



2014/15

VA Barometer 2014/15 – VA Report 2014:4

ISSN: 1653-6843

ISBN: 978-91-85585-74-8

Published by: Vetenskap & Allmänhet, VA

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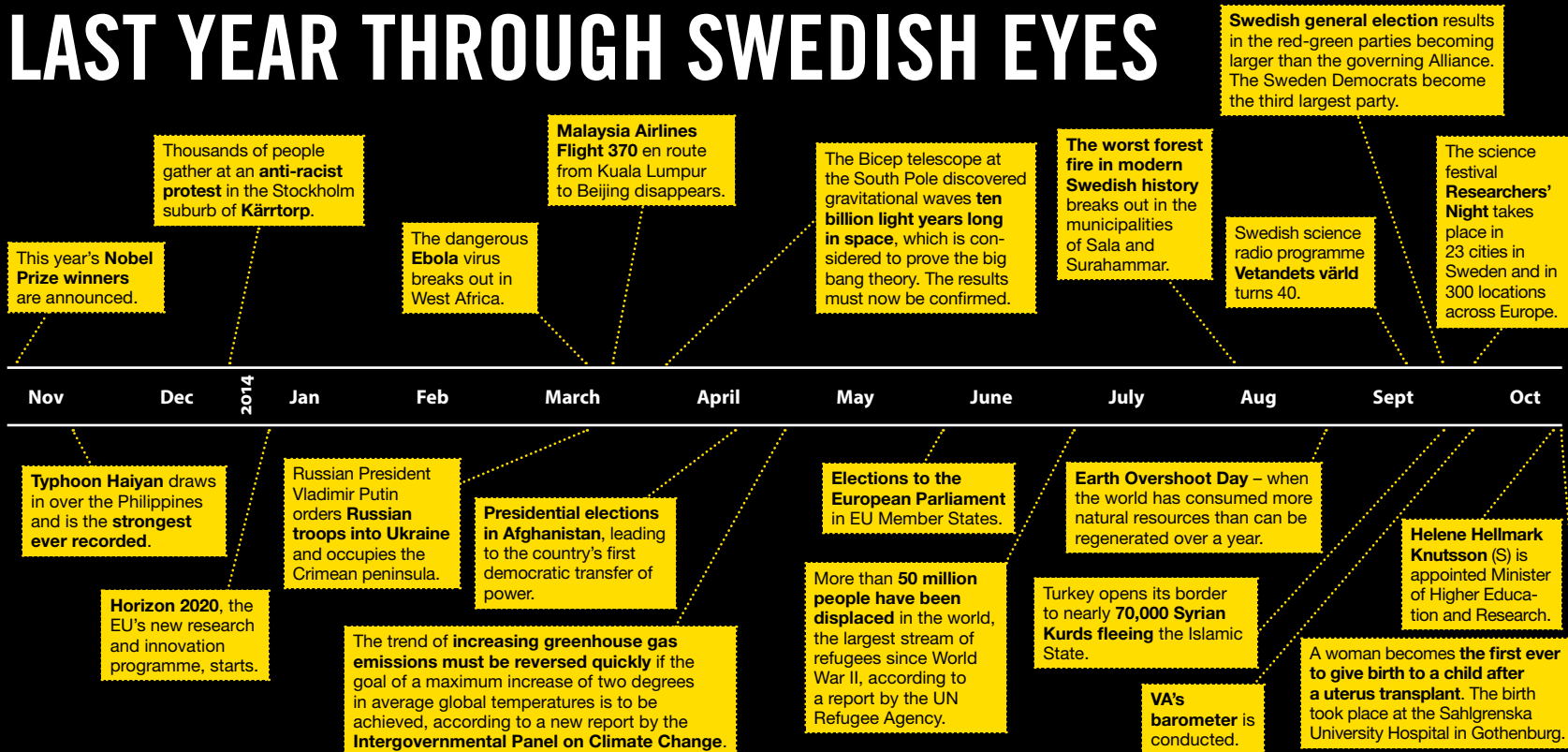
RESEARCH ENGAGES SWEDES

Here are some of the results of this year's VA barometer:

- Confidence in researchers falls
- The public are keen to be involved in the research process
- Increased uncertainty about science's contribution to society
- Strong support for public investment in research into learning methods and nanotechnology

The VA barometer is based on around 1,000 telephone interviews with a representative sample of the Swedish population aged 16–74. The interviews were carried out by market research company Exquiro between 22 September and 5 October 2014. The questions can be found on VA's website: www.v-a.se. It is VA's 13th barometer survey since the organisation was founded in 2002.

LAST YEAR THROUGH SWEDISH EYES

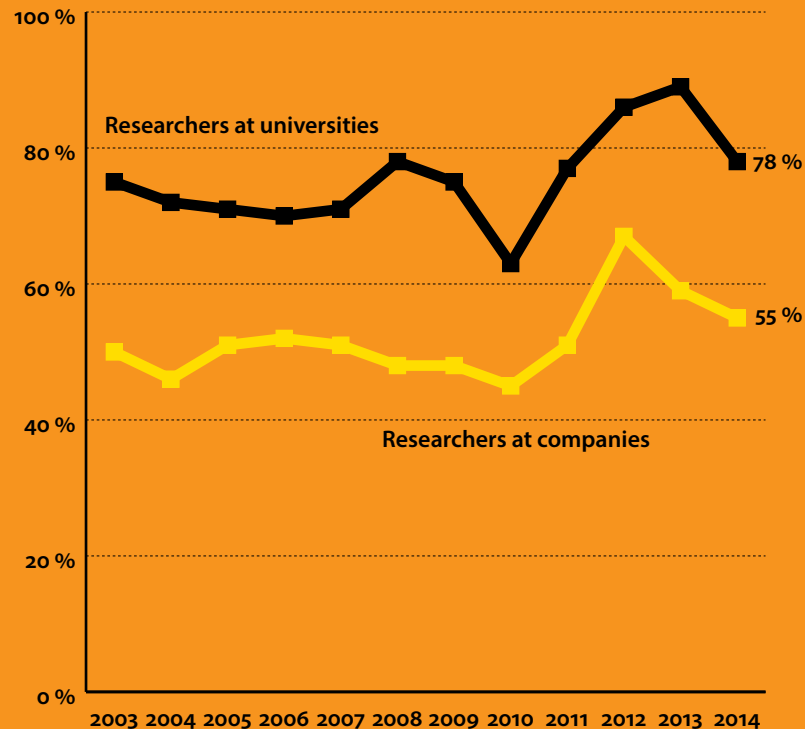


CONFIDENCE IN RESEARCHERS FALLS

For the last few years, confidence in researchers has been very high. This year, we see a decrease in confidence, both for university researchers and company researchers. However, the percentage that express uncertainty rises from 5 percent last year to 14 percent this year. For company researchers, the percentage of those that are uncertain increases from 10 to 15 percent. The decrease in confidence is greater among men than women: 92 percent of men reported last year that they had a fairly or very high confidence in university researchers, compared with 76 per cent this year. The percentage of men who are unsure has increased from 3 to 16 percent; for company researchers the percentage is 17 percent compared with 8 percent last year.

*The graph shows the percentage of respondents who have a **fairly or very high** confidence in researchers (four-point scale: Very high, Fairly high, Fairly low, Very low. Prior to 2013 the scale was: Very high, High, Low, Very low, None).*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,007



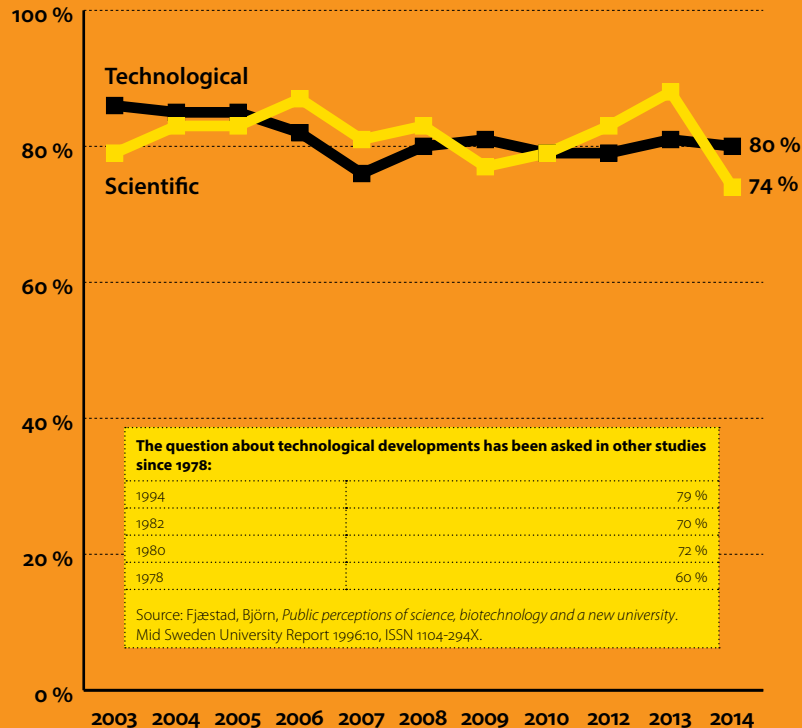
CONTINUING BELIEF IN TECHNOLOGY

Confidence in technological developments remains stable: eight out of ten believe that technological developments have made life better for ordinary people. On the other hand, people's belief that scientific developments have improved our lives has dropped from 88 to 74 percent. The percentage of people that are uncertain has increased overall (from 5 to 11 percent) and among men (from 2 to 19 percent). The greatest decline in confidence is among men and retired people.

A possible context effect (the response is affected by preceding questions) cannot be excluded, as some preceding questions had been removed this year.

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

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 500 (SCIENTIFIC) 507 (TECHNOLOGICAL)



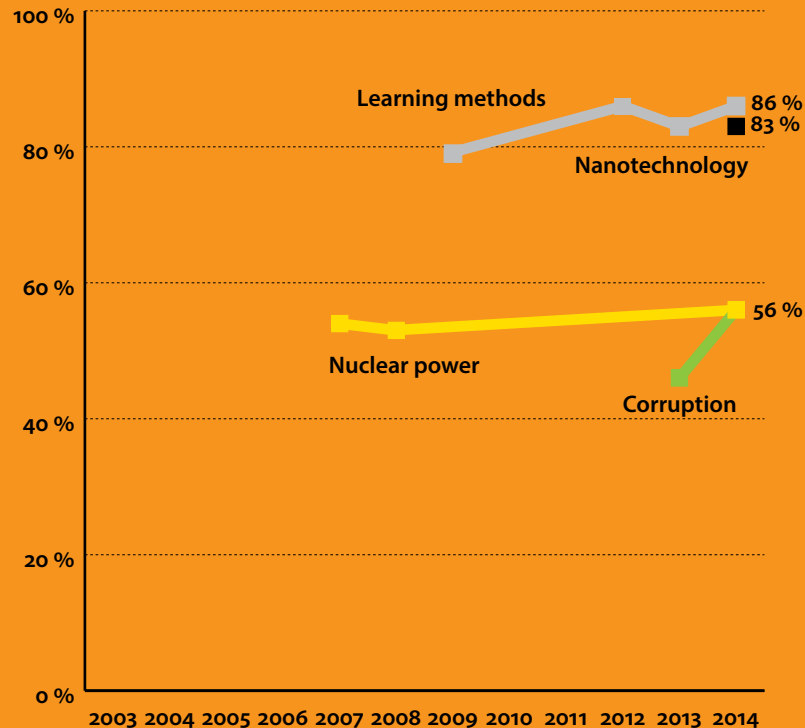
YES TO RESEARCH ON LEARNING

Support for investing public money in research into learning methods to improve pupils' performance in school remains strong. The majority consider it to be *very important* to invest in this type of research. The same applies for a question, new for this year, on attitudes to nanotechnology, when used for the development of new medical therapies.

Swedes' willingness to invest public money in research into nuclear power, for example to develop it as an energy source, is stable and comparable to previous years. Support for research to combat corruption has increased from last year, when the question was asked for the first time.

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

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,007



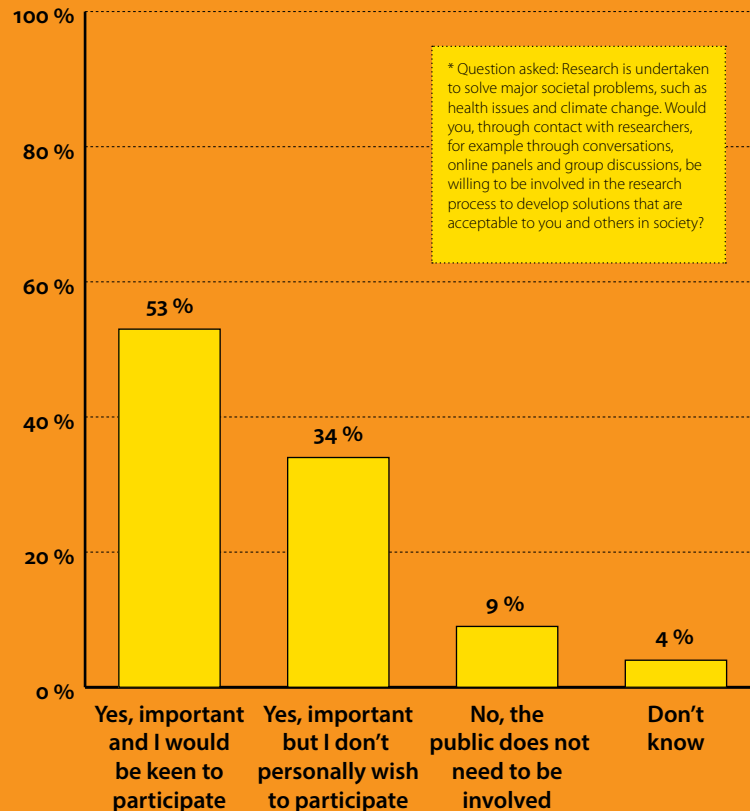
INVOLVE US IN RESEARCH!

One in two Swedes would like to be involved in the research process to develop solutions to major societal problems. The higher a person's level of education, the more keen they are to be involved. Only one in ten believe that the public does not need to be involved.

In a European study on responsible research and innovation, RRI (Special Eurobarometer 401, Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), Science and Technology, November 2013), seven out of ten Swedes thought that citizens should be consulted or play an active role in decisions about science and technology, compared to, on average, just over half of all Europeans.

*The graph shows the percentage, who think it is **important to involve the public in the research process** or who **don't think the public should be involved in the research process**, as well as whether they **themselves wish to participate** or if they **do not know**.**

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,007



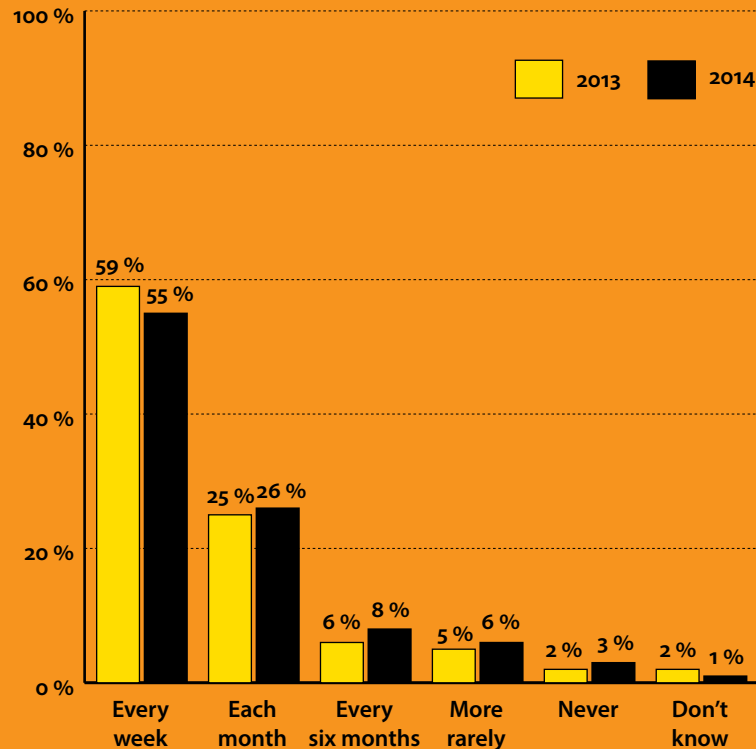
RESEARCH NEWS ON A WEEKLY BASIS

For most Swedes, the media is their main source of news about research. The majority access news about research every week. A quarter do this at least once a month. The elderly (60–74 years) and the highly educated are the ones who, more often than the average person, access research news on a weekly basis. People who work in research are the most prolific consumers of research news.

In a European comparison, the Swedes are the Europeans with the most interest in developments in science and technology and the second most well informed about them (Special Eurobarometer 401, Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI), Science and Technology, November 2013).

The graph shows how often respondents usually find out about research via news on the radio, television, internet news sites or in newspapers.

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,007



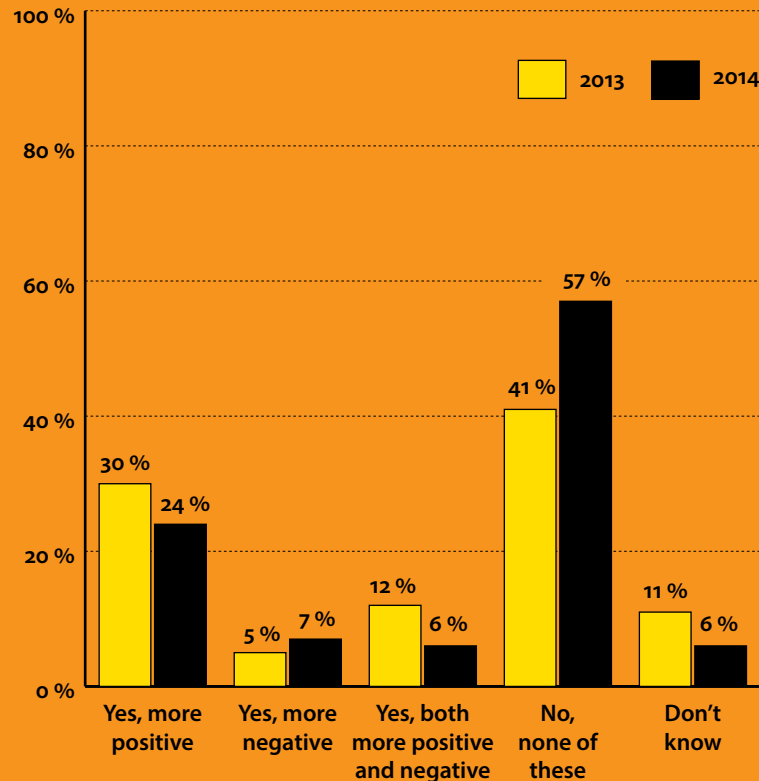
THE IMPACT OF MEDIA COVERAGE

Confidence in research can easily be shaken and influenced by external events. As the media is a key source of information, we asked whether people's attitudes towards scientists and research have been influenced by something they have seen or heard in the media during the past month.

Among those whose opinion has changed, it is the highly educated, those working with research and people aged 45–59, who are *positively* influenced by research news more often than others. No group is particularly *negatively* influenced. One in four Swedes say their attitude was influenced in a positive way. This year a larger percentage than last year said they were not influenced by news about research.

*The graph shows the percentage of respondents, who have a **more positive** and/or **more negative** or **unchanged** attitude towards scientists and research as a result of something they saw or heard in the media during the past month.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,007



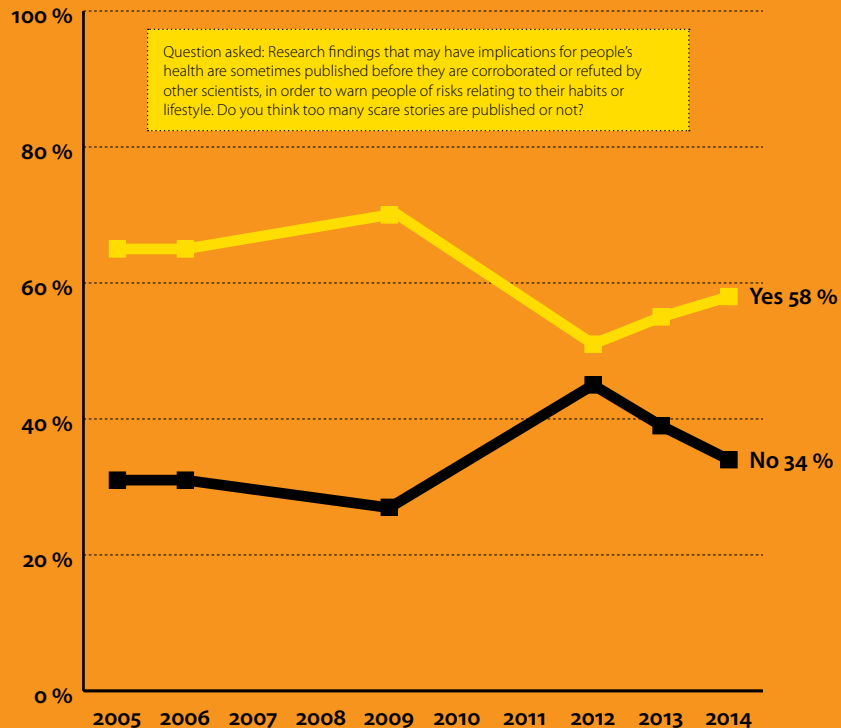
SWEDES TIRED OF SCARE STORIES

Nearly six in ten Swedes think too many scare stories are published. Every year we have asked the question, the percentage is above 50 percent.

To examine the extent to which the term *scare story* affects the results, half the sample were asked the same question using just the word *stories*. This change actually seems to make the question more difficult to answer, as 16 percent instead of 8 percent responded 'Don't know'. The percentage that feel that too many stories are published was 52 percent, compared with 58 percent for scare stories.

*The graph shows the percentage that answer **yes** or **no** to the question whether too many scare stories are published (the percentage of Don't knows is not shown).*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 500 (507 WERE ASKED THE SAME QUESTION USING JUST THE WORD 'STORIES')



SUPPORT FOR NEW DATABASES ...

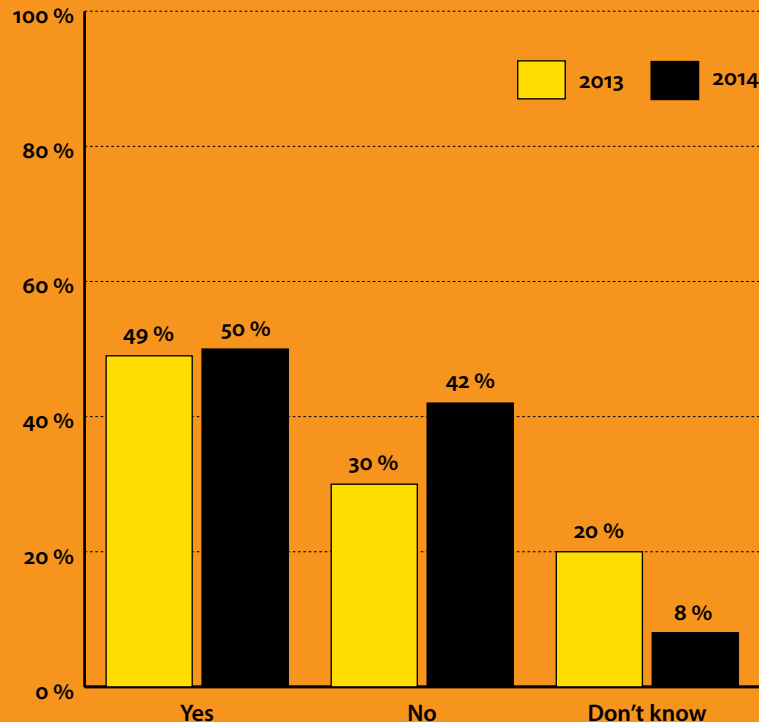
Swedes are generally very positive towards register-based research. In June 2014, a government inquiry into register-based research was published. Integrity issues, vital to avoid damaging public confidence in research, were highlighted in the directives.

This year we asked two questions about register-based research on attitudes to building up new databases and to combining data from databases. The questions are presented here and on the following spread.

Half are in favour of building new databases; younger people are more positive than older people. However, a higher percentage than last year say no to building new databases.

*The graph shows the percentage responding **yes**, **no** or **don't know** to the question of whether researchers should be allowed to build new databases on, for example, people's illnesses or family circumstances.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,007



... AND OK TO COMBINE DATA

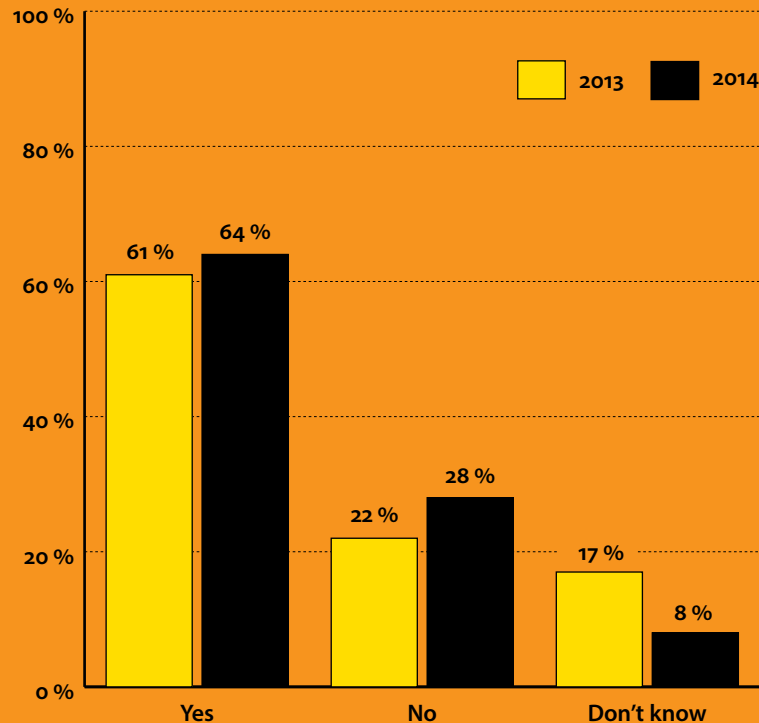
Two-thirds of respondents believe that researchers should be able to look for connections by combining data from different databases.

For both of the questions on register-based research, it is the younger age groups who are the most positive (16–29-year-olds for the building of new databases and 30–44-year-olds for merging databases), and they are even more positive than those who work in research. The age group 45–59 are the most negative.

The percentage that is unsure of the value of register-based research decreases from around a fifth last year to less than a tenth this year.

*The graph shows the percentage responding **yes**, **no** or **don't know** to the question of whether researchers should be allowed to combine data about people from various databases to examine connections.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,007



NOTES ABOUT THE SURVEY

The VA barometer has been conducted annually since 2002. This year we have, for the first time, weighted the results in order to better reflect the level of education in Sweden. We know from previous studies, for example through our participation in the annual SOM-Institute surveys at the University of Gothenburg, that education level is an important factor when it comes to confidence in research: the higher a person's level of education, the higher their confidence.

In recent years, the percentage of highly educated respondents has gradually increased in our data. In previous years, when we checked the results, this overrepresentation only caused a deviation of one or two percentage points.

However, this year, for the first time, the overrepresentation of

highly educated respondents significantly affects the results to several questions. These include the question about confidence in researchers (p. 6–7) and the question about whether scientific developments have made life better or worse for ordinary people (p. 8–9). Unweighted results would give confidence figures of 84 percent for researchers at universities, and 60 percent for researchers at companies (compared with 78 and 55 percent, respectively). Confidence in the value of scientific developments would be 79 percent instead of 74 percent.

We will continue to follow developments closely in our upcoming surveys.

VA (Public & Science) promotes dialogue and openness between researchers and the public, especially young people. The organisation works to create new and engaging forms of dialogue about research. VA is also developing new knowledge on the relationship between research and society through surveys and studies. Its members consist of 81 organisations, authorities, companies and associations. In addition, it has a number of individual members.



Vetenskap & Allmänhet

Read more at www.v-a.se