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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

Master's Thesis

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CHARLES UNIVERSITY

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Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism

**One year with the Foreign Espionage Act: Implications
to the Freedom of Press in Sweden**

Master's Thesis

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Study programme: Erasmus Mundus Journalism Programme

Supervisor: Mgr. Barbora Součková

Year of the defence: 2024

Declaration

1. I hereby declare that I have compiled this thesis using the listed literature and resources only.
2. I hereby declare that my thesis has not been used to gain any other academic title.
3. I fully agree to my work being used for study and scientific purposes.

In Prague on 2024.07.31

Emilia Söderholm

References

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Abstract

On the 1st of January 2023, a Foreign Espionage Act was added as an amendment to the Swedish Freedom of Press- and Expression Acts. According to the law, it may be illegal for journalists to publish information that would harm the relationship to another state or an intergovernmental organization, such as the UN or NATO. When the law passed, journalists, media executives, and media experts criticized the Foreign Espionage Act for being a threat to Swedish media freedom. It was perceived that the law could lead to self-censorship among reporters and editors, as well as intimidating sources and whistleblowers. In this study, eleven semi-structured interviews with Swedish reporters and editors have been thematically analyzed in order to explore the perceptions and implications of the Foreign Espionage Act about 1,5 years after its passing. The findings show that even though self-censorship is considered a serious threat and a possible implication of the law, none of the participants of this study admit to self-censorship. This suggests a high level of professionalism among Swedish journalists. However, participants also say that the Foreign Espionage Act should be seen as one threat among many directed at Swedish media freedom. This is not only concerning in the current times but more so for the future when a different political landscape may use laws like the Foreign Espionage Act to seriously restrict media freedom. This study gives a first glimpse into the perceptions and implications of the foreign espionage act and serves as a starting point for future research on the topic.

Keywords

Media freedom, press freedom, democracy, self-censorship, Sweden

Title

One year with the Foreign Espionage Act: Implications to the Freedom of Press in Sweden

Abstrakt

Ledna 2023 byl do švédského zákona o svobodě tisku a projevu doplněn zákon o zahraniční špionáži. Podle tohoto zákona může být pro novináře nezákonné zveřejňovat informace, které by poškodily vztah k jinému státu nebo mezivládní organizaci, jako je OSN nebo NATO. Když byl zákon přijat, novináři, vedoucí pracovníci médií a mediální odborníci kritizovali zákon o zahraniční špionáži za to, že ohrožuje svobodu švédských médií. Domnívali se, že zákon by mohl vést k autocenzuře reportérů a redaktorů a také k zastrasování zdrojů a informátorů. V této studii bylo tematicky analyzováno jedenáct polostrukturovaných rozhovorů se švédskými reportéry a redaktory s cílem prozkoumat vnímání a důsledky zákona o zahraniční špionáži přibližně 1,5 roku po jeho přijetí. Zjištění ukazují, že ačkoli je autocenzura považována za vážnou hrozbu a možný důsledek zákona, žádný z účastníků této studie se k autocenzuře nepřiznal. To naznačuje vysokou úroveň profesionality švédských novinářů. Účastníci však také uvádějí, že zákon o zahraniční špionáži je třeba považovat za jednu z mnoha hrozeb namířených proti svobodě švédských médií. To je znepokojivé nejen v současné době, ale ještě více pro budoucnost, kdy jiná politická scéna může zákony jako zákon o zahraniční špionáži využít k vážnému omezení svobody médií. Tato studie poskytuje prvotní pohled na vnímání a důsledky zákona o zahraniční špionáži a slouží jako výchozí bod pro budoucí výzkum tohoto tématu.

Klíčová slova

Svoboda médií, svoboda tisku, demokracie, autocenzura, Švédsko

Název práce

Jeden rok se zákonem o zahraniční špionáži: Důsledky pro svobodu tisku ve Švédsku

Acknowledgment

These past two academic years which resulted in this thesis would not have been possible without many people. While I can not name them all, there are some that simply can not be ignored.

First of all, I would like to sincerely express my gratitude to the participants taking part in this study. Thank you for answering my emails, thank you for taking the time for me in your busy schedules and thank you for your interest in my research. Talking to you all was the highlight of this project and I can only hope that I have made your voices justice.

I would also like to thank and apologize to my supervisor Barbora Součková. Thank you for your engaging support and steadfast guidance, and sorry for intruding on your vacation and sometimes being extremely slow at responding to your emails.

Teke Ngomba, thank you for teaching me to enjoy reading academic articles.


This acknowledgment would not be fair if my fellow Mundusian were not mentioned. Thank you for making me a better journalist and a better human.

Aren Melikyan needs a mention in particular. I am grateful that you not only assisted me with printing and submitting the physical copy of this thesis, but also for believing in this project and encouraging me along the way.

Thank you to my family, who have little knowledge of exactly what I am doing, but whose support is always present. It is a true privilege as a granddaughter, daughter, and sister to never have my choices questioned.

And what would I do without Emma Djurberg. She inspired me through the darkest of times. Through phone calls, outfit pictures, and the occasional Strava update, her unwavering belief in my abilities gave me the strength to push forward.

Last but far from least, Teo Kristjansson. I love you for not even once making me feel guilty for leaving home for four academic semesters in two different countries. Thank you for waiting. Thank you for cheering me on.

Institute of Communication Studies and Journalism FSV UK Research proposal for Erasmus Mundus Journalism Diploma Thesis	
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Student's surname and given name: Söderholm Emilia	Registry stamp: / Razítko podatelny: 
Start of studies for EMJ (in Aarhus) September 2022	
Your faculty e-mail: 91091912 @fsv.cuni.cz	
Study program/form of study: Erasmus Mundus Journalism	
Thesis title in English: One year with the “foreign espionage act”: Implications to the freedom of press in Sweden	
Expected date of submission (semester, academic year) (Thesis must be submitted according to the Academic Calendar.) Summer semester, 2024	
Main research question (max. 250 characters): Q1: How is the “foreign espionage act” perceived among Swedish journalists? Q2: What implications does the “foreign espionage act” have for self-censorship in journalism, according to Swedish journalists?	
Current state of research on the topic (max. 1800 characters): From 1 st of January 2023 there is a new law in Sweden called “the foreign espionage act”. This law has gotten a lot of criticism of decreasing the press freedom and increasing the risk of self-censorship. This is because it, according to this new law, is illegal to publish information that may harm Sweden’s relationship to foreign states, among other things (Regeringen, 2022). Due to the novelty of this newly implemented law, no research has yet been published on this specific case and its implications for press freedom in Sweden. However, the main concepts that I will focus on in my research is the concepts of media freedom and self-censorship which are relatively well-researched topics. However, research on self-censorship and threats to media freedom is mostly focusing on countries that rank low in the press freedom index (Turkey, Venezuela, and China etc.) (Arsan, 2013; Pain & Korin, 2020; Xu, 2014). Current research in the Swedish/northern European context, is limited but existing. It mostly focuses on the effects of physical or verbal threats aimed at journalists and how those threats may lead to self-censorship among reporters (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016).	

Due to the limited research and the novelty and relevance of the newly implemented “foreign espionage act” I have identified a gap in research. Additionally, I have chosen to focus my study on the Swedish context, a country that rank high in both the press freedom index (Reporters Without Borders, 2023) and democracy index (Our World in Data, 2023), because I find it important to examine possible threats to democracy and press freedom, even in countries that rank high in these indexes.

Expected theoretical framework (max. 1800 characters):

The foundation of this study is made up by a theoretical framework consisting of the principles of media freedom, the role of media in a democratic society and self-censorship.

Media freedom refers to the principle that media should be able to work independently and without interference from politicians or other authorities. Government censorship, threats to the safety of journalists and legal restrictions are just a few of the challenges facing media freedom and journalism all over the world (Tambini, 2021). Given these aspects, the level of media freedom is often used as an indicator of the level of democracy in a country. This is due to the concept of the media being the fourth pillar of democracy and has the mission to be the watchdog of democracy (McNair, 2008).

I will use the theory of media freedom to discuss the democratic problematics of media regulation and, in the case of this research, how the “foreign espionage act” sets new conditions for Swedish journalists and what the implications are.

One possible implication of this law is the possibility of self-censorship among journalists. This is why the theory of self-censorship is also relevant. The action of self-censorship is defined by Bar-Tal (2017, p. 41), as “the act of intentionally and voluntarily withholding information from others in the absence of formal obstacles”. With the definitions of media freedom and media’s role in democratic societies in mind, this restriction of freedom of expression should be viewed as a threat to democracy and democratic values (Tambini, 2021). Nevertheless, there are certain situations when self-censorship has value – in some cases it can work as a tool for safety and security (Bar-Tal, (2017).

Expected methodology, and methods for data gathering and analysis (max. 1800 characters):

I will conduct a qualitative study where I thematically analyze 10-15 semi-structured interviews with Swedish journalists. For this study, semi-structured interviews seem to be the most suitable method because of the exploratory nature which will allow me to examine the very specific and subjective experiences of journalists (Knott et al., 2022).

But before the data collection process begin, I will prepare an interview guide. The interview guide will include broad topics to be discussed and will allow for flexibility in each interview. Meaning, in case a new topic arises during the interview it is possible that I chose to let the respondent expand on it. However, I will make sure that the guide is detailed enough to make sure I collect the information that is relevant and needed to answer the research questions (Grønmo, 2020).

Thereafter, the interviews will be conducted in Swedish via telephone or video call and recorded. The communication aspect is an important part of qualitative interviews and conducting them in Swedish will strengthen the level of communication. Throughout the data collection process, I will transcribe, identify,

code and interpret the key themes in the data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of self-censorship and the “foreign espionage act”. These insights, on both the topic and the methodology, may result in improvements to the interview guide and the interview process (Grønmo, 2020).

I will analyze the data using thematic analysis which is suitable because of its inductive approach, possibility for in-depth exploration of the data and its adaptability (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Expected research design (data to be analyzed, for example, the titles of analyzed newspapers and selected time period):

My population of interest is focused to reporters and editors who are most likely to be influenced by this law, which I believe should be journalists who mainly cover politics and foreign politics and work for media outlets with a nationwide reach.

Except for this limitation, my population is rather unspecified. I will therefore use snowball sampling as a strategic sampling, meaning ideally, I will identify a journalist who him/herself has already had to take this law into consideration in his/her reporting. I will then consult this journalist about who else could be included in the sample. Continuing these consultations with the respondents, will eventually have me reach a satisfactory sample size. In this case, the final sample size is expected to be among 10-15 interviews and/or whenever a theoretical saturation point is reached (Grønmo, 2020).

Due to its method and sampling strategy, this exploratory study will by no means be representative to all Swedish journalists. However, I aim to reach theoretical generalizability (Grønmo, 2020) of my results, and I want to identify themes and partly lay a foundation for future research.

The research may struggle with certain limits, for example self-censoring practice during the interviews of this research. I will try to reduce the risk by being perceptive and sensitive in my communication and emphasize that the interviews will be anonymous. I will also explain and stress the importance of the research. Although I am aware of the risk that the self-censoring practice will be present during the interviews, I would argue that this research still has the potential to tell us something valuable about the current perceptions and implications of the “foreign espionage act” among Swedish journalists. Because even if they may not want to talk about themselves as people who may at times self-censor themselves, they may be able to talk about their perceptions or they may talk about the law itself.

Expected thesis structure (chapters and subchapters with brief description of their content):

1. Introduction
 - 1.1 Context (The level of media freedom in Sweden and the newly implemented “foreign espionage act”)
2. Literature review
3. Theoretical framework
 - 3.1 Media freedom
 - 3.2 The role of media in democracy
 - 3.3 Self-censorship
4. Methodology
5. Analysis
6. Discussion of key findings

7. Limitations
8. Conclusions
9. Reference list

Basic literature list (at least 5 most important works related to the topic and the method(s) of analysis; all works should be briefly characterized on 2-5 lines):

1. Bar-Tal, Daniel. (2017) Self-Censorship as a Socio-Political-Psychological Phenomenon: Conception and Research. *Advances in Political Psychology*, Vol. 38, (1). doi: 10.1111/pops.12391

In his article, Bar-Tal explains self-censorship of information as “an act of intentionally and voluntarily withholding information from others in the absence of formal obstacles”. He further identifies the act of self-censorship as a threat and an obstacle to a well-functioning democracy due to the blocking of information and its implications to the freedom of speech and expression. On the other hand, he also identifies some cases of self-censorship to be of necessity – especially in the context of personal safety.

2. Tambini, Damian. (2021). *Media freedom*. (1st edition). Polity Press.

In this book, both the history and the current state of media freedom in the world is presented. It deals with issues of how to regulate media freedom, how it is affected by the digital era that we live in and how media freedom is connected to democracy, just to name a few aspects.

3. Löfgren Nilsson, Monica & Örnebring, Henrik. (2016). Journalism Under Threat, *Journalism Practice*, 10:7, 880-890, DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2016.1164614

The researchers highlight threats to journalistic autonomy and potential consequences for democratic societies, with a focus on the Swedish context. They stress the importance for journalists to adapt to new realities while still maintaining ethical journalism standards. The article provides insights to future challenges and journalism’s vital role in democratic societies.

4. Hiltunen, Ilmari (2017) Trouble in paradise? Self-censorship, outside interference and harassment of journalists in Finland, *Media Asia*, 44:1, 66-70, DOI: 10.1080/01296612.2017.1374632

This article stresses the need to keep an eye on western democracies and to recognize and acknowledge that issues with self-censorship may/is spread even to countries that are highly ranked in the press freedom index, although it is presented in a subtle shape and not in explicit violence. The study shows that 14 percent of the respondents had performed self-censorship due to various forms of interference.

5. Grønmo, Sigmund (2020) *Social Research Methods: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. (1st edition). Sage Publications.

This book covers the key aspects of social research methods. From planning, executing, analyzing, interpreting, and writing. The sections about qualitative interviewing, interpretation and writing will be especially relevant to me.

6. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology, *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3:2, 77-101, DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

This article explains the thematic analysis that I will use to interpret my data. For example, the authors go through coding, searching and defining themes and writing. Among other things they outline how to make the analysis in a systematic way. They also emphasize the importance of flexibility and transparency in decision-making throughout the research.

Related theses and dissertations (list of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. theses defended at Charles University or other academic institutions in the last five years):

Lind, Jakob. (2023). Understanding the Mob: An Inside Perspective on Harassment and Threats Against Journalists in Sweden. (Unpublished master's thesis). Faculty of media studies at Stockholm University, Stockholm.

Sundin, Amanda. (2020). Journalisters upplevelser av hot och hat på nätet: En kvalitativ intervjustudie om vad trakasserier på olika sociala forum kan få för konsekvenser. (Unpublished bachelor thesis). The faculty of media and journalism at Linné University, Kalmar.

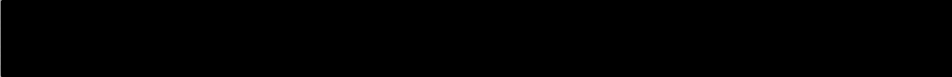
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THIS PART TO BE FILLED BY THE ACADEMIC SUPERVISOR:

I confirm that I have consulted this research proposal with the author and that the proposal is related to my field of expertise at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

I agree to be the Thesis supervisor.



Surname and name of the supervisor

Date / Signature of the supervisor

Further recommendations related to the topic, structure and methods for analysis:

Further recommendations of literature related to the topic:

The research proposal has to be printed, signed and submitted to the FSV UK registry office (podatelna) in two copies, by **November 15**, addressed to the Program Coordinator. Accepted research proposals have to be picked up at the Program Coordinator's Office, Sandra Lábová. The accepted research proposal needs to be included in the hard copy version of the submitted thesis.

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Introduction

In march 2012, the Swedish public broadcasting radio, Sveriges Radio Ekot, published an investigation which showed that the governmental authority Total Defence Research Institute, for several years secretly planned to build a weapon factory located in Saudi Arabia. When these plans became public knowledge through the journalistic investigation, it resulted in harsh criticism, and the project was canceled (Bodin & Öhman, 2012). And in 2014-2015 the Swedish UN diplomat Anders Kompass leaked documents to the public service broadcaster, SVT, about how French UN soldiers had abused children in the Central African Republic in exchange for food (Zachariasson, 2017).

Since the 1st of January 2023, these investigations would probably have been illegal to conduct in Sweden. Due to an amendment to the Swedish constitution, it is now considered a crime for a media outlet to publish information that may harm the relationship to another state or an intergovernmental organization such as the UN or NATO (the Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022).

This law is passed at a time when media freedom is in decline worldwide (Repucci, 2019). According to UNESCO (2023), 85 percent of humanity has experienced some kind of restriction to the media landscape in the last five years. For example by restrictive laws or regulations threatening the freedom of media and the freedom of expression (UNESCO, 2023; Reporters without Borders, 2024). However, the state of media freedom is of varying levels all over the world. Countries like Eritrea, Vietnam, China and North Korea are to be found at the very bottom of the Press Freedom Index. On the contrary, Norway, Denmark and Sweden are found at the very top (Reporters without Borders, 2024). Naturally, studies on press freedom are generally focusing on non-democratic and authoritarian states. While threats to media freedom get far less academic attention in nations such as Sweden.

Nevertheless, as argued by Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring (2016), it is still important to keep an eye out for threats to the high standards of Scandinavian freedom of press. And the need to study threats of media freedom in Sweden has become even more pressing since the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) was put in effect and added to the Freedom of the Press act and the Freedom of Expression act. This amendment to the Swedish constitution means that foreign espionage, gross foreign espionage and gross unauthorized dealing with secret information linked to foreign espionage will be

considered a crime (The Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022). Additionally, the legal changes will have consequences for the freedom of communication and the immunity from liability sources. It is especially concerning for journalists that these amendments to the constitution put limitations on the possibilities to obtain and the right to spread information (The Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022).

However, the passing of the law concerns has been raised that it is a threat to Swedish media freedom and democracy and representatives of several different media companies and media organizations, such as the CEO's of Swedish Radio (SR) and Swedish Television (SVT) Cilla Benkö and Hanna Stjärne, and the former president of Reporters without Borders in Sweden, Erik Halkjær, heavily criticized the law. They argue, for example, that *“journalists themselves and the media they work for could feel compelled to choose not to publish important information to the public”* (Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et.al., 2022). Highlighting the possible consequence of self-censorship among media outlets and journalists.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the perceptions and implications of this law at an early stage, only 1-1,5 years after its passing. Due to the novelty of the law, the issue has hardly been scrutinized in academic circles, yet has received criticism from Swedish journalists and news organizations as previously mentioned (Rosén, 2023; Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et. at, 2022; Ahlqvist, 2022). Its implications for media freedom in Sweden is therefore unknown from an academic point of view. The results of this study are therefore hoped to give a first glimpse of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) from the journalists' perspective, as well as to be part of a foundation to build upon for further research in the future. Therefore, I have posed the following research questions:

RQ 1: How is the Foreign Espionage Act perceived among Swedish journalists?

RQ2: What implications does the Foreign Espionage Act have for self-censorship in journalism, according to Swedish journalists?

To answer these two questions, semi-structured interviews with Swedish reporters and editors will be thematically analyzed in order to explore the subjective perceptions and implications of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517). These findings will then be

discussed in relation to theories explaining self-censorship, media freedom, and the role of journalism in a democracy.

The structure of this thesis is as follows. To begin with, a literature review and the theoretical framework about the role of media in a democratic society, media freedom and self-censorship will be presented. Thereafter, the chosen methodology will be explained and elaborated on before the analysis and discussion chapter. Finally, the findings will be concluded and suggestions for how these results can inspire future research will be presented.

1. Literature review and theoretical framework

To build a solid foundation for the research, this literature review will focus on three themes that are believed to give valuable context to this study. These are “*journalism and democracy*”, “*press- and media freedom*” and “*self-censorship*”. This chapter will offer definitions to the key concepts, give an overview of current research in these three fields while also presenting theoretical frameworks which later will be used to discuss the findings.

1.1 Journalism and democracy

The concept of democracy stretches back to ancient Greece. The word itself is made up of the two words Demos (meaning “*people*”) and Kratos (meaning “*Power*” or “*Force*”) (Merriam-Webster, n.d). In other words, democracy is the idea that the power must come from the people. Over the centuries, the concept has been the subject of ongoing debate and discussion. Two philosophers who have written extensively about democracy as a superior form of governing are John Locke (1689) and John Stuart Mill (1859).

John Locke (1689) emphasizes the individual rights and freedoms which, according to him, are inherent to human beings. Democracy builds on a social contract that exists between the people (with these natural rights) and the government whose legitimacy and main purpose is to protect these rights. Based on this, Locke’s (1689) theory includes an element of revolution or up-rising. If the people are not pleased with the government’s job, it will lose its legitimacy and the people have the right to protest. Holding governments accountable is therefore a key aspect on which the concept of democracy is developed.

Similarly, John Stuart Mill (1859) argued that representative democracy is the most optimal form of governance because it builds on the idea that the people must remain sovereign, but is in need of a people-elected government in order to practically function. Mill (1859) rooted his theory on utilitarianism, meaning to maximize the happiness and minimize the suffering and to aim for “*the greater good of human freedom*” (Mill, 1859, p. 155). This includes the responsibility of the individual to be well educated and informed to be able to elect the most appropriate government according to them (Mill, 1859). This is why free and independent media is considered a prerequisite for democracies. Because it simply explains the relationship between the necessity of people being able to form their own independent opinions and to make rational decisions (Strömbäck, 2005).

A foundational theory touching on the role of journalism in democracies evolve around Edmund Burke’s idea of the power of journalism as the fourth estate, alongside the Lords, the Church, and the Commons in 18th-century England (McQuail, 1987). Or as Jürgen Habermas (1989) suggests, journalism is situated in the “*public sphere*” and works as a prerequisite for participation in public life and political debate. One key mission of serving as a fourth pillar of democracy is what scholars call “*watchdog journalism*” or for journalists to have a “*watchdog role*” (McQuail, 1987; Lippmann, 1922). The watchdog role puts emphasis on the mission of journalists to monitor and hold the power accountable and is perceived to be a basic need for the people to be able to retrieve accurate information to base their opinions on (McNair, 2009). This notion is so strong among some journalists that they equate being a journalist with being a defender of democratic processes (McNair, 2005).

McQuail (1987) also identifies multiple threats to journalism that may challenge democratic values, such as political influence. Similarly, Waisbord (2019, p. 210) put forward the “*vulnerabilities of journalism*”. However, he questions the norms of “*watchdog journalism*” as an ideal form of journalistic practice in all contexts and scenarios. Acknowledging vulnerabilities such as the tailwind of anti-democratic forces where authoritarian governments “*monitor and persecute dissident reporters, dismantle legal protections*” (Waisbord, 2019, p. 211) and the effects that may have on journalists. Instead, Waisbord (2019) wants to raise an understanding of how journalism is affected by threats in order to “refine normative visions about professional ethics in ‘real-world’ conditions” (Waisbord, 2019, p. 213) and by doing that contributing in favor of democratic forces and journalism as a democratic means.

Other scholars prominent in modern research on democracy and journalism are Pippa Norris (2009; 2017) and Hallin & Mancini (2004). In *“Is Western democracy backsliding? Diagnosing the risks”*, Norris (2017) illustrates how the world seemed to flourish from a democratic point of view after the fall of the Berlin Wall, but how this optimism slowly has taken a toll. However, backsliding of weaker democracies such as Turkey, Venezuela and Hungary raises the question of how resilient the more rigid Western ones are, especially in the light of Brexit and the presidency of Donald Trump (Norris, 2017). The tightropes between democracy and journalism are further concluded in Hallin & Mancini’s (2004) book *“Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics”* where he proposes four dimensions for comparison: the structure of media markets, the degree and form of political parallelism, the development of journalistic professionalism and the degree and form of state intervention in the media system. As many studies and reports indicate, the press freedom and form of governance are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them in research dealing with either of the two concepts (Reporters Without Borders 2024; V-Dem, 2024). Stier (2015, p. 1273), concludes that *“democracies lead to significantly higher levels of media freedom than autocracies”* while Kenny, (2020, p 273) explicitly finds that *“all populists restrict press freedom”*. As to be expected, while media freedom is decreasing, the level of democracy is decreasing worldwide too (V-Dem, 2024).

In 2023, the level of democracy enjoyed by the average person is on the same level as in 1985 (V-Dem, 2024). This is portrayed by the fact that 71 percent of the world's population live in autocracies, meaning 29 percent live in liberal democracies. According to V-Dem the worst affected factor of democracy is the freedom of expression which is closely connected to the freedom of the press. In 35 countries, freedom of expression declined in 2023 (V-Dem, 2024). This might not be surprising since attacks on the media are an important act for aspiring autocrats (Stier, 2015) and this has been getting worse in 45 countries during the last decade (V-Dem, 2024).

One way to illustrate the connection between press freedom and democracy is to compare the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (2024) and the Democracy Index conducted by the Economist Intelligence (2024). As can be seen in Table 1, states that rank at the top of the press freedom index also rank high in the democracy index and the same similarities are to be found at the very bottom of the rankings, as seen in Table 2. These indexes illustrate the interconnectedness between

democracy and journalism. However, it needs to be taken into consideration that these two indexes build on different variables. The World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2024) is compiled by analyzing five different indicators which are political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context and safety. While the Democracy index (Economist Intelligence, 2024) is based on 60 different indicators grouped into five categories which are electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture and civil liberties. Comparing these indexes should therefore be done cautiously and, as already mentioned, for this thesis they only serve as real-life evidence to illustrate the connections between media freedom and democracy. To draw any deeper conclusions by this comparison should however only be done with careful consideration of the two different methods of analysis.

Table. 1

World Press Freedom index 2024: Top five <i>(Measuring 2023)</i>	Democracy index 2023: Top five <i>(Measuring 2023)</i>
1. Norway	1. Norway
2. Denmark	2. New Zealand
3. Sweden	3. Iceland
4. The Netherlands	4. Sweden
5. Finland	5. Finland

(Reporters Without Borders 2024; Economist Intelligence, 2024)

In an extended list of the countries ranked in the Democracy Index for 2023 in Table 1, Denmark would be ranked as number 6 and Ireland ranked as number 7 (Economist Intelligence, 2024). As for Table 2, Vietnam, China, Iran, and Turkmenistan can all be found among the bottom-ranked countries in the Democracy Index (Economist Intelligence, 2024).

Table 2.

World Press Freedom index 2024: Bottom five <i>(Measuring 2023)</i>	Democracy index 2023: Bottom five <i>(Measuring 2023)</i>
1. Eritrea	1. Afghanistan
2. Syria	2. Myanmar
3. Afghanistan	3. North Korea
4. North Korea	4. Central African Republic
5. Iran	5. Syria

(Reporters Without Borders 2024; Economist Intelligence, 2024)

As confirmed by Table 1. shown above and scholars such as Nord and von Krogh (2021) and Andersson (2023), Sweden and the Swedish media generally meet the standards of satisfaction and fulfill their role as a key actor in Swedish democracy. This might not be surprising given Sweden’s long democratic history and very special relationship to press freedom. Being the first country in the world to add press freedom to the constitution back in 1766 (Nordin, 2016).

1.2 Press- and media freedom

For a long time, the term press freedom was an adequate term to describe the freedoms which acts as a prerequisite of journalism. However, technical and digital development has created the need for a more appropriate term given that journalism today stretches far beyond the written word on a piece of paper (Zayani, 2021; Wahl-Jorgensen & Williams et. al, 2016; Lewis & Molyneux, 2018; Broersma & Eldridge; 2019). Nowadays, the more inclusive term “*media freedom*” is being increasingly used as an extension of the freedom of the press. However, the term press freedom is still commonly accepted as an umbrella term for free and independent media no matter what medium is used to convey the information, and many scholars use the terms

interchangeably (Stier, 2015; Solis & Waggoner, 2021) as will be the case throughout this thesis if not stated otherwise.

Press- and media freedom refers to the principle that journalists and other media workers should be able to work independently and without interference from politicians or other authorities. Government censorship, threats to the safety of journalists and legal restrictions are just a few of the challenges facing media freedom and journalism globally (Tambini, 2021; Schneider, 2020; Oster, 2013; Koltay, 2015). In recent decades the situation has gotten increasingly alarming. The World Press Freedom Index for 2024 highlights that governments fail to protect free, diverse, and independent journalism, and the latest report finds that the indicator “political context” decreased by the most points since last year, a drop of 7.6 points on a global average (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). The political context indicator measures aspects like *“the degree of support and respect for media autonomy vis-à-vis political pressure from the state or from other political actors”* and *“the level of acceptance of a variety of journalistic approaches satisfying professional standards, including politically aligned approaches and independent approaches”* as well as *“the degree of support for the media in their role of holding politicians and government to account in the public interest”* (Reporters Without Borders, 2022).

Historically, there is a tradition of politicians trying to protect the media through legal measures, at least that is what can be interpreted by Press freedom being included in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UN from 1948 (United Nations, 1948). This declaration emphasizes and protects the *“freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers”* (United Nations, 1948, art. 19). Except for being protected by the Human Rights Declaration, media freedom in Sweden is seemingly well-protected by the constitution which is made up based on four different laws; the Instrument of Government and the Succession Act as well as the two acts especially focused on media freedom which are the Freedom of the Press Act and the Fundamental Law of Freedom of Expression (the Swedish Riksdag, n.d).

According to Nord & von Krogh (2021), there is no evident issue with external influence in Swedish newsrooms in the form of politicians or other actors of power. However, the situation globally does not resemble the situation in Sweden. Instead of using politics as a means of protecting journalism, the contrary is what has been happening lately in many countries around the world (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Similarly to

Sweden, Hong Kong is facing a relatively new law that has made it both difficult and dangerous to be a journalist in the state. The findings by Lee, Tang, and Chan (2023) show how the National Security Law that was established in Hong Kong in 2020 has not only led to self-censorship through political pressure on news organizations. They also found that a worsening situation for journalists is connected with the societal self-censorship that the law resulted in which makes it substantially more difficult to get information from sources. All in all leading to a restriction in media freedom as a part of a democratic backsliding (Lee, Tang & Chan, 2023).

What perhaps starts to be evident is that freedom of media is one - if not the - most important building block for the practice of journalism. But because of the vast amount of studies, it is difficult to give a complete overview of the current state of research on the topic. However, it is safe to say that an extensive part of the total amount of studies are either concerning political, legal, social, ethical or technological aspects (Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021). More specifically, common topics to study are the relationship between press freedom and form of governance (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Stier, 2015; Norris, 2017; Kenny, 2020) and case studies of particular nations or regions concerning mainly threats against it (Arsan, 2013; Pain & Korin, 2021; Lee, Tang & Chan, 2023). Combined, it unfortunately adds to the dark picture regarding the freedom of press globally.

As already established, the last decade has resulted in decreased levels of press freedom all around the world (Mechkova, Lührmann, & Lindberg, 2017) and the most recent global crisis being the COVID-19 pandemic is considered an essential factor to explain this development (Papadopoulou & Maniou, 2021). While previous studies show that populist leaders often target the media (Kenny, 2019; Stier, 2015), Papadopoulou and Maniou (2021) emphasize how also democratic states seized the situation of the recent pandemic in order to control and decrease press freedom, for example by legitimizing restrictions, increasing censorship and enhancing surveillance.

Countries suffering from democratic backsliding and restricted media freedom due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are, in other words, to be found all over the world (Hellmeier, Cole, Grahn, et. al, 2021). The media landscape in India is today made up of big media conglomerates which rely on government advertisement. This is considered a threat to media freedom because it makes reporters not want to criticize the government (Maiorano, 2022). Even though the backsliding of democracy in India was already apparent, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the process (Hasan, 2021). The

decision for a lockdown was hastily decided without proper parliament processes and the government tightened its grips on the media and the flow of information. For example by pushing for the media not being allowed to publish any information that was not accepted by the government (Hasan, 2021).

However, whether or not these signs of democratic backsliding are mainly a short-term consequence due to pandemic restrictions with clear time limits or if the decrease in press freedom is a long-term result is difficult to predict (Hellmeier, Cole, Grahn, et. al, 2021). In Slovenia, the democratic backlash experienced during the pandemic resulted in a strengthened journalistic practice. Facing the pressures from the government to report in favor of the ruling party, Pajnik & Hrženjak (2024) found that Slovenian journalists saw their mission in a new light and strengthened their journalistic ethics.

To be better equipped to resist these restrictive measures, Tambini (2021) argues for the need for a common definition of media freedom. He bases his argument on the fact that there are currently two different kinds of theories connected to media freedom. First there is the theory occupied with what media is/should be free from (the negative theory). In other words, does not push for any special treatment or protection of the media. The second theory speaks in favor of the media operating by special privileges, for example with regard to subsidies and source protection (the positive theory).

Tambini (2021) points out that a negative approach may lead to a weakened media landscape and democratic backsliding because of the current technical and market environment. Furthermore, he argues that an agreement that media policy and democracy should be underpinned by a positive approach that allows for special privileges and duties for the media (2021). However, because there is a traditional skepticism and critique related to the positive theory based on the fear of media capture (Schiffrin, 2021), it is important that the accountability is clearly separated from the state. And while it in reality might be difficult to draw a clear line between the two theories, the negative theory is more common in the US media tradition while the positive theory goes in line with a European media tradition, such as the Swedish one (Tambini, 2021).

Nevertheless, studies on Swedish press- and media freedom and its threats are limited. It rather describes the strengths of the Swedish press. For example in a study by Andersson (2023), a majority of the participants say that the investigative ideal and to hold the power accountable is the foundation of what it means to be a journalist. Additionally, a strong motivation among Swedish journalists to choose the profession is the will to express

themselves (Andersson, 2023). This confirms the conclusions by Nord and von Krogh (2021) about Swedish journalists adhering to a high level of professionalism which is summarized well by Nord and von Krogh (2021) when they refer to Strömbäck, Nord and Shehata (2012): they conclude that a majority of journalists in Sweden “*strongly endorse the professional goals of independent scrutinising of power-holders, gathering and distributing information to citizens to inform decisions in a democracy and giving a voice to the voiceless*” (Nord and von Krogh, 2021, p.373).

While the academic literature with the keywords “media freedom” or “press freedom” and “Sweden” is limited, the European Center for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) published a report in 2019 about “best practices” regarding maintaining a strong media freedom. The examples were collected from Denmark and Sweden - two countries that consistently rank at the very top of the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2024). Among the aspects stressed as important are the press subsidies, distributional subsidies, and innovation subsidies working in favor of a diverse media landscape. Strong trade unions, public service media with good audience engagement and high trust as well as strong constitutional safeguards are other factors important to high levels of media freedom in Sweden (European Center for Press and Media Freedom, 2020; Weibull & Wadbring, 2020). This further supports the alignment of Tambini’s (2021) positive media freedom.

1.2.1 Threats to press- and media freedom

Research on threats against free and independent journalists and journalism is pluralistic, but a common topic of research focuses on physical threats (Tumber, 2011; Waisbord, 2022) and censorship (Tai, 2014; Gumede, 2016; Barbosa & de Castro Pereira, 2023). These are often interrelated, but depending on geographic region and political situation the most pressing threats may differ in nature. In general, however, research on threats to media and press freedom mostly focuses on countries that rank low in the press freedom index (Arsan, 2013; Pain & Korin, 2021; Xu, 2014). Current research in the Swedish and northern European context is limited but exists and mostly focuses on the effects of threats aimed at journalists in a digital media landscape (Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016; Svensson, Björkenfeldt, Åström & Dahlstrand, 2021).

But, as both Hiltunen (2017), Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring (2016) conclude - just because a country scores high in the press freedom index, it does not mean that it is free

from or immune to threats against a free press. Meaning, it is of high necessity to keep studying the physical and non-physical threats against journalists and journalism in democratic societies.

Hiltunen (2017) who research the topic in a Finnish context and, Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring (2016) who study the Swedish context, agree that while the levels of physical violence remain low, the levels of verbal threats is on the rise, much because of social media as is further confirmed by (Svensson, Björkenfeldt, Åström & Dahlstrand, 2021). And where there are threats there is also a risk of self-censorship (Hiltunen, 2017; Löfgren Nilsson & Örnebring, 2016). This is especially true for freelancers who often work with tight resources and without the security of being tied to a specific media company (Waisbord, 2022).

And just as Tambini (2021, p. 135) states in his article “A Theory of Media Freedom”: *“The international drum beat of support for freedom of the media is louder than ever”*. As previously mentioned, all the countries that have a “good” press freedom according to the World Press Freedom Index are located in Europe (Reporters Without Border, 2024), nevertheless, the EU has a strong focus on press- and media freedom issues. Not only has the European Media Freedom Act passed (European Parliament, 2024), an alert system has also been founded. *“The Safety of Journalists Platform”* gathers alerts about restrictions to press- and media freedom in Europe (Safety of Journalists Platform, 2022). On the 8th of December 2022, the passing of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) in the Swedish Riksdag a couple of weeks earlier was reported to the alert system because of the imagined chilling effect the law may have on media freedom in Sweden. The alert was given the level 2 status, meaning it's considered a serious threat to media freedom and that the alert is dealing with *“laws and regulations that unduly restrict media freedom or access to information”* (Safety of Journalists Platform, 2022).

However, Swedish politicians claim that the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) is not going to be targeting journalism and in an official statement they emphasize exceptions granted for journalism (Ehnberg, 2023). However, given that media representatives are very critical of the law and are accusing it of restricting the media freedom and might encourage self-censorship among journalists (Rosén, 2022; Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et. at, 2022; Ahlqvist, 2022) a potential “chilling effect” (Schauer, 1978) seems to be in full swing.

1.3 Self-censorship

Self-censorship is a widely researched concept in media- and communication studies (Hayes, Glynn & Shanahan, 2005; Cook & Heilmann, 2013; Bar-Tal, 2017; Jungblut & Hoxha, 2017). Before exploring the range of research on the topic, the concept of self-censorship needs to be defined. The Cambridge English Dictionary (n.d) defines self-censorship as the “*control of what you say or do in order to avoid annoying or offending others, but without being told officially that such control is necessary*” and the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d) describes it as the “*control of one’s own speech, writing, or actions, so as to avoid what is considered undesirable or unsuitable*”. Similarly, journalism scholars such as Jungblut and Hoxha (2017) use the definition “*the individual self-restriction of one’s freedom of speech*” (p.227) and (Hayes, Glynn & Shanahan, 2005) identify self-censorship as the “*withholding of one’s true opinion from an audience perceived to disagree with that opinion*” (p. 299).

Self-censorship is a socio-psychological term (Bar-Tal, 2017) and there is a pile of adjacent theories which could be used to explain and understand the concept. One possible motivation behind the act of self-censorship is what Festinger (1957) called the cognitive dissonance theory. It explains the struggle of a person carrying contradictory opinions, beliefs or attitudes about something. Cognitive dissonance can also be created if a person's behavior conflicts with their beliefs.

Another possible motivation for self-censorship is what Noelle-Neumann (1974) called “*the spiral of silence*”. When realizing that one’s opinion differs from the majority, people tend to stay quiet and not disclose their differing opinion. According to Noelle-Neumann (1974) this will result in the dominant opinion becoming increasingly prominent while other, less stated opinions will risk fading away in the public debate. This phenomenon may also be explained through the normative influence theory (Yanovitzky & Rimal, 2006) which explains the conforming to other people's expectations if noticed that our beliefs or opinions are in conflict with other people’s beliefs or opinions. How strong the urge to fit in is, depends on the group dynamics, such as how big the group is and the relationship to the group. And the more one wants to be in a group, the easier it is for the person to conform to the group's expectations (Yanovitzky & Rimal, 2006).

Two key concepts of the normative influence theory is public compliance and private acceptance (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). If a person adheres to the norms of a group publicly, despite not agreeing with them privately, that is public compliance. Private

acceptance however, is when a person's actual opinions or behaviors are changed to go in line with the group (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). As is the case with a few of the already mentioned theories used to explain self-censorship, a strong motivation for normative behavior is to not stand out and risk being left out of the group (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

The social identity theory is another important theory to grasp in order to understand the concept of self-censorship. This theory is developed by Tajfel and Turner (1978) and it builds on the components of social categorization, social identification and social comparison. Briefly explained, people categorize other people as well as themselves into different social groups which may be based on nationality or profession for example. People then tend to conform to the identity of the group and internalize its norms, values and behaviors which create a feeling of belonging. People then compare their social group with other groups, often referred to as in-group and out-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1978).

One theory closely related to self-censorship and media freedom which has already been mentioned briefly is the chilling effect theory (Schauer, 1978). It explains the phenomenon of self-censorship due to the fear of legal sanctions or other forms of punishments such as imprisonment, fines or loss of employment. For example, vague or broad laws and regulations related to media and journalism may have a chilling effect on reporters, which in other words mean that they do not speak up and instead self-censor (Schauer, 1978).

A modern scholar whose research is occupied with self-censorship and whose connections to media freedom are more straightforward is Bar-Tal (2017). He emphasizes the principle of self-censorship being performed only if people voluntarily decide not to disclose information that is believed to have an impact on society, even though there are no formal obstacles to doing so. A person may also think there are formal obstacles when there really are not. There is also an emphasis on the term "*information*", as in valid and true facts. Hence, not revealing one's opinions is not regarded as self-censorship.

Bar-Tal (2017) identifies three psychological bases for self-censorship which are the human drive and the need to share information and experiences, the importance of identification with a group, and the individual struggle of experiencing a dilemma. These psychological bases are also to be found in the adjacent theories mentioned above, such as "the spiral of silence"-theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), normative influence theory (Yanovitzky & Rimal, 2006) and the social identity theory Tajfel & Turner, 1978).

Further, it is not assumed that the performance of self-censorship is done on a whim and without consequence (Bar-Tal, 2017). Personal distress because of hiding information that, depending on the content, potentially could be important for society is pointed out as a potential consequence. It may also come in conflict with personal principles about the importance of free flow of information and how the withholding of information actively reduces the information flow. In addition, this may lead to ignorance and for people to make decisions based on the lack of facts due to an impoverished public debate and transparency. It may also lead to the reproduction of particular practices and norms that may otherwise have been changed due to the information now withheld (Bar-Tal, 2017).

The connections drawn between self-censorship and the free flow of information are the biggest motivating factor when deciding to apply the theoretical framework by Bar-Tal (2017) to this research. In summary, Bar-Tal (2017, pp 41-42) presents this concise definition about when and how self-censorship takes form:

“the actor must have new information that has not been revealed to the public, must be aware that he or she has truthful information, and believes that the information has implications for the society as a whole [...] The act of censorship indicates that the individual intentionally and voluntarily decides to withhold (does not share) this information in spite of the fact that there is no formal obstacle like external censorship that prevents him or her from sharing it”.

Self-censorship is a concept with a big possible impact on journalism and media freedom. On the one hand, if performed by sources, information will not reach the media or will be difficult to verify (Lee, Tang & Chan, 2023). On the other hand, if performed by journalists themselves, the flow of information necessary in a democratic society and the very foundation of press freedom is interrupted (Bar-Tal, 2017).

There are several case studies in the literature focused on self-censorship as a threat to media freedom and democratic governance (Norris, 2017; Kenny, 2020; Lee, Tang & Chan, 2023). Though, strong democratic states are not immune to self-censorship (Bar-Tal, 2017), most common is that studies focus on autocratic states such as Russia (Bodrunova, Litvinenko and Nigmatullina, 2020), Hong Kong (Ngok, 2007; Lee & Chan, 2009) and Venezuela (Pain & Korin, 2021). And few of them are occupied with states ranked as strong democracies such as the Nordic countries (Nilsson Löfgren & Örnebrink, 2016; Hiltunen, 2017; Guðmundsson & Kristinsson, 2019).

In the case of Russia, Bodrunova, Litvinenko and Nigmatullina (2020) find that self-censorship is quite common among Russian journalists - both on social platforms and throughout the editorial process. The motivating factor for self-censoring seems to align with behavior on social networks and in the editorial practice with a mix of ethical and risk concerns where political threats act as the “perceived censor” in most cases. Similar findings are shown in the study by Lee and Chan (2009) who explore self-censorship among journalists in Hong Kong. However, a noteworthy finding is that some journalists in Hong Kong seemingly have a high level of professionalism and are actively trying to resist self-censoring practices (Lee & Chan, 2009).

But while Hong Kong journalists are trying to hold self-censorship at bay (Lee & Chan, 2009), young and aspiring journalists in Venezuela see self-censorship as part of the profession and what it means to be a journalist (Pain & Korin, 2021). Nevertheless, both Russian, Hong Kong and Venezuelan journalists are aware of the concerns with the self-censoring practice in the role of a journalist (Bodrunova, Litvinenko and Nigmatullina, 2020; Lee & Chan, 2019; Pain & Korin, 2021). But just as Bar-Tal (2017) claims, self-censorship is not inherently a negative phenomenon. In countries and states mentioned above, self-censorship could serve to prevent controversies and disagreements and help create and maintain a positive social identity and a feeling of unity and solidarity. Other scholars who are conducting case studies also find that self-censorship is used as a means for personal safety (Fadnes, Krøvel & Larsen, 2021) and as a prerequisite to work as a journalist at all (Skjerdal (2010).

Skjerdal (2010) studied the case of Ethiopia where reporters are aware of the journalistic concerns of self-censorship but justify the action as a basic means to keep journalism alive. Skjerdal (2010, p. 99) summarizes the width of the concept as: *“stretch[ing] from a wide understanding, seeing self-censorship as an everyday practice for any journalist anywhere in the world caused by the inevitable selection and de-selection processes while reporting and editing; to a narrow definition, entailing only those practices which are performed for the sake of excluding information from publicity due to felt threats by public authorities”*.

Protecting the group is one of a few motivations behind the act of self-censoring, according to Bar-Tal (2017), while protecting yourself from negative sanctions is another. There may also be motivations to protect a third party, a particular belief or to protect your own self-image.

And depending on the current conditions self-censorship may vary in occurrence. Context of the group, as well as personal factors play a role. It also has a lot to do with the type of information at hand and the general circumstances (Bar-Tal, 2017).

Worth mentioning is also what self-censorship is not. For example, self-censorship is not regarded as the journalistic and editorial process of selecting what information is included in the news report, but rather, not publishing relevant information out of fear or concern of the consequences (Bar-Tal, 2017).

But, there are studies which argue that the act of self-censorship is in fact part of a journalist's job (Jungblut & Hoxha, 2017). As a reporter, one gathers information and through a process of editorial decisions, some information gets cut from the story. This may be for reasons such as to protect a source, due to lack of space in the final report or just because it is not relevant to the story. This is a natural part of the workflow and is practiced daily in newsrooms all across the globe. But even though the act of withholding information may be enough to classify an act as self-censoring the journalistic routine mentioned above is not considered to be actual self-censorship per se (even though there are arguments for it being justifiable self-censoring (Jungblut & Hoxha, 2017), it is rather referred to as a natural part of the journalistic craft and news production. Everything can simply not make the final cut.

In other cases, journalism ethics stands in the way of information to be published. This too, happens everywhere and all the time in the production of news. And to stick to journalistic ethics is not seen as self-censorship but rather highly important for the credibility of the profession and individual reporters. One could argue that the withholding of information due to journalism ethics is considered justified self-censorship (Grøndahl Larsen, Fadnes & Krøvel, 2021).

Nevertheless, it should be stated that in the context of this thesis, self-censorship does have negative connotations. This stance is based on the alarming way self-censorship has been discussed as a potential consequence of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) and how that risks to become a future threat to the democratic society of Sweden (Rosén, 2023; Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et. al, 2022; Ahlqvist, 2022).

I would therefore like to stress that this study is entirely occupied with self-censorship as a practice which is intentional for the sake of personal safety, the mere existence of journalism or a general fear of consequences related to publishing information

- even though there are no formal barriers to do so. Especially considering the claims about an exception for journalists (Ehnberg, 2023).

This study is conducted in a research void where not many other similar studies exist. Existing research about self-censorship in Sweden exist but I scarce. According to a study from 2019 (Löfgren Nilsson), two out of ten journalists who have ever received derogatory comments online have avoided covering certain topics or societal groups out of fear. And in 2021, a report from the Swedish Crime Victim Authority (Svensson, Björkenfeldt, Åström & Dahlstrand, 2021) shows that it is a growing issue that actors who are important for democratic maintenance such as journalists and politicians are victims of hate and threats - especially on social media. The same report concludes that self-censorship is common among people in these groups.

This outline of relevant concepts, definitions, previous studies, and theories serves as a foundational ground for this study whose research aims are to explore Swedish journalists' perception of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) and how it may already have affected or potentially could impact their work. Because of the exploratory nature of this research and given the lack of previous studies to draw on, the first research question is of exploratory nature:

How is the Foreign Espionage Act perceived among Swedish journalists? (RQ 1)

A broad research question like this, is expected to generate themes which not only will serve the purpose of this study, but also contribute to further research on the subject. To answer this question the results from the analysis will be discussed in relation to previous literature on journalism and democracy as well as literature about press- and media freedom.

The second research question is based on the public debate about the law before it was passed (Rosén, 2022; Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et. at, 2022; Ahlqvist, 2022). Drawing on those discussions, self-censorship among journalists is a particular threat that has been raised. Therefore the second research question is:

What implications does the Foreign Espionage Act have for self-censorship in journalism, according to Swedish journalists? (RQ 2)

To address this question findings will be discussed in relation to Bar-Tal's (2017) theoretical framework as well as adjacent theories and previous research about self-censorship in journalism. Additionally, the results will contribute to a broader discussion about journalism in relation to democratic values. Because as highlighted in an analysis done by the Freedom House (2019): *"While the threats to global media freedom are real and concerning in their own right, their impact on the state of democracy is what makes them truly dangerous"*.

2. Methodology

In order to explore subjective attitudes and opinions of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) and its implications for Swedish journalism by Swedish journalists, a qualitative method has been chosen for this research (Grønmo, 2020). Since the law is relatively new and because no other studies have yet been conducted on the topic, it is suitable to apply an inductive approach when thematically analyzing the data of semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following sections of this chapter will explain in detail what has been done in each step of this particular study, starting with the sampling, followed by data collection and analysis.

2.1 Sampling method: Snowball sampling

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, the population was rather unspecified. Therefore, strategic sampling, more specifically snowball sampling, was the most appropriate way to identify and choose the participants (Grønmo, 2020). Sampling is defined as "the act, process, or technique of selecting a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population", according to Merriam-Webster's dictionary (n.d).

In snowball sampling the researcher starts with a "seed", which is one or a few people, to start the snowball. After the first interview with the "seed", they will refer the researcher to other suitable participants that fit the criteria that the researcher has decided on. This chain of referral then continues until a satisfactory sample size and a theoretical saturation is reached (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019). This sampling method was chosen for this study in order to be sure to identify people who actually had given this law some thought, who might have had to deal with the law somehow or who, in the future, probably

will have to deal with it somehow. This “hidden population” (Browne, 2005) was crucial to find since the law is relatively new (about 1-1,5 years at the time of the interview phase) and it was difficult to know how much attention the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) had gotten in newsrooms and editorial discussion so far. By applying this sampling strategy, time was not wasted interviewing people who had no relationship with the law, probably never will and who has not given the law much thought so far, which likely would have been the case if a random sampling approach would have been applied (Robinson, 2014).

Worth mentioning is that snowball sampling has a few limitations. Its lack of randomness may create a selection bias, but it has also been criticized for its lack of external validity, generalisability and representativeness (Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019). Another concern is that women may be over-represented in snowball sampling because of their likelihood to be more cooperative (Noy, 2008). However, this has not been the case for this study which will be elaborated on in the discussion chapter.

At the start of this research, there was at least one known case where a publication was said to have been stopped by the media outlet in question due to this Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517). The first participant - the “seed”(Parker, Scott & Geddes, 2019) - of this study was found through this case (even though the real reason behind the decision to stop the publication was later revealed to have been a different one than the Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517) (P6). After that interview, he was consulted about who else should be included in the sample. The only requirement was that the person being recommended would work with topics such as politics, foreign politics, security and/or are often working on investigations. Or someone who, for other reasons, has some knowledge about the law. This criteria is based on the fact that these areas of journalism are most likely to be affected by the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) since they often report on international stories and international relations.

This process of consulting participants to find more participants continued until a theoretical saturation was reached (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) after eleven interviews with reporters and editors working for media outlets with a nationwide reach.

Table 3. In some cases the information has been replaced with “-”. That means that the information is not disclosed in order to ensure anonymity of the participant.

Name code	Gender	Age	Role	Media outlet	Type of media
P1.	Male	60-65	Editor	SVT	Public Service
P2.	Male	40-45	Foreign news editor and reporter	-	Digital platform
P3.	Male	70-75	Freelance reporter with a special focus on the Freedom of Press- and Expression act	-	-
P4.	Male	35-40	Freelance foreign news reporter	-	-
P5.	Male	40-45	Investigative news editor	SVT	Public Service
P6.	Female	60-65	Editor-in-chief	SR	Public Service
P7.	Male	35-40	Reporter	-	-
P8.	Male	50-55	Editor and reporter	-	Commercial
P9.	Male	50-55	Investigative news editor	-	-
P10.	Male	30-35	Freelance Foreign news reporter		-
P11.	Male	40-45	Editor	Aftonbladet	Commercial

2.2 Data collection: Semi-structured interviews

As already mentioned, due to the exploratory nature of this study and the fact that the aim has been to examine the very specific and subjective attitudes and opinions of Swedish journalists, semi-structured interviews were the most suitable method (Grønmo, 2020). However, the method of collecting data through semi-structured interviews has its limitations.

One aspect often mentioned is that it is time consuming (Adams, 2015). While this is true, the recent years technological developments resulting in secure AI-transcription tools with a high level of accuracy (GoodTape, n.d) has been cutting down the time at least a little bit. Another limitation is interviewer bias as well as participant bias. For the researcher it might be a challenge not to let his or her own bias shine through in the way questions are asked and answers interpreted. And for participants, there is a risk that they answer the questions in a way which they believe is appropriate or expected from them (Grønmo, 2020).

Nevertheless, using semi-structured interviews to collect the data for this research project was the best method because it offered flexibility and the opportunity to collect data based on subjective and personal opinions by the participants (Adams, 2015). But before the data collection process began, a brief interview guide was prepared (See appendix 1). The interview guide included broad topics and questions to be discussed while at the same time allowing for flexibility in each interview. Meaning, if a new topic arose during the interview, the participant was granted space to expand on it and there was room for follow-up questions. However, the guide was detailed enough to ensure that all the relevant information that I needed in order to answer the research questions were collected (Grønmo, 2020). The questions are therefore grounded in theory about press- and media freedom, self-censorship and the preexisting knowledge about the law based on facts and debates (the Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022; Rosén, 2023; Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et. at, 2022; Ahlqvist, 2022), as well as the curiosity of the researcher.

The participants were asked to take part in the study through email. The interviews were conducted via video call between the 16th of april and 12th of june and each interview lasted between 12 and 40 minutes. The interviews were recorded and conducted

in Swedish in order to secure a strong level of communication, something that is very important when conducting qualitative interviews to decrease the risk of misunderstandings or misinterpretations (Adams, 2015; Grønmo, 2020).

After having collected each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed using GoodTape - a fully encrypted AI transcription tool with a data retention policy ensuring immediate deletion after transcription (GoodTape, 2024). The transcriptions were proofread to make sure there were no misinterpretations between the AI and the recording. This step was performed almost directly after the interview to ensure no important aspects were forgotten that may have gotten lost in the transcription process.

It is possible that gathering data through video call had some influence on the quality of the data. However, in the case with this research it was a positive influence. Using video may compromise the level of communication negatively due to aspects such as bad internet connection and lack of experience using software (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, Mirick & Wladkowski (2019) argue against these concerns. Their study shows that using video tools to conduct interviews does not compromise the quality of the interview in a substantial way. It rather offers the accessibility and flexibility that is sometimes needed for example if the researcher and the participants are being located far away geographically, as in this study, as well as offers the participant to be interviewed in the comfort of their own home (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019).

Nevertheless, they also point out the issue of technical struggles that may arise such as “connection issues, lags in sound and/or video, garbled or indistinct audio, or malfunctioning technology” (Mirick & Wladkowski, 2019, p. 3063). However, the recent COVID-19 pandemic is regarded to have trained a wide range of work groups in online communication and using video software to communicate (Vargo, Zhu, Benwell & Yan, 2020) and throughout the data gathering phase no such issues occurred and it obvious that the all of the participants were used to online meetings.

The choice of language used throughout the study has reduced the risk of miscommunication even more (Adams, 2015). Throughout the data collection phase, the interviews were transcribed, identified, coded, and interpreted in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of self-censorship and the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517). These processes were fully conducted using the Swedish transcripts as well as coding and developing themes in Swedish. It was not until step five of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis, which is to define and name the themes, that the themes got their

English names and definitions. Additionally, for the analysis and discussion chapter, extracts from the transcriptions were translated into English in order to illustrate the points made in those chapters. The argument for this is the same as for conducting the interviews in Swedish which is to not risk anything getting lost in translation or risk misunderstandings between the researcher and the participant (Adams, 2015). The insights gained along the data gathering process, on both the topic and the methodology, resulted in improvements to the interview guide and the interview process along the way (Grønmo, 2020).

2.3 Mode of analysis: Thematic analysis

Using thematic analysis was a suitable mode of analysis for this study because of the possibility for in-depth exploration of the collected data and the fact that it is a method of analysis which offers great flexibility as well as being exploratory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Naturally, this method of analysis will also help develop themes which may be of value for future research on the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517).

The analysis phase follows the six steps developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and will begin with familiarizing and getting to know the data, first by proof reading and then by re-reading the transcriptions to get a brief idea of what the data contain.

The analysis continues with the coding phase, when the researcher will code the transcriptions using an inductive approach, meaning deriving codes from the data instead of having predetermined codes to match with the data (deductive approach). Then, the following two steps are generating and reviewing the themes. During these phases the researcher takes a look at the codes and tries to develop themes based on the codes. This requires a reflexive mindset where the researcher moves back and forth between codes and themes.

When feeling satisfied with the themes, they needed to be properly defined and named for transparency and so that others understand what each theme contains and are built on. The final step is to write the analysis which should be done in a captivating yet pedagogical way which shows the nuances of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The following paragraphs will present each step and how the analyzed data of the semi-structured interviews were handled. However, this is not to be seen as a linear process. Instead, the different steps have been revisited as needed through the process of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

2.3.1 Familiarization

The first familiarization with the data happened right after each interview when the transcriptions were checked for mistakes or misinterpretations between the AI-tool and the audio recording. This step was repeated at least once more at the beginning of the analysis phase of this research. Throughout the analysis, specific parts were re-read in order to decrease the risk of misinterpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

During the familiarization process, notes of interesting patterns, ideas and general interpretation of the data were taken in order to remember them for a later phase of the analysis. In the end, some of these notes were found to be supported by the data and could be elaborated upon in the analysis, while other notes had no bearing.

2.3.2 Coding

During the coding phase, the data were read through and coded by using different colors. The codes were organized by different aspects of the interviews that may potentially form themes in the upcoming step of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When highlighting relevant parts of the text, surrounding text was also highlighted in order to not lose the context of the paragraph.

The data were also coded for as many potential themes as possible not to limit or miss aspects of the data which could be important in the further steps of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This means that one code could fit into one of more umbrella codes which I developed to create a better organization of the data. This process resulted in codes that were organized under the following umbrella terms by different colors: *“presence”, “design of the law”, “effects”, “approach”, “media climate”, “self-censorship”, “example cases”, “general opinions”, “knowledge” and “protection of sources”*.

2.3.3 Generating themes

In the next step the codes were developed into themes. During this step, the codes were organized by color in a table using Google Sheets to create an overview (see appendix 2 for an extract on the Google Sheet). The codes could then be combined in different ways to search for overarching themes, as well as sub-themes. The themes are developed on a semantic level where what is being explicitly said during interviews is what matters, instead of themes being derived from latent and interpretive data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Organizing and reorganizing the codes to find overarching themes, ultimately

resulted in nine draft-themes. And as previously mentioned, the whole process of data collection and analysis was done in Swedish in order to secure a high level of communication and to decrease the risk of important information getting lost in translation (Grønmo, 2020). The names of the umbrella codes and the drafted themes have therefore been translated exclusively for presenting this presentation of the steps.

2.3.4 Reviewing themes

Once the ten draft themes were developed, the next step involved taking a more thorough look at the derived themes using some key questions proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012, p. 65);

- Is this a theme?
- If it is a theme, what is the quality of this theme?
- What are the boundaries of this theme?
- Is there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme?
- Is the data too diverse and wide ranging?

During the review of the themes, it was obvious that some themes were not really themes, but sub-themes. At this phase codes were also moved around to fit more than one theme or a different theme than what was interpreted originally. When satisfied with the created themes and sub-themes, the entire data set was read through to make sure that imagined thematic map “works” in relation to the data.

Finally, this review resulted in the following five themes and four sub-themes: “*Recognized occurrence*”, “*Perceived effects*”, “*Test the law*”, “*Faulty law design*” and “*Slippery slope for media freedom*”, while the sub-themes are: “*Self-censorship*”, “*Sources/whistleblowers*”, “*Vagueness*”, and “*Line of responsibility*”. These themes will be further explained and elaborated on in the analysis chapter.

2.3.5 Defining and naming themes

For transparency, the themes were then defined (see appendix 3) and easy-to-grasp names of each theme were made up. The themes need to be defined in a way which can help describe the exact aspects of the data that is encapsulated in the theme, without trying to force too much into one single theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Defining the themes also prove and support the consistency of the analysis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017).

2.3.6 Write-up

Finally, the themes are narrated in a written analysis chapter to “*provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and interesting account of the story the data tell*” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 93). Quotes from the interviews translated into English are included in the written part of the analysis in order to illustrate the key results found in the analysis. However, this part is not merely a text to present the result, there is also an underlying argument in connection to the research question. These arguments will be outlined more clearly in the discussion section where they also will be discussed in reaction to previous literature and theories.

3.4 Quality of the data

Lastly, this chapter will address the quality of the collected data which is measured by its validity and reliability (Grønmo, 2020). Validity is best described as a concept to check if what is said to be measured is actually being measured (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). When examining the validity of one’s research it is therefore important to keep the research question(s) in mind and see if the method of data collection allows for data to be collected which corresponds with the research question in a way which allows for an answer.

Reliability is instead measured by the extent to which the results can be reproduced. Focus on reliability is therefore more common for quantitative studies because the measured data is objective and steady while the data in qualitative research are characterized as being subjective and flexible and therefore very difficult to reproduce (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). This section will end with a brief, yet important, discussion on generalizability and research ethics.

3.4.1 Validity

Since this research is qualitative the validity is the most relevant measurement to discuss and for this study and it regarded as rather high. The choice of snowball sampling directed the data gathering in a profitable direction since all of the participants were well aware of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) and could contribute with valuable insights and thoughts, even though not all of them had been forced to take it into account in editorial decisions. Furthermore, most journalists who were invited to take part in this study agreed to do so, only a few did not respond at all and three said no because of time constraints.

High validity is also proved by triangulation of the data since results match what was already discussed among journalists before the passing of the law, and during the direct aftermath (Grønmo, 2020). As well as the data sets having no to few contradictions to them, meaning respondent validation is considered high (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008), and by reaching theoretical saturation (Rowlands, Waddell & McKenna, 2016).

3.4.2 Reliability

As already mentioned, reliability is rather difficult to achieve in qualitative research because of its element of interpretation during the data collection and analysis phase. When conducting semi-structured interviews for example, the participants, as well as the researcher, are likely to interpret and answer questions in varied ways which make it difficult to compare the results to other studies (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017).

To still achieve acceptable levels of reliability, a great focus lies on consistency. For this research consistency has been ensured mainly by two focal points. The first has been to make sure to properly follow the interview guide, however still allowing for flexibility that semi-structured interviews allow for. Second, by being consistent throughout the transcription process and coding phase. This was achieved by double-checking transcripts as well as transcribing them right after the interview was done. But also by being meticulous in following the color-coding schedule (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017).

3.4.3 Generalizability

Drawing on the quality of the data, generalizability is then decided by to what degree the results can be applicable to a larger population. However, in qualitative studies, generalizability is rarely expected or attributed. This is because of the flexible and subjective data collection and mode of analysis which makes it difficult to draw any general conclusions from it (Leung, 2015). Therefore, the findings in the study are only supposed to be seen as applicable to the studied sample. Nevertheless, the results are still valuable in describing a piece of the studied reality and can serve to inspire further research.

3.4.4 Research ethics

A reflection on research ethics is also necessary in order to be fully transparent with the quality of the collected data (Grønmo, 2020). The participants were reached out to by

email where they were informed about the study and why they had been contacted. In this email they were also informed about the possibility to request anonymity and that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time if they choose to participate. This was once again emphasized after each interview as a reminder (Knott, Rao, Summers & Teeger, 2022).

For transparency, being a researcher with a few years of experience working as a journalist and being a part of the relatively small Swedish media corps, there was a risk of being referred to a participant who was known to the researcher. In a situation like that, the researcher would have had to take into consideration how the data may be affected by this pre-existing relationship. However, the researcher never got referred to someone she knew on a personal level.

4. Analysis

For analyzing the data collected by interviewing Swedish journalists, an inductive thematic coding approach with the six steps presented by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used. In the following chapter, the themes will be presented and explained as well as illustrated by extracts translated from Swedish to English from the interviews. The analysis resulted in a total of five main themes and five sub-themes related to the two research questions.

Since, there were no previous studies done regarding the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517), this study is aiming to answer a very broad first research question of an exploratory nature: **How is the Foreign Espionage Act perceived among Swedish journalists?** It was necessary to pose such a broad research question due to the research aim of getting a first hint of the implications of the law at a very early stage in order to lay a foundation for further studies.

Five themes were and four sub-themes were developed related to RQ1. The main themes are “*Recognized occurrence*”, “*Perceived effects*”, “*Test the law*”, “*Faulty law design*” and “*Slippery slope for media freedom*”, while the sub-themes are: “*Self-censorship*”, “*Sources/whistleblowers*”, “*Vagueness*”, and “*Line of responsibility*”. RQ2 is more specific and is based on the preexisting debate about the implications of the law: **What implications does the Foreign Espionage Act have for self-censorship in journalism, according to Swedish journalists?** The answer to RQ2 will build on the sub-theme “*Self-censorship*”, but is also discussed in relation to the findings for RQ1.

4.1 Recognized occurrence

Perhaps because of the novelty of the law, “recognized occurrence” is the most diverse theme. The split between those participants who claim they have not or have been presented with information that potentially could be subject of this law is approximately equal. One participant said that *“it is included in the editorial discussion that this legislation exists”* (P2). Two other participants said that *“it was only when I was confronted with a particular publication that I had to get into it seriously”* (P9) and *“I have had to take that (the law) into account. I had a discussion with my publisher about it when I was writing my latest book”* (P4), while a fourth participant said that she had not found herself in the situation where she or any of her colleagues has had to consider the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) *“but it could happen at any time that kind of material reaches you. It's just a coincidence that it hasn't happened yet”* (P6). And a fifth participant said *“it is not impossible that you may have to take such questions into account. But it feels very far away for us so far”* (P8).

While the diversity and inconsistencies of this theme makes it impossible to know for sure the quantitative occurrence of the law’s presence in the editorial process (that is not the aim of this study either), it helps paint the picture for the qualitative interpretation. Because it is now known that the perceptions are based, at least partly, on real life experiences and not only on speculations and thoughts of how it *potentially could* have an effect on the editorial practices. This strengthens the validity and reliability of the forthcoming results.

However, frequently mentioned by the participants is the case when the public service broadcaster, SVT, in the end of april 2023 chose to not publish a report including Ukrainian maps which would indicate vulnerabilities in the Ukrainian energy supply. Information first leaked from the Pentagon in the US (SVT, 2023; CNN, 2023).

“The only concrete case that has come to public, which I'm guessing that you also have picked up, was SVT”, said P3. P11 said that “discussions have come up about publications that have already failed. After all, SVT made an example of when it came to publishing a map. It's one of very few examples that have been mentioned in public”.

Coincidentally, the snowball sampling eventually led the research to the head of news at SVT responsible for the situation with the unpublished article. She says that the background story about SVT not publishing the Ukrainian maps is misunderstood and

exaggerated (P6). It is therefore appropriate to grant some space in this thesis to give an explanation to the confusion.

According to the (at the time) head of news at SVT, it is a misunderstanding that the article was stopped because of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517). The decision not to publish the Ukrainian maps was taken on grounds unrelated to the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) and the participant explains it as: *“When this material comes to me as a publisher, I do not think it is a good publication, regardless of the law or not. That is the reason for not publishing”* (P6). However, this decision coincided with an editor asking the lawyers at SVT if the article could become subject for the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517). Since the lawyers thought that it potentially would be the case, these two reasons for why the article with the Ukrainian maps were not published got mixed up.

Even though this context is not directly relevant to the research questions, it is still important to disclose this information in order to not keep spreading this misinformation. This example could have been left out of the study altogether, but since almost all of the participants mentioned this case, there is some value in keeping it. Second of all, since the report could potentially have been subject to the law, this example helps illustrate what kind of cases lawyers potentially believe could be subject to the law.

Except for the misunderstood case with the Ukrainian maps that SVT chose not to publish (SVT, 2023), there are no other publicly known cases related to the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517). Given that the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) was put in place from the 1st of January 2023 (The Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022), this was not surprising. However, the results show that several other media outlets have had to take the law into consideration.

4.2 Perceived effects

Related to what was mentioned above, the “perceived effects” theme is based on a mix of knowledge and speculations regarding the possible effects of the law.

P11 claims that he knows *“that the law, at several other newsrooms, has meant that they have made completely different considerations than they have done before and that some newsrooms have sometimes waived information. So I know that it is already affecting journalism today”*. The fears of what the law has already led to/could lead to is divided into two main threats; *“that whistleblowers or sources do not dare to contact journalists.*

And that journalists, or rather publishers, do not dare to publish” (P8). Based on this reoccurring opinion, two sub-themes were developed, namely “sources/whistleblowers” and “self-censorship”.

Furthermore, the data clearly suggests that the perception is that the law has no positive implications from a journalistic perspective. To the question *“Do you see any positive aspects of the law from a journalistic point of view?”* the participants, almost unanimously answered short and concisely: *“No. No.”* (P3), *“No, I have not. No one has been able to argue for why it is needed”* (P5), *“For journalism? No.”* (P6).

P8 elaborated a little bit more and said that *“it is hard to see actually. The positive thing is that you can clearly see that we have been targeted by politicians who are not sufficiently familiar with the Swedish freedom of expression act to understand that this type of change is a threat to the freedom of the press”*.

4.2.1 Sources/whistleblowers

While self-censorship among journalists can be perceived as an internal threat, there is the external threat of sources and whistleblowers being afraid of disclosing information to journalists. P5 argues that *“an unforgivable sin has been committed with this legislation and the lack of discussion around it”* because of the *“risk of scarring citizens and citizens of other countries who could provide extremely important information to us journalists that could constitute important qualified investigative journalism. But who, despite the fact that it would probably not break the law, now risks not daring to leave their tips to us, and we will never know how many they could be”*. And P3 highlights that *“the most serious thing about this legislation is that it tears apart what has been the hallmark of the Swedish Press-and Freedom of Expression Acts, namely the freedom of communication”*.

The increased responsibility and precautions that journalists need to adapt to in order to be able to fully protect their sources is something that few participants mentioned but which inevitably is a serious concern for the industry. P8 emphasized that journalists have a *“huge homework to do”* when it comes to making it clear what are *“the rules of the game”*. Meaning, that the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) might force journalists to *“go back to basics”* and meet sources in *“parking garages to hand over physical documents or use a push-button phone”* in order to not leave any traces behind which

could reveal the source. P8 stresses that *“you as a journalist have to get better at explaining to your sources and whistleblowers what the risks are and what applies”*.

4.2.2 Self-censorship

The Foreign Espionage Act’s (SFS 2022:1517) implications on self-censorship was strongly emphasized by the participants. Often the word *“self-censorship”* was mentioned by them before they got questions specifically about self-censorship. P1 for example said that *“the problem (with the law) is that it may have a self-censoring effect”* and P5 *“think self-censorship is actually a big risk”*, while P8 says that Swedish media *“already have a problem with self-censorship”* and this law will *“unfortunately probably add to it”*.

Other participants did not explicitly use the word *“self-censorship”*, instead using other words such as *“anxiety”* (P6), *“uncertainty”* (P2) and *“overly cautious”* (P3) or phrases such as *“it is simply a threat that some jobs will not be done”* (P7) to imply that the law could have the effect that certain information and stories risks to not be published. However, one striking pattern is that among the participants who were said to have come across information that might be subject to the law, all chose to go ahead and publish the information anyway after discussing it thoroughly.

One participant said *“we had a discussion about me writing very sensitive information about Swedish military relations in the Middle East, about Sweden's very controversial relations and the concession to Turkey during this blackmail policy during the NATO process. [...] The fact that we even had to have such a discussion is proof that we took it seriously. Then I still chose to publish all the information that I had come across. But I also refer to this law and that I publish at the risk of being negatively affected”* (P4).

Other strategies disclosed by P9 is that they published the essential information important to the audience, but *“toned down quite a lot of things that we would normally have written”*.

So instead of identifying some of their choices of not publishing certain information as self-censorship, they refer to the ethics of journalism of how there is a natural element of not publishing all the information at hand just because you can. P11 claims that press ethics could be perceived as a form of self-censorship. For example when refraining from publishing something in order to protect crime victims. *“It is important to know what you do, why, when and what consequences it has. And to have thought it*

through. [...] *Are we contributing to something that is dangerous for society? So self-censorship in the form of being reflective and regulating yourself, it's absolutely necessary*" (P11). P4 has a similar line of thought regarding refraining from publishing certain information: *"I could very well have published it. It was about a form of - not self-censorship - but a carefully considered choice. Just because you know things, you don't necessarily need to publish it"*. P9 recalled a report where he said that they did not censor themselves but *"toned down"* certain things. However, in the end *"the information that was relevant made the cut and had an impact"*.

And while many of the participants show a willingness to discuss the law in order to educate themselves about its scope and limitations, few believe it should be part of editorial discussions regarding whether or not to publish certain materials. As P7 used as a warning example: *"It is mainly editors or publishers who sometimes bring it up as an example or an argument to why one or the other job can be difficult to do. And that we have to take this into account. It becomes like a wet blanket over the work in those cases"*. And as a result of the perceived unclearities of the law (which will be elaborated on in the next section) and the fact that there is yet no preceding case, it is difficult for journalists to know what exactly the law entails. This might have a *"chilling effect"* as mentioned by P3, and P4 is afraid *"that such situations may arise or have already done so"*.

4.3 Faulty law design

The need to test the law is particularly highlighted in the critique towards how the law is written and constructed. Lawyers have said that the law *"could have been more explicit"*, according to P1, and P4 described the law as *"rather fuzzy"*. Critique is also posed toward the fact that it is the individual reporter who gets punished if a crime is committed against the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517). However, normally in Sweden, if a crime is committed related to the Press Freedom- or Freedom of Expression Act, it is most always the publisher who gets punished (the Swedish Riksdag, n.d) From these two main aspects mentioned by the participants, the two sub-themes *"vagueness"* and *"line of responsibility"* were developed.

4.3.1 Vagueness

One possible reason for this perceived vagueness is the alleged exception for journalists and journalism which is mentioned by participants (P4, P5, P6) as well as

previously by officials (Ehnberg, 2023). However, not exactly knowing the scope of this supposed exception may lead to a *“chilling effect”* (P4). P10 argues that *“as soon as there is a precedential case, this will create clarity”*. But there are other factors of vagueness expressed by participants where a preceding case will not give enough clarification. This vagueness of the law is expressed by the participants in words such as *“...experienced ambiguities when it comes to journalists - what we are covered for, not covered for and what protection we have in the law”* (P1). P6 expands on this with the following exposition:

“When laws are introduced, we who must submit to the laws must understand what it is that we must conform to. It is very difficult in this case. Here you have to make an assessment as to whether the material you get your hands on is part of an intelligence collaboration that Sweden is part of. Intelligence collaboration is, after all, secret by its very nature, so how to know? First you need to know if it is included, the second is if publication would be harmful to Swedish interests or to those we collaborate with? It is unreasonable to make that assessment. And we may not even know who we are collaborating with. In this way, I think the law is slightly absurd in its writings”.

Furthermore, P5 is missing an argument for why the law is needed, because he has *“not heard the opponent's best argument”*.

There are also raised concerns about how this legislation *“leaves far too much vagueness and opportunities for another government to carry out a more invasive interpretation less generous towards journalism”* (P5) and that *“the risk is that it will be a kind of rubber band law that can be used in different ways over time depending on who is in power”* (P7). Because even if the law is *“established with good intentions”* (P1) it can be used with less good intentions *“in a more pressing political situation”* (P1).

4.3.2 Line of responsibility

As mentioned in the opening paragraph of this theme, normally the line of responsibility for what is being published in the Swedish media almost always starts with the publisher. If a crime against the freedom of press act is committed, the publisher is responsible and is the one who is getting punished (The Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022). However, for the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517), it is the individual reporter who gets punished if a crime is committed meaning that the traditional responsibility hierarchy is invalid.

Nevertheless, even though this makes individual reporters more vulnerable, the majority of the participants say that they trust the media corps to stand up for journalistic ethics even if it may mean having to challenge the law. However, P11 makes a relevant reflection in regards to “the line of responsibility”:

"You can't and shouldn't trust or put that responsibility on, for example, a substitute reporter on the news desk who has been working here for four months...24 years old. You can't do that. You shouldn't demand it and therefore I can't have faith in it".

Furthermore, he continues by claiming that he is “*totally convinced*” (P11) that the industry would support the journalist challenging the law if being reported. P10 agrees that “*we have an incredibly well-functioning journalism industry in Sweden. I am very impressed by it and the solidarity that is in it. When it comes to matters of principle, we tend to be very good at standing up for each other*”. However, P11 is not equally sure that media owners believe it's their outlet who should “*take the fight*”. He also adds that “*it is more difficult as an employer to say that you, as a young reporter, should write something that might violate this law because we think the law is bad. It would have been easier if it was linked to the publisher. So that pisses me off*” (P11).

The same imbalance which can be spotted between employers and young employees can be experienced by freelance journalists as is mentioned by P4 when he says: “*In this case, regardless of where you work, you get punished as an individual. But as a freelancer, you don't have the same kind of... You don't have a given workplace, you don't have an editor-in-chief you can talk to before an investigation, before a publication, before something comes out. You could maybe have a little dialogue about things with an assigned editor or something if you're lucky. But you don't have the same opportunity as an employee to discuss these things*”.

4.4 Test the law

There is a remarkable consensus among the participants about the need for journalists and media companies to challenge the law in order to create a precedent and gain an understanding of the scope and limits of the law. Participants refer to the old-school approach “*publish and be damned*” (P1). Another participant said when referring to the ethics of being a journalist that the job is to “*publish if it is true and relevant, otherwise we might as well quit*” (P3). This attitude was commented on by P2 with hesitation: “*I guess we will have to wait and see how it turns out*”.

Nevertheless, participants explicitly say that they are “*searching for precedents and would like to have this law tried [...] Because if we were convicted, I think it would be a hell of a life and if we were acquitted, we know that then the law works the way someone says it should work*” (P5) and “*had it been a case which would have been better publicistically, then I would have liked to challenge the law*” (P6).

According to some participants, their news rooms have already published information that potentially could be subject to the law (P4, P9). However, to public knowledge, no case has yet been legally reported. P9 describes how the company took as many precautions as possible to not expose the individual reporter to unnecessary risks: “*We discussed what happens if there is a house search? What happens if this person is arrested? What happens if this person is arrested and refuses to reveal his source? How long can you be detained for this in that case? So yes, we went very far and in the end we decided, with this reporter's full consent, to publish*”.

4.5 Slippery slope for media freedom

The final theme is occupied with the concern of the general direction for media freedom in Sweden. Despite being mindful about the fact that Sweden has a media climate which, “*even if it has become harsher, is significantly better than in most other countries*” (P1), it does, however, not remove the concerns about the Swedish situation which are described with words such as “*worrying*” (P5) and in direct relation to the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) -“*absurd*” (P4).

P5 reflects on the recent increase of a number of different laws and regulations that obstruct the possibilities for qualified journalism in Sweden. Where the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) “*is perhaps the one that has sparked the most debate, but what I'm a little unsure about is whether, in a practical sense, it is the legislation that affects us the most*”. P2 draws connections to the state of journalism recognized from countries in Africa for example, where journalists are sometimes regarded as “*targets*” because “*states have learned that it is a cheap form of censorship. You imprison messengers when you silence the message*” and he continues by stating that Swedish journalists “*must be prepared to go to prison in Sweden too if necessary. We must have that attitude. That it comes with the job, sort of. And that may require a change in attitude. To be imprisoned for a period, that is perhaps the price that you also have to be prepared to pay for some future investigations*” (P2).

Many participants raising this concern are careful by saying that despite this law and other restrictions, the media climate and level of media freedom in Sweden is still among the best in the world. That criticizing and claiming to not care about this law, comes from a privileged position. And while P6 does not agree that there is anxiety present in the Swedish media climate, she, however, does argue that there is a *“measure of carelessness by the legislative power when it comes to media freedom. It is gnawed from a lot of different directions and every time it is equally heart-wrenching”*. P11 expands that idea by stating that the threat is so much bigger than people might realize because knowing that an investigation might be criminal may very well mean that it will not be done and *“we as the public, we as citizens, we as a society never get a chance to even make up our minds as to whether it was a good investigation or not? And we don't even get, in that case, any media that asks or raises issues. And that creates room for maneuver for those in power that they shouldn't have”*.

The results of this study give an exploratory insight into the perceptions' of Swedish journalists regarding the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) which at the time of conducting this research had been in effect for about 1-1,5 years. Therefore, the results should and need to be seen and evaluated in the light of that novelty.

5. Discussion

The aim of this study is to explore how Swedish journalists perceive the first 1-1,5 years of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) being in force and its possible and actual implications so far. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, due to the fact that yet no other study has been conducted on the subject, the first research question is very broad:

RQ 1: How is the Foreign Espionage Act perceived among Swedish journalists?

The second research question is more specific since it is inspired by the debate leading up to the official passing of the law in November 2022 (The Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022), when journalists and media executives expressed concerns about the potential self-censorship the law could imply (Rosén, 2022; Torén Björling, 2023).

RQ2: What implications does the Foreign Espionage Act have for self-censorship in journalism, according to Swedish journalists?

This chapter will offer suggested answers to these two questions by discussing the results of the analysis in relation to previous studies and theories. The limitations of this study will also be acknowledged. However, first follows a summary of key findings.

5.1 Summary of key findings

The collected data suggests that the answers to these two questions are intertwined. The main concern is that the law will lead to investigations not being done and stories not being told. In other words, Swedish reporters and publishers will self-censor themselves and refrain from publishing information. But also, that sources and whistleblowers will not dare to share materials with journalists. However, even though single participants claimed that this is already evident in newsrooms, most participants denied having experienced themselves - or colleagues - to self-censor. A high level of professionalism and journalistic ethics are aspects that were highly present in elaborations to why this is the case.

The analysis also shows a striking urge among the participants to find a story which potentially would be subject to the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) and publish - just to test and explore the scope and limits of the law. This need to challenge the law comes from the perception that it is unclear what kind of information would be illegal to publish. Additionally, there is a perception that the law is being too vague in its wordings and that it all comes down to the arbitrary factor of what information is damaging for Swedish diplomatic relationships. This only adds to the urge to explore its scope and limits of the law. To test the law, potentially in court, would therefore probably decrease the risk of self-censorship - because a preceding case would give clarity to the questions regarding how the law should be interpreted.

However, what is concerning to many participants is that it is the individual reporter who would be prosecuted (The Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022). This might limit the potential for newsrooms and journalists to actually stand-up for these values and the opportunity to challenge the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517). It is especially concerning for the freelancers who do not have the same resources and support as reporters who are employed by a big media company. Nevertheless, among the participants in this sample the freelancers are equally determined that the law needs to be challenged and self-censorship due to the law has been unthinkable to them so far.

The data also suggest frustration among journalists that this is only one of multiple restrictions aimed at the media in Sweden. Participants emphasize that it should be

interpreted as a part of a general “negative direction” (P5) for the media freedom in Sweden and that there are no positive aspects of the law from a journalistic point of view. In the following two sections of this chapter, these results will be discussed in relation to previous research and theories. These discussions will result in elaborate answers to the two research questions.

5.2 RQ1: How is the Foreign Espionage Act perceived among Swedish journalists?

The discussion related to RQ 1 should be read with the novelty of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) in mind. As evident in the data, few cases known to the public have yet occurred. However, some participants are said to actually have had to take the law into consideration regarding whether or not to publish certain information. The perception is therefore based partly on actual real-life experiences and partly on opinions and speculations. This is merely information about the basis of the data and not considered an issue. Since this study is measuring perceptions and never set out to research the actual effects of this law.

The overall perception among the eleven journalists taking part in this study is that the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) has no positive implications from a journalistic point of view. They rather see it as one serious restriction among many, which has been recently directed against the media in Sweden. This notion adds urgency to the conclusion by scholars such as Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring (2016) and Hiltunen (2027) who encourage research on the threats to media freedom in Scandinavian countries.

As emphasized by most participants, the Swedish media landscape is still characterized as free and independent (World Press Freedom, 2024) and democratic levels remain high (Economist Intelligence, 2024), something which is further confirmed by scholars such as Nord & von Krogh (2021) and Andersson (2023).

Nevertheless, just as the stated worries from several journalists and media executives (Rosén, 2023; Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et. al, 2022; Ahlqvist, 2022), as well as the collected perceptions by participants, the law is interpreted as a threat to media freedom and in the long run maybe even a threat to Swedish democracy. It is important not to exaggerate the results and their meaning, but given the interconnectedness between democracy and journalism (Stier, 2015; Kenny, 2020) and the established linkages between old ideas about the media acting as a fourth pillar to sustain democratic values

(McQuail, 1987), as well as being an important arena creating a public sphere (Habermas, 1989) open for people to attain and debate information. - it is not an unreasonable interpretation to make.

In general participants are worried about the restrictions aimed at the media which is perceived to be getting more and more common and where the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) is only one aspect of the overall negative trend. The phenomenon studied in this research is an example of what several scholars have already established; political actors and restrictive legislations are one of the main threats to media freedom (Stier, 2015; Norris, 2017; Kenny, 2020). This does not only legitimize this research itself, but also validate the worries by participants about the perceived negative direction of media freedom - which, just as a reminder, is defined as the freedom “*to operate freely in society without government control, restriction, or censorship*” (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, n.d).

However, the data suggests that participants do not necessarily believe that the current government has passed this law to explicitly restrict media freedom, even if that is a potential consequence of passing the law. Nevertheless as several participants point out, a different political rule in the future, such as an illiberal rule, might take advantage of the law and use it in ways that could be directly harmful towards free independent journalism and investigations. This is a valid concern given that the media often is what illiberal politicians and populist rulers hijack first to use as a tool to control the public debate and flow of information (Stier, 2015; Kenny, 2019). Participants rather criticize politicians for not being knowledgeable enough about the fragility of a strong media freedom.

Furthermore, it would be an exaggeration to claim that the Swedish government is trying to completely hijack the Swedish media for its own benefit. But the case with the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) in Sweden could be one example to confirm the possibility of media capture as a consequence of a positive theory regarding media freedom which speaks for a special treatment and certain laws directed towards the media as argued by Tambini (2021). Even though the media is protected by the Swedish constitution (European Center for Press and Media Freedom, 2020; Weibull & Wadbring, 2020) with special privileges by the world's oldest Freedom of the Press Act (Nordin, 2016), it has yet proved itself vulnerable to these kinds of political interferences. This underscores the participants' worries and perceptions that the law is part of a general negative direction for media freedom in Sweden.

The results of this study clearly show that this traditional function of journalism is present and highly regarded by Swedish journalists still to this day. The findings about the participants urge to challenge the law, goes in line with previous results in studies by Andersson (2023) and Nord and von Krogh (2021) who conclude the highly esteemed investigative elements of journalism as well as the importance of holding the power accountable by adhering to the watchdog role (McQuail, 1987). Given this rigid professionalism it might not be surprising that none of the participants admits to having self-censored themselves in the light of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) - neither have they heard of colleagues in the industry do it. This is noteworthy since participants also claim self-censorship as being one of the main threats by this law, together with the risk of scaring away sources and whistleblowers. However, the results concerning self-censorship will be discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Finally, even though the results confirm a rigid journalism corps with high journalistic values, the concerns stated by participants should also be seen in a global context. In a time of democratic backsliding (Norris, 2017) and just years after many democracies across the world was being shaken by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hellmeier, Cole, Grahn, et. al, 2021), a restriction like adding the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) to the Swedish constitution should not be down-played.

5.3 RQ2: What implications does the Foreign Espionage Act have for self-censorship in journalism, according to Swedish journalists?

At an early stage, even before the law was officially passed, it got criticized for having a self-censoring effect on journalists (Rosén, 2023; Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et. at, 2022). With the knowledge of the preexisting debate regarding the legislation, the second research question was directed to explore if this still is regarded as a main threat also by journalists. And more importantly - if there are signs of self-censorship already being committed in the light of this law.

The result of the analysis highlights two main concerns in relation to the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517): self-censorship and the risk to scare away sources and whistleblowers. These are the same concerns predominantly raised in the discussions leading up to the parliament passing the law (Rosén, 2023; Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et. at, 2022; Ahlqvist, 2022), so this was hardly surprising. For the scope of this thesis, the latter concern about the risk of intimidating sources and whistleblowers will not be

discussed in this section. Though, what is interesting is that while most participants agree that self-censorship among reporters is a valid threat, none is admitting to have self-censored themselves in relation to the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517).

On the one hand, this finding needs to be taken with a pinch of salt given that it is likely that journalists not willingly admit to self-censorship due to shame and knowledge of how it contradicts with normative journalistic values (Grøndahl Larsen, Fadnes & Krøvel, 2021; Andersson; 2023). On the other hand, a possible interpretation of these results is that the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) remains a threat to media freedom, however is yet not in reality a concern because of the strong professionalism among Swedish journalists (Nord & von Krogh, 2021).

The striking consensus among participants of wanting to challenge the law if given the opportunity is further evidence that living up to high professional standards is a fair interpretation of these results. Participants rather “*publish and be damned*” (P1) and see no point in continuing doing the job if they would start to not publish important and relevant information. The interpretation of a strong professionalism leading to not admitting to self-censorship and perhaps also not actually practicing self-censorship, confirm results from scholars such as Andersson (2023) and Nord and von Krogh (2021). These results are also similar to what is found among Slovenian (Pajnik & Hrženjak, 2024) and Hong Kong-journalists (Lee & Chan, 2009), where professional standards are highly esteemed, even in threatening contexts.

However, as a participant realistically pointed out, perhaps no media outlet want to be the first to challenge the law, and for freelancers, the bar to actually risk going to court and potentially prison is suspectedly higher than for reporters employed by big media companies with a lot of resources (Waisbord, 2022). Furthermore, even though none of the participants agree to having self-censored themselves as a consequence of the law, some mention a possible “*chilling effect*” (Schauer, 1978) on the basis of the perceived vague writings of the law. Since Schauer (1978) suggests that the “*chilling effect*” could lead to self-censoring, it should perhaps not be out-ruled for Swedish journalists to unwittingly adhere to that practice. Especially given the fact that it is the individual reporters who get punished and not the publisher which most often is the case (Sveriges Riksdag, 2022).

Given these results, common motivations for self-censoring seem to not be applicable to Swedish journalists. The driving force to belong to a group is explained by many different theories such as the normative influence theory (Yanovitzky & Rimal,

2006), the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1978) and the spiral of silence (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) as presented in the literature chapter. Even though these theories are a bit different in some aspects, the thing they have in common is that they all explain, in one way or another, how humans tend to stay quiet, repress or simply change opinions in order to belong to the group. Given the lack of formal obstacles (Bar-Tal, 2017), staying quiet in order to not stand out from the group could be perceived as self-censorship. Self-censorship may also be performed as a means to protect one's own self-image (Bar-Tal (2017).

However, it seems like this is not true for the participants in this study. Perhaps because the professional norms and ethics are so strong among Swedish journalists, the contrary is necessary for them in order to feel belonging. The data suggests that Swedish journalists feel the driving force to not self-censor themselves (or at least not admit to self-censoring practices) in order to belong to the group. This interpretation works in a Swedish context where self-censorship because of safety risks is not as common as in, for example, Ethiopia (Skjerdal, 2020). This strengthens the argument that it is easier for Swedish journalists to challenge laws like the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) by refraining from self-censorship, than perhaps journalists from countries with lower levels of media freedom and democracy (Fadnes, Krøvel & Larsen, 2021).

Bar-Tal (2017) argues that to not publish something out of fear of punishment is to self-censor oneself. In this case, time in prison for the individual reporter would be the ultimate punishment (the Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022). This adds value to the trustworthiness of what participants say about not self-censoring themselves. The relatively safe media environment in Sweden also does not call for journalists being forced to self-censor because of safety reasons, as in the case of Ethiopian journalists (Skjerdal, 2010). The opposite is rather argued for, as one respondent said *“it comes from a very privileged position”* (P2) to say that the law needs to be tested and that Swedish journalists might have to get used to the idea to potentially sit in jail for a period of time in order to sustain the values of Swedish journalists.

Circling back to what was being suggested for RQ1, it can be interpreted that the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) is perceived to restrict the public debate by having a “chilling effect” (Schauer, 1978) on journalists and their work. However, the counter-argument that the proven professionalism among participants may be strong

enough to protect the media's role in the public sphere (Habermas, 1989) should not be neglected.

5.4 Limitations

As is the case with most research, this is by no means a perfect study. It does however contribute with valuable information and meet the set research aims which was to get a first glimpse on how Swedish journalists perceive the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) and its implications, especially regarding self-censorship. Nevertheless, there are limitations to the study which will be mentioned in the following paragraphs.

First, there are a few limitations to the choice of methods. The main reason for choosing snowball sampling as a sampling method for this thesis was to be able to identify a sample in a rather unspecified population. However, this sampling method may result in limited heterogeneity among participants regarding geographical area of living or working, ethnic background and socioeconomic statuses (Emerson, 2015).

Another limitation with using snowball sampling is that the process of finding participants is not random and it can therefore possibly lead to a biased sample (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). As a result of this, a certain group within the population might be overrepresented or underrepresented. This may happen because people tend to recommend people who are similar to themselves (Heckathorn, 1997).

The snowball sample also makes the results of this study heavily dependent on the participants taking part. In other words, this study is by no means representative to a broader population of journalists. However, this was never the aim. The aim has been to get a first glimpse of possible perceptions and implications which can be used as a foundation for further research on the topic (Heckathorn, 1997; Faugier & Sargeant, 1997).

The choice of analysis is also up for discussion regarding limitations to this study. It was evaluated as the most suitable method of analysis for this thesis due to its exploratory and flexible approach (Grønmo, 2020). This flexibility, as argued by scholars such as Holloway & Todres (2003) might however lead to inconsistency when developing themes based on the research data. This will inevitably compromise the replicability of the study, however replicability is often not a necessary goal in qualitative research (Roberts, Dowell & Nie, 2019).

Second, one needs to keep in mind that when researching self-censorship there is always a risk of the participants performing self-censorship during the research interview

itself. This risk was reduced by a perceptive and sensitive approach in the communication before, during and after the interviews, as well as by emphasizing the possibility of anonymity. Nevertheless, one must be aware of the risk of self-censoring practice and its effects on the results.

Third, there are limitations regarding the sample because the vast majority of my sample are male. This is a result of the deliberate choice not to add the gender aspect as a requirement when asking to be referred to new participants. The main reason for not doing so is that it is deemed more important for an exploratory study like this, to reach participants who are relevant for the study (Browne, 2005). In this case, journalists in a position where they are responsible for reporters and reports (in the role as editors) or journalists who find themselves in situations where they probably have had to or will have to take the law into consideration (in the role of reporters covering politics, foreign politics and/or security). To limit the population in this way is an effective way to find participants who are most likely to be able to give valuable insights about the law (Browne, 2005).

The fact that the majority of participants who were recommended to be part of the study are male might mean that more male than female reporters/editors work with the journalism topics of my interest (politics, foreign politics and/or security). However, it speaks against research showing that women are more likely to cooperate (Noy, 2008) because the women that I actually got referred to, however still few, did not respond to my attempts of reaching out (one email + follow up) or declined due to time constraints. However, while gender equality is often preferred in research (Knott, Rao, Summers & Teeger, 2022), the fact that this study does not live up to this target should not compromise the results to a concerning degree. While doing initial research on the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) and its implications on journalism there are no indications found that gender could be expected to be a variable in perceptions and opinions about the law and/or its implications on self-censorship.

Finally, this method and sampling strategy entail results which are not representative of all Swedish journalists, however generalizability was never the aim. The purpose of this thesis was rather to explore subjective attitudes, opinions, and eventual implications of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) in relation to Swedish journalism. These results give an estimation of what this law can lead to in the future, but they also build the foundation for perceptions that may serve journalists in how to deal

with this law for it to have as little negative impact on the media freedom and democracy in Sweden as possible.

Regardless of the mentioned limitations, this research still identifies valuable results about the current perceptions and implications of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) among Swedish journalists which can be used as a foundation for further studies. In the next concluding chapter suggestions for future studies will be presented.

Conclusion

This thesis is inspired by a somewhat controversial law, at least according to journalists in Sweden (The Foreign Espionage Act, SFS 2022:1517, 2022). The Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) passed on the 16th of November 2022 and has been in effect from the 1st of January 2023. According to the law, it is illegal to publish information which harms the relationship to another state or an intergovernmental organization, such as NATO or the UN. Highly regarded journalistic investigations such as the one that revealed that the governmental authority Total Defence Research Institute, for several years secretly planned to build a weapon factory located in Saudi Arabia (Bodin & Öhman, 2012), would probably have been illegal if investigated today. Concerns were therefore raised by several journalists and media executives that the law would potentially lead to self-censorship among Swedish reporters (Rosén, 2023; Aschberg, Bengtsson, Benkö, et. at, 2022; Ahlqvist, 2022).

This study set out to explore Swedish journalists' perception of the law during the first 1-1,5 years since it was put in effect. The results of this study is based on data collected by conducting eleven semi-structured interviews with reporters and editors likely to come across the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) in their journalistic practice, such as journalists covering politics, foreign politics, security or who are working on investigations. This data was then analyzed thematically by following the six steps by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The data suggests that participants do not see any positive aspects of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) from a journalistic perspective. They rather perceive it as one of many aspects being a serious threat to media freedom in Sweden. However, conscious that the situation in Sweden is extremely good in comparison to many other

countries across the globe (Reporters Without Borders, 2024), participants still perceive the law as a part of a general negative direction for the Swedish media climate.

The Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) is also regarded as vaguely formulated which is suspected of having a “chilling effect” (Schauer, 1978), which in turn may lead to self-censorship. Nevertheless, while presenting self-censorship and the risk to scare off sources and whistleblowers as the main threats of the legislation, participants claim they themselves have not practiced self-censorship in the light of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517). They instead unanimously agree on the importance of challenging the law by publishing information that may trigger the legislation and to test the law in court would mean a clarification to the scope and limits of the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) and provide a hint on how careful journalists actually need to be.

This testifies to a Swedish media corps with highly regarded professional standards which goes in line with the perception of media being perceived as the fourth estate in society (McQuail, 1987), important for upholding democracy by adhering to a watchdog role (McQuail, 1987; Lippmann, 1922; McNair, 2009) where journalists hold the power accountable in order for the public’s right to true information (Strömbäck, 2005). This research was partly inspired by the prompt from Löfgren Nilsson and Örnebring (2016) to not refrain from studying threats to media freedom in Scandinavian countries just because the standards and quality of journalism are high. And just as Waisbord’s (2019, p. 213) explanation of the “*vulnerabilities of journalism*”, these results contribute to a collective knowledge about “*how journalistic practices are affected by threats, instability, and insecurity, and to refine normative visions about professional ethics in ‘real-world’ condition*”. With the participants in this study claiming an ongoing restriction to the media and a general negative direction to media freedom the urgency to keep studying the threats become even more obvious and pressing.

So while this is the first piece of academic literature occupied with the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) in Sweden, it is hopefully not the last. One of the research aims for this study has been to get a glimpse of what Swedish journalists think about the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517) in order to lay a foundation for further research on the topic. A few suggestions on what can be expanded on or studied in future academic works is presented below.

To start with, there is a lot of inspiration to be drawn from the already mentioned limitations of this study. For example, conduct a study with a more even gender balance among the participants to see if that would have an effect on the results. But looking beyond the limitations, this study is situated in a period of time when the law has only been in effect for about 1-1,5 years. It is likely that the time frame has a big impact on the study and that a similar study, done five or ten years from now, would give results which would be more nuanced and in-depth. Especially since there is likely to be more cases, possibly court cases, to discuss. Because with more time passing, more editorial discussions will take place and more situations will occur when reporters and editors are faced with information that potentially could be subject to the law and how they, in that case, will choose to proceed. In a few years time, it is also more likely to notice what effect the law has had for Swedish media freedom and for Swedish journalists. Some aspects of the results would also be very interesting to discuss through a different theoretical framework. Based on what participants said in this study about the role of a journalist, one suggestion is to discuss the results through theories from Hanitzsch and Vos (2017) or Mellado (2021), just to name two possible scholars whose work on role perception would be interesting to discuss in relation to the Foreign Espionage Act (SFS 2022:1517).

Finally, based on what P11 said about it being problematic to force or encourage a young journalist on a substitute contract to stand-up for journalistic ethics, refrain from self-censorship and challenge the law at all costs, it would be interesting to conduct a study like this one with a sample made up by journalists in the beginning of their career.

Summary

Ledna 2023 byl do švédského zákona o svobodě tisku a projevu doplněn zákon o zahraniční špionáži. Podle tohoto zákona může být pro novináře nezákonné zveřejňovat informace, které by poškodily vztah k jinému státu nebo mezivládní organizaci, jako je OSN nebo NATO. Když byl zákon přijat, novináři, vedoucí pracovníci médií a mediální odborníci kritizovali zákon o zahraniční špionáži za to, že ohrožuje svobodu švédských médií. Domnívali se, že zákon by mohl vést k autocenzuře reportérů a redaktorů a také k zastrasování zdrojů a informátorů. V této studii bylo tematicky analyzováno jedenáct polostrukturovaných rozhovorů se švédskými reportéry a redaktory s cílem prozkoumat vnímání a důsledky zákona o zahraniční špionáži přibližně 1,5 roku po jeho přijetí. Zjištění ukazují, že ačkoli je autocenzura považována za vážnou hrozbu a možný důsledek zákona, žádný z účastníků této studie se k autocenzuře nepřiznal. To naznačuje vysokou úroveň profesionality švédských novinářů. Účastníci však také uvádějí, že zákon o zahraniční špionáži je třeba považovat za jednu z mnoha hrozeb namířených proti svobodě švédských médií. To je znepokojivé nejen v současné době, ale ještě více pro budoucnost, kdy jiná politická scéna může zákony jako zákon o zahraniční špionáži využít k vážnému omezení svobody médií. Tato studie poskytuje prvotní pohled na vnímání a důsledky zákona o zahraniční špionáži a slouží jako výchozí bod pro budoucí výzkum tohoto tématu.

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Appendix no. 1: The interview guide

Introduction

- Where do you work?
- What is your role?

About the law itself

- How well would you say you know the Foreign Espionage Act and what it entails?
- What did you think when it was passed?
- What are your spontaneous thoughts about the law?
 - How serious do you think it is?
- What are you worried this law could lead to?
- Do you see any positive aspects of the law from a journalistic point of view?
- How does the law affect your daily work?
- How do you perceive that your media company acts in relation to the law?
- Have there been situations where you or your editorial team have acted in a way that you would not have done before the law was passed?
- How do you think journalists and newsrooms should approach the law?
 - Why?
- Do you or one of your reporters have information that you are considering whether or not you can publish in view of the Foreign Espionage Act?

About self-censorship

- What do you think about the risk of self-censorship among journalists?
- Have you yourself or any of your colleagues censored themselves due to the law?
- How do you think the phenomenon of self-censorship affects journalism?
- Is self-censorship always negative?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix no. 2: Extract of the Google Sheet which were used to organize the codes into themes

Effekt	Förhållningssätt	Medieklimatet	Självensur	Exempelfall	Äsikt	Kunskap
Vilka effekter har lagen (haft) på journalistiken/ditt j	Äsikter om hur redaktion	Äsikter om det generella	Äsikter om självensur.	Konkreta exempel på vad som	Generella äsikter om lag	Kunskapsnivån kring
Och de liksom sa, så här var det inte meningen och Och det var en som till och med sa, ja men det vore					Det var ju först, jag tror Då blev det liksom en er Jag tror jag skrev två. In är ju inte jag en jurist	Men för journalister: s
Vad tänker du om det då? Och det var en lite häpnadsväckande kommentar. D	Och det här var med, bla så hade hon, hade vi kur	Vi har ju ett medieklimat s	Problemet är kanske att den får e	FN är ju faktiskt en sådan orgi		
		Bra. Ser du några andra Som är kopplad till lagen?				
		Ja, precis. Nej, det gör jag inte. Det ä	Och självensuren, jag tror inte de	Och sen, vad händer till ex	Jag hade ju lille grann m Efter tolv år så var det s	Sen nej och kan man
Problemet är kanske att den får en självensureranc	Jag är ju av den gamla s Men det ska ju vara en s		Att man tycker det är ovanligt att b	Det här med hemlig uppgift, de	Nej. Ser du några positiv	Jä, men ganska väli
	Så det är väl först, lite so niksdagsledamoten sa, d			Utan det kan ju vara som regel Och sen må det vara en uppgif	Nej. Nej.	Men jag har väl gjort
Vågar vi publicera det här? Vi har ett avslöjande. Sc		Och det är väl, som jag sa	Det finns ju de här undantagen. L			
		Och då tycker jag man vil Och även mot liksom civil Man ser hur journalister s Som i mitt eget fall i Etiop Det är en grupp som sedd Men då så stämplade ma Så att det är ju... Den lags Det var liksom utmaninge Och det är väl det någons Mitt jobb är ju att prata m Genom att vara journalist Och det får inga som hels Så det är den bakgrunder Där man förändrar våra g		Och där finns det ju konkreta s Exakt Sexuella övergreppen i, var de Och det var det ju två svenska		

Appendix no. 3: Definition of themes

Themes and <i>sub-themes</i>	Definition
Recognized occurrence	Existing or non-existing first-hand and second-hand experiences of the Foreign Espionage Act
Perceived effects	Description of what effects are perceived to arise
<i>Self-censorship</i>	Gathering thoughts, opinions and experiences about self-censorship
<i>Sources/whistleblowers</i>	Gathering thoughts, opinions and experiences about self-censorship
Test the law	Description of the want, need and urge for journalists to challenge the law in order to test its scope and limits
Faulty law design	Description about how the law is designed, for example written, constructed and defined
<i>Vagueness</i>	Description about the writings of the law
<i>Line of responsibility</i>	Description of thought and concerns about the fact that the reporter as an individual is the one getting punished for breaking the law
Slippery slope for media freedom	Gathering general concerns about the threat to media freedom and democratic values

Appendix no. 4: Example of a coded interview transcript

Vad snällt att du kunde ställa upp på det här.

Ja, men självklart. Hoppas jag har något vettigt att säga.

Ja, det har du säkert. Någonting. Först så vill jag bara fråga ifall du har några frågor utöver det som jag redan har skrivit i mejlet.

Nej, jag tror inte. Du kan bara berätta lite kort. Mm. Jag...

Ja, självklart. Jag håller då på att skriva min masteruppsats om utlandsspionerilagen. Och då har jag intervjuat olika journalister om vad man... Eftersom att den inte har funnits så länge så har det ju mest blivit hur man tänker att man kommer förhålla sig till den om tillfället skulle uppstå. Men det har även varit lite andra svar. Så det jag gör då är att intervjua er. Och sen...

Hur många går intervjuat totalt?

Jag ger upp... Du är min... Jag är min elfte. Och jag siktar på femton. Och sen så kommer jag då sammanställa de här resultatet och... Ja. Sammanfatta lite vad det är när jag har sagt.

Eventuellt om... Och jättegärna... Mm. När du är färdig så får du jättegärna skicka den.

Absolut.

Det kan jag göra. Och sen undrar jag också ifall du säger någonting nu som är så superklockrent så kanske jag... Om jag får... Plockar ut ett citat för att liksom illustrera det. Som jag har sagt. Skulle det vara okej i så fall?

Ja, absolut. Absolut.

Bra. Och sen undrar jag också ifall du vill vara anonym.

Nej. Nej.

Ja, men grymt.

Ja, men då kör jag igång med mina frågor då.

Ja, och då undrar jag först hur väl du skulle säga att du känner till lagen och vad den innebär.

Jag tycker att jag känner till lagen väl och jag har läst väldigt mycket om den, har läst så mycket som har funnits och går att tillgå.

Men det sagt, det är någonting helt annat att läsa om en lag och att se en lag implementeras. Så i ett avseende vet jag ingenting.

Och vad tänkte du när den antogs?

När den antogs så tänkte jag flera saker. Dels rent... I min bransch och i min kår så att det var ett stort misslyckande för oss att vi reagerade alldeles för sent. Det här är liksom en fråga som är värde för alla medier, alla publicister, alla journalister. Och det var först inför beslutet i, vad blir det, november 2022 måste det vara ibland, som jag skrev. Och... Då var jag ändå väldigt tidig med att skriva om det. Och jag ringde runt och pratade med utgivarna och Journalistförbundet, Publicistklubben och alla de hade liksom skrivit remissvar redan. Men jag tycker att... Och det var ju jättebra, där de liksom argumenterade väl för varför det här är ett problem. Men jag tycker det är ju tyvärr liksom misslyckande även för dem att de inte har fått oss andra att... Alltså fått igång debatten. Så det var väl det jag tänkte. Men sen tänkte jag att det här är...så enormt, liksom... Det är en så enormt stor, vid och vag lagstiftning. Så den är potentiellt förödande och hade den införts i ett land som Ungern eller Polen så hade vi liksom mycket snabbare och mer reflexmässigt kallat den antidemokratisk. Eller farlig. Eller liksom...Den långtgående inskränkning. Och det har vi inte gjort. Eller jag gjorde det då i min text. Och de texter jag skrev sen. Men... Vi har ett försiktigt språkbruk när det kommer till även väldigt stora förändringar som sker... När det sker en demokratisk ordning i Sveriges riksdag då har vi som kår ett väldigt försiktigt förhållningssätt till det.

Ja, jag har ju läst en del av de texterna som du har skrivit. Men idag då... Hur skulle du vilja omnämna den här lagen?

Ja, alltså... Utlandsspionerilag är ju på ett sätt en missvisande beskrivning. Jag skulle ju hellre beskriva den som en begränsningslag för grävande journalistik. Och... Om man använder det... Om man uttrycker det på det sättet så blir det mycket tydligare vad som är problemet och varför det är angeläget för alla som jobbar med journalistik. Det är... Det har kommit upp diskussioner om publiceringar som redan har uteblivit...SVT gjorde ju ett exempel av någon... När det handlade om en publicering av en karta. Och... Det är liksom... Ett av väldigt få exempel som har nämnts. Jag vet att det på flera andra redaktioner har varit... Alltså att lagen har inneburit att man har gjort helt andra övervägande än man har gjort tidigare inför publiceringar. Och att man ibland avstått i uppgifter. Så jag vet att det redan idag påverkar journalistiken. Jag vet inte om det var svar på din fråga. Men så skulle jag beskriva det. +++ ROSA

Och vad känner du om det då? Att du hör att medier avstår från att publicera vissa uppgifter?

Nej men jag blir... Dels blir jag förbannad för att det visar att lagen har precis de effekter som jag befarade. Det vill säga inte i första hand att det kommer sättas en massa journalister i fängelse för att de bryter mot lagen. Utan att det kommer påverka vad vi gör och inte gör. Att vi kommer begränsa oss själva. Att det blir en självcensur. Att det blir en oro. Den är inte riktad... Lagstiftningen är inte riktad mot ansvariga utgivare utan den är

riktad mot enskilda journalister. Vilket också liksom blir ytterligare begränsning. För det är också svårare som arbetsgivare då att säga att du... Du som ung reporter ska skriva den här som kanske bryter mot den här lagen. Att vi tycker att lagen är dålig. Det hade varit lättare om det var kopplat till utgivarskapet också. Så det gör mig förbannad. Sen gör det mig också... Men det kan samtidigt också bli liksom... Att jag tänker på hur vi... Alltså hur alla publicistiska verksamheter förhåller sig. Där måste vi också våga testa gränserna. Och våga... Peka på att det här gör vi trots att vi befarar att vi kan strida mot den här lagen. Eller att liksom få till en diskussion om hur den ska tolkas och implementeras. För där tror jag att... På ytterst lekmanamässiga boliner så tycker jag att... Det finns ändå skäl att tro att... Domstolar möjligen skulle värna... Yttrande och tryckfriheten... Väldigt högt i en ensam rättsprocess. Där måste vi liksom våga pröva lagen. Så skulle jag säga.

++++ORANGE++++LILA

Hur tycker du att din egen arbetsplats, Aftonbladet, förhåller sig till lagen?

Jag vill... Jag kan inte riktigt... Liksom... Prata om hur... Aftonbladet har förhållit sig till lagen i liksom... Reda publiceringar. Men när jag säger att jag vet att många redaktioner förhåller sig till det här. Då ingår också min egen tidning.

Och du personligen då? Och dina närmsta kollegor. Hur... Nu är ju du biträdande kulturchef. Men... Skulle du säga att ni har haft anledning att förhålla er till lagen än så länge?

Nej, inte så att vi har övervägt att någon publicering skulle strida mot lagen. Däremot... Vår... Min uppgift, det är jag som har skrivit mest om det hos oss på Aftonbladet. Min uppgift har väl varit att återkommande påminna om att den här finns. Att det är ett problem. Snarare än att vi har gjort några publiceringar som vi tror riskerar att bryta mot den. Men... Det är klart att det kan uppstå. Särskilt om det kommer uppgifter till oss som just kan påverka våra relationer till andra länder. Och vi skriver ju både om NATO-samarbete och liksom... Nu är DCA-avtalet precis uppe för diskussion. Och... Vi skriver om Ryssland, om Ukraina, om Turkiet, om... I alla de här frågorna som rör utrikespolitik och andra länders förhållanden. Och kontakter med Sverige och samarbete med Sverige. Det är klart att det hypotetiskt... Skulle kunna påverka det vi skriver idag. Men jag skulle inte säga att vi har suttit med någon stor publicering hittills på Aftonbladet Kultur som... Där vi har varit tvungna att avstå någonting.

Och du nämnde förut att du tycker att man behöver... Försöka utmana lagen. Att det är så man bör förhålla sig till den. Skulle du vara redo att driva en sån... Ja, en sån sak?

Det är lätt att säga att man skulle vara det. Det är svårt att göra, tror jag. Men... För egen del... Absolut. I... När det är en publicering som är värd att ta strid för... I en fråga som jag tycker är så enormt viktig för svensk journalistik. Så... Ja, det skulle jag absolut vara.

Och har du tilltro till att resten av branschen... Känner samma?

Nej. Man kan inte, ska inte och bör inte liksom... Ha tilltro till eller lägga det ansvaret på sig en... Vikarie på nyhetsdesken som är inne fyra månader... 24 år gammal eller så. Jag tror att den... Det kan man liksom inte... Man ska inte kräva det. Och därför kan jag inte ha tilltro till det. Jag har en stark tilltro till att branschen skulle sluta upp... Bakom en journalist som åtalas på det sättet. Eller som hamnar i det... Läget. Det är jag... Alldeles, alldeles övertygad om. Och att även mediebolagen skulle göra det. Alltså ägare och... Liknande. Det är... Det tror jag. Men däremot... Jag är inte säker på att alla... Liksom... Medieägare... Är säkra på att just deras... TV-kanal eller tidning eller radiokanal ska vara den som... Har den här fajten.

Nej. Vad ser du är de största hoten? Med lagen? Eller de största effekterna som kommer komma ut från den?

Alltså självcensuren... Som det innebär och begränsningen som det innebär... Är det största hotet... Tills någon... Alltså... Tills det börjar dyka upp åtal och liknande. Och om man då ska göra... Det som... Det exempel som ofta har nämnts i det här... När Sveriges Radio avslöjade planerna på att bygga en... Vapenfabrik i Saudiarabien. Och där han som... Hade varit med och formulerat... Lagerårsremissen säger att... Dels skulle det vara olagligt med den här nya lagen. Det som jag tror... Händer, kommer hända, kanske redan har hänt... Det är att man... Tittar på den typen av gräv... Och i ett väldigt tidigt skede... Bli mindre benägen att göra dem. För att man tänker att det kanske faktiskt är olagligt att göra det här. Är det verkligen där dit vi ska? Är det verkligen liksom... Den här kriminella publiceringen... Eller det här kriminella grävet som vi ska göra? Eller är det det här andra? Som också är bra, men... Som är lagligt. Det tror jag kommer vara... Det största problemet och... Hotet med det... Det är liksom... Det är så mycket större än man kanske förstår. För att det som det innebär... Det är ju publiceringar som aldrig görs. Av... Granskningar som aldrig görs. Och vi får liksom aldrig heller... Vi som offentlighet, vi som medborgare, vi som samhälle... På aldrig ett tillfälle att... Ens ta ställning till om... Var det en bra granskning? Var det... Fanns det någonting här? Fanns det liksom... Hittade de någonting? Gjorde de inte det? Och vi får inte ens... I så fall... Några medier som... Ställer eller lyfter... Frågeställningar. Utan det... Vi kommer inte ens så långt i så fall. Och det är... Det skapar ju liksom... Ett svängrum för... Makthavare. Som de inte bör ha. +++++RÖD+++LILA

Nej, verkligen. Ehm... Ja, jag vet att du inte kan gå in på specifika publiceringar eller så närmare. Men skulle du säga att Aftonbladet har... Självcensurerat sig... Än så länge? I förhållande till lagen?

Jag avböjer att liksom... Resonera om hur... Hela Aftonbladet har... Ehm... Agerat där. Det får liksom bli en fråga för... Våra ansvariga utgivare i så fall. Men... Och jag kan säga att... Aftonbladet Kultur har än så länge inte... Gjort det. Men... Ja, nej. Men jag... Nöjer mig så. Ser du att självcensur alltid är dåligt?

Nej. Ehm... Självcensur är ju på ett sätt... Alltså, pressretyk är ju självcensur på ett sätt. Att förhålla sig till... Brottsoffers särskilda utsatthet. Att ha avstånd med handport... Det är ju självcensur. Mm. Ehm... Eller självreglering kallar vi det ju. Men det är ju på liksom...

Självrensning på ett sätt. Det är viktigt att veta... Vad man gör, varför, när och liksom vilka konsekvenser det får. Och att ha tänkt igenom det. Ehm... Så det är viktigt. Och det är också viktigt om vi...
Ehm... Avslöjar militära hemligheter eller liksom... Granskar en bygget av en vapenfabrikare. Vi måste ju veta att det här kan få... De här konsekvenserna. Och spelar det en roll för oss?
Är vi konsekvensneutrala eller... Bidrar vi till någonting här som är liksom...
Samhällsfarligt eller alltså... Så självrensning i form av... Att vara reflekterande och reglera sig själv. Det är ju helt nödvändigt. Och det är klart liksom... Vi har förtalslagstiftning och vi har... Ja. Så det är inte per definition dåligt.

Och sen undrar jag ifall du ser utlandsbionerilagen som en del av något större... En större... En större inskränkning mot tryck och yttrandefrihetsgrundlagen. Eller som en riktning i... Medieklimatet kanske.

Jag ser det som en... Extremt... Obehaglig... Och farlig... Väg.
Där detta är... Kanske det värsta exemplet. Men bara ett av många. Mm. Vi har ett... Mindre dramatiskt men icke desto mindre allvarligt exempel när det gäller möjligheten... Att... Dra tillbaka sändningstillstånd under vissa förhållanden som är en ny lagstiftning. Vi har...
Åtskilliga nya lagar som handlar om...
Liksom hemlig avlyssning och preventiv övervakning och... Möjlighet för att installera...
Egentligen avlyssnande hårdvara hos...
Privatpersoner och... Att man överhuvudtaget får övervaka och avlyssna mycket mer... I någon slags guilt-free association. Och alla de här sakerna kommer att påverka...
Journalistiken dels för att det kommer påverka... Det finns liksom en rejäl... Risk att...
Journalister kommer att avlyssnas. Det kanske kommer gallras en del av det. Det kommer kanske... Ehm... Inte liksom leda till några stora spektakulära fall där... Det visar sig att en grävande reporter...
Avlyssnas när de granskar staten eller så. Men, men... Liksom hemlig källskyddad information kan ändå komma i... Polisiära händer.
Behöva hanteras där. Ehm... Och det kan få stora konsekvenser men... Det som... Det framför allt kommer göra tror jag är att... Ehm... Källor och... Ehm...
Uppgiftslämnare kommer att bli räddare för... Att dela med sig av det. För att de vet att risken är mycket större. Att någon annan lyssnar. Ehm... Och...
Då kan inte vi leva upp till källskydd och medlemsskydd i värsta fall. Och det... Ja... Det är... Då har vi liksom... Sågat av en... Viktig gren på det journalistiska trädet.

Ser du några positiva aspekter med lagen? Rent ur en journalistisk synvinkel?

Nej. Jag tror inte det.

Är det någonting annat som vi inte har pratat om än som du skulle vilja tillägga?

Jag tror att man kan... Lägga till möjligen att... Det är också... Vi lever i en tid där...
Säkerhet... Ehm... Och trygghet.
Och liksom... De frågorna... Av naturliga skäl med liksom krig i vårt närområde. Ehm...
Värderas väldigt högt. Ehm... Och...
Det gör att... Ehm... De... Liksom våra militära förmågor och våra... Ehm...

Liksom... Försvarsförmåga. Försvarets... Försvaretsgöranden och förehavanden.
Förflyttningar. Ehm... Satsningar. Inköp. Alla de här delarna. Ehm...
Blir viktigare för samhället. De kommer bli större och de kommer... Ehm... Liksom... Ha
en mer avgörande roll. Och det är inte konstigt. Men...
Men att det sker samtidigt som de här lagstiftningarna och instänkningarna kommer. Det
kommer göra att de här processerna... Ehm... Kring försvar. Kring säkerhet. Kring polis.
Kring övervakning.
Kommer att... Behöva granskas extra mycket. Men... Den här typen av lagar gör att de blir
mindre granskade. Mm. Och det tror jag vi kommer att... Få anledning att...
Sörja liksom när man tittar tillbaka på det sen. Mm. Tror...

Finns det någon del av dig som tänker att... Det var uttänkt från början? Alltså att det
kommer... Nu vet jag att den här lagen har utträttats otroligt länge. Men...

Nej... Alltså... Jag tror ju väldigt sällan på så. Det här är en hemlig plan. Mm. Men... Ehm...
I så fall mer att...
Man från olika håll kan se... Man ser inte som såhär... Nu ska vi... Lura igenom det här.
Utan man ser det som... Det är naturligt att vi får nya behov. Mm. Och våra behov...
Militärt är att inte...
Journalistiken ska ha samma insyn. Mm. Och då... Och på det sättet finns det ju liksom ett
uppsåt. Men uppsåtet är ju från en del av intresseskalen. Och då har man liksom inte vägt
in de andra intressena som finns i en demokrati. Mm.
På ett tillräckligt tydligt sätt. Mm. Men jag tror inte att det är någon hemlig smygplan. Nej.
Nej.

Nej men vad bra.

Är det någonting annat du vill lägga till?

Jag tror inte det.

Nej? Vad bra. Om du inte har någon annan fråga då så känner jag mig jättenöjd.

Ja men toppen. Mm.

Jag hoppas att det blev citerbart någonstans.

Ja det är helt självklart. Och om jag har någon annan fråga, något klagande som behöver
göras så mejlar jag bara.

Ja självklart.

Mm.

Toppen. Tack så jättemycket.

Tack själv.