be the only media company in the country that can still transmit. We'll keep broadcasting, even if the lights go out.'¹⁴ SR runs three national radio channels with different focal points in their content and one local channel broadcasting across 25 regions in Sweden. Additionally, other services are offered to the public in the form of a website, podcasts, the streaming platform 'SR Play' and other digital platforms. In 2024, SR broadcast 140,000 hours of radio content, which amounts to 380 hours per day. SR produces content in ten different languages, including a range of national minority languages.¹⁵ As of December 2024, SR employed 2,233 people in 50 locations across Sweden, as well as temporary offices around the country. SR has the largest correspondent network in the Nordic region, with 18 correspondents covering geographically divided areas and two correspondents covering topics from a global perspective.^{16 17} In terms of audience, 55 per cent of the Swedish population listens to SR every day and 78 per cent every week. On average, 7.4 million people listen to SR weekly.¹⁸

Sveriges Utbildningsradio is committed to its vision of 'Knowledge for life'. The company aims to provide educational material and knowledge to everyone in Sweden, paying special attention to children, young people and their teachers, providing them with tools for teaching and learning. They create educational programming for schools and the public and offer factual, unbiased programmes free of advertisements.¹⁹ UR distributes its content via SVT and SR, as well as digitally. 'UR Play' is the company's

4 See: <https://sweden.se/life/equality/national-minorities-in-sweden> (accessed 29 November 2025).

5 Jaakkola Maarit (17 December 2024). ECMI MiNorities Blog. How Public service Media Enriches learning for and about Sweden's national Minorities. European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI). Available at: <https://doi.org/10.53779/SANN5221> (accessed 1 November 2025).

6 About SVT (n.d.). SVT Om Oss. Available at: <https://omoss.svt.se/about-svt.html> (accessed 5 September 2025).

7 Ett utbud för alla - Året med SVT (n.d.). Available at: <https://aretmedsvt.svt.se/ett-utbud-for-alla> (accessed 12 September 2025).

8 About SVT (n.d.). SVT Om Oss. Available at: <https://omoss.svt.se/about-svt.html> (accessed 5 September 2025).

9 Jobba här (14 December 2025). SVT Om Oss. <https://omoss.svt.se/jobba-har.html> (accessed 10 September 2025).

10 Siffror (n.d.). Available at: <https://siffror.svt.se/det-har-vill-svt.html> (accessed 5 September 2025).

11 SVT toppar med 4,1 miljoner tittare medan Netflix går om TV4 och SkyShowtime kliver in på topplistan – MMS (n.d.). Available at: <https://mms.se/svt-toppar-med-41-miljoner-tittare-medan-netflix-gar-om-tv4-och-skyshowtime-kliver-in-pa-topplistan/> (accessed 10 September 2025).

12 Vision och värdegrund (4 October 2021). *Om Sveriges Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/vision-och-vardegrund> (accessed 16 October 2025).

13 Vårt uppdrag (2023, November 24). *Om Sveriges Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/vart-uppdrag> (accessed 16 October 2025).

14 Lewitschnik, L. and Lucey, K. (10 October 2025). Inside Sweden's fight to protect public-service broadcasting. *Monocle*. Available at: <https://monocle.com/culture/media-industry/inside-swedens-fight-to-protect-public-service-broadcasting/> (accessed 16 October 2025).

15 Siffror över vårt utbud (12 March 2025). *Om Sveriges Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/siffror-over-vart-utbud> (accessed 5 September 2025).

16 Siffror över vår organisation (11 March 2025). *Om Sveriges Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/siffror-over-var-organisation> (accessed 18 September 2025).

17 Var vi finns och hur vi är organiserade (27 March 2025). *Om Sveriges Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/var-vi-finns-och-hur-vi-ar-organiserade> (accessed 18 September 2025).

18 Lyssnarsiffror (14 March 2024). *Om Sveriges Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/lyssnarsiffror> (accessed 18 September 2025).

19 UR | Vårt uppdrag (n.d.). UR.se. Available at: <https://www.ur.se/om-oss/vart-uppdrag/> (accessed 1 October 2025).

streaming platform. Additionally, UR offers its own app for preschoolers, and its content is also available on other digital platforms. UR has about 230 employees across its offices in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. UR's particular target group is people within the education system, including children, parents, the elderly, national minority groups and people seeking education and knowledge in general.²⁰ Teachers make up a large portion of their audience and according to a 2024 report by UR, 65 per cent of teachers in Sweden use their content in teaching every month. Their app for preschoolers has on average 90,000 active users per month and the use of UR's radio services on 'UR Play' increased in 2024. As for their television services, user numbers vary considerably.²¹

All three enjoy a high degree of trust in Swedish society, on both the left and the right, although the radical right (the radical right-wing party *Sverigedemokraterna* (Sweden Democrats)) is an online outlier.²²

Brief history of public service media

SR marked a hundred years of public broadcasting on 1 January 2025. This makes it only three years younger than the BBC. The history of public service broadcasters in Sweden begins in 1924 with the founding of AB Radiotjänst (Radio Service), which would later become Sveriges Radio. The company broadcast for the first time on 1 January 1925. At first, Radiotjänst had only seven employees and one broadcasting channel, which was active for a few hours in the evening. In 1928, school radio started. Teachers were able to use its broadcasts with students in the classroom. Early on, the Swedish National Board of Education (*Skolöverstyrelsen*) was responsible for programming. Radiotjänst took over this responsibility in 1931. Until 1931 all broadcasting was done exclusively live, which changed when gramophone records were introduced into broadcasting. During those years, broadcasting times were gradually extended until by 1933 Radiotjänst was broadcasting around eight hours a day. When the first women read the news in a radio broadcast in 1938, some listeners were outraged. Before that, this weighty task was confined to men, among other things in the belief that women should not have to talk about war and other forms of carnage. Radiotjänst played a vital role in reporting and mobilising when Germany invaded Poland in 1939, as radio was the fastest way to spread news and information. Even today, SR's local channels are responsible for informing the public during

emergencies. Radiotjänst added a second radio channel in 1955 and expanded into television broadcasting in 1956.

The ownership of the company changed in 1957 and it was renamed Sveriges Radio. SR's best known and most popular programme was launched in 1959: *Sommar I P1* (Summer in P1). Today, the programme has around 600,000 FM listeners and over a million people listen to the podcast. A third national channel was added in 1962 and became permanent two years later. The three channels were each allotted their own programming profile in 1966. P1 focused on talk and information; P2 provided educational and regional content, as well as 'serious music'; while P3 offered 'easy listening' and news. A few years later, in 1969, a second television channel was added, and a Finnish language editorial team was established. Starting in 1975, broadcasts were introduced in Serbo-Croatian, Greek and Turkish. With the start of local radio in 1977, the Swedish public was now able to listen to news about their own region from broadcasters speaking their own dialect. Today, these local channels are provided on SR's channel P4, which is now the company's biggest channel. Following this development, Utbildningsradio (UR) was founded in 1978, replacing a committee founded in the 1960s that was concerned with questions of pedagogical content on the radio. Sveriges Radio was reorganised in 1979: parent company Sveriges Radio and four subsidiaries that produce programmes (Sveriges Riksradio, Sveriges Lokalradio, Sveriges Utbildningsradio and Sveriges Television). Sveriges Television took over responsibility for television broadcasting. After the assassination of then Prime Minister of Sweden Olof Palme in 1986, 24-hour broadcasts were introduced.^{23 24}

The parent company established in the 1970s was dissolved in 1993. Sveriges Riksradio and Sveriges Lokalradio were merged. In the same year, the radio monopoly was broken and private radio stations started to broadcast alongside SR. A year later, the ownership structure of SR was changed again. The shares of the company are now completely owned by a foundation.²⁵

On 27 September 1995, SR broadcast digitally for the first time. In 2002, SR added broadcasting in Romani Chib, in 2003 the company's digital and web only channels were expanded, while in 2005 SR started to invest in podcast radio. P3 Dokumentär was one of the first podcasts and is still among the most popular. SR started talk shows in Arabic and light Swedish for people arriving in Sweden in 2016. Beginning in January 2019, the standard broadcasting fee

20 UR | About UR (n.d.). UR.se. Available at: <https://www.ur.se/om-oss/about-ur/> (accessed 20 September 2025).

21 Sveriges Utbildningsradio AB (2025). *Public service-redovisningen 2024*. Available at: <https://www.ur.se/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/PSR-2024-uppslag.pdf> (accessed 18 September 2025).

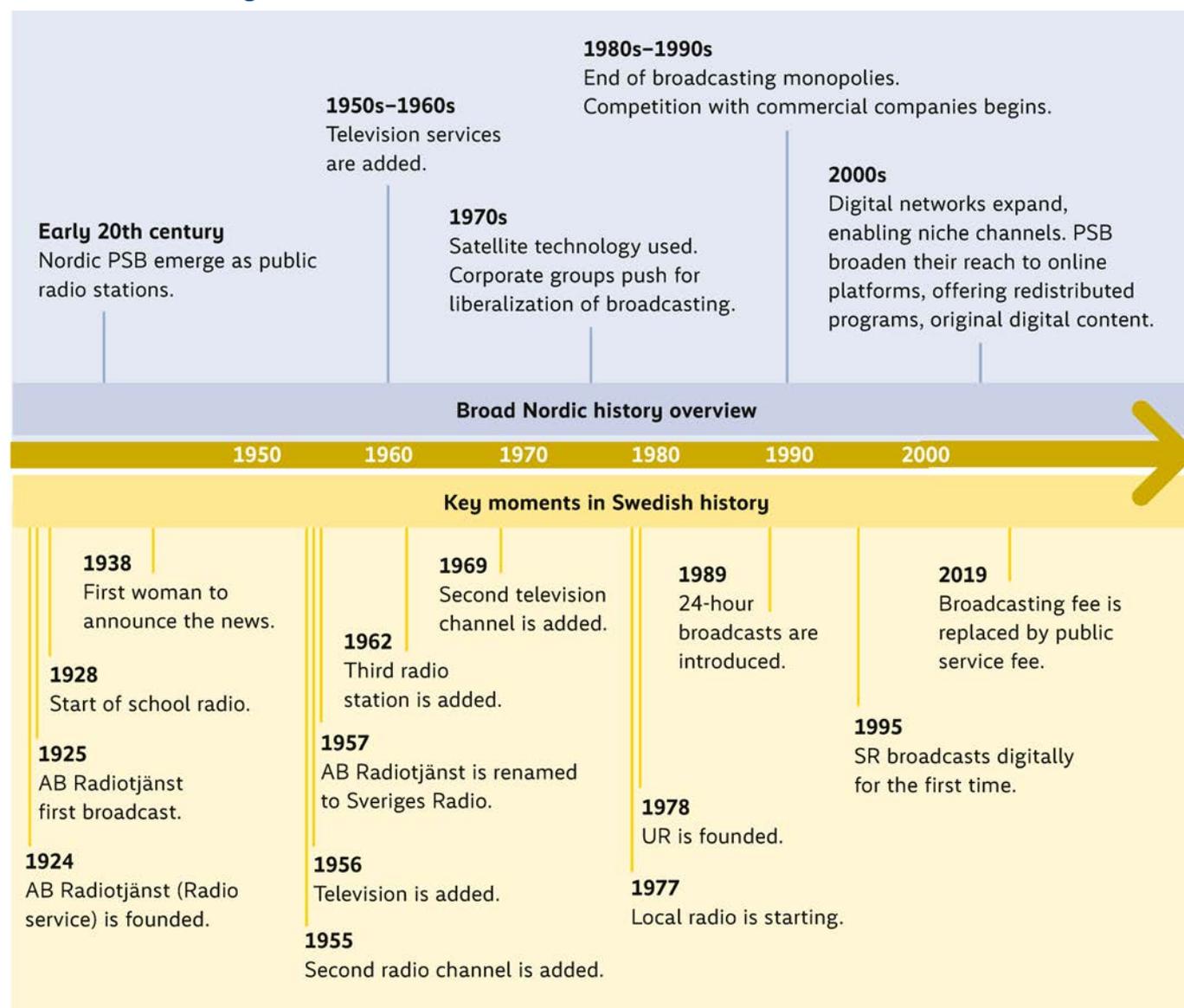
22 Medieakademin (2025). *Förtroendebarmetern 2025: Allmänhetens förtroende för institutioner, politiska partier, massmedier & företag* (Stockholm). Available at: <https://medieakademin.se/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Fortroendebarmetern-2025-Rapport-slutversion.pdf> (accessed 20 September 2025).

23 Key moments in Swedish Radio history (22 February 2023). *About Swedish Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/key-moments-in-swedish-radio-history> (accessed 18 October 2025).

24 Sveriges Radios historia – år för år (20 December 2024). *Om Sveriges Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/sveriges-radios-historia-ar-for-ar> (accessed 19 October 2025).

25 Sveriges Radios historia – år för år (20 December 2024). *Om Sveriges Radio | Sveriges Radio*. Available at: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/sveriges-radios-historia-ar-for-ar> (accessed 19 October 2025).

Timeline of major Nordic public service developments and key events in Swedish history.



Quelle: Syvertsen, T., Enli, G., Mjos, O.J. and Moe, H. (2014). *The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Era*. University of Michigan Press. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv65swsg>

was replaced by a personalised public service fee to be paid based on taxable income.²⁶

In 2021, the EBU awarded SR the Radio Technology & Innovation prize for developing the editor-controlled algorithm 'Nyhetsvärden'. In the following year, SR started a

news podcast in Russian to report on the war in Ukraine, as well as providing news in Ukrainian. In 2024 SR tested the use of AI in its app services to offer support for hearing impaired people and can be described as a pioneer in harnessing AI for public service uses.²⁷

²⁶ Public service fee (n.d.). Skatteverket. Available at: <https://skatteverket.se/servicelankar/otherlanguages/englishengelska/individualsandemployees/livinginsweden/publicservicefee.4.676f4884175c97df4193041.html> (accessed 10 November 2025).

²⁷ Swedish Radio celebrates 100 years - Public Media Alliance (7 April 2025). Public Media Alliance. Available at: <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/pma-celebrates-swedish-radios-100-anniversary/> (accessed 10 October 2025).

2. Analysis

Governance

The Radio and Television Act of 2010 is the primary legislation that regulates Swedish public service media. The act also applies to private, commercial providers. The Radio and Television Act includes the licensing rules, rules for distribution, regulations on content and advertising, as well as sponsorship and oversight over broadcasting companies.²⁸ The primary regulation of public service media, however, is implemented through state licensing. The Media Authority and more specifically the Broadcasting Commission for Radio and Television is the central oversight institution for public service media licensing. New services provided by public service media that are to be implemented for longer than 12 months must be reported for pre-trial to the Broadcasting Commission for Radio and Television beforehand. The Commission's main task, however, is to assess complaints on, for example, impartiality or violations of advertising regulations. Viewers can submit complaints to the Media Authority's Broadcasting Commission for Radio and Television. The Commission consists of a chairperson, six regular and six substitute members who are appointed by the government. The Commission oversees not only the content of public service media but also its economic reporting, which is supposed to provide sufficient transparency for the public.²⁹ With the new Act on Public Service Media, which includes new guidelines, renewed emphasis has been put on impartiality, which should be systematically overseen by independent research. Impartiality is also assessed by the Broadcasting Commission for Radio and Television.

Funding

Swedish public service media companies are funded through a mandatory fee paid by all taxpayers in Sweden and collected with income tax by the Tax Authority (Skatteverket). This model of fee collection replaced the previous model of a license fee paid by owners of television or radio sets collected by the TV licensing body *Radiotjänst* in 2019. A public survey conducted during the switch to the mandatory fee found that a majority of the population thought that public service media was 'worth the money'.³⁰

Today, the fee is a maximum 1249 SEK/ 130 EUR per year for people with an annual income over 124,930 SEK

(13,000 EUR). People who earn less pay 1 per cent of their income. The collected license fee is separate from the government budget. The government decides on the amount that each public service media company receives based on the size of the company and international comparison.³¹ In 2024, Swedish Radio received 3.4 billion SEK (309 million EUR), SVT 5,6 billion SEK (509 million EUR) and UR, education radio, 491 million SEK (45 million EUR). In comparison with other European countries Swedish public service media is well funded. The companies rank among the top five public service media budgets in Europe per capita. Until recently, public service media received an annual increase in their budgets of 2 per cent to meet increasing inflation and extended responsibilities. This practice is changing with the new act coming into effect in 2026. The funding will be increased for 2026 by 3 per cent (relative to the budget of 2025), 2 per cent for 2027–2030, and only 1 per cent for 2031–2033. This means de facto that the budget has been reduced, with inflation estimated at just over 2 per cent.³²

Both SVT and SR argued in 2024 that the proposed funding scheme is too tight to cover their rising costs.³³ Especially with the extended mandate for public service media related to the need to cope with heightened geopolitical tensions, public service media representatives argue that the funding scheme is problematic. To a certain extent increased efficiency can compensate but not fully. During the past two years, more than 200 journalists have been laid off across the three broadcasters.³⁴

Competition

The reach of Swedish Television, at 80 per cent, and Swedish Radio, at 70 per cent of the total Swedish population of 10.6 million as of 2024 is high. This includes linear, streamed and on-demand viewing. In 2024, the streaming platform of Swedish Television, SVT-play, was the most popular, even more popular than Netflix (29 per cent for SVT and 21 per cent for Netflix).

Trust in public service media is high among Swedes: 73 per cent of Swedes express high trust in SVT and 71 per cent in SR, which is the highest level for all media in Sweden and among the highest levels in Europe. Also the public value it contributes is also considered high among Swedes: 82 per cent of Swedes thought that SVT provides a 'very large' or 'fairly large' value to Swedish society. Some 78 per cent said the same about SR. That positions SVT

28 Swedish Media Authority (Myndigheten för press, radio och TV) (2025). *The Swedish Radio and Television Act* (SFS 2010:696). Stockholm. Available at: <https://mediemyndigheten.se/globalassets/om-mediemyndigheten/mediemyndighetens-verksamhet/dokument/radio-och-tv-lag/the-swedish-radio-and-television-act.pdf> (accessed 1 August 2025).

29 Government of Sweden (2025). Regeringens proposition 2024/25:166: En lag om public service och riktlinjer för verksamheten 2026–2033 (Stockholm, 22 May 2025). Available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/31407b691096492a9df3f1d4dfb27033/en-lag-om-public-service-och-riktlinjer-for-verksamheten-20262033-prop.-202425166.pdf> (accessed 1 August 2025).

30 Kantar Sifo survey on mandatory license fee (n.d.). Available at: <https://www.svtstatic.se/image-cms/svtse/1542894858/opinion/article20127608.svt/BINARY/PDF:%20Resultatet%20av%20unders%C3%B6kningen,%20TNS%20Sifo%2020181122> (accessed 29 November 2025).

31 See: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/finansiering>

32 See: <https://tu.se/standpunkt/budgetpropositionen-for-ar-2025>

33 See: <https://www.publicmediaalliance.org/sweden-public-media-describe-funding-proposal-as-insufficient/>

34 See: <https://monocle.com/culture/media-industry/inside-swedens-fight-to-protect-public-service-broadcasting/>

and SR 20–30 points ahead of other media, such as major newspapers and commercial television channels.

Debates on levels of trust have previously often suggested the emergence of polarisation or generally falling levels of trust in Swedish society. However, research indicates that trust remains high across the political spectrum. Among those Swedes who identify as right-wing, 57 per cent still have a high level of trust in Swedish television and 68 per cent believe it provides great value to Swedish society. Clear outliers are those on the radical right, primarily voters of the Sweden Democrats, who exhibit significantly lower trust, correlated with generally lower levels of trust in public institutions, politics and even their fellow citizens.³⁵

At the policy level, discussions of public service media in relation to commercial providers have focused on the competitive advantage of publicly funded media moving into the digital domain. For example, SVT has been accused by the Swedish commercial publishing industry of providing long texts to accompany their news clips on their digital platforms that supposedly compete with newspapers. The new Act on Public Service Media stipulates that companies in this realm should use text more sparingly on their own platforms. The Act also maintains that the presence of public service media on commercial digital platforms should be restricted.

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence

The digitalisation of Swedish society is generally high and user patterns of public service media are changing in terms of digital offers. Many viewers and listeners are migrating to the digital services provided by public service media. SR, which initially distributed many of its podcasts on popular streaming platforms, such as Spotify, has now removed large parts of its podcasting from the platform and invested in developing its own streaming platform. Through playlists and new ways of searching for content, SR hopes to be able to keep old and attract new listeners, although the competition with other podcast platforms is increasing.³⁶ As part of their improved digital services, SR has launched the digital search service ‘Nyhetsök’, which was awarded a prize for digital innovation in 2025.³⁷

When it comes to making content available for the ‘training’ of large language models (LLMs) and artificial intelligence, SR has chosen a restrictive approach. They allow none of their content to be used for commercial AI training. All public service media organisations established guidelines for the use of AI in their own productions, emphasising fact-checking and transparency alongside efficiency gains through automation.³⁸

Societal and political discourse

The potential weakening of Swedish public service media as a result of the planned financial cuts between 2026 and 2033, along with new content-related provisions, should be understood primarily in the context of domestic politics. A minority right-wing government was formed following the 2022 general election, consisting of the Moderate Party, the Liberals and the Christian Democrats. As these three parties lack a parliamentary majority, they have governed with the support of the far-right Sweden Democrats, based on a formal agreement. In exchange for backing the government, the Sweden Democrats have been granted influence over some policy areas central to their political agenda.

Support for public service media in Sweden has traditionally transcended ideological and party lines. Although the system has faced criticism over the years, high levels of trust and a strong sense of the national value it provides have meant that overt attacks have not been a regular feature of Swedish politics, not being considered politically advantageous. Surveys conducted in 2024 confirm that voters from nearly all major parties express continued trust in and appreciation for public service media – except for supporters of the Sweden Democrats. The gap in trust between Sweden Democrat voters and those of other parties is considerable, sometimes as much as 50 percentage points lower, even than among other right-wing voters.

The Sweden Democrats have long accused Swedish public service media of what they call ‘left-wing bias’, despite the fact that research on SVT’s and SR’s political coverage consistently refute such claims. However, it is only over the past decade that such rhetoric has gained significant traction, paralleling broader European and US right-wing populist (styled ‘conservative’ in the latter country) campaigns targeting journalism and, in particular, public service media. This has been termed ‘anti-media populism’ by researchers.^{39 40}

This dynamic was highlighted during the 2024 parliamentary inquiry preceding the renewal of the broadcasting licenses for 2026–2033. For the first time since the establishment of Swedish public service media in the 1920s, the new broadcasting agreement failed to achieve political consensus. Instead, two competing proposals were presented: one from the governing coalition (including the Sweden Democrats) and another from the centre-left opposition.

The adopted proposal – cuts in annual funding from 3 per cent to just 1 per cent for 2031–2033 – is widely regarded by Swedish media experts as a direct result of Sweden Democrat influence over government policy. The proposal also introduced measures such as reviews of public service impartiality, investigations into alleged ‘political

35 Medieakademin (2025). *Förtroendebarmetern 2025: Allmänhetens förtroende för institutioner, politiska partier, massmedier & företag*. Stockholm. Available at: <https://medieakademin.se/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Fortroendebarmetern-2025-Rapport-slutversion.pdf> (accessed 1 August 2025).

36 See: <https://su.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1785438&dsid=-3129> (accessed 12 November 2025).

37 See: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/sveriges-radios-nyhetsok-vinnare-pa-prix-italia>

38 See: <https://www.sverigesradio.se/artikel/oppnhet-om-var-ai-anvandning-bygger-trovardighet> (accessed 12 November 2025).

39 See: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/02673231241228961> (accessed 12 November 2025).

40 See: <https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/1467> (accessed 12 November 2025).

bias' and external audits. These are seen as clear concessions to the Sweden Democrats and reflective of their long-standing hostility towards Swedish public service media.

3. Conclusion and outlook

The biggest challenges for public service media are emerging on the (i) political, (ii) technological and (iii) organisational levels. Starting with the political level, we have seen an increased politicisation of public service media. While Sweden has a long tradition of broad political consensus about the value of public service media, the latest parliamentary inquiry and the associated process exposed a strong political schism between the left and the conservative/right-wing block, turning public service media into a left versus right question. This is historically a quite recent phenomenon in Sweden. Such political friction does not reflect the attitudes and positions of the general population, however. As we have discussed, there is broad support for public service media and people generally express high levels of trust, especially in SVT and SR. It is on the fringes of the right-wing political spectrum that public service media tends to be criticised and its impartiality and democratic value for Swedish society called into question. The cleavage between the right and the left is problematic; research has consistently shown that long-term stable regulations, as well as broad political consensus about the value of public service media are important factors in the ability of such media to perform its democratic function.⁴¹

The second challenge is related to technological changes. Public service media is under pressure to use its resources efficiently and consequently to turn to technological solutions to overhaul internal practices and productions. This includes artificial intelligence. The public service media is proactive and innovative when it comes to working with artificial intelligence, including the development of improved search services and AI-supported content production. SVT and SR have a designated AI coordinator to improve and foster the use of AI across the organisation. However, AI products are still under development and errors might occur. For example, SVT has been implementing automated subtitles that often do not produce correct translations. Errors like this and other so-called 'hallucinations' in AI-generated content can reduce trust in public service media among the audience.

Another challenge related to technological change is the question of distribution. Viewers and listeners are increasingly moving from tableau consumption to on-demand use via digital platforms. With the use of AI 'chatbots' such as ChatGPT and Co-pilot, the importance of public service media's own digital platforms might decrease for the audience. The pressing question of how to

reach their audiences emerges with renewed urgency and the companies might have to develop new strategies for distributing their content while remaining within the framework of the licensing agreement, which stipulates for example restricted use of commercial digital platforms for content distribution. Overall, public service media will need to consider the role of AI assistants in the consumption of digital news. As this role continues to grow, it is becoming increasingly important that those assistants provide accurate information. A report published by the EBU in October 2025 based on a collaboration between 22 public service media companies in 18 countries evaluates the quality of AI responses to questions about current affairs and news. The evaluation was focused on five different parts: accuracy, sourcing, distinguishing opinion and fact, editorialisation and context. Overall, 45 per cent of answers given by different AI assistants had significant problems in at least one of the five aspects, with incorrect or false sourcing being the biggest problem. In general, AI assistants tend to misrepresent public service media content in their answers. SVT took part in this evaluation, stating that '[t]he problem is how the AI mixes opinions, facts, judgments, analysis, and standard journalism from several different sources into a mishmash that an average reader finds very difficult, if not impossible, to untangle.'⁴² This poses a threat to public service media as their impartiality may be questioned, their credibility and integrity weakened, and trust lost within the population. This reinforces the importance of the topic for Swedish public broadcasters as well, because 'when AI assistants misrepresent, distort or editorialize PSM content, they do not just make isolated mistakes — they compromise the credibility of the organizations involved and, in doing so, threaten the trust that underpins public service journalism.'⁴³ With AI technology evolving constantly, understanding how and which issues occur in regard to public service media content will continue to be an important task for public service media institutions in order to protect their integrity and position in society.⁴⁴

The last challenge is related to the organisation and mandate of Swedish public service media. The division between the three companies is unique compared with other Nordic countries and has recurrently been contested. The three companies not only have different economic conditions when it comes to budgeting, but take different approaches, for example with regard to AI content-scraping policies. Potentially, this may contribute positively to public service media diversity. However, arguments on scalability and efficiency gains have been put forward, emphasising the positive aspects of merging the three companies. Lastly, the new license agreement confirmed the broad mandate of public service media in Sweden to provide information, education and entertainment. Furthermore, public service media has been identified as a crucial actor in a time

41 Neff, T. and Pickard, V. (2024). Funding democracy: Public media and democratic health in 33 countries. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 29(3), 601–627.

42 Fletcher, J. and Verckist, D. (2025). *News Integrity in AI Assistants: An international PSM study* (European Broadcasting Union, Ed.) (Report), p. 53.

43 Fletcher, J. and Verckist, D. (2025). *News Integrity in AI Assistants: An international PSM study* (European Broadcasting Union, Ed.) (Report), p. 51.

44 Fletcher, J. and Verckist, D. (2025). *News Integrity in AI Assistants: An international PSM study* (European Broadcasting Union, Ed.) (Report).

of geopolitical unrest and war. Public service media plays a crucial role in preparedness and defence (*totalförsvaret*), which includes the requirement to develop annual plans for preparedness to ensure information requirements are met during times of geopolitical unrest. In that sense, their remit has been broadened even further, while at the same time funding has not been increased and over the long term is effectively shrinking. This poses a number of major challenges to Swedish public service media and the need to prioritise in programming and journalism.

About the authors

Anne Kaun is a professor of media and communication studies at Södertörn University. She is a founding and board member of the Knowledge Centre for Public Service Media (K-pub) at Södertörn University.

Michele Madeleine Biendara is a masters student in media, communication and cultural analysis at Södertörn University, Sweden. During her studies she was a research intern with the Knowledge Centre for Public Service Media (K-pub).

Imprint

Published by

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V.
Godesberger Allee 149
53175 Bonn
info@fes.de

Publishing Department

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Nordic Countries
Barnhusgatan 10
111 23 Stockholm
Sweden

Content Responsibility and Editing

Kristina Birke Daniels | Director | FES Nordic Countries
<https://nordics.fes.de>

Contact

Josefin Furst
josefin.fuerst@fes.de

Image Credits

P. 1: Till Lukat

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V. (FES). Commercial use of media published by FES is not permitted without the written consent of the FES. Publications by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung may not be used for election campaign purposes.

January 2026
© Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung e.V.

Further publications of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung can be found here:
www.fes.de/publikationen



Nordic Countries