

Chapter 33 : Opinion polls & discourses

*There are three kinds of lies;
lies, damn lies and statistics.*
Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881)

A. THE OPINION POLLS

Form of government (republic or monarchy)

It has been possible to find 56 opinion polls on the form of government conducted by 12 different test houses (Appendix 1: Figure 1). The questions have been some variant of “Are you for or against inherited monarchy?” alternatively, “Do you want to replace the inherited monarchy with an elected president?” The support for the inherited monarchy has 1943-2016 been in the range of 57-85 percent (reservation for different measurement methods). There is a robust trend over time (10-year averages) so that the support increased from 65 percent in 1960 to about 75 percent at Carl Gustaf’s 50th birthday in 1996 and 2010 was back at 65 percent.

There are demographic and regional differences in the statistics. For the period 2003-2012: Women, Swedish citizens and elderly people are more positive to the monarchy than men, immigrants and young people. Rural areas are more positive than cities. The south of the country is more positive than the north. Those with low education are more positive than those with high education. Entrepreneurs are more positive than other professions. Christian Democrats and Moderates (the right-wing) are more positive than the Left and Green parties. National Democrats (the right-wing), Social Democrats, Centrists (the rural population) & Liberals are divided. The Parliament is more polarized than the population.¹ As in the past, support for the monarchy varies with support for the establishment in general: church, banks, big companies, defence & law courts.²

In 2005, the Norwegian monarchy expert Carl-Erik Grimstad conducted a survey showing that there were 15 percent more monarchists in Sweden than in Norway, but that supporters in both countries had the same social background. The main difference between monarchists and republicans was that the latter could be categorized as “postmodern materialists“. The concept is not entirely clear, but seems to imply a more crass, down-to-earth view of existence. The monarchists would then espouse a more aesthetic, idealistic philosophy. This may also be expressed as the Republicans belonging to an America-influenced post World War II generation, the Monarchists to an earlier Germany-influenced generation. Linking up with modern business is perhaps not such a good idea for Carl Gustaf after all.³

It has been assumed that the post-war generation, raised in a more democratic social climate, the “68s“, would prefer a republican form of government, but in the long term the changes in opinion have been insignificant. In 1973, 64 percent of young people aged 18-29 believed that Sweden would still be a monarchy in 1983. In 1983, 90 percent of young people aged 18-29 believed that Sweden would still be a monarchy in 2000 and that is how it is.⁴

¹ Nilsson 2013.

² Holmberg & Weibull 2013a: ss. 95-97.

³ Grimstad 2006.

⁴ Dagens Industri, 1984-01-05.

*

Trust (in the Royal house as a whole)

Support for the form of government depends to some extent on the trust in the royal house (especially the regent). It has been possible to compile two series of opinion polls. Series 1: 30 opinion polls 1981-2019 by seven different test houses (Appendix 1: Figure 2). Series 2: 22 annual opinion polls 1995-2016 by the SOM Institute (Appendix 1: Figure 3).

- Series 1: The trust in the royal house (measured as a percentage of positive) has 1981-2018 been in the range of 30-69 percent (reservation for various measurement methods). There is a robust trend over time (10-year averages) so that the trust increased from 40 percent in 1980 to 70 percent Carl Gustaf's 50th birthday in 1996 and then 2011 declined to about 35 percent. After 2013 there is again an increase.
- Series 2: The trust in the Royal house (expressed as a balance measure = percent positive minus percent negative) has 1995-2016 been in the range 2-46 percent. There is a downward trend so that the trust from a 1995 maximum of 46 percent, 2013 had dropped to 2 percent. After 2013 there is an increase.

The SOM Institutes measure's are sufficiently detailed to follow the changes year by year. The biggest changes were caused by the Brunei debate (-19), the tsunami speech (+10), the Crown Princess's wedding (+7) and the scandal book "The Reluctant Monarch" (-15). There was a similar but weaker effect of Princess Estelle's baptism. In the week after the 2012 baptism 18 percent believed their trust in the Royal house had increased and eight percent that it had decreased.⁵ However, the SOM Institute's measure that year only rose from 4 to 5 percent which is within the margin of error.

Trust figures are usually discussed in terms of media management. There is a Dutch investigation. The conclusion seems to be that if you immediately admit your guilt, you get off more lightly. The royal house should never consider itself to have the right on its side.⁶

*

Popularity (individuals)

There is a long time series 1984-2011 about Sweden's most popular man and woman (Appendix 1: Figure 4). Carl Gustav's popularity peaked around the 50th anniversary in 1996. Silvia has always been popular. Crown Princess Victoria only became popular in 2002. She is now the most popular, followed by her mother and father. The most likely reason for Carl Gustav's declining popularity is that he now avoids personal interviews. He is increasingly anonymous. Obviously, he has forgotten fundamentals: That the relationship between a monarch and his people is personal and that it takes work and a portion of generosity to maintain it.

*

⁵ Karin Sörbring m fl. Estelles dop - en vattendelare. Expressen, 2012-05-27, s. 24.

⁶ Hensels 2016.

The distaff side

During the 20th century, interest increased in the Swedish queens, their person and what they actually accomplished for their appanages. There was criticism that this involved shifting the focus from the political role of the royals to their subordinate love life. There is a Swedish media critical essay on the subject (Fransson 2012). The essay seems based a similar English debate about the importance of Henry VIII's many wives, with the male side (historian David Starkey) believing that if this continued, English history would risk turning into a feminist soap opera.

However, there has been considerable interest in such a feminist soap opera, and it has been interpreted as a support for the monarchy. There are some Swedish statistics on this. 1995-2016 more women than men wanted to keep monarchy, which has been interpreted as: (1) An effect of the poorer education of women, especially working women, so that they had more fantasies about the royal house. (2) A feminist monarchism (=a desire to defend women regardless of their position in society or at least not ignore them). (3) A consequence of how the women of the Royal house are portrayed in the weekly press - a mixture of family values, suffering mystique & romance. (4) A specific female curiosity, sensationalism & desire to dream away from reality.

*

Summary

All available data support that the trust (or popularity) of the monarchy, the royal house and its members reached a maximum in 1996 and then abated. There is no analysis of the cause, but as it coincides with the increasingly hostile attitude of the journalists' community (Appendix 1: Figure 3) the explanation should probably be sought there - possibly in the fact that the Marshal's office in 1996 got support from the supreme administrative court for its interpretation that the royal court were subordinate to the king, not the government, why the principle of public access did not apply to the royal house. The Royal family and its sympathizers have also (like previously Charles XIV John) conducted vendettas against disagreeable newspapers, journalists, artists & researchers and even been involved in physical scuffles. They are now paying for it.

The alternative explanation is that different generations have been socialized into different viewpoints, but this is not reflected in the statistics until the older generations have died. The popularity of the royal house in 1996 would then be a combined effect of Gustav V's popularity between the war and the wedding in 1976. The media effect of the wedding was particularly strong, as it had been preceded by a several years-long media feuilleton about Carl Gustaf's courtship of his future wife.

* * *

B. DISCOURSES

*What is truth in Berlin and Jena,
Is just a bad joke in Heidelberg.
Gustaf Fröding (1860-1911)*

Opinions based on facts can change with new facts. Discourses based on “stories“, “beliefs“ or “values“ can also be changed by dying away or being replaced with alternative “stories“, “beliefs“ or “values“. The concept is difficult to operationalize. In chapter 29, the monarchic discourse is interpreted as notions of “the true nature of monarchy“. Republicans refer to a “monarchic cultural climate“. In any case, the existence of a discourse means that the monarchy is being debated. The more intense the debate, the more detailed the discourse. The most obvious effect of the Republican agitation has been the opinion polls, which can be said to form a discourse of their own. When the monarchy is doing well, statistics are not usually published, which seems to be a thought. Health still remains silent.

Since discourses are cultural phenomena, research should take place in this area. But since the concept of discourse is so vague, the subject matter is also vague. With these reservations, I state that research on discourses takes place in the areas of culture and media studies. These are described below & in Appendix 3 “Psychoanalytic & rhetorical political science“ (where the researchers try to lead in evidence that both republicans & monarchists live in a fantasy world).

*

Cultural studies

In 2009, the journal *Kulturella Perspektiv* published a special issue about the Royal Family. The number began with a foreword about the lack of monarchy research. The articles are all over the place in their attempts to define the subject. The efforts are summarized in the preface as:

“All contributions in this issue of *Cultural Perspectives* analyse representations in the sense of secondary representations [interpretations] of royalty. The only exception is Mattias Frihammar who bases his text also on his own observations and interviews. Studying representations means that the analysis will be about how different social agencies - newspapers, theatre, art, internet, TV - present information about the Royal Family. The starting point is that such representations have a bearing on what the royal house and the royals are perceived to be, yes in some sense what they are and what opinions they thereby reproduce or change. In that sense, it matters less if there is a discrepancy between the representations and the royals self-understandings.“⁷

Frihammar's article “Commonality that arouses desire“⁸ is about how the environment in accordance with Hegel's lord-slave reasoning (see chapter 5) is a co-actor in emphasizing the special position of the Royal House & once it is established it becomes self-sustaining. “The king as a person does not really need to put in any great effort,“ says Mattias Frihammar, just as in the world of theatre, it is the co-actors that make him credible.“⁹

*

⁷ Arvidsson m fl. För Sverige I tiden? Kulturella perspektiv, 2009:2, s. 7.

⁸ Mattias Frihammar. Vanlighet som väcker begär. Kulturella perspektiv, 2009:2, s. 15-19.

⁹ Caroline Lagercrantz. Taffeltäckare, marskalk och fatbursjungfru. Populär historia, 2004:7.

Media Studies

Carl Gustav's speech in memory of the 2004 tsunami disaster was widely noted. There is a report from the Swedish Crisis Preparedness Authority (Andersson m fl. 2005) on the media coverage. The figures were summarized as a balance measure of percent positive minus percent negative. In the newspapers Carl Gustaf got +34, on radio & TV -50. The corresponding figures for the government were -81 and -95. The articles were also reported by content: Carl Gustaf's competence -20, commitment +71, responsibility +33, ability to act -60.

In connection with the Markovic affair (Harrison & Ahokas 2012), historian Dick Harrison summarized Carl Gustaf's situation in three points:

- The change in the status of the monarchy towards symbolic and moral supremacy.
- The political developments that resulted in the Torekov-compromise.
- The escalating medialization of society.

“The concrete result of the three processes mentioned above is a new type of royal publicity, which can be likened to a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the Swedish king has never had as much informal influence over the Swedish people as today. On the other hand, he has never been so vulnerable. The new public creates both optimal conditions for reaching out to the people and greater risks of being attacked.”¹⁰

Harrison's fears seem exaggerated. The royal court has a massive information advantage: 60 percent of the articles in Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Expressen & Aftonbladet under three weeks in 2010-2012 (n=353) were based on first-hand sources (=opinion formers or citizens in general) - but these rarely added any new information. 20 percent of the articles were based on sources from the royal court - that's where the new information came from. (Andersson & Rådne 2012.)

Further articles on the royal house's media image can be found in Jönsson & Lundell (2009) and Ekedahl (2010). What these studies have in common is the lack of interest in “how it really was“. The focus is on “how it was perceived“. At the publishing of ”Media and Monarchy in Sweden” June 12, 2009, representatives from the royal court participated in a debate at KB. I have not found any minutes from that particular debate, but in other debates this time there are lengthy talks about media & monarchy being mutually dependent and that the effect of the media coverage is to make the royal house a common concern for the Swedish people:

The royal family maintains its position precisely because we get to follow their lives and loves. Through newspapers and television, a relationship is created with the royal house. We learn to empathize with the Queen's flu and sprained feet, experience joy at the Crown Princess's wedding, and outrage at the King's womanizing and blagues. As if the very presence of their bodies and relationships matter to us on a personal level. In this way the monarchy has symbolic meaning.¹¹

*

¹⁰ Harrison & Ahokas 2012: ss. 151,153.

¹¹ Anna Adeniji. Kungahuset och media behöver varandra. SVT Debatt, 2011-04-07.

Summary

Since the discourse (true or false) is the values of society (as opposed to the opinion that measures the scope or effect of the discourse), it is according to Parson's paragraph 4 in chapter 21 difficult to change - a society always strives to preserve its values. The default defence is to ignore the arguments of the opposition. Republicans & monarchists have since the 1950s been buried in their respective trenches & there is no end in sight. Blidh (2009) has examined both sides of the argument. He summarizes:

“The most common and thus most important arguments are all those that fall into the “expected“ categories (consistency ethics [=state utility] on the royalist side and equality/rights thinking on the republican side).

Having made the above analysis, I conclude that my investigation has supported the basic thesis. Royalist and republican arguments are based on different basic values. Royalist support for the monarchy is based on the expected positive consequences of the monarchy. Republican resistance to the monarchy is due to their view that it is contrary to principles of equality and rights.

This probably explains why the debate is rather polarized. The representatives ignore each others arguments because they are based on different moral traditions. It is difficult for a Republican, for example, to respond to the argument that “the King gives good PR for Sweden“ because he or she finds it completely irrelevant. The Republicans have instead focused on the principles that the monarchy supposedly violates.“¹²

Which in this book's terminology is described as two separate discourses:

- The political discourse describes the functioning, state utility and support of the monarchy in terms of power, influence & popularity.
- The ideological discourse describes the functioning of the monarchy, state utility & support in terms of tradition, loyalty & reciprocal legitimacy: the political system legitimises the monarchy, which in turn legitimises the political system.

It is unclear what the opinion polls measure, but since the result is about the same no matter how you ask the question, I would guess at content-dissatisfied or the like. When asked to answer plainly, their knowledge appears so superficial that it cannot be attributed any value.¹² In-depth interviews where the IP are forced to develop his or her views in detail seem a better method (see section 20B).

¹² Blidh 2009: s. 25.

Referenser

- *Andersson, Freja & Rådne, Jessica. (2012.) Hovjournalistik på nyhetsplats – Hur kungahuset bevakas i Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet och Expressen. (C-uppsats, vt.) Södertörns högskola: Institutionen för kommunikation, medier och it.
- *Andersson Odén, Tomas, Ghersetti, Marina & Wallin, Ulf. (2005.) Tsunamins genomslag – En studie av svenska mediers bevakning. (KBM:s temaserie nr 13.) Stockholm: Krisberedskapsmyndigheten.
- *Billig, Michael. (1992.) Talking of the Royal Family. London: Routledge. [Ny omarbetad upplaga 1998.]
- *Blidh, Daniel. (2009.) Monarkidebatten - En analys av de båda sidornas argument. (C-uppsats, vt.) Göteborgs universitet: Statsvetenskapliga institutionen.
- *Ekedahl, Nils. (red.) (2010.) En dynasti blir till: medier, myter och makt kring Karl XIV Johan och familjen Bernadotte. Stockholm: Norstedt.
- *Fransson, Simon. (2012.) Kungahuset i veckopressen. En studie av feminiseringen av kungahuset från 1950 till idag. Lunds universitet, Historiska institutionen, 2012-03-05.
- *Frihammar, Mattias. (2010.) Ur svenska hjärtans djup : Reproduktion av samtida monarki. Stockholm: Carlsson förlag.
- *Grimstad, Carl-Erik. (2006.) Det svenska kungahuset ur norsk synvinkel. I: Ögren red. 2006: ss. 136-152.
- *Harrison, Dick & Ahokas Schein, Desirée. (2012.) Från en säker källa... Stockholm: ICA bokförlag.
- *Hensels, Maxime. (2016.) The Dutch Royal Family in the spotlight. A framing analysis of newspapers de Volkskrant and Trouw on the quest for transparency regarding the Royal Family. MaRBLE Research Papers | Edition 2016 | Volume III. <researchgate.net> (2019-01-01).
- *Holmberg, Lennart & Weibull, Sören. (2013a.) Föränderligt förtroende. I: Holmberg & Weibull red. 2013b: ss. 93-107.
- +Holmberg, Lennart & Weibull, Sören. (red.) (2013b.) Förtroendet för samhällets institutioner : Utvecklingen i Sverige 1986–2012. (SOM-institutets temaserie, 2013:1.) Göteborg: SOM-institutet.
- *Jönsson, Mats & Lundell, Patrik. (red.) (2009.) Media and Monarchy in Sweden. Göteborg: Nordicom.
- *Nilsson, Lennart. (2013.) Svenska folket, journalisterna, monarkin. I: Weibull m fl. red. 2013: ss. 155-174.
- +Weibull, Lennart, Oscarsson, Henrik & Bergström, Annika. (red.) (2013.) Vägskäl. (Årsbok, SOM-rapport nr 2013:59.) Göteborgs universitet: SOM-institutet.
- +Ögren, Mats. (red.) (2006.) För Sverige – Nuförtiden. En antologi om Carl XIV Gustaf. Bokförlaget DN.