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VA Barometer 2013/14 – VA Report 2013:4

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More information about the survey can be found at www.v-a.se.

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RECORD CONFIDENCE IN RESEARCH

Here are some of the results from VA's latest barometer:

- Confidence in researchers at universities in Sweden is at a record high
- The public supports investment in research and letting researchers do research that may not necessarily yield useful results
- Most Swedes believe that some restrictions should be placed upon researchers conducting register-based research
- Many Swedes do not entirely trust research findings published in the media and believe that researchers lack consensus on important issues.

The VA barometer is based on 1,000 telephone interviews with a representative sample of the Swedish population aged 16–74. The interviews were carried out by market research company Exquiro between 30 September and 6 October 2013. The questions can be found on VA's website: www.v-a.se. It is the 12th survey to be conducted since VA was founded in 2002.

LAST YEAR THROUGH SWEDISH EYES

After intensive lobbying, **Science With and For Society** subprogramme included in EU's new research programme Horizon 2020.

Scientists sentenced to prison for toning down the risks associated with the earthquake in the Italian city of L'Aquila in 2009.

Chalmers University to lead a EU-funded **flagship project on graphene** with a budget of one billion euros. Other Swedish researchers involved in a flagship project about the brain.

Whistleblower **Edward Snowden** comes forward.

Rioting breaks out in the Stockholm suburb of **Husby**. Unrest continues for several days and spreads to other cities in Sweden.

Researchers at Karolinska Institutet and the Stress Research Institute show that prolonged work-related **stress affects brain tissue**.

DN newspaper uncovers illegal police **database of Roma people**.

VA's **barometer** is conducted

Swedish government proposes **lower employer's contributions for researchers in the 2014 budget**.

Earth Overshoot Day – when the world has consumed more natural resources than can be regenerated over a year.

Nov Dec 2013 Jan Feb March April May June July Aug Sept Oct

Germany's Education and Research Minister resigns after her doctorate was revoked due to plagiarism allegations.

A meteor explodes above **Chelyabinsk** in Russia with the force of 30 Hiroshima bombs.

Researchers at Mid Sweden University discover **treeline rise of 200 meters** in the Swedish mountains.

The world's most lucrative science award, **Fundamental Physics Prize**, given to Alexander Polyakov for his discoveries in string theory.

Researchers from Uppsala and Stockholm Universities discover large **residential segregation increases the risk of cars being torched**.

The Curiosity space rover sends images showing that **running water existed on Mars**.

Sture Bergwall (Thomas Quick) cleared of all murders. The prosecutor promises a task force to review weaknesses in the prosecution service.

Swedish reforms on **new career paths for teachers** come into force. Lecturer positions mean more opportunities for teachers to conduct their own research.

The world's first **lab-grown hamburger** cooked and tasted.

VA's report **How schools view science** shows lack of time is biggest obstacle preventing teachers integrating research into their teaching.

The UN's climate panel, the **IPCC**, presents its climate report in Stockholm. The probability that global warming is caused by human activities increases to 95 percent.

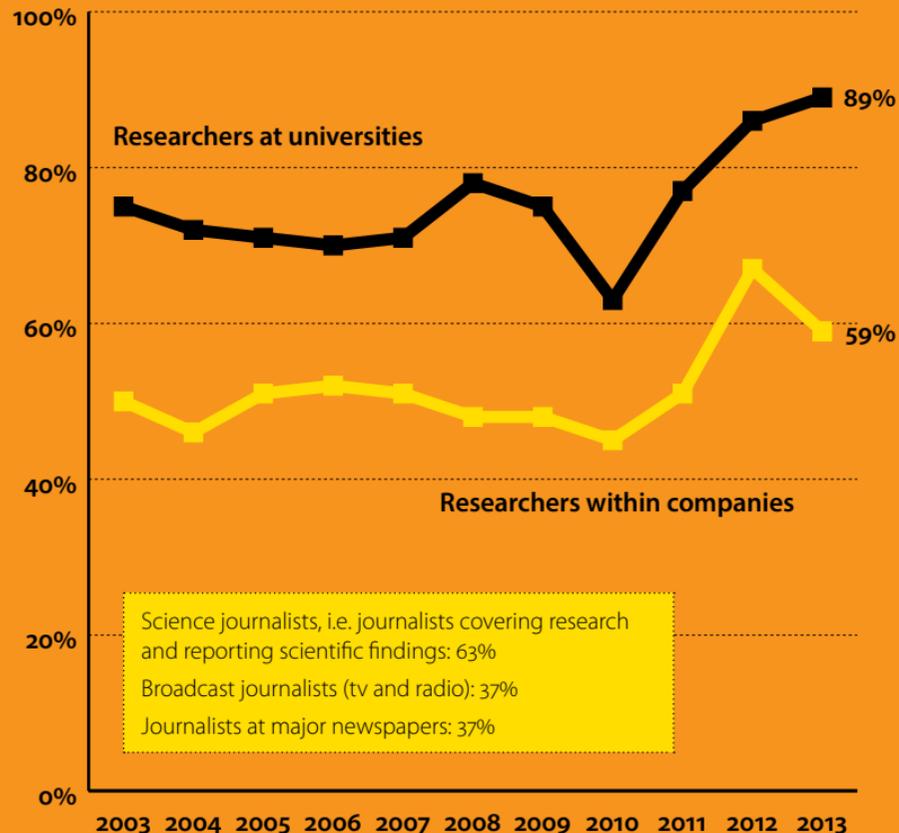
CONTINUED TRUST IN RESEARCHERS

Sweden's high level of confidence in researchers at universities and colleges, which was measured last year, has risen even further, although confidence in researchers within companies has fallen. Older people have the highest confidence in both categories of researchers. Nearly twice the percentage of retired people, compared with unemployed people, say that they have a very high level of confidence in researchers at universities.

In this year's barometer, we focused on how the public views journalists, media coverage of research and how trust in researchers changes as a result of media reports. Learn more about this on pages 20–27.

*The graph shows the percentage of respondents who have a **fairly or very high** confidence in researchers (four-point scale: Very high, fairly high, fairly low, very low. Prior to 2013 the scale was: Very high, high, low, very low, none). Figures for different types of journalists are also shown.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008

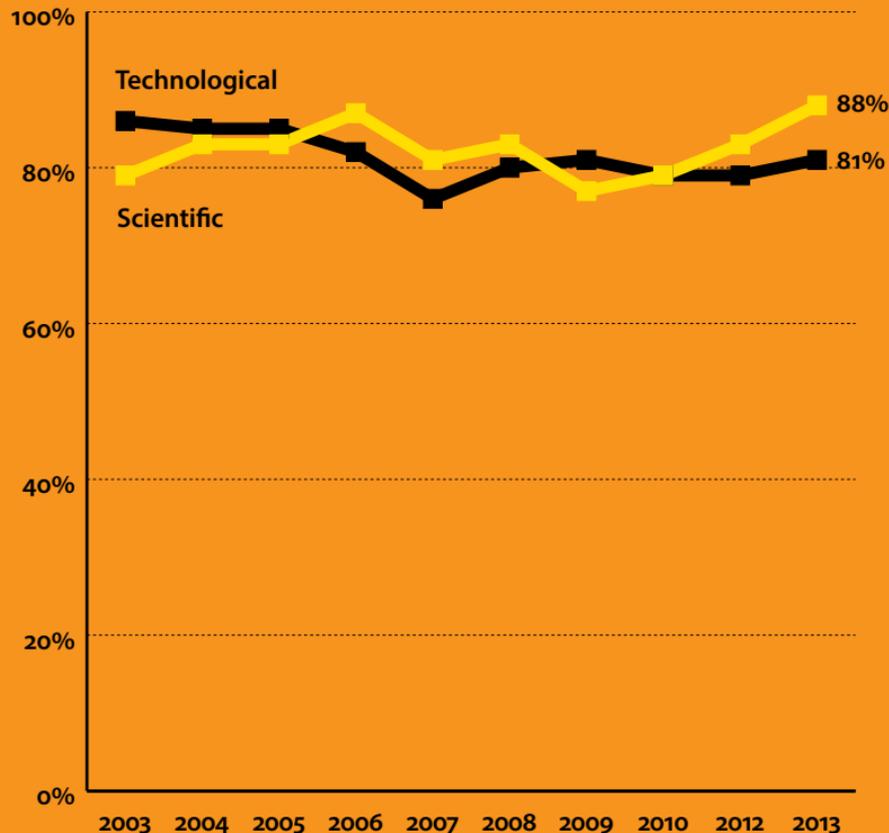


SCIENCE MAKES LIFE BETTER

Nine out of ten Swedes think that the scientific developments of the last 10–20 years have made life better. Eight out of ten believe that technological developments have improved our lives. The most positive are retired people; two thirds believe that life has improved a lot in recent decades thanks to scientific progress, compared to half of the population as a whole. People aged between 30 and 44 years old are most positive about technological progress; nine out of ten think technology makes life somewhat or much better. The least positive are the unemployed, where the corresponding figure is just two-thirds.

*The graph shows the percentage who responded **a lot** or **somewhat better** to the question about whether scientific / technological developments in the last 10–20 years have made life better or worse for ordinary people (five-point scale from a lot better to a lot worse). Separate questions were asked to each half of the sample.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 503 (SCIENTIFIC) 505 (TECHNOLOGICAL)

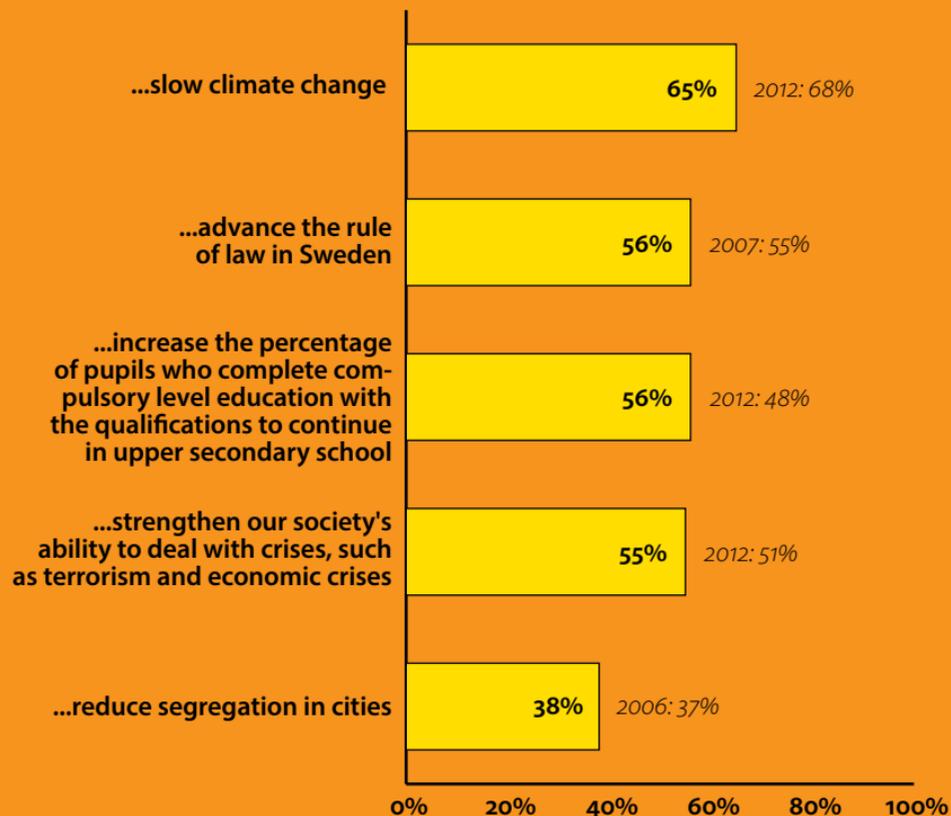


THE YOUNG HAVE FAITH IN CLIMATE RESEARCH

Confidence in the potential of research to solve societal problems varies depending on the topic. Of the five topics we asked about, there is greatest faith in climate research. Young people aged between 16 and 20 are most optimistic; eight out of ten believe in the potential of research to help slow climate change. The least optimistic are retired and self-employed people; only one in two believe this. Just over half believe that research can strengthen crisis management, advance the rule of law and increase the number of pupils with the qualifications to continue in upper secondary school, but also many select "don't know". Only a third believe that research can help to reduce segregation. Those with a high level of education and retired people are the most skeptical.

*The graph shows the percentages of respondents who believe that over the next decade there is a good chance that research will help to... (Alternatives: **Yes**, **No** and **Don't know**.)*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008



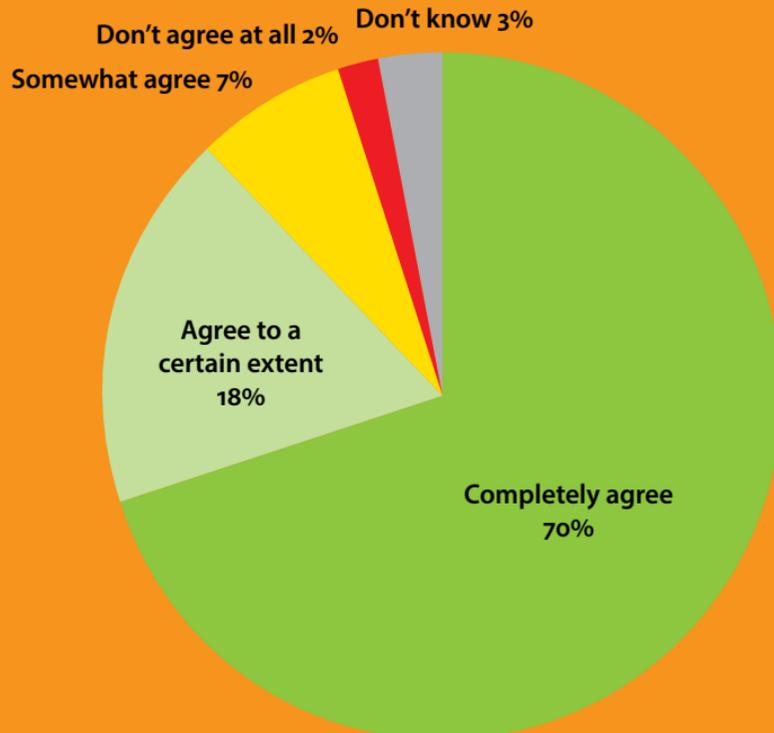
INVEST IN BASIC RESEARCH!

Certain research is aimed at solving problems affecting society, such as developing better treatment methods or new energy sources that do not harm the environment. Other research is driven by curiosity; where it is unknown if the new knowledge will benefit citizens.

The large majority of people believe that it is important to invest money in research, even if it is uncertain that the results will be of use. This applies to all those surveyed regardless of their level of education, gender, or occupation. This perception is also not altered if the respondent or someone they know is involved in research.

*The graph shows the percentage of respondents who **agree completely, to a certain extent, somewhat, don't agree at all or don't know.***

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008

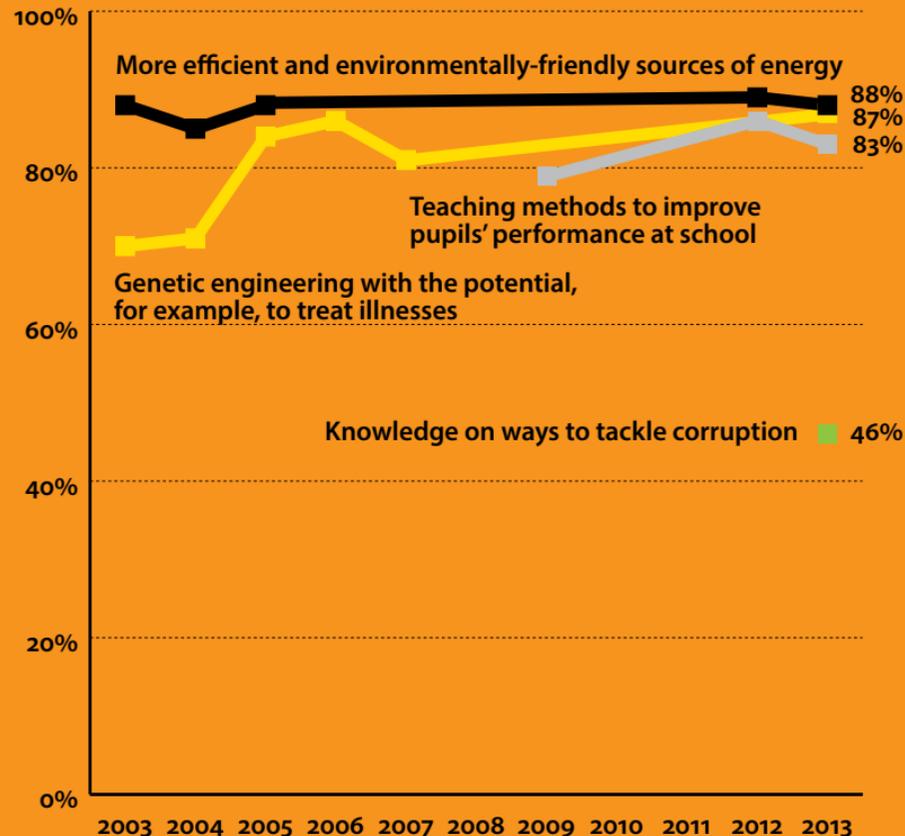


WILLINGNESS TO INVEST IN RESEARCH

There appears to be strong support for government investment in research, particularly in developing efficient and environmentally-friendly energy sources. Nine out of ten respondents also believe that it is important to invest in genetic engineering, for example, for the treatment of illnesses. This differs from last year's survey in which only half of the respondents supported investment in genetic engineering to develop hardier crops. Research into teaching methods is also considered important. Are current debates in Sweden about schools influencing public support for investment in education? When it comes to tackling corruption, the public is more half-hearted; nearly one in five don't believe that it is important to invest in this area.

The graph shows the percentage responding 4 or 5 on a five-point scale from 1 = not at all important to 5 = very important to the question "How important is it that Sweden invests public money in these areas?"

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008

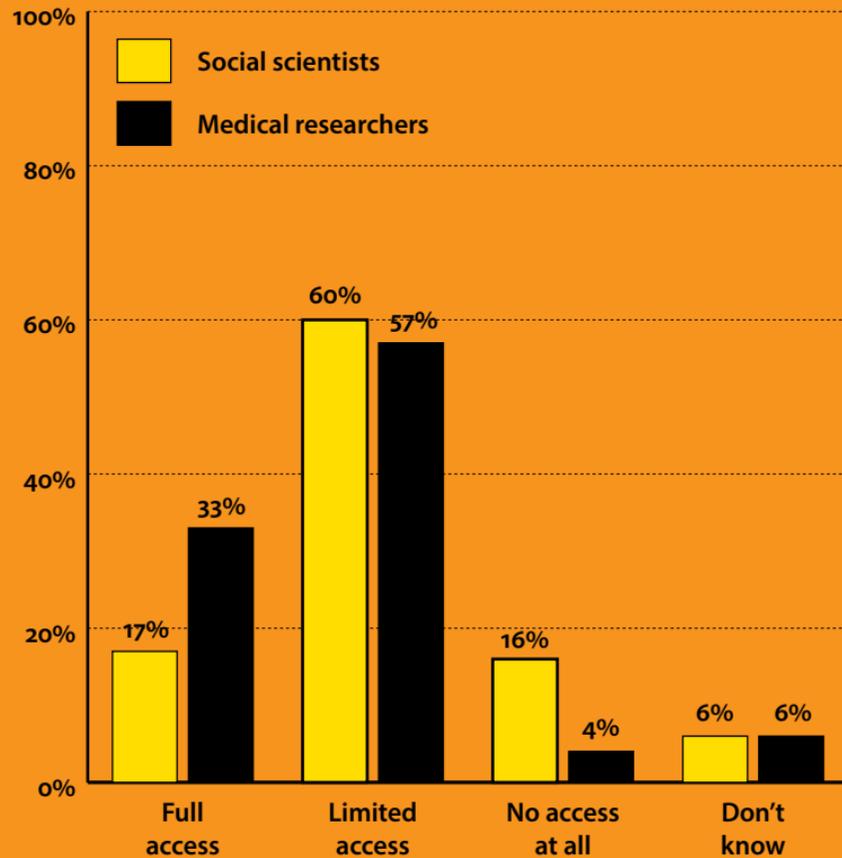


PROTECT PERSONAL INTEGRITY!

Many researchers can benefit from databases; allowing them to study large amounts of data and monitor changes over time without the need to constantly collect new data. A Swedish government study is currently looking at how Swedish research can benefit from the use of databases. Meanwhile, the EU is developing new data protection laws that specifically cover integrity issues. The public wants researchers to have access to records for research purposes, but not without some restrictions. Desirable restrictions include, for example, only having access to anonymous data or to data on certain illnesses or personal relationships.

*The graph shows the percentage who answer **full access**, **limited access** or **no access at all** to the question of whether social scientists should have access to databases containing information about, for example, people's personal relationships or qualifications, as well as whether medical researchers should have access to databases on people's medical conditions.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008

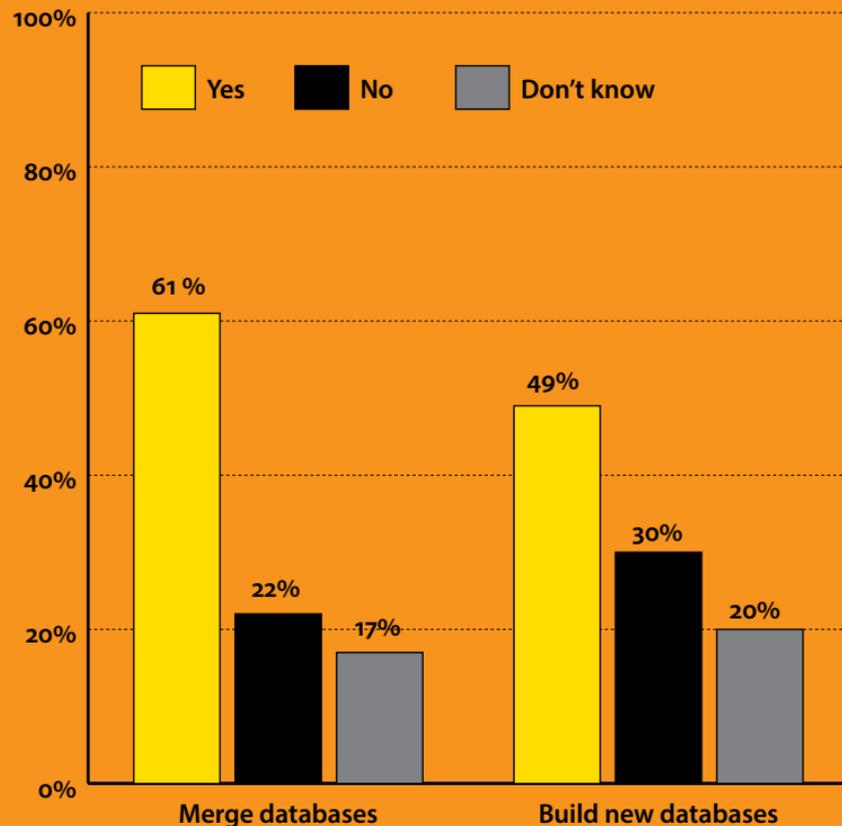


ALLOW RESEARCHERS TO MERGE DATA

Researchers sometimes need to merge different databases to generate new findings. The public supports giving researchers the right to do this. People with a high level of education and students are the most positive to this. Older and less educated people are the most negative. Building up new databases, such as in the Swedish LifeGene research project, in which people voluntarily donate blood and urine samples for future research into genes and diseases, is supported by one in two Swedes. Again, it is younger people who are the most positive and older people who are the most negative. There is, however, some uncertainty about what new databases involve: as many as one in five select 'don't know' as their response.

*The graph shows the percentage responding **yes**, **no** or **don't know** to the question of whether researchers should be allowed to merge data about people from various databases to examine connections, and have the right to build new databases on, e.g. people's illnesses or their family relationships.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008

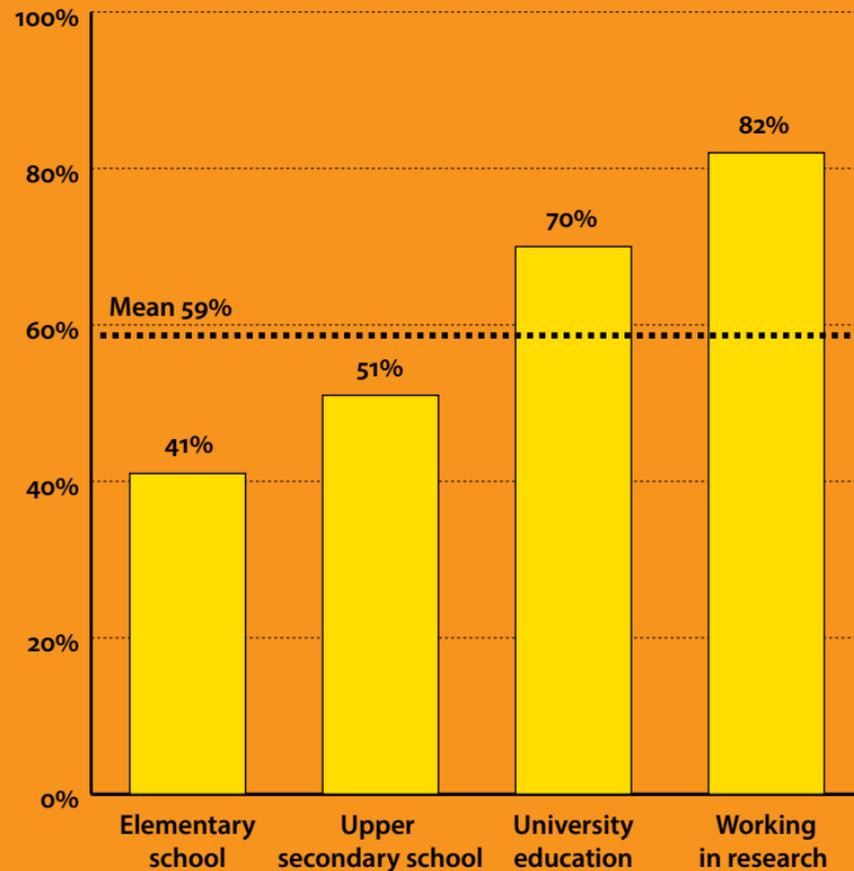


HIGH CONSUMPTION OF RESEARCH NEWS

For most Swedes, the media is their main source of news about research. Six out of ten Swedes learn about research through reports on the radio, television, in newspapers or via online news sources at least once a week. A quarter of respondents do this at least once a month. The people who read news about research the most are those who work in research. According to the Eurobarometer 401, which was published in November 2013, the Swedes are the Europeans with the most interest in science and technological developments and who read the most news about research.

*The graph shows the percentage of respondents who learn about research **on a weekly basis** via news on the radio, television, in daily newspapers or online news sources, broken down by their level of education and whether they work in research. Other alternatives are Each month, every six months, more rarely and never.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008

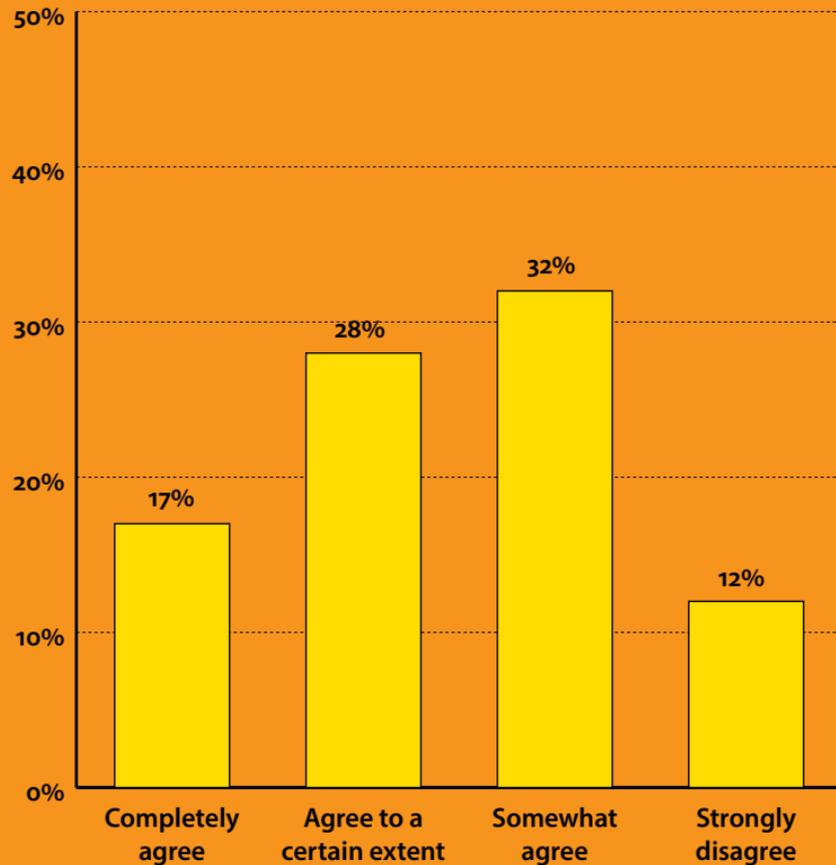


DO SWEDES TRUST MEDIA REPORTS?

Swedes harbour a certain skepticism about how the media reports research. The majority of people agree somewhat or to a certain extent with the statement that news about research is usually presented in a reliable way by the media. Fewer than one in five completely agree, and one in ten disagree. Those that are most skeptical are people working in research; six in ten disagree or agree to a certain extent that reports are reliable. Meanwhile, two out of three respondents have a very or fairly high confidence in science journalists. Confidence in broadcast and national newspaper journalists is considerably lower; just over a third of respondents have confidence in them. Also see page 7.

*The graph shows the percentage who **completely agree, to a certain extent, somewhat, or not at all**. The proportion who Don't know is not shown in the graph.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008

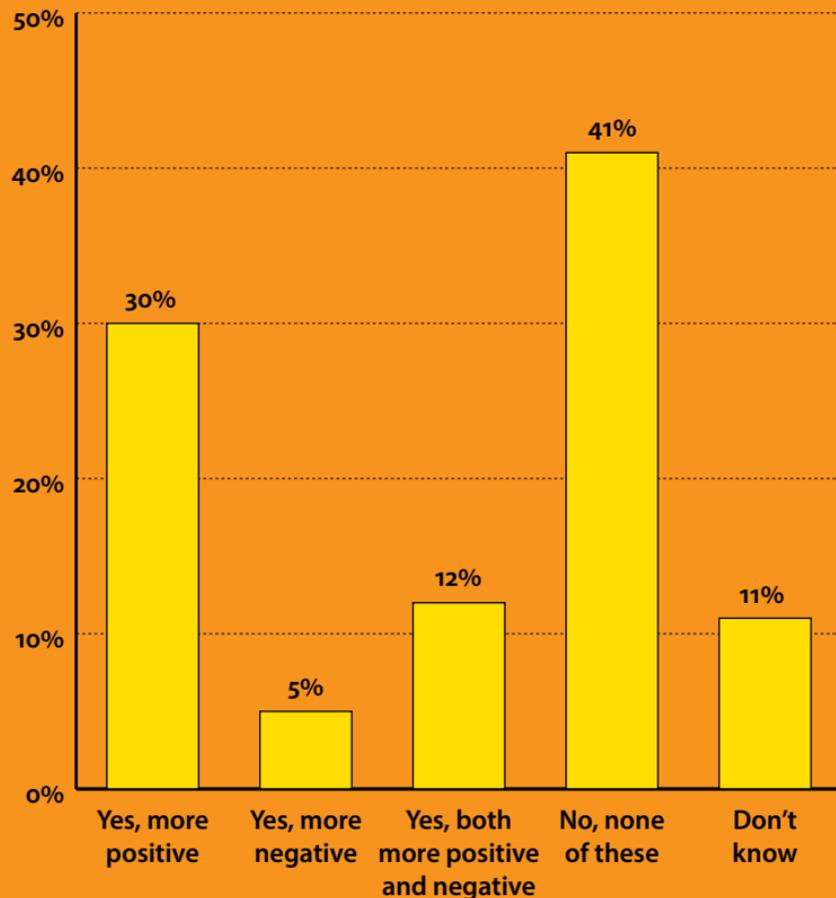


MEDIA INFLUENCES PUBLIC CONFIDENCE

Confidence in researchers is high in Sweden, although this confidence can easily be shaken and influenced by external events. Almost one in two respondents say that their attitude to researchers and research has been influenced by something they have read in the media during the past month. Of those who have changed their opinion, six out of ten have become more positive, and only one in ten more negative. It seems that the more news about research that someone is exposed to, the more positive their attitude becomes towards researchers and research.

*The graph shows the percentage of respondents who have changed attitude towards researchers and research to be **more positive, more negative, both** or **have not changed attitude** as a result of something they have seen or heard in the media during the past month.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008

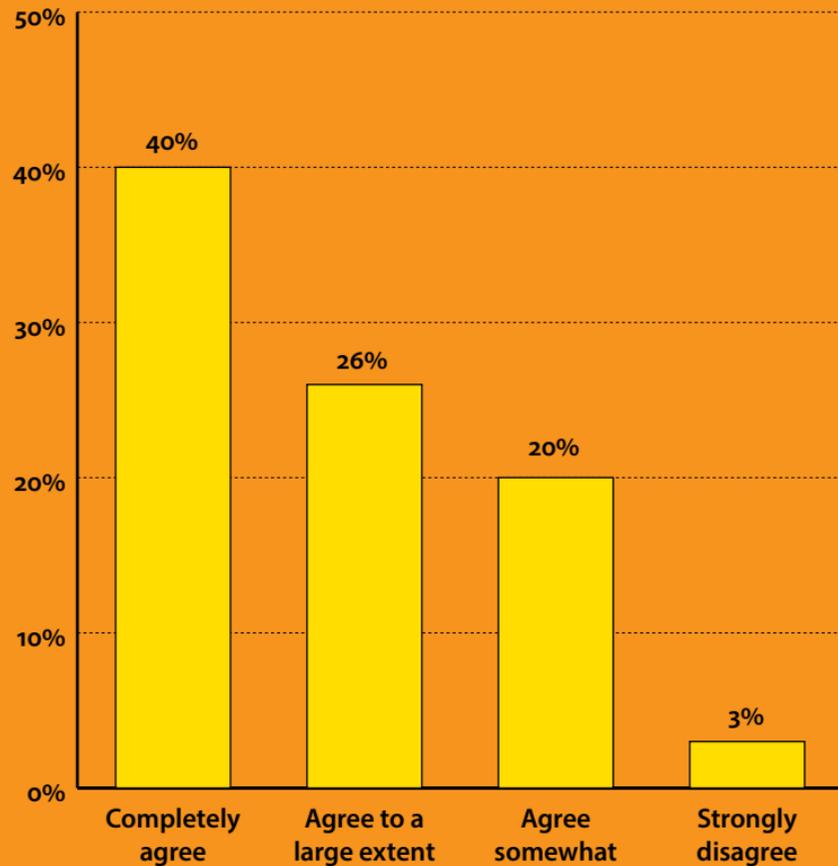


CONSENSUS BETWEEN RESEARCHERS FIRST

Different messages given out by researchers about, e.g. health risks or environmental threats can confuse people; who is right and who is wrong? However, science involves testing different hypotheses and an accepted truth may later prove to be wrong. Two-thirds of respondents agree completely or to a large extent that researchers have different opinions on important issues. The vast majority of respondents believe that researchers should hold off publishing new research relating to health issues, until other studies corroborate the findings. Only one in five want the results to be published immediately. One in two feel that the media publishes too many scare stories about health risks.

*The graph shows the percentage of respondents who **completely agree**, **agree to a large extent**, **agree somewhat**, or **strongly disagree** with the claim that Researchers often have different opinions on important issues. The percentage of Don't knows is not shown.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,008



VA (Public & Science) aims to promote dialogue and openness between the public – particularly young people – and researchers. The organisation works to create new models that facilitate discussion about research. VA also develops new knowledge about the relationship between research and society through opinion polls and surveys. Its members consist of 79 organisations, public authorities, companies and associations. It also has individuals as members.



Vetenskap & Allmänhet

Read more at www.v-a.se