

Mediating society

Gallup polls as a statistical attraction in the Swedish press, 1941–1948

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At the end of 1944, a large advert in the major Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* encouraged readers to subscribe to *Vi* ('We'), the Swedish cooperative movement's weekly magazine. Just 3 Swedish kronor bought you an annual subscription to a magazine 'known by all of Sweden, for it has 1,800,000 adult readers (according to Gallup)'.¹ Moreover, the *Vi* advert listed polls by Swedish Gallup done exclusively for the magazine as one of its main attractions.²

It is striking that polls by Swedish Gallup ranked as a selling point on a par with high-quality texts, pictures by leading photographers, and original Swedish comic strips.³ In the words of Tord Palander, professor of economics with statistics and the 'scientific controller' of Swedish Gallup, 'the Gallup polls are no *l'art pour l'art*, no science for the sake of science'. The purpose of the company, whose full name was Svenska Gallupinstitutet (the Swedish Gallup Institute), was to generate journalistic material of interest to the public, rather than facts for facts' sake. And even if he thought that Gallup polls 'should naturally use the best available scientific methods', he emphasized that critics of these polls should keep in mind that 'when it comes to formulating questions and showing the result' Gallup polls 'must primarily limit themselves to being popular sociology, or, if you will, journalistic sociology' rather than science.⁴

This chapter is a study of Gallup polls in Sweden in the 1940s. I argue that a media and cultural historical perspective is necessary to understand the rich source material these Gallup polls constitute. When studying such polls, one might think of approaching them as a source of historical knowledge concerning the opinions and habits of the population at the time. Such an approach, however, would be problematic for several reasons. First, not even contemporaries—as per the Palander quote above—were urged to approach them as truly scientific representations of society. Rather, they were ‘popular sociology’ for use in the press. Second, one might well be sceptical of the existence of public opinion in the form represented by polls, because, according to Pierre Bourdieu, opinion polls in the newspapers are artefacts that conceal more than they reveal about the complex system of forces that actually constitute opinions.⁵ For my purposes, however, the status of opinion polls as artefacts does not pose a problem. Even if ‘public opinion does not exist’, as Bourdieu put it, opinion polls, being cultural historical artefacts, can still be used for studying *how* society was represented or, with a media historical approach, mediated. Here, I use the concept of mediation—which points to what the media *do*—to denote the operation of the media as intermediaries of communication.⁶ In my analysis of the Gallup polls’ mediation of society, the word *how* is central; it is not a study of what these polls postulated about society, but how a new way of mediating society worked in this historical context.⁷ If reality, as James Carey suggests, is produced by communication, the purpose of this chapter is thus to study how a new technology changed the conditions for communicating about and thus producing society in the mid twentieth century.⁸

Most accounts of the history of polling in Sweden are written as background for social science studies on contemporary political polls or the relation between polling and public opinion.⁹ The historical perspective is often negligible and such accounts of polling in the past as there are border on presentism, taking for granted the role

that opinion polling fills in the current media system. In today's media system, polling is naturally of continuous relevance to political reporting, especially in the months leading up to an election. In this context polling's function appears predictive: to forecast the result of coming elections. Additionally, different types of polls are used by a wide range of actors, such as market researchers, political consultants, and, not least, academics. Given the ubiquity of polling today, its history remains surprisingly unexplored. The only historical study of Swedish polling is Carl-Filip Smedberg's article about how Swedish market research and opinion polling reproduced knowledge of taxonomies relating to social class in the twentieth century.¹⁰ The history of opinion polling in other countries, especially the US, is better known.¹¹ Still, the media historical perspective is largely absent in this literature, which focuses instead on survey methods, public debates, or more overarching principles of political participation. My aim here is to engage with the more practical mediation of the polls in the Swedish press. What questions did polls deal with? What groups were described? How were the results represented?

I would suggest that polls in the press are best understood as a statistical attraction: entertaining material in which the audience could see themselves and society represented statistically. Anders Ekström and Frans Lundgren, both historians of ideas, have examined the ways of exhibiting society at funfairs and exhibitions around 1900 in Sweden, and I hold that Gallup polls were comparable to such statistical attractions.¹² Much like the 'statistical pavilion' at the Stockholm Industrial Art Exhibition of 1909, whose fascinating statistical representations of society competed with waterslides and a house of mirrors, the Gallup polls in the press drew in and mediated audiences to themselves, entangled with other media.¹³ Newspaper and magazine articles adorned with graphs, photographs, and cartoonish illustrations told readers that 32 per cent of Swedes wanted more religious education in schools; that 24 per cent of rural

women reported they could swim; and that 54 per cent of Swedes kept a household budget.¹⁴

The empirical material for this chapter primarily consists of articles in the Swedish press from the period between 1941 and 1948.¹⁵ First, I will outline the history of the Swedish Gallup Institute. This is followed by sections on themes of the polls, the categories employed in them, the visualization of their results, the use of qualitative comments, and the mediation of polling itself. I conclude by discussing Gallup polls' shifting position in the borderlands between entertainment and science.

The rise and fall of the Swedish Gallup Institute

As noted by Bernhard Fulda, the early history of opinion polling is a transnational one.¹⁶ The methods of opinion polling used in Sweden came from the US and were often referred to as American—both by supporters and detractors. The Swedish Gallup Institute was named after George Gallup, one of several market researchers who in the 1930s brought quota sampling from market research into opinion polling. In quota sampling, or the representative method as it was also known, the population is divided according to several mutually exclusive categories—for example gender, age, and social class—in relation to which the interviewed sample is made representative for the whole population. In practice, this meant that interviewers were tasked with going to a specific area and interviewing set numbers of women, blue-collar workers, and so on. This new method of polling differed significantly from the straw polls that had been prevalent in America since the early nineteenth century. Straw polls were simple to conduct but lacked statistical sampling methods and were thus unscientific.¹⁷

Gallup and his company—the American Institute of Public Opinion (AIPO)—were not the only pollsters using quota sampling, but they achieved the best brand recognition by successfully challenging

the famous *Literary Digest* straw poll before the 1936 presidential election. *Literary Digest* predicted a landslide for Alf Landon. But as the respondents were sourced from the magazine's own subscribers and lists of telephone and car owners, their sample had a bias towards high-income groups. Gallup's sample was much smaller but more representative; thus, he successfully predicted both that Roosevelt would win and that *Literary Digest*'s prediction would be 20 per cent off. With this still oft-repeated origin myth of scientific polling, Gallup popularized his name and his method.¹⁸ He envisioned that his supposedly scientific, value-neutral method for opinion polling would amplify the voice of the people, demonstrate their political competence, and be a necessary counterbalance to organized lobbies and interest groups, thus revitalizing American democracy.¹⁹ Alva and Gunnar Myrdal helped popularize these ideas in Sweden months before the first Gallup poll was taken there.²⁰

In the late 1930s, George Gallup started building an international network of affiliated polling organizations. In 1939 a Danish market researcher, Haagen Wahl Asmussen, was thus given permission to use Gallup's method and name for his polling enterprise.²¹ Although Asmussen's work was soon hampered by the German occupation of Denmark, it was through him that the Swedish advertiser Sven O. Blomquist got hold of the instructions for the Gallup method. In October 1941 Blomquist founded the limited company, the Swedish Gallup Institute.²²

There seems to have been little Swedish contact with Gallup and AIPO during the war. Shortly after VE Day, however, they were in communication with the pollsters in the US and elsewhere.²³ However, according to Hultgren there was never any financial agreement with George Gallup; despite its name, the Swedish Gallup Institute was not a franchise of AIPO, but rather a local initiative by an advertising executive.²⁴ This also exemplifies the extensive entanglement of political opinion polling and market research prevalent in many countries at the time.²⁵ So while the new polling methods

spread from the US, the decisions of local actors played a decisive role in the institutional forms and polling practices in the various national contexts. Therefore, we need to study how this technology was introduced and adapted to the Swedish context.

On 27 December 1941—a couple of months after the institute was founded—the first Gallup polls were published in the Swedish press. The two first subscribers were *Dagens Nyheter*—a Stockholm newspaper with a liberal profile—and *Vi*—the cooperative movement's magazine.²⁶ By the end of 1942, they were joined by the social-democratic Malmö newspaper *Arbetet* and the liberal *Jönköpings-Posten*.²⁷ By 1948, thirteen newspaper titles subscribed to the polls.²⁸

Subscribers received material for one article a week. In these weekly digests, the Swedish Gallup Institute generally provided an illustrated diagram and a suggested article text. The diagrams were published as they were and always looked identical across the different newspapers, while the accompanying text was subbed—sometimes quite heavily—by the paper.²⁹ The empirical material for these weekly articles came from polls carried out every other month, with a large number of questions being asked at the same time. These questions could then be published individually over the course of several months; for example, a questionnaire dated April 1943 contained questions that provided material for eight articles in *Dagens Nyheter* and nine articles in *Vi*, published between 13 May and 11 September.³⁰ The subjects of the weekly published polls were decided by the Swedish Gallup Institute together with the editors of the subscribing newspapers and reflected current affairs.³¹

In the late 1940s, the legitimacy of the Gallup poll waned, especially on the left, and subscribers affiliated with the labour movement, primarily *Vi* and *Arbetet*, withdrew. Two probable reasons were that the Swedish Gallup Institute conducted polls for organized business interests opposed to the social-democratic post-war reform programme, and severely underestimated the Social Democrat results in the election of 1948.³² Beyond hurting the legitimacy of

the Gallup method as such, the failed election prediction raised suspicions that the institute was biased towards centre-right parties. To make matters worse, these Swedish controversies coincided with the failure of all major American pollsters to predict the outcome of the 1948 presidential election.³³ This seems to have undermined the legitimacy of polling not only in the US, but also in Sweden.³⁴

The dwindling political legitimacy of the Swedish Gallup Institute led it to gradually realign its business model towards market research, especially by means of stocktaking in shops rather than interviews. This method was inspired by the American market research company AC Nielsen, which eventually took over the Swedish Gallup Institute in 1956.³⁵ In a 1955 Christmas circular to all institute staff, Göran Åkerhielm, the then CEO, explained how the company's turn to stocktaking had been brought about by 'the 1948 election crash in the States'.³⁶ This had put an end to the seven-year period when 'the enterprise had the shimmering air of a dream world with limitless possibilities' and there had been a 'mood of harvest home and overflowing cornucopias'.³⁷ The political turbulence of 1948 and the Swedish Gallup Institute's subsequent change of business model is not the subject of this chapter, however. My interest is precisely those seven years of 'cornucopias' between 1941 and 1948, when Gallup polls enjoyed a higher degree of legitimacy and could function as a statistical attraction in a wide range of Swedish papers.

The questions

What, then, were the subjects of the polls published in the press? A large advert (Fig. 4.1) for a *Dagens Nyheter* subscription gives some examples:

How are people getting by on the ration? What are they listening to on the radio? What are people's views about the ban on extremist



**Hur
tänker, tycker och handlar
svenska folket?**

*H*ur leder sig folk i allmänhet på ransonerna? Vad lyssnar man på i radio? Vad är folks åsikt om partifickandet, om dödsstraff för sabotage? Hur är det med kyrkans verksamhet?

Dessa och många andra intressanta frågor ha under de senaste månaderna besvarats i Dagens Nyheter, där resultaten av Svenska Gallup-Institutets riksomfattande undersökningar publiceras med ensamrätt för dagliga huvudstadstidningar.

De svenska Gallup-undersökningarna, genomförda enligt i Amerika utexperimenterade metoder och under vetenskaplig kontroll av professor Teod Palander, avse att ge en klar, genomskinlig bild av svensk opinion, av vad svenska folket anser om aktuella företeelser, av dess handel och Wandel i nuvarande kritiska tider.

Undersökningsresultaten äro av största intresse för var och en som vill följa med vår tid. Nya undersökningar genomföres oavbrutet, och resultaten inflytas i Dagens Nyheter. Gå inte miste om något av dem —

**Prenumerera från 1 juni på
DAGENS NYHETER**

Endast kr. 4:— för hela juni månad.

I Stockholms med angivelser mottages prenumerationer på telefon, abonnemang "Dagens Nyheter", eller i tidningens kontor: Tegelhäcken, Stureplan, Medborgarplatsen, S:t Eriksplan. På öfriga platser i landet på varje postanstalt eller av tidningens ombud.

SVERIGES STÖRSTA MORGONTIDNING

**Svenska GALLUP
INSTITUTETS**
undersökningsresultat publiceras
med ensamrätt
för dagliga huvudstadstidningar i
DAGENS NYHETER

Figure 4.1. 'What are the thoughts, opinions and habits of the Swedish people?' An advert for Gallup polls in a Swedish broadsheet, 28 May 1942. © AB Dagens Nyheter.

parties, [or] regarding the death penalty for sabotage? How often do they go to church?

These and many other interesting questions have been answered in recent months in *Dagens Nyheter*, where the results of the Swedish Gallup Institute's countrywide surveys are published exclusively among all the newspapers in the capital. ... The survey results are of great interest to anyone who wants to keep up with the times. ... Don't miss out on any of them—Subscribe from 1 June to *Dagens Nyheter*.³⁸

As seen in the examples given in the advert, the Gallup polls published in the press did not concern political sympathies. Instead, what the diverse questions all shared was that they provided different types of statistical representations of the Swedish people, thought interesting enough to be used to market the newspaper. Rather than the tool for election forecasting that opinion polling is today, these polls were marketed as a novel way of representing society, and of great interest for 'anyone' who wanted to stay abreast of current events.

The diverse character of the Gallup polls could also be seen outside the papers that published them. In a causerie in *Svenska Dagbladet*—a conservative newspaper which usually took a critical stance on Gallup polls—the famous humorist Kar de Mumma described the nightmares of a Gallup interviewer. Trapped in hell, the interviewer is tortured by 'an inquisitive little devil' who, despite his pleas for mercy, bombards him with an increasingly absurd battery of questions:

Well, how should we handle the right to asylum? If Göbbels [*sic*] comes to Sweden, would he be allowed to stay with you? Do you have a long nightgown or short pyjamas? Can one invite Stalin over for lunch? What radio programmes do you listen to the most ...? How is a metal can made? Do you have hair on your chest?³⁹

This goes on for several paragraphs, the point being to ridicule the range of questions asked by the Swedish Gallup Institute. Some of the questions are references to recent polls, such as one about whether foreign leaders (including Joseph Goebbels and Joseph Stalin) should be given asylum in Sweden after the war.⁴⁰ Kar de Mumma's questions were represented as both wildly irrelevant and inappropriately personal, the comic effect coming from the contrast of serious political issues (the right to asylum, how long the prime minister should stay in office) with questions about crochet, making boiled sweets, and hair loss.

The Gallup polls' prevailing image for proponents and critics alike was as a technique concerned with a wide variety of questions. Predicting election results or gauging party support were generally not perceived to be polling's central function.⁴¹ Instead, the broad object of study in the early Swedish Gallup polls was 'the living conditions, knowledge, views, or actions of a population', as Palander described it in 1944.⁴² This was supported by the extensive list of 1940s Gallup polls supplied in *'Gallup' och den svenska väljarkåren*—the book that marked the start of academic opinion research in Sweden. 'Elections and political parties' accounted for 8 of its 145 pages, as did 'Religion, faith, and the church' and 'Defence and preparedness'.⁴³

While election predictions and party support polls were thus not Gallup's main function in Sweden, there were in fact election forecasts, which were published in advance of the national elections in 1944 and 1948 and the municipal election in Stockholm in 1946.⁴⁴ Compared to today's continuous polling of party sympathies, the scope was smaller with only two or three polls published before each of these three elections.

In a lengthy article about the successful election forecast of 1944, published in several Gallup-affiliated newspapers and later by the Swedish Gallup Institute as an offprint in two editions, Palander expressed his views on the purpose of such polls. He wrote that election predictions should be seen as something other than true

opinion polling. The reason was that they did not measure people's opinions, but rather the voting intentions of individuals considered likely to vote in an election. Therefore, groups less likely to vote, such as the working class, risked underrepresentation.⁴⁵ According to Palander, the point of election predictions was thus to create interest and public knowledge about opinion polling as such, rather than to measure public opinion.⁴⁶

Judging from the way election predictions were published, however, their main function seems to have been legitimizing rather than popularizing. This resembled the situation in the US, where the professional credibility of polling companies was built on the accuracy of their election predictions.⁴⁷ There were thus several Swedish examples of election predictions being published *after* the elections were finished, as a way of showing the accuracy of the Gallup method.⁴⁸ This left a somewhat contradictory impression of election forecasts as conceptually different to ordinary opinion polls, yet at the same time providing them with legitimacy. Hanging the legitimacy of polling on successful election forecasts like this worked well for the Swedish Gallup Institute when its predictions were accurate, as in 1944, but when they were off, as in 1948, it damaged the legitimacy of Gallup polls as a whole.

Knowing oneself, knowing others

Statistical descriptions of averages, publics, and social groups have functioned as medial attractions in several historical contexts. Lundgren has studied the twentieth-century statistical fiction of Medelsvensson, the average Swede. Popularized in caricatures, exhibitions, and competitions for the most average family, Medelsvensson became 'at once a fairground mirror, a morality play, and a source of self-reflection'.⁴⁹ The representations of social class in the Swedish press in the 1960s, where the lifestyle differences between the three 'social groups' were shown using polls and sociological research, also

functioned as ‘a form of civic self-knowledge and entertainment’ according to Smedberg.⁵⁰ Similarly, in 1950s France, young women were encouraged to see themselves and their relation to normality through an abundance of opinion polls and other *enquêtes* in *Elle* magazine.⁵¹ Swedish Gallup polls seem to have served a comparable purpose. The public could learn who they were from them, in relation both to the population as a whole and to specific groups.

Firstly, then, the Gallup polls naturally mediated the views and living conditions of the Swedish population at large. Expressions such as ‘the Swedish people’ (‘svenska folket’), ‘the public’ (‘allmänheten’), and ‘public opinion’ (‘den allmänna opinionen’) were repeatedly used to describe the people whose opinions the polls represented.⁵² With this mediation of the average Swede, the Gallup polls encouraged a sort of national and civic self-understanding. This—the role of the new survey technologies in making individuals understand themselves as part of a national mass public—is also the overarching theme of Sarah Igo’s book *The averaged American*. Using Benedict Anderson’s concept of the nation as an imagined community, she conceptualizes the mass public of these various surveys as a community that was not only imagined, but also statistical.⁵³ In the Swedish context, political notables such as Alva and Gunnar Myrdal argued that a central democratic task of opinion polling was to make the ordinary man recognize himself as an important part of public opinion.⁵⁴ For the Myrdals, it seems, this pedagogical use of opinion polling was a logical continuation of their ambitions in the 1930s, studied by Petter Tistedt to create what he calls ‘citizen audiences’.⁵⁵ The Myrdals’ enthusiasm for opinion polling seems to have added to the Swedish Gallup Institute’s credibility. Yet it is unclear how well the Swedish Gallup Institute lived up to the Myrdals’ ideal of polling as a democratic counterweight to lobby groups and commercialized newspapers, as it in practice was a commercial company working with precisely such lobby groups and newspapers.

Secondly, however, the Gallup polls did not only mediate the living conditions, knowledge, views, and actions of the Swedish population at large. Rather, categorization was inherent to the Gallup method per se, since the basis of quota sampling lies in the division of the population into mutually exclusive categories, which for the Swedish Gallup Institute were gender, age, marriage status, employment in the agricultural sector, and social class. When it came to age, the only categories were under 35 or over. When it came to social class, the three-tiered class taxonomy of Sweden's official statistics—its social groups—was used, but the institute's internal names for the categories were 'well-off', 'middle class', and 'workers' rather than the standard denominations I, II, and III.⁵⁶

When polls were published, the answers were thus often grouped by one or more of these categories. Readers of Gallup-affiliated newspapers could learn that only 27 per cent of workers' families thought their bread rations sufficient, compared to 60 per cent of the well-off ones, that pianos (but not violins, organs, or accordions) were more common in urban homes than rural ones, and that 5.1 per cent of women but only 2.4 per cent of men had read Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*.⁵⁷ From often entertaining mediations of the various societal groups, the Gallup poll audience were made familiar with economic, cultural, and political differences in Sweden. Thus, the mediation of society in these polls encouraged self-understanding, and not just as Swedes or members of the public—other statistical communities were also mediated.

While the social statistics and early survey research of the nineteenth century had often focused on groups deemed to be social problems such as criminals or the poor, the survey researchers of the twentieth century had instead fixed their gaze on normality.⁵⁸ So even though the various groups mediated in the Gallup polls were presented as distinct parts of society, it is important to note they were generally not singled out as social issues. With a few exceptions—most notably the youth survey of 1942⁵⁹—the object mediated through

the Gallup polls was instead the same public who were also the polls' intended readers. The Gallup polls showed this audience what they and others were like as men and women; as workers, middle class, and well-off; as city dwellers and countryfolk; and as Swedes in general. Finally, for the Myrdals, this self-reflectiveness was, at least in theory, a way of creating an audience who could understand themselves as part of a larger democratic public.

Visualizing society

Visualizations using illustrated graphs were an important part of the articles based on Gallup polls. Especially in the early years, these articles were generally centred on an illustrated graph showing the poll's most important result. The most common form of graphic visualization was a bar or pie chart with a photo or an illustration related to the subject of the poll as the background (Fig. 4.2 & 4.3). The graphs themselves could be illustrated too. In a poll about the standardization of bread, for example, the pie chart was made to look like a round of Swedish crispbread (Fig. 4.3). Often, photographs invited readers to identify with an everyday scene such as a woman buying bread (Fig. 4.3).

The visual appeal was even more evident in the caricatures or cartoon-style illustrations that accompanied many diagrams. Such illustrations were used to set a humorous tone, but, remarkably, they were not only used for polls with lighter themes, such as married men doing household chores (Fig. 4.4): more serious themes could also be illustrated like this, such as a poll on the perceived significance of the nuclear bomb, published the same week as the bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Fig. 4.5).

These cartoon-like illustrations were often an active part of the visual representation, whereas photographs primarily provided a backdrop to the charts. Drawings tended to exemplify respondents' positions in a caricatured way, with a closer correspondence to the



Figure 4.2. 'Do you believe that the vaccine against smallpox is an effective drug, or do you think that it is ineffective or too risky?' with the answers 'Effective drug', 'Not effective', 'Too risky', 'Other objections', and 'Don't know'. '7 percent av svenska folket anser vaccinering skadlig', *Vi* (4 Sept. 1943). © Vi Media AB.

various alternatives (Fig. 4.6), and drawn figures also tended to interact more with the graphs themselves, for example, by sitting or climbing on them (Fig. 4.6). The drawings by Uno Stallarholm for the Swedish Gallup Institute in 1945 and 1946 rate a special mention (Fig. 4.6). Stallarholm was well known for his book and newspaper illustrations. Readers encountering Gallup polls illustrated by him might have recognized his work for *Dagens Nyheter's* humorous section 'Namn och Nytt' as well as from his comic strip adaptation of the popular Viking adventure novel *Röde Orm* (*The Long Ships*)



Figure 4.3. 'Would you prefer fewer types of bread if that would keep prices low?' 'Konsumenten önskar standardisering av brödet', *Vi* (30 May 1942). © Vi Media AB.

published in several newspapers starting in 1942.⁶⁰ In his drawings, the graphs become especially caricaturesque, as politicians appear frequently. For example, in an illustration for a poll asking what people would do if they won 10,000 kronor, the alternative 'debts, taxes' was illustrated with a small man handing a large, shiny coin to the Minister of Finance Ernst Wigforss (Fig. 4.6).⁶¹

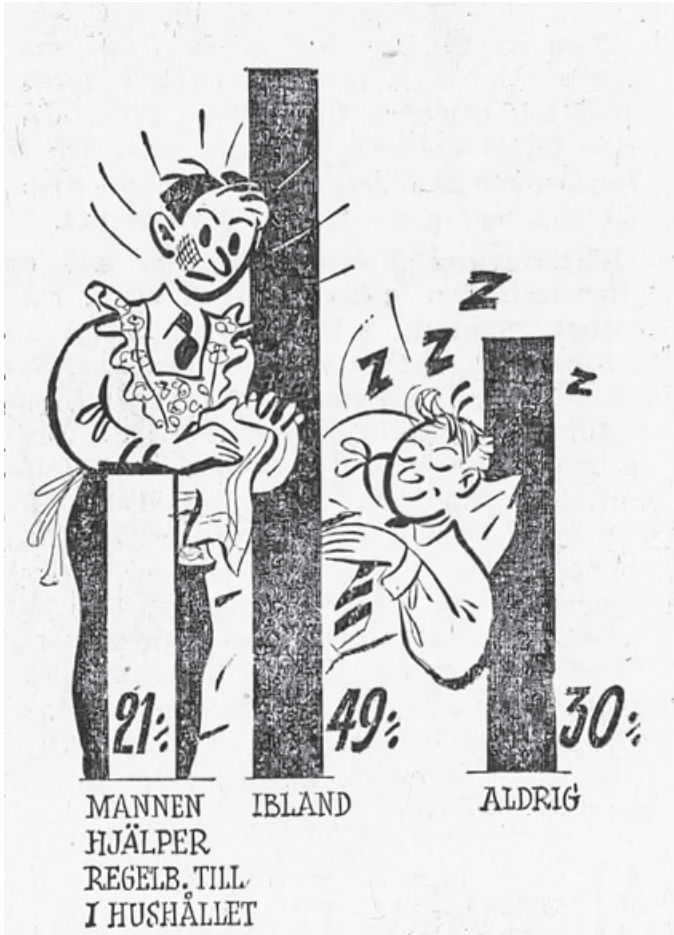


Figure 4.4. 'Does your husband (you) sometimes or regularly help with household chores?' with the answers 'Husband regularly helps around the home', 'Sometimes', and 'Never'. 'Var femte äkta man torkar disk ibland, var sjätte, säger eldande, städande fru', *Dagens Nyheter* (26 Feb. 1948). © AB Dagens Nyheter.

By these means of visualization, and perhaps in particular the more caricatured ones, the Gallup polls could be popularized as far removed from dry statistical science. By combining them with visual media, statistical survey tools were turned into eye-catching

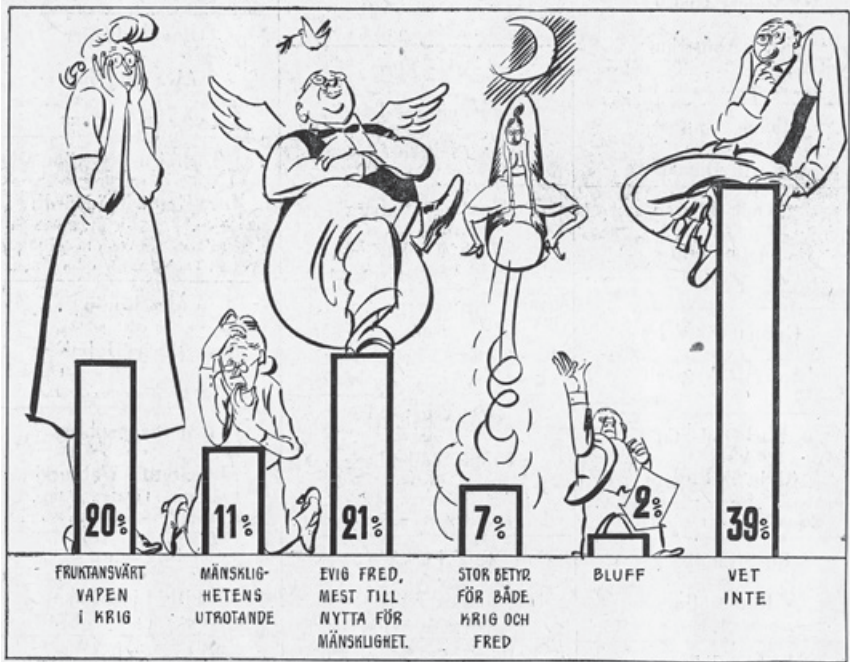


Figure 4.5. 'Do you have any thoughts about what the invention of the nuclear bomb might mean in the future?' with the answers 'Horrible weapon in war', 'The extermination of the human race', 'Eternal peace, to the benefit of the human race', 'Major significance for both war and peace', 'Hoax', and 'Don't know'. 'Vi och atombomben', *Dagens Nyheter* (12 Aug. 1945). © AB Dagens Nyheter.

attractions, blurring the distinction between opinion poll graphs and other visual media in the press, such as photographs or comics. The advert for *Vi* at the beginning of this chapter is more readily understood in light of this: a Gallup poll could be listed together with media such as comics and photographs since it operated in relation to such media and incorporated them into its own mediation of society.

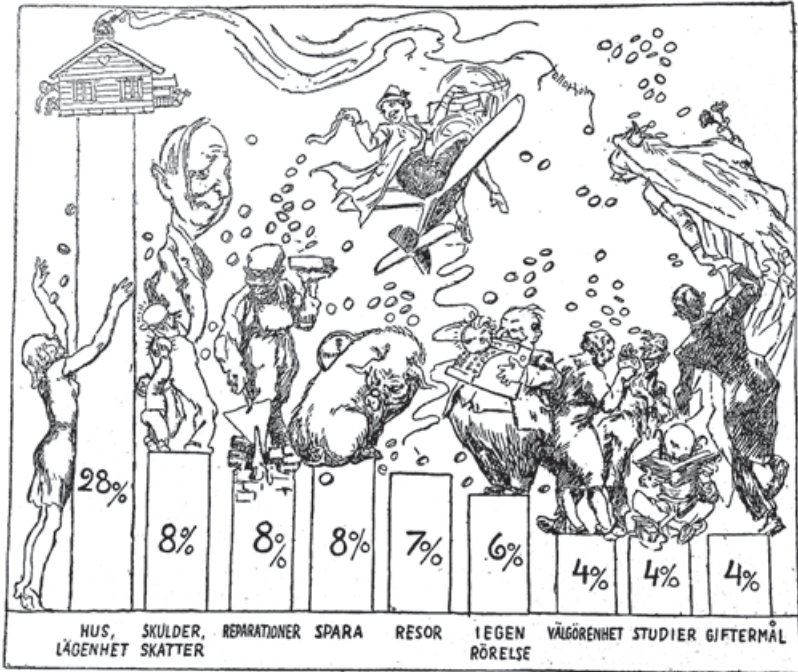


Figure 4.6. 'If you won 10,000 kronor in the lottery how would you primarily spend the money?' with the answers 'House, apartment', 'Debts, taxes', 'Renovations', 'Savings', 'Travel', 'Own venture', 'Philanthropy', 'Education', and 'Marriage'. 'Vad skulle ni göra om ni vunne 10,000 kronor', *Östgöta Correspondenten* (11 Oct. 1945). © Östgöta Correspondenten.

Qualitative comments

The Gallup polls' mediation was not all about quantification. One interesting practice that makes this clear was the inclusion of 'personal comments' from respondents. These were often placed at the end of the newspaper article, after the discussion of the poll's statistical results. One particularly detailed example was appended to a poll where married couples had been asked whether they would have more children if the government were to pay a monthly child benefit of 20 or 30 kronor. At the end, the article offered the reader a plethora of quotes from a wide range of people:

‘I would like to have five [children], and 30 kronor would be a great help for school’, says the wife of a corporal, who already is the mother of four children. And others think just like her. ‘30 kronor—in that case you could perhaps afford [having another child]’ (Female shop assistant). ‘Yes, then it would be easier to raise children’ (Wife of a farm worker with two children and an income of 1,500–2,000 kronor). ‘Yes, 30 kronor is an increase of 25 per cent in income’ (Farm labourer’s wife with two children). ‘One should not wait for better times—such a grant would mean a lot for many people’ (Wife of a lieutenant).⁶²

After additional positive quotes, the article then continued with four similar paragraphs with those who opposed to the benefit or thought it irrelevant.⁶³ This practice of including quotes seems to point to a more qualitative line in the mediation of society, resembling the function of the qualitative *enquêtes*—surveys on the opinions of a smaller group of people, often experts—that had preceded the Gallup polls.⁶⁴

In general, the respondents whose comments were reported were categorized by gender, age, occupation, and sometimes location (urban or rural) corresponding to the categories in the statistical presentations, apart from occupation, which appeared as three aggregated classes in the statistics, but as specific occupations in the personal comments. Yet how specific these characterizations were could vary, even in the same article. A poll on opinions regarding a ban on extremist meetings, for example, included comments from an ‘older caretaker’, a ‘female journalist’ and a ‘middle-aged repairman in a smaller town’.⁶⁵ Perhaps the combination of abstract statistical categories, as well as the breaking down of class categorizations into everyday occupations, served to make the anonymous respondents tangible to the readers. Their ordinariness was reinforced by the colloquialisms or even dialectal spelling of the comments.⁶⁶ It seems as if the presence of these qualitative comments allowed readers to

identify with the respondents, and thus with the Gallup material as such.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the Gallup poll, which was an essentially quantitative tool, was supplemented with more open-ended, qualitative questions. In his article on the early transnational history of opinion polling, Fulda writes that 'questions that do not force respondents to choose between pre-determined answers (mostly Yes, No, or Don't Know) ... were then hardly ever used by commercial opinion pollsters' because of their uselessness for statistical processing.⁶⁷ Similarly, Daniel Robinson describes a wartime poll commissioned in Canada as 'noteworthy' for including open-ended questions.⁶⁸ Swedish Gallup polling thus seems to have worked differently than it did in America. In Sweden, qualitative answers to more open questions were integrated in the Gallup polls' statistical mediation of society, despite the extra work and, thus, higher costs that it must have incurred. Perhaps the qualitative aspect was included because it would make the interrogated public more tangible to the reader, or perhaps it was simply entertaining to see the political opinions and habits of ageing caretakers, lieutenant's wives, and middle-aged repairmen.

Mediating Gallup polling

Not only the results of the polls were mediated in the press; the making of the polls received attention too. In the summer of 1942, when polling was new, Palander wrote two articles about polling methods and meanings, which were published in Gallup-subscribing newspapers and together as a separate brochure.⁶⁹ Written in dry, scientific language, they read like instruction manuals for how to read and understand polls.

Beyond Palanders scientific explanations, a few articles in *Vi* highlight the making of Gallup polls in a more entertaining way. In a 1943 article, with the headline 'Over 50,000 have been interviewed

by Gallup', its methods were showcased in a visual manner using six photographs. The first photo showed the meeting at the Stockholm office where the questions and interviews are being planned. Then readers accompany the interviewer, Britta Sjögren, on a polling tour. In a town square, she is shown talking to Asta Malmlov, 'exactly the middle-aged woman she is looking for.' In a kitchen, she speaks with Irma Schytte, 'an ambitious housewife' with a 'keen interest in the issues of the day.' On a countryside road, she interviews Carl Andersson, 'an honest old Swedish farm labourer' on a horse-drawn milk cart. At first he is suspicious, but when informed that 'it's Gallup who's out' polling he relents and contemplates the suitability of a post-war continuation of the coalition government. In the penultimate photo, Sjögren is shown interviewing Rikard Sandler, county governor of Gävleborg and former minister for foreign affairs, who is of the opinion that the tobacco ration is insufficient. The sixth and final photo shows Palander, who is said to be responsible for the final examination of the results, after the answers have been turned into numbers by the institute's statistical department.⁷⁰

Another article two months later concerned the adventures of a Gallup pollster, but this time in writing. In an anecdote-filled account similar to the photographic article, an interviewer going by the name of Håge described her work with a 'motley crew of different types'—self-centred, grumbling, suspicious, insecure, and indifferent—in various settings. In the countryside, where she trudged between scattered farms through the snow, she visited both the poor dwellings of farm labourers—'the nicest people you could interview'—and the smart manor houses of their employers. In the city, the task of finding interviewees was easier, although identifying people of the correct classes and ages to fill the selection quotas could prove hard.⁷¹

The polls' statistical mediation of society was not taken for granted, but rather the public had to be taught what a Gallup poll was and how to interpret it. The visual, anecdotal portrayals of the Gallup pollsters' work also suggest that there was a novelty to the polls and a

fascination with their mediation as such. Such articles showcased the production of the polls as being of interest to a wider public, rather than just an instrumental activity for the quantification of public opinion. Depictions of the making of Gallup polls also offered an image of them as a complete mediation of society. The diversity of the interviewees was a constant motif, with photographs and anecdotes of labourers, county governors, housewives, shoemakers, and professors. Beyond pointing to the broad spectrum of interviewees, including the audience in the mediated public, it also situates the making of the polls in society—much like the use of personal comments at the end of newspaper articles about polls. Highlighting how interviewers worked and how real people answered questions—recounted in words rather than numbers—points to a more qualitative aspect to the Gallup polls, making their mediation something more than an abstract, instrumental quantification of society.

Conclusion

As Igo notes, survey research in the mid twentieth century did not just provide summaries of data; rather it ‘encouraged new ways of seeing, perceiving and imagining.’⁷² In Sweden, the new ways of seeing provided by the Gallup poll was intertwined with pre-existing media in various ways. The most overarching intermedial entanglement was with the press, as Gallup polls were employed as interesting material—that is, to entertain—in magazines and newspapers. To that end, polls were coupled with visual media such as photographs, cartoons, or caricatures which were already being used in the press. Furthermore, the representative and quantitative mediations of society that were presented as emblematic for the Gallup poll were complemented by qualitative ones, such as ‘personal comments’, reminiscent of the *enquêtes* of previous decades, and the mediations of the polling process itself.

In this intermedial context, Gallup polls thus became something more than a tool for the quantification of popular opinion. They were a statistical attraction that by using other media offered nothing less than a new way of seeing oneself and others. Showcasing specific methods or individuals such as Tord Palander, these ways of seeing could be legitimized as at least partly scientific, and thus made more convincing. Further, the polls' function as a form of popular sociology also points to an interesting dynamic in the spread of scientific knowledge. In 1942, Palander argued that scientific criticism of Gallup polls was misdirected:

Complaints have often been made, from many sides, that the possibilities for practical sociological investigations are still so limited in Sweden. In this situation, I see it as commendable that the interest of the press in the type of investigations carried out by the Gallup institute is great enough to finance them. This can eventually generate such a widespread interest in sociological questions that purely scientific sociology might also benefit from it. And methods that so far have hardly been used in our country could be made subject to tests and further experiments, which may even be beneficial to other sociological research endeavours.⁷³

Palander's vision of popular sociology leading to the development of scientific sociology complicates the model of dissemination common to historical accounts of science. There is a parallel here with a study by Solveig Jülich of X-ray images as an attraction at the turn of the last century, in which she complicates the classic narrative of the dissemination of scientific knowledge by showing the blurriness of the boundaries between the production and communication of radiological knowledge, as well as between X-ray images as entertainment and as learning.⁷⁴ Something similar was true of Gallup polls. Firstly, they were often legitimized as scientific at the same time as they functioned as a statistical attraction in the press. Secondly,

Palander seems to have been partially right about how commercial Gallup polls could advance quantitative methods in social science: in 1946 the political science department at Stockholm University started studying Gallup polls, which ultimately led to the Swedish National Election Studies Programme at the University of Gothenburg.⁷⁵ Thus, data collected to entertain newspaper readers ended up giving a new direction to Swedish political science.⁷⁶ The boundaries between the Gallup poll as a statistical attraction and as a scientific method were never clearly demarcated. Unlike dissemination, a model by which scientifically produced facts are popularized for a large audience, I would argue that—in the Swedish context at least—survey research by means of representative sampling can be characterized as a popular entertainment technology that was eventually made scientific by the scholarly community.

Notes

- 1 *Dagens Nyheter* (27 Dec. 1944), 14. Arnberg 2019 studies the ways in which Swedish newspapers marketed their advertising space to companies with arguments based on the composition of their readership. Here, however, data on readership was used to market the magazine to the readers themselves.
- 2 *Dagens Nyheter* (27 Dec. 1944), 14.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Palander 1942, the second of two lengthy articles explaining the methods and purposes in the Gallup polls, both published in all subscribing papers. Svenska Gallupinstitutet itself also published these articles in brochure form.
- 5 Bourdieu 1979. In the same vein, Lewis 2001 has argued that opinion polls are best seen as cultural representations that construct public opinion, and that this works in the political elite's favour by excluding progressive views.
- 6 Media history in Sweden since 2000 has often focused on materially tangible *mediations*, not the *representations* that have often been studied in other forms of cultural historical research, see Cronqvist et al. 2014, 16–17. The concept of mediation should not be confused with that of mediatization (Hjarvard 2008), which generally denotes a process by which the logic of (mass) media as an institution increasingly permeates other social institutions.
- 7 The emphasising of mediation as what media *do* and the prioritising of investigating *how* the media mediate is inspired by Nilsson 2020, 29–30.
- 8 Carey 2009, 20.

- 9 See, for example, Petersson & Holmberg 1998, 103–10. One exception is Kulenberg 2012 on the history of quantitative surveys in Swedish academia since the 1950s.
- 10 Smedberg 2021.
- 11 The most extensive studies are on American polling, see Herbst 1993; Igo 2007; Converse 1987, ch. 3–4. For France and the UK, see Cowans 2002; Coffin 2011; Beers 2006. For a transnational perspective, see Fulda 2011.
- 12 Ekström 2008; Lundgren 2006.
- 13 Ekström 2008. According to Smedberg 2021, 102–106 statistical representations of class, among them Gallup polls, constituted a similar ‘medial interactive attraction’ in the mid twentieth century.
- 14 ‘Kristendomens plats på schemat’, *Vi* (12 Aug. 1944); ‘Simkunnigheten god bland män dålig bland kvinnor’, *Vi* (26 Sept. 1942); ‘Varannan vuxen svensk har budget’, *Vi* (10 Apr. 1943).
- 15 *Vi* has been read in full and *Dagens Nyheter* has been accessed digitally, using the search thread ‘gallup*’. Material from other newspapers has been sourced from the newspaper clippings archive at Sigtunastiftelsen.
- 16 Fulda 2011.
- 17 Herbst 1993, ch. 4.
- 18 See Fulda 2011, 14–18; Igo 2007, 103–104.
- 19 Igo 2007, 118–26. However, groups who were disenfranchised or thought less likely to vote such as women and African Americans were consistently under-represented in these polls, despite Gallup’s claim to represent the voice of the people, see Robinson 1999, ch. 2.
- 20 Alva Myrdal alone (1941) and with her husband Gunnar (Myrdal & Myrdal 1941) published such ideas in the spring of 1941, while the first Swedish Gallup polls were published at the end of December the same year.
- 21 Kloppenborg Madsen 2016, 425.
- 22 Hultgren 1990, 11–13, a semi-autobiographical book, was one of two published about how Svenska Gallupinstitutet worked in the 1940s, the other being Kaiser 2002 on his career in Swedish market research.
- 23 Hultgren 1990, 26–8. There were some internationally coordinated polls published, see, for example, ‘Världshegemonien till USA, tror Gallup’, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning* (28 July 1945).
- 24 Hultgren 1990, 11–12. The Gallup name was not used in the same way outside Scandinavia, where polling institutes modelled their name on the AIPO instead, with examples such as the British Institute of Public Opinion or the Institut Français d’Opinion Publique (Fulda 2011, 19–20).
- 25 Robinson 1999; see also Coffin 2011.
- 26 *Dagens Nyheter* had worked its way into the lead among the Stockholm papers in the interwar period. *Vi*, the cooperative movement’s weekly, was the Swedish magazine with the highest circulation at the time. Lundström et al. 2001, 153.
- 27 Palander 1942.

- 28 The subscribing newspapers were *Dagens Nyheter*, *Göteborgs Handels- och Sjöfartstidning*, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet Snällposten*, *Engelholms Tidning*, *Jönköpings-Posten*, *Hallands Nyheter*, *Borås Tidning*, *Bohusposten*, *Vestmanland Läns Tidning*, *Gefle Dagblad*, *Falu-Kuriren*, *Ljusnan*, and *Västerbottens-Kuriren*. Publications associated with the labour movement, such as *Vi* and *Arbetet*, had cancelled their subscriptions by this time. See 'Opinionsundersökningar' 1950, 213.
- 29 The archives of Svenska Gallupinstitutet only have press releases from September 1946 to September 1947. From a comparison with corresponding articles in *Dagens Nyheter*, it seems as if the most frequent edits were changes in the heading of the article or the removal of a paragraph. Compare, for example, Svensk Nationell Datatjänst (Swedish National Data Service), Gothenburg (SND), Specialsamlingar Gallup 1942–1956 (Gallup), 1946–1947, 'Uppfostran med stryk i mer än vartannat hem', 3 Oct. 1946 with its published counterpart, 'Gallup om barn och agä', *Dagens Nyheter* (3 Oct. 1946).
- 30 SND, Gallup, Frågeformulär U:001-U:100 Questionnaire, April 1943. For articles based on this questionnaire, see, for example, 'Dans mest helgstörande', *Dagens Nyheter* (13 May 1943); 'Greer Garson och Edvin Adolphson årets främsta filmfavoriter', *Vi* (12 June 1943).
- 31 Hultgren 1990, 15.
- 32 Ibid. 28–35. It is likely that there were close ties between Svenska Gallupinstitutet and what Stenlås 1998, ch. 7 calls 'the inner circle' of the Swedish business elite, since Sven O. Blomquist's uncle, Ragnar Blomquist—who had invested money in Svenska Gallupinstitutet—was the founder of Garantistiftelsen, an organization for channelling funds from big business into the non-socialist opposition parties (Hultgren 1990, 14, 36; Westerberg 2020, ch. 3).
- 33 Herbst 1993, 109–11.
- 34 Several Swedish papers mentioned the American Gallup 'fiasco', for example, 'Gallupfiaskot', *Stockholms-tidningen* (5 Nov. 1948).
- 35 Hultgren 1990, 36–8; Kaiser 2002, 15–18. It was replaced as the leading opinion polling institute in Sweden by Svenska institutet för opinionsundersökningar (SIFO, the Swedish Institute for Opinion Surveys), founded in 1954 by Sten Hultgren.
- 36 SND, Gallup, Register A-K 1955, Göran Åkerhielm circular, 17 Dec. 1955.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 *Dagens Nyheter* (28 May 1942). The same advert was published at least once more on 28 July of the same year.
- 39 Kar de Mumma (pseudonym of Erik Harald Zetterström), 'Gallupintervjuarens mardröm', *Svenska Dagbladet* (12 Sept. 1943).
- 40 'På vill ge skydd åt nazistledare', *Dagens Nyheter* (9 Sept. 1943).
- 41 Hultgren 1990, 15 attributes this to the fact that in the Second World War, Sweden was ruled by a coalition government of all the parties in Parliament except the Communists, thus making questions of party support less relevant.

- However, even after 1945, voting intention polls were uncommon, even in politically turbulent times.
- 42 Palander 1944, 3, an offprint of an article Palander published on 23 November 1944 in several Gallup-affiliated newspapers.
 - 43 'Opinionsundersökningar' 1950.
 - 44 See, for example, 'Gallup om utsikterna vid valet', *Dagens Nyheter* (30 Aug. 1944); 'Gallupprognos för höstval', *Dagens Nyheter* (19 June 1946); 'Ny frammarsch för folkpartiet', *Dagens Nyheter* (14 Sept. 1948).
 - 45 Palander 1944, 5–9. Robinson 1999 shows American Gallup polls consistently underrepresented those judged less likely to vote since election predictions were used as measure of polling companies' professional credibility—a methodological shortcoming unknown to Canadian critics of the Gallup poll, but familiar to Svenska Gallupinstitutet and published publicly by them. Thus it is possible they could avoid it.
 - 46 Palander 1944, 5.
 - 47 Robinson 1999, 62–3.
 - 48 See, for example, 'Andra valprognosen', *Dagens Nyheter* (13 Sept. 1944); Seved Apelqvist, 'Korta kommentarer', *Vi* (7 Oct. 1944). In one instance, an article lists the great accuracy of recent election forecasts in seven different countries, see 'Gallupmetoden gav rätt utslag vid politiska val i sju länder', *Dagens Nyheter* (3 Nov. 1945).
 - 49 Lundgren 2020, 231–40.
 - 50 Smedberg 2021, 104–105.
 - 51 Coffin 2011.
 - 52 See, for example, 'Fredsslut i kristen anda önskar folkets majoritet', *Vi* (9 Dec. 1944); 'Gjöres okänd för de flesta', *Dagens Nyheter* (28 Jan. 1943); 'Gallup om beredskapen', *Dagens Nyheter* (4 Nov. 1943).
 - 53 Igo 2007, 21. In a revised edition not used by Igo, Anderson 2006, 164–70 notes the role of statistics in imagining communities and how the use of quantifications was essential in the colonial governance that 'gave real social life' to imagined ethno-racial classifications in nineteenth-century Southeast Asia.
 - 54 Myrdal & Myrdal 1941, 81.
 - 55 Tistedt 2013, 66–75.
 - 56 Palander 1942. Sweden's three-tiered class division originated in the election statistics of the early 1900s. Smedberg 2022 suggests this class taxonomy worked as a 'difference technology'—a way of categorizing, mapping, and studying populations—in various twentieth-century contexts, among them opinion polling.
 - 57 'Värst för skåning att dra åt svångremmen', *Vi* (28 Mar. 1942); 'Pianot populärast', *Vi* (6 June 1942); 'Högonkonjunktur för politiska böcker', *Vi* (29 Apr. 1944).
 - 58 Igo 2007, 25–9. For a Swedish example of social statistics on criminals in the nineteenth century, see Lundgren 2003, ch. 3.

- 59 The 'youth survey' was a survey on a wide range of issues that Svenska Gallupinstitutet conducted for *Vi* in 1942 among young people aged 16–20 and their parents. In *Vi*, the results were published in three articles—Anna-Lisa Kälvesten, 'Blott 5 proc. Av stadsungdomen träffas på kafé om vintern', *Vi* (18 July 1942); ead., 'Mer hemmadans än fröjd på krog', *Vi* (25 July 1942); ead., 'Många unga bor gratis hemma', *Vi* (1 Aug. 1942)—to contribute to the ongoing youth debate by nuancing accepted notions of youth problems.
- 60 Sandström 1967, 239–40.
- 61 The right-wing press and business leaders of the time pilloried Wigforss as a symbol of the socialization of the economy and excessive taxation, see Westerberg 2020, 78–9, 91–2, 103.
- 62 '20 kronor i månaden från staten—flera barn', *Vi* (1 May 1943).
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 See Harvard 2013.
- 65 '58 procent önskar mötesförbud för ytterlighetspartier', *Vi* (7 Aug. 1943).
- 66 See, for example, 'Något borde di ju ha...', *Vi* (18 Sept. 1943).
- 67 Fulda 2011, 26.
- 68 Robinson 1999, 107.
- 69 For the two articles, see Tord Palander, 'Gallupundersökningarnas innebörd och metoder', *Vi* (27 June 1942); id., 'Hur arbetar svenska Gallup' (27 June 1942). For the separately published brochure, see Palander 1942.
- 70 'Över 50.000 har intervjuats av Gallup', *Vi* (3 July 1943).
- 71 Håge, 'Att vara gallupintervjuare', *Vi* (4 Sept. 1943).
- 72 Igo 2007, 18.
- 73 Palander 1942, 32.
- 74 Jülich 2004, 36.
- 75 Holmberg 2010, 375.
- 76 For examples of how these political scientists used Gallup data, see Håstad 1950, an edited volume reporting the Stockholm University project, and especially Westerståhl 1950, who four years later founded the Swedish National Election Studies Programme, noted for its use of a wide array of Gallup polls.

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