



**2020/21**

# CONFIDENCE & CORONA IN FOCUS

## VA Barometer 2020/21 – VA Report 2020:4

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More information about the survey can be found at [www.v-a.se](http://www.v-a.se)

You are welcome to quote from this report provided that VA is cited as the source.

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

- Most Swedes think science and technology make life better.
- Strengthened confidence in research and researchers.
- The researcher profession attracts both young and old.
- The majority of Swedes think that research is taken into account to a reasonable extent in the handling of the coronavirus.

The VA Barometer 2020/2021 is based on 1,018 telephone interviews with a representative sample of the Swedish population aged 16–74. It is the 19th Barometer survey since VA was founded in 2002.

Read more about the survey on page 30.

# LAST YEAR THROUGH SWEDISH EYES

**Paolo Macchiarini**, a former researcher at Karolinska Institutet, is sentenced to prison in Italy for abusing his position as a doctor. The ruling was not related to his controversial trachea operations in Sweden.

The **first two cases of corona infections in Europe** are reported in France.

Chinese researchers identify the new virus as a type of **coronavirus**.

Large corona outbreak in **northern Italy**.

**Brexit** – Britain leaves the EU. The withdrawal has been postponed several times since the referendum in 2016.

The WHO classifies the new coronavirus outbreak as a **pandemic**.

**Public gatherings** of more than 500 people are banned in Sweden.

**22 researchers** publish a debate article publicly criticising Sweden's corona strategy in the Swedish newspaper DN.

Swedish prosecutors close the **Olof Palme murder inquiry**, naming Stig Engström as the probable killer.

Global coronavirus death toll hits **800,000**.

The WHO announces that **polio** has been eradicated in Africa.

Oct      Nov      Dec      2020      Jan      Feb      March      April      May      June      July      Aug      Sept

China informs the World Health Organisation (WHO) about an **unknown virus** that causes respiratory illness, which spread through the city of Wuhan in China in December.

The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) announces that the last decade was the **warmest ever** recorded and that 2019 was the second warmest year.

The **first confirmed case of corona in Sweden**. A woman in her 20s who has been in Wuhan is isolated at a hospital in Jönköping.

Global corona death toll passes **100,000**.

Britain's Prime Minister **Boris Johnson** is taken to hospital suffering from Covid-19.

Swedish **death toll** passes **5,000**.

DNA genealogy research leads to the perpetrator of a 2004 **double murder in Linköping** in 2004 being identified and arrested.


**Forest fires** ravage Australia. The fires cover an area equivalent to almost half of Sweden. The World Wildlife Fund for Nature (WWF) estimates that the fires have killed three billion animals.

The **first Covid-19 death in Sweden**.

Swedish government recommends upper secondary schools, adult education and higher education institutions switch to **remote learning**.

George Floyd is killed by police in Minneapolis, USA, leading to **Black Lives Matter** demonstrations in over 450 locations around the USA and globally.

Extensive protests in **Belarus** after Alexander Lukashenko claims victory in the presidential election.

 Pandemic-related events

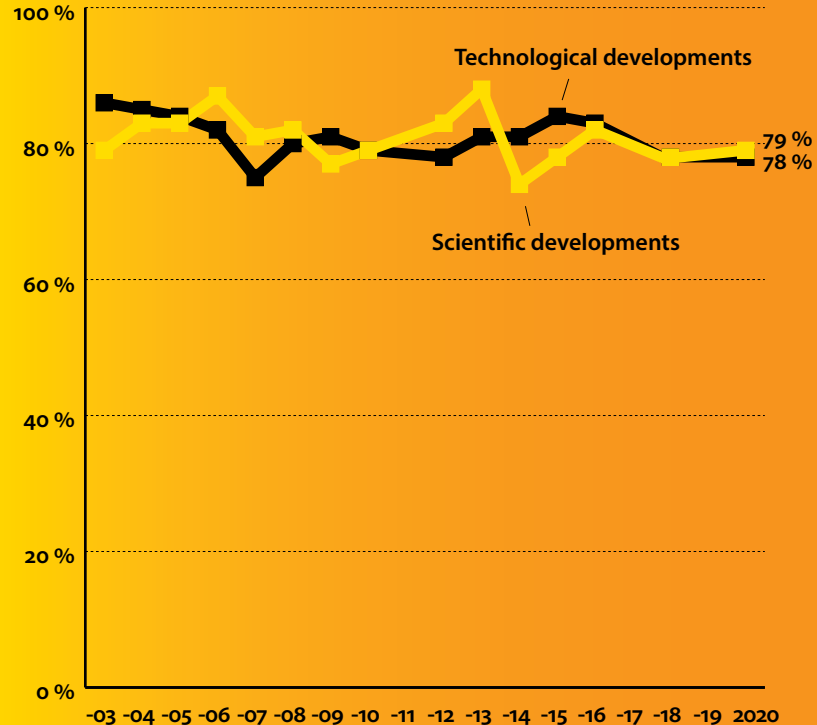
# SCIENCE MAKES LIFE BETTER ...

Eight out of ten Swedes think that scientific and technological developments have made life *a lot* or *somewhat better* in the last 10–20 years. People under the age of 45 think that scientific developments have made life better to a greater extent than people over 60.

A larger proportion of women than men believe that scientific developments have made life better (83 and 75 percent, respectively). At the same time, more men than women think that scientific developments have made life worse (9 and 3 percent, respectively). Regarding technological developments, no differences are seen between men and women or between different age groups.

*The graph shows the proportion that responded a lot better or somewhat better to the question of whether scientific and technological developments in the last 10–20 years have made life better or worse for ordinary people. Comparison between years 2003–10, 2012–16, 2018 and 2020.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS 2020: 512 (SCIENTIFIC) 506 (TECHNOLOGICAL)



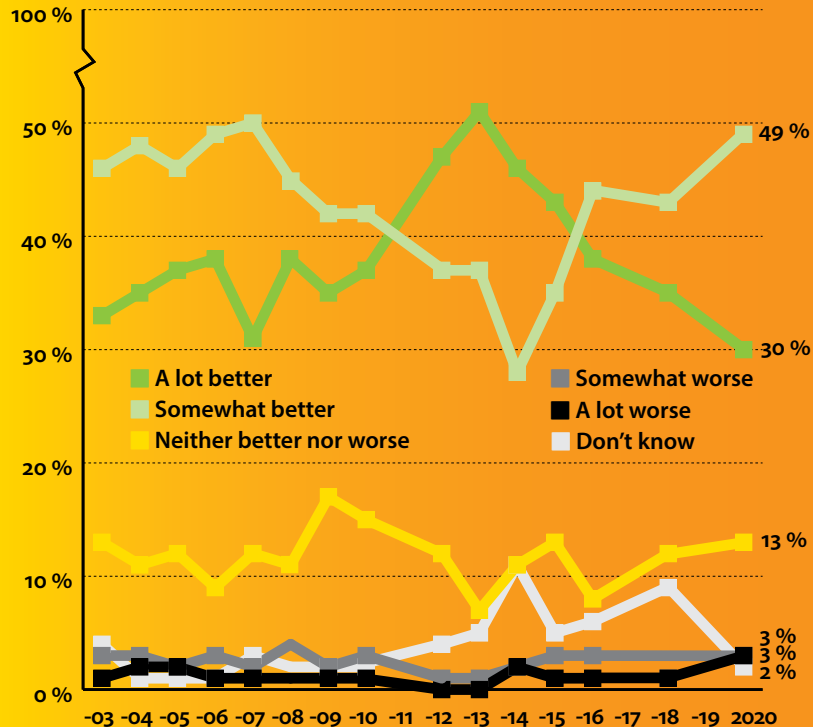
# ... BUT THE PICTURE HAS CHANGED

Although the proportion of Swedes who think that scientific developments have made life better remains unchanged, the distribution between the alternatives *a lot better* or *somewhat better* has changed over time. In recent years, a smaller proportion say *a lot better* while the proportion saying *somewhat better* has increased. This change is seen among both women and men, and is particularly evident among people aged 60 or older.

Also when it comes to technological developments, there is a growing proportion responding *somewhat better* and fewer who respond *a lot better*.

*The graph shows the proportion that responded to the question on whether scientific and technological developments in the last 10–20 years have made life better or worse for ordinary people. Comparison between years 2003–2010, 2012–2016, 2018 and 2020.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS 2020: 512



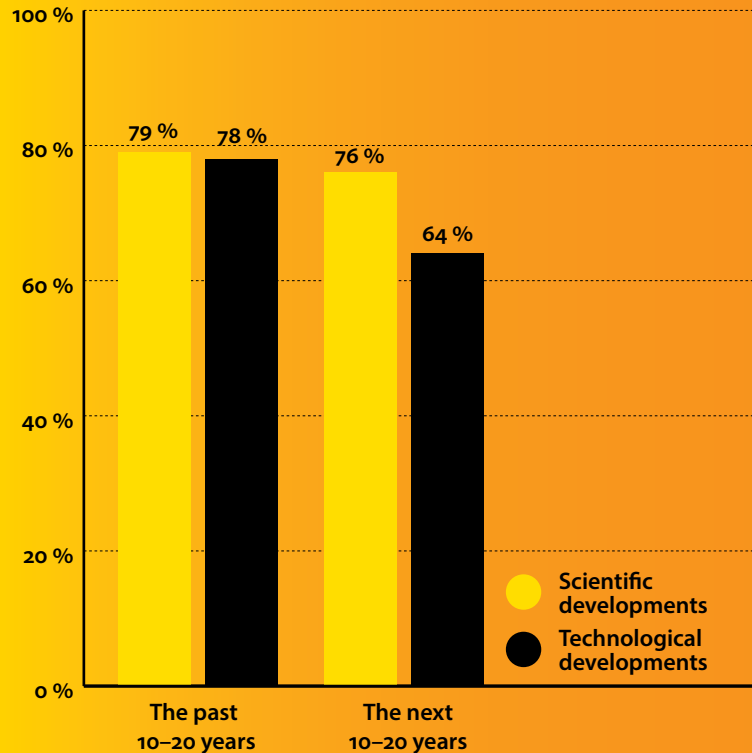
# MORE CAUTIOUS ABOUT THE FUTURE

Opinions about how technological and scientific developments will affect us *in the future* differ. There is greater optimism for scientific developments, with three out of four Swedes (76 percent) believing that they will make our lives *a lot or somewhat better*. The corresponding proportion for technological developments is 64 percent.

Those with a university education have greater confidence in science than technology when it comes to their ability to make life better in the future. Among people without a university education, confidence in the future is about the same for both science and technology.

*The graph shows the proportions that believe **scientific and developments in the last 10–20 years, and in the next 10–20 years, respectively, have made/will make life a lot or somewhat better for ordinary people.***

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 512 (SCIENTIFIC) 506 (TECHNOLOGICAL)



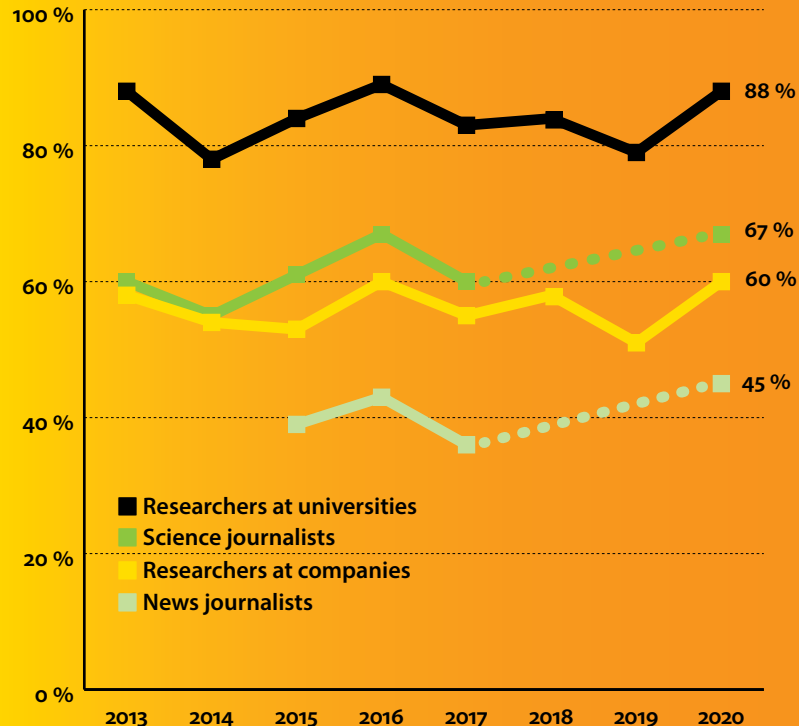
# HIGH CONFIDENCE IN RESEARCHERS ...

Confidence in researchers has increased. Nearly nine out of ten (88 percent) of Swedes have a *fairly* or *very high* level of confidence in researchers at universities, an increase of nine percentage points since 2019. Six out of ten (60 percent) have a *fairly* or *very high* level of confidence in researchers at companies, also an increase of nine percentage points.

Two out of three Swedes (67 percent) have a *fairly* or *very high* level of confidence in science journalists, and just under half (45 percent) have similar confidence in news journalists.

*The graph shows the proportion that has a **fairly** or **very high** confidence in researchers at universities, researchers at companies, science journalists and news journalists. Comparison between years 2013–2020 (four-point scale: Very high, Fairly high, Fairly low, Very low.)*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS 2020: 1,018

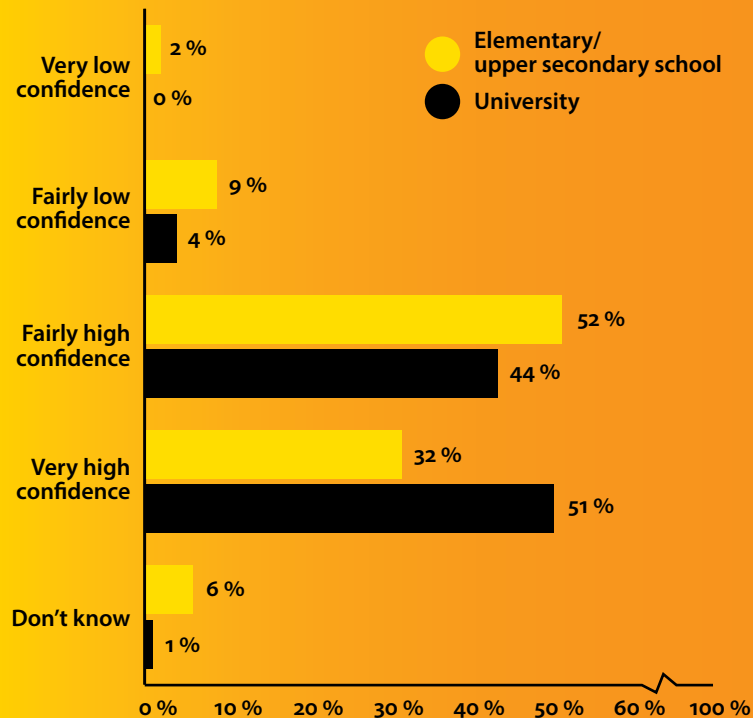


# ... ESPECIALLY AMONG HIGHLY EDUCATED

Among Swedes with a university education, one in two (51 percent) have *very high* confidence in researchers at universities. The corresponding proportion among people without a university education is one in three (32 percent). In this group, there are instead higher proportions that have *fairly high* and *fairly low* confidence, as well as a larger proportion that responds *don't know*.

*The graph shows responses to the question **what level of confidence do you have in researchers at universities**, divided into people with a university education and those with an elementary or upper secondary education as their highest level of completed education.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 444 (ELEMENTARY/UPPER SECONDARY) 572 (UNIVERSITY)





# DOES THE PANDEMIC AFFECT CONFIDENCE?

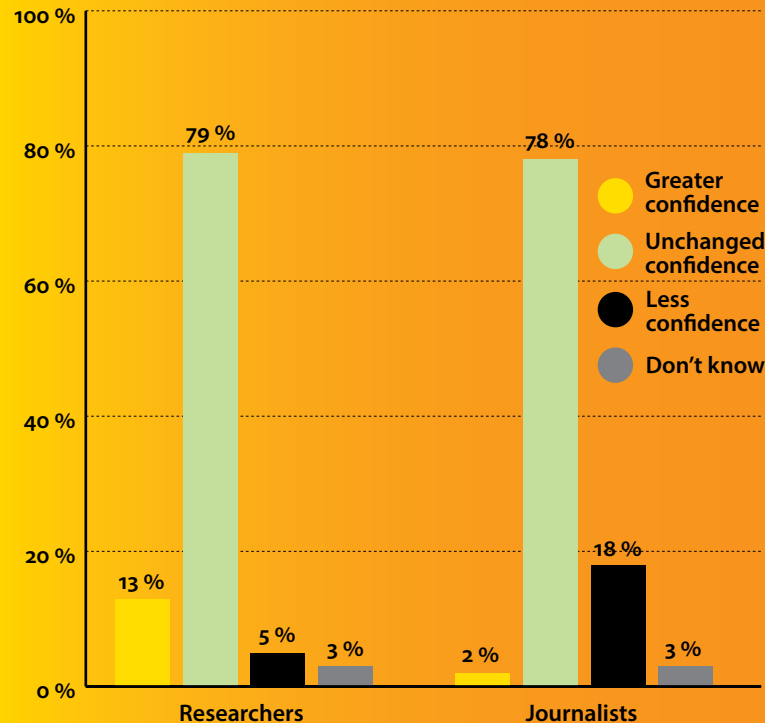
Eight out of ten Swedes say that the corona pandemic has not affected their confidence in researchers. The proportion is the same when it comes to journalists. One in eight (13 percent) say that they have gained greater confidence in researchers during the pandemic, something only one in fifty (two percent) say they have in journalists.

One in five people (18 percent) have experienced less confidence in journalists during the pandemic. Only one in twenty (five percent) say that they have less confidence in researchers.

Among people born outside Sweden, there is a smaller proportion that have unchanged confidence and a larger proportion that have reduced confidence, both for researchers and journalists, compared with people born in Sweden.

*The graph shows responses to the questions **Has the corona pandemic affected your confidence in researchers and journalists, respectively?***

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,018



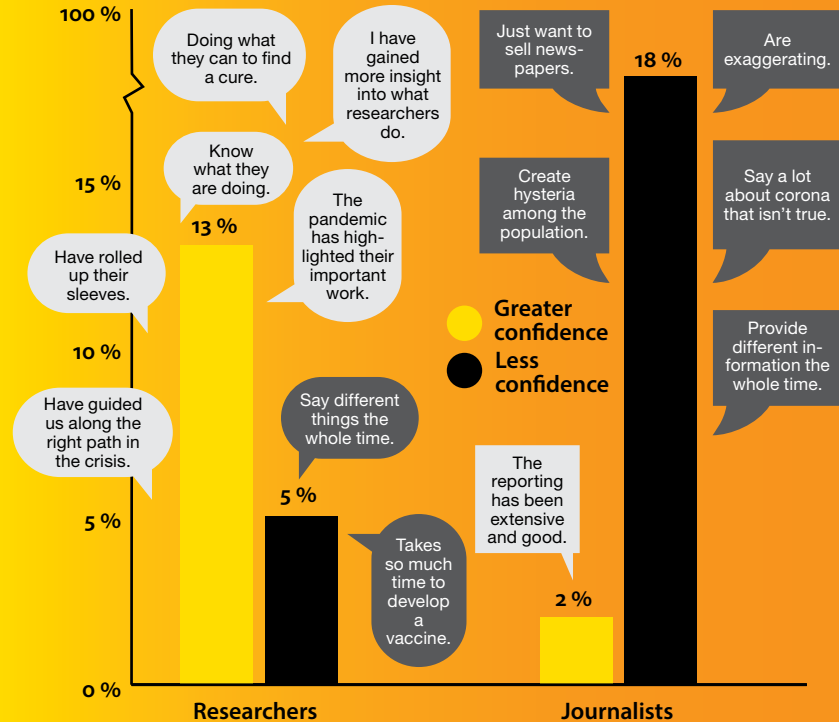
# WHAT AFFECTS CONFIDENCE?

Those whose confidence in researchers has increased during the pandemic often justify it by saying that researchers are competent, committed and crucial to finding a *future vaccine*. Also that researchers are *more visible than before* and that they have gained a *greater insight into researchers' work*. Among those who have lost confidence, common reasons include that researchers provide *different information or contradict each other*, and that they are *inefficient/slow*.

The most common reasons for a decrease in confidence in journalists are that they *exaggerate, scare, publish incorrect information* and *act for their own benefit*. Swedes who instead have gained greater confidence in journalists believe that the reporting in general has been *trustworthy and good*.

*Common responses to the question What is the main reason why your confidence has increased/decreased?*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 120 (RESEARCHERS GREATER CONFIDENCE), 41 (RESEARCHERS LESS CONFIDENCE), 18 (JOURNALISTS GREATER CONFIDENCE), 162 (JOURNALISTS LESS CONFIDENCE)



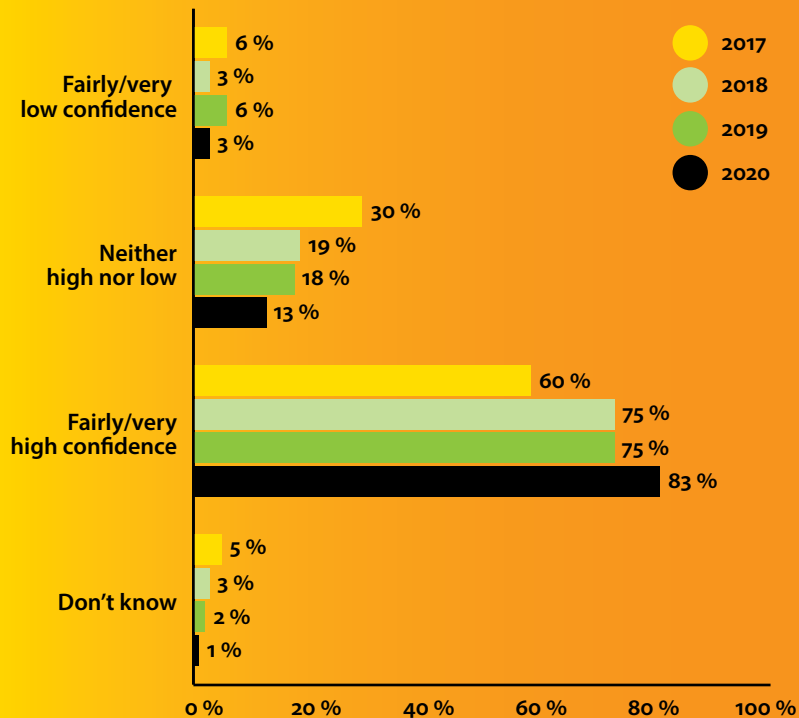
# HIGHER CONFIDENCE IN RESEARCH

83 percent of Swedes have *fairly* or *very high* confidence in research, which is the highest result since the question was first asked three years ago. Compared with 2019, there are fewer who have *fairly* or *very low* confidence and who have *neither high nor low confidence*.

Higher confidence in research is seen among those with a university education compared with people who do not have a university education and among those living in large cities and suburban municipalities compared with people in other parts of the country.

*The graph shows responses to the question **Generally speaking, how much confidence do you have in research?** Comparison between years 2017–2020.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,021 (2017) 1,052 (2018) 1,021 (2019) 1,018 (2020)



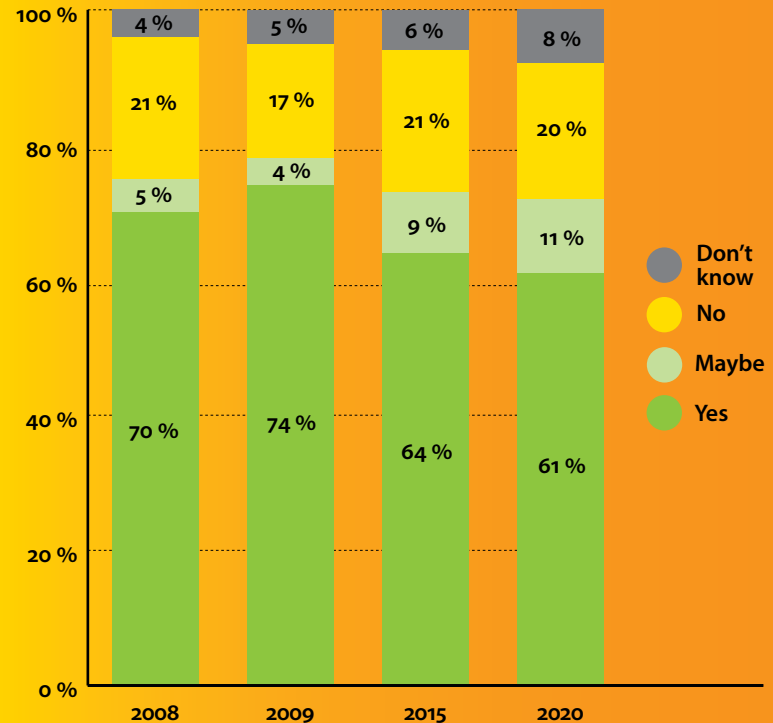
# A RESEARCH CAREER IS RECOMMENDED!

Six out of ten Swedes (61 percent) would recommend someone they know to become a researcher. Among people with a university education, 70 percent would recommend someone to become a researcher. The corresponding proportion among people without a university education is 55 percent.

It is more likely that Swedes would recommend someone to become a researcher if they themselves have a family member, relative or close friend who is a researcher. Among these, eight out of ten (78 percent) would recommend someone to become a researcher, compared with just over half (54 percent) of those who do not have anyone close to them who works in research.

*The graph shows responses to the question **Would you recommend someone you know to become a researcher?** Comparison between years 2008, 2009, 2015 and 2020.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,017 (2008) 1,000 (2009) 1,011 (2015) 1,018 (2020)



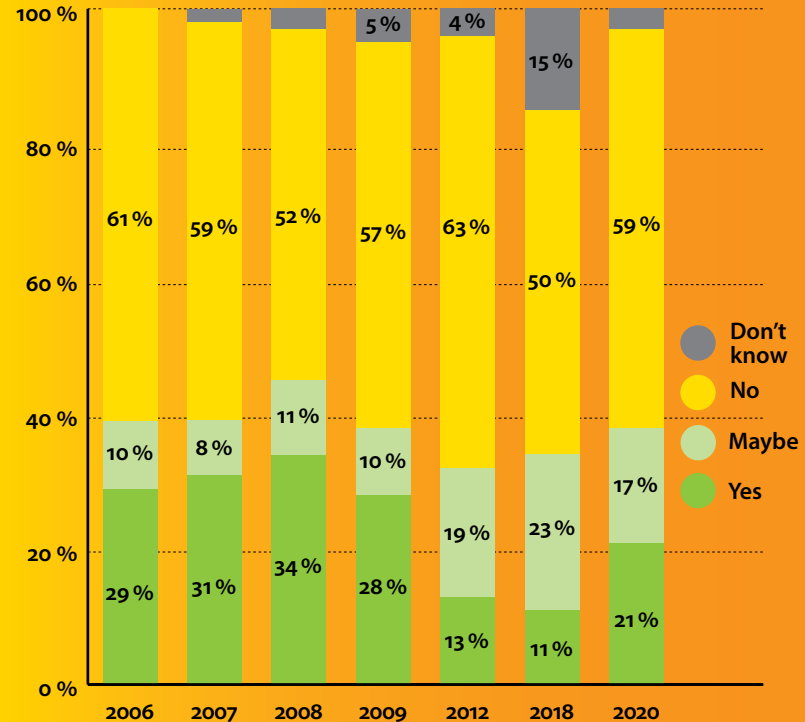
# BE A RESEARCHER IN THE FUTURE?

One in five people aged 16–29 would like to work as a researcher in the future. This is almost twice as large a proportion as when the question was asked in 2018. Six out of ten (59 percent) answer *no* to the question of whether they would want to work as a researcher in the future, which is not a statistically significant difference compared with 2018. However, the proportion saying *don't know* has decreased from 15 to 3 percent.

Among young people living in smaller cities and rural municipalities, 77 percent answer *no* to the question of whether they would like to work as a researcher in the future. The corresponding proportion in large cities and suburban municipalities is 54 percent.

*The graph shows responses to the question **Would you want to work as a researcher in the future?** asked to people aged between 16 and 29. Comparison between years 2006–2009, 2012, 2018 and 2020.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 232 (2006) 216 (2007) 208 (2008) 226 (2009) 248 (2012) 269 (2018) 258 (2020)



# OLDER PEOPLE WANT TO RESEARCH TOO

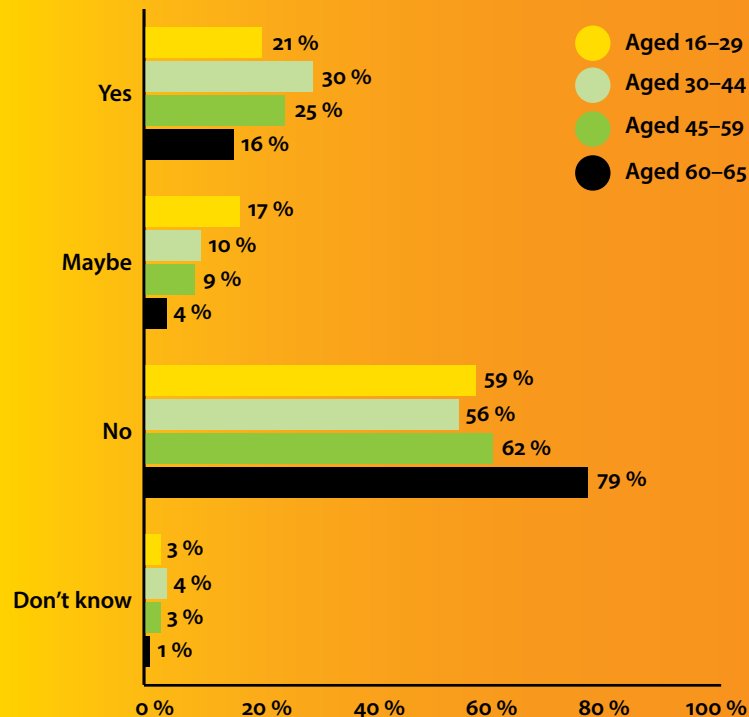
In previous surveys, the question of whether you want to work as a researcher in the future has only been asked to people aged between 16 and 29 years. This year, the question was also asked to older participants, aged up to 65.

Interest in working as a researcher in the future does not differ significantly between different age groups. The highest proportion that answer *yes* is in the group aged 30–44 (30 percent) and the lowest proportion is in the group aged 60–65 (16 percent).

People who have a family member, relative or close friend who works in research answer *yes* to a greater degree than people who don't (36 compared with 21 percent).

*The graph shows responses to the question **Would you want to work as a researcher in the future?** asked to people aged between 16 and 65, divided into four age categories.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 258 (AGED 16–29) 264 (AGED 30–44) 265 (AGED 45–59) 108 (AGED 60–65)



# RESEARCH AND POLITICAL DECISIONS

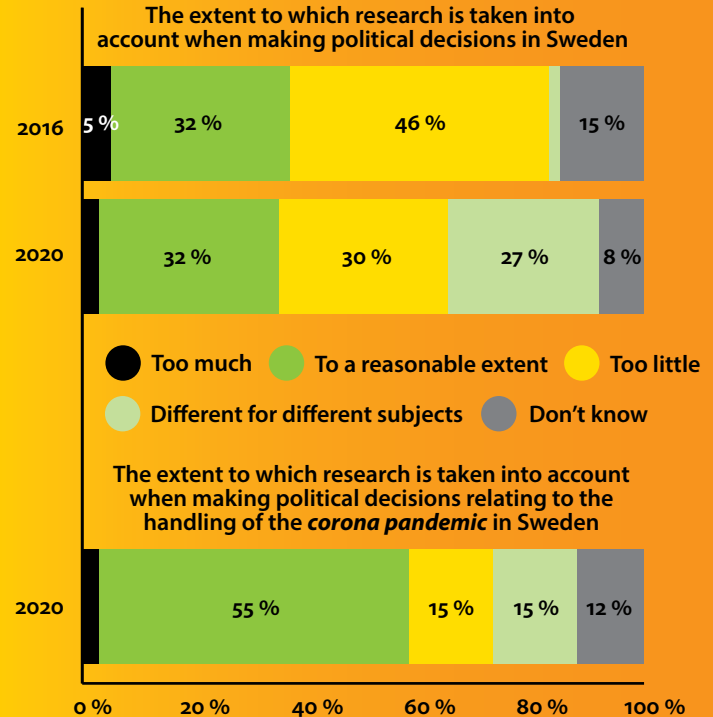
One third (32 percent) of Swedes think that research is taken into account *to a reasonable extent* when political decisions are made in Sweden, and almost as many (30 percent) believe that it is taken *too little* into account. Compared with 2016, a smaller proportion think that research is taken *too little* into account today.

When it comes to political decisions in the handling of the corona pandemic in Sweden, a majority (55 percent) believe that research is taken into account *to a reasonable extent*.

*The graph shows responses to the question Overall, to what extent do you think that research is taken into account when political decisions are made in Sweden, plus when political decisions are made regarding the handling of the corona pandemic in Sweden?*

*Comparison between years 2016 and 2020.*

NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS: 1,023 (2016) 512 (2020 DECISIONS IN GENERAL)  
506 (2020 DECISIONS AROUND THE HANDLING OF CORONA)



# ABOUT THE SURVEY

The VA Barometer has been conducted annually since 2002. The survey is conducted via telephone interviews with a stratified random sample of the Swedish population, around 1,000 people (this year 1,018), aged between 16 to 74 years old. The response rate in this year's survey was 44 percent. Respondents are representative in terms of gender, age and place of residence. The results have been weighted retrospectively since 2014 (2013 for confidence in researchers) to ensure representativeness in terms of level of education. Only statistically significant comparisons between the response groups are published.

Interviews are conducted annually after the summer and are completed before the yearly announcement of the Nobel Prize winners due to media attention surrounding the Nobel Prize. For this year's survey, the field period ran from 24 August to 1 October 2020.

Exquiro Market Research has carried out the interviews since 2012. A reference group with expertise in survey methodology helps to formulate the questions. The interview questions can be downloaded at [www.v-a.se](http://www.v-a.se).



**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 some 100 organisations, authorities, companies and associations. In addition, it has a number of individual members.



Vetenskap & Allmänhet

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