

Sweden



Population: 10.7m

Country media capture risk overall (value - %): 24.6

Media capture risk average across countries (mean - %): 38.3



Country Overview

Sweden is featured by one of the lowest levels of risk of media capture, second only to Denmark. Sweden is a constitutional monarchy where strong public service broadcasters operate alongside a well-established commercial news sector. While media ownership remains concentrated, government strategies priorities diverse voices and reflect the country's multicultural society even if in recent years these policies have come under attack by the conservative government. At the same time, the current government – supported by the *Sweden Democrats* – has adopted increasingly restrictive positions on immigration, including proposals for refugee repatriation, which complicates the framing of Sweden as a consistently multicultural policy environment.

As the first country to adopt a press freedom law in 1766, Sweden displays a particular attachment to media independence. Media owners are immune from interference from the executive and legislative branches of government, and no elected official can sit on the board of directors of public service media (PSM) outlets. Historically, the Swedish media system has balanced commercial pressures with political diversity, and daily newspapers continue to receive state subsidies regardless of their affiliation. About half of the population expresses trust in the news, a figure that has risen slightly in recent years. Swedes highly trust news media, particularly the two PSM outlets and newspapers more than alternative media. Nevertheless, despite their strong institutional position, public service broadcasters *SVT* and *SR* have faced sustained political pressure over the past decade, accompanied by a gradual erosion of funding in real terms. In the context of heightened security concerns, their role within national crisis preparedness systems may also create structural tensions with their function as fully independent journalistic actors.

The market is characterized by high ownership concentration in both the newspaper and broadcast sectors. This development is primarily the result of mergers and acquisitions that began after the introduction of the internet in the mid-1990s and intensified around 2020, driven by the need for economies of scale and competition from global digital platforms. The largest company group in the media market is *Bonnier AB*, which, through its subsidiaries, owns *Dagens Nyheter* and *Expressen*, two of Sweden's leading newspapers. Another major player is the Norwegian-owned *Schibsted Group*, which publishes, both digitally and in print, the leading tabloid *Aftonbladet*. Since 2024, Schibsted also owns the main commercial television channel *TV4*. In parallel, public service broadcasters *Sveriges Television* (SVT) and *Sveriges Radio* (SR), which are politically independent and funded through a mandatory service fee, constitute Sweden's most respected news organizations. High ownership concentration also has implications for political pluralism. Left-wing perspectives are today only marginally represented in mainstream media, following the disappearance of most labour press outlets, while the majority of publishers and commentators reflect liberal or conservative viewpoints. In addition, some digital-native outlets have emerged with explicit links to the *Sweden Democrats*, suggesting that the overall range of perspectives in the media system may be narrower than implied by formal pluralism indicators.

The country's news media landscape is undergoing a profound transformation. News publishers have continuously lost advertising revenues, primarily because tech giants such as *Meta* and *Alphabet* have come to dominate digital advertising. As a result, publishers have been compelled to implement cost-cutting measures and seek alternative revenue streams, with reader subscriptions emerging as the primary focus. While newspapers still generate most of their income from print subscriptions, which often include home delivery and relatively high prices, 31% of the population now pays for news online. Major national publishers are among the most successful digital subscription models, with *Bonnier News+* being recognized for its comprehensive content offering.

Media policy in Sweden is governed by a strong constitutional framework. While there is no specific anti-SLAPP legislation in Sweden, crimes committed against journalists due to their profession are subject to harsh penalties. Furthermore, the implementation of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) has strengthened transparency requirements, particularly in relation to state advertising, with reporting obligations for public authorities – previously absent – coming into force on 1 January 2026.

Sweden holds free and fair elections and has a strong multiparty system. Political rights are legally guaranteed and generally respected in practice. Following the 2022 elections, the country is governed by a right-wing coalition known as the Tidö Agreement, backed by the far-right party *Sweden Democrats* (SD) which has also brought important changes in the media sector. In March 2024, Sweden, after a very short public discussion, officially joined NATO, ending over two centuries of military nonalignment. This historic shift was driven by rising geopolitical tensions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The timing and limited public deliberation surrounding this decision also point to a broader alignment between political and media agendas, with relatively little space for dissenting perspectives in mainstream coverage. The range of Sweden's religious and ethnic groups is represented in parliament. Since 1993, the Indigenous Sámi community has elected its own legislative body, holding authority over community education and culture, and acting as an advisory institution to the government. Nevertheless, there are ongoing calls for the Sámi legislature to be granted greater political autonomy and influence.

Swedish society shows a high level of civic engagement and a strong commitment to universal welfare, though confidence in institutions is moderate with 48.2% of the population reporting low levels of trust in the government. People generally enjoy equality of opportunity. Freedom of movement, religion, and assembly are protected by law, and workers are free to strike and organize in labor unions. Social inclusiveness extends to LGBTQ+ rights; same-sex couples are legally allowed to marry and adopt, and in April 2024, parliament lowered the minimum age for legal gender reassignment from 18 to 16. However, these systemic strengths are countered by significant integration challenges. Rising violence in less affluent, ethnically diverse suburbs reflects frustration among residents over their lack of the same equality of opportunity as ethnic Swedish citizens. Unemployment is higher among immigrants than is among people who were born in Sweden. Likewise, the United Nations noted that the performance gap between foreign-born and native-born children in school remains high.

In conclusion, Sweden combines a strong commitment to media freedom with a stable and pluralistic political system. Its tradition of editorial independence and public support contributes to a reliable information landscape, despite growing ownership concentration and economic pressures. While Swedish society is marked by civic engagement and inclusivity, challenges related to integration and inequality persist and appear to have intensified in recent years.