Ideology or psychology?

A comparison of the news media framing of the crimes of Anton Lundin Pettersson and Rakhmat Akilov

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Abstract

In October 2015 and April 2017, Sweden was hit by two of the most notorious deadly attacks in modern history. The first was directed towards people of immigrant backgrounds at a school in Trollhättan, the second took place in Stockholm, where a truck drove straight through the crowded pedestrian street of Drottninggatan. In this thesis, frame analysis is used to study how four major Swedish newspapers (Aftonbladet, Expressen, Dagens Nyheter and Göteborgs-Posten) portray the acts of the assailants Anton Lundin Pettersson (N = 89) and Rakhmat Akilov (N = 173), respectively and comparatively. Previous research suggests a disparity in the framing of “international” (i.e. Islamist) and “domestic” (e.g. right-wing) extremists, where the former are typically politicized and treated as part of a larger terrorist threat while the latter are described as mentally ill lunatics with individual motives. This thesis partly enforces this, by showing how Lundin Pettersson’s actions are psychologized to a larger extent than Akilov’s, which are rather put in a standard terrorism frame, as a symbol of “the terrorists”’ war on “the West”. The results also show several similarities in framing, like how counterimages are used to strengthen the norms and values of the ingroup after both attacks.

Keyword

Frame analysis, media discourse, terrorism, Rakhmat Akilov, Anton Lundin Pettersson.
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Introduction

*Media reports suggest – explicitly or implicitly – on what and how to think about a topic, what to know about it, and sometimes even how to feel about it (Ben-Yehuda 2005, 40).*

As a society, our relationship with violent crime seems to be characterized by two equally strong emotions: Fascination and fear. Open a newspaper at any given day and you are practically guaranteed to find reports on brutal murders, cold-blooded killers and their innocent victims. Sweden is no exception and has had its own share of notorious acts of violence. However, when it comes to mass killings – defined as the murder of three or more victims within the same attack – the country has been relatively spared. In fact, if you only count cases without affiliations to organized crime, only two mass killings during the 21st century stand out: A sword attack at a school in Trollhättan in western Sweden in 2015 – and a truck attack at a busy pedestrian street in the capital of Stockholm in 2017. The first assailant, Anton Lundin Pettersson, is understood to have been motivated by xenophobia and discontent with Swedish immigration policies whereas the second one, Rakhmat Akilov, claims to have acted as a member of the Islamist terror group ISIL.

In this thesis, I intend to study the news media portrayal of these two assailants, both among the most notorious in Swedish crime history. I have selected four major Swedish newspapers (Aftonbladet, Expressen, Dagens Nyheter and Göteborgs-Posten) and will analyse the reports during the first four days after each attack in order to see how the portrayal develops as new information appears. On a theoretical level, the study is based on the sociological notion that the media is shaped by, and in turn help shape, or culture and perception of social phenomena (Gitlin 1980; Lindell 2015; Fairclough 2003; van Dijk 2013; Manning 1993). Furthermore, theory on how journalists portray deviance and crime is used to explain differences and similarities in how the assailants are framed in the reports (Powell 2011; Roy & Ross 2011; Falkheimer & Olsson 2015; Norris, Kern & Just 2003 et al).

Using the methodology of frame analysis (Goffman 1986; Entman 1993; Matthes and Kohring 2008 et al), the aim of the study is to explore how media reflects and shapes our views of these two harrowing crimes with connections to extremist Islamist and right-wing
ideologies respectively, and to answer my main research question: *How are the actions and ideologies of Anton Lundin Pettersson and Rakhmat Akilov framed in Swedish news media?*

**Background**

On October 22, 2015, 21-year-old Anton Lundin Pettersson walked into a school in Trollhättan in Western Sweden – armed with a sword and a knife and wearing a helmet similar to those used by the Nazi Party’s armed unit Waffen-SS – and attacked several students and employees, before getting shot to death by police. Four people died, including the assailant himself, and one more person was severely injured. The attack was classified by Swedish police as a hate crime, since the victims seemed to have been chosen because of their immigrant background. Lundin Pettersson also left a letter behind, explaining that his acts were motivated by what he perceived as the failed migration policies of Sweden (Erlandsson 2017).

On April 7, 2017, 39-year-old Rakhmat Akilov drove a stolen truck straight through the pedestrian shopping street Drottninggatan in central Stockholm, killing five people and injuring several others. Upon his arrest he confessed to the attack, claimed that he acted as a member of the Islamist terror group ISIL and that his purpose was to help stop the military intervention against ISIL in Syria and Iraq. He also said that the terror group themselves ordered the attack. An analysis of his phone activity suggests that he had been in contact with people claiming to be a part of ISIL in the Middle East. That being said, the terror group has never taken public responsibility of the attack, as they have with ones similar to it in the past (Gardell, Lööw & Dahlberg-Grundberg 2017). On June 7, 2018, Akilov was sentenced to life imprisonment for terrorist crimes through murder and attempted murder.

At first glance, Rakhmat Akilov and Anton Lundin Pettersson do not seem to have that much in common, but from a closer look the similarities start piling up. Firstly, the attacks are both among the most notorious and gruesome to occur in Sweden, where mass-murder with three victims or more is extremely rare. Secondly, the assailants both seem to have been influenced by extremist ideologies, Islamist and right-wing extremist respectively. Both movements are considered to be on the rise in Sweden and the rest of Europe at the moment and are defined as “violence-promoting” and as posing a threat towards the Swedish democracy and the safety
of Swedish citizens (Högne Rydheim & Alm 2014). Both groups are understood to radicalize their members by introducing them to a “culture of violence” (Juergensmeyer 2003) and the recruitment of new, typically young – almost exclusively male – members occurs to a large extent through the internet: “As much as young radical Muslims have made use of the Internet to widely broadcast their view — thus becoming ‘Generation Jihad’ – so too have their contemporaries on the extreme right become ‘Generation Contrajihad’” (Turner-Graham 2014, 418).

Furthermore, both attacks were directed towards people with no personal connection to the assailants. Rather, the victims pose as symbols for a bigger, ideological target. In the case of Anton Lundin Pettersson, this is understood to be immigrants and the migrations policies of Sweden, while Rakhmat Akilov claims to have acted as revenge and means to stop the attacks on ISIL in Syria and Iraq. The links between the assailants and the extremist movements they are connected to are, however, quite hard to define. There is no proof that either Lundin Pettersson nor Akilov acted as part of a bigger organized terror cell. In their book about terrorists who act alone, Heléne Lööw, Mattias Gardell and Michael Dahlberg-Grundberg (2017) label both assailants as “lone-wolfs”.

There are also several aspects that set the two attacks apart from one another. One of the assailants, Anton Lundin Pettersson, was a native Swedish man while the other, Rakhmat Akilov, was an asylum-seeker who had been refused Swedish citizenship. Theories on how criminals belonging to the in- and outgroups of a society are portrayed suggest this might affect the reports. One of the attacks took place in the very centre of the Swedish capital of Stockholm, while the other took place in Trollhättan, a smaller city of about 50 000 inhabitants. Also, Lundin Pettersson died during the attack, meaning that there could be no trial, sentence or interrogations giving us more information about his motive. For the scope of this thesis, being the first few days after each attack, the letter he left behind can be argued to provide about an equal amount of information as the few snippets of information we get from the first interrogations with Akilov.

At the centre of both cases is the discussion of whether the attacks could be defined as acts of terror or not. Terrorism has no specific political colour and has been executed by people of different ideological backgrounds. Europe has a long history of terror attacks with right-wing and left-wing extremist perpetrators. During the last two decades, a series of attacks with perpetrators of an extremist Islamist persuasion have changed the way we look at the terror threat. The legal definition of terrorism in Sweden is the same as in the rest of the EU,
describing it as acts carried out “with the aim of seriously intimidating a population, or unduly compelling a Government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, or seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation” (European Parliament 2005). Similarly, in their book “Framing terrorism”, Pippa Norris, Montague Kern and Marion Just (2003) define terrorism as “the systematic use of coercive intimidation against civilians for political goals”.

Rakhmat Akilov was convicted with committing a crime of terrorism, while Anton Lundin Pettersson’s acts were referred to by Swedish police and security services as a hate crime. These different definitions have led to a debate in Sweden were people, among those both politicians and researchers (Lööw 2016; Lööw, Gardell & Dahlberg-Grundberg 2017 et. al.), have argued that the attack in Trollhättan should be called terrorism as well. The attack has in fact been labelled as terrorism outside of Sweden. For example, in the well-recognized Global Terrorism Database (GTD), maintained by the University of Maryland, Trollhättan is listed as a terror attack, fulfilling three out of three of their criteria defining such a crime (Global Terrorism Database 2016). At this point its record is only updated until 2016, thus excluding Drottninggatan. That being said, we will never know what would have happened during a trial for Anton Lundin Pettersson and cannot know for certain what crimes he would have been charged with.

The purpose of this study is not to claim whether either attack should be regarded as terrorism or not. Yet, I am interested in studying if, and to what extent, they are framed as such in the media reports, and on what grounds. I do not intend to do a comparative study of the two cases in a strict sense, but rather to draw strength from a comparative analytical approach for a deepened analysis.

Research review

Sociological studies of media reports as representations of culture and ideology have a long and varying tradition. It became a popular pursuit during the 1970’s, as scholars (Halloran, Elliot & Murdock 1970; Cohen 2002; Hartmann, & Husband 1974; Golding & Elliott 1979 et al) began studying both the production of news – through interviews and fieldwork in
newsrooms – and the final product – through discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is still one of the main methodologies for research within this field, as will be discussed further in the theoretical and methodological chapters of this thesis.

Relevant research on violent crime and extremism in the media is much more recent, and it generally finds news reports on the subject to be highly dramatized (Chouliaraki 2004; Roy and Ross 2011). This is particularly true for reports on terrorism. Sociologist Nachman Ben-Yehuda (2005) even argues for a specific “terror-media relationship”, in which the media tends to dramatize and seeks to entertain, while the assailants themselves seek to promote their world-view through the media. Ben-Yehuda and others have also exhibited a tendency for the media to adopt the government’s ideological definitions and solutions to these types of violent crime.

Previous research on attacks with extremist motives has focused predominantly on the extremist Islamist movement. Many of these studies share the starting point of the US September 11 attacks in 2001, the events that really put extremist Islamist groups on the news agenda in the West (Reese & Lewis 2009). Many of these studies focus on how media depiction of Islamist terrorists in particular – and of Muslims in general – has changed since. A shared conclusion is that convicted and suspected terrorists tend to be depicted as an absolute evil and that their actions are constantly put into contrast with ‘Western values and beliefs’, which are consequently normalized. Roy and Ross (2011, 289) state that “together, these two discursive strategies – normalizing the West and fanaticizing the rest – construct binaries that naturalize divisions and undermine informed deliberation of the causes and solutions to terrorism”. Like Ben-Yehuda (2005), Lazar and Lazar (2004) argue that Western media tend to adopt the ideas and the dramaturgy of the government within the context of ‘war on terror’.

Studies of the representation of right-wing extremism in the media are a bit more scarce and present more scattered results. One of the deadliest attacks with radical right motives in contemporary Europe occurred in Norway on 22 July 2011, when right-wing extremist Anders Behring-Breivik attacked the government quarters in Oslo and a summer camp for the Norwegian social democratic youth association, killing a total of 77 people. In a frame analysis of news reports on Behring-Breivik’s actions in Norwegian media, Falkheimer and Olsson (2015) conclude that the motives behind Breivik’s actions were “depoliticized”; media sought to frame him as a lone lunatic rather than a terrorist driven by ideology.
This is a frequent conclusion in the study of representation of right-wing extremism, usually explained by the fact that the assailant tends to be part of the culture sharing ingroup in the country towards which their actions are being directed (Falkheimer & Olsson 2015; Samuel-Azran et al. 2015; Sela-Shayovitz 2011). This is, in turn, contrasted to the way outgroup terrorists are portrayed. In a study of the news coverage of 11 “terrorist events” (both consummated and stopped attacks) since 9/11, Kimberly Powell (2011) identifies two different terrorism frames used by the US media: ‘Domestic’ terrorism is framed as “a minor threat that occurs in isolated incidents by troubled individuals” while ‘international’ (i.e. extremist Islamist) terrorism is framed as organized attacks by terrorist cells towards “Christian America” (2011, 91).

More specifically, the “domestic terrorists” in the study are described as smart but mentally unstable and are “personalized” through descriptions provided by family members. Their actions are framed as not being part of a larger threat towards society but rather as being caused by one out of three individualized motives: “creating fear, anti-government message, and attention seeking” (2011, 100). The “international terrorist”, on the other hand, is framed as angry and/or an extremist. He is “depersonalized”, with no reference to any family, and his motives are described as “to avenge the killing of Muslims by the US government, Islamic radicalism, and to kill” (2011, 101). The prospect of the assailant being associated with a larger terror cell increases the fear of future attacks compared to the domestic attack, which is largely considered an isolated event.

These differences in the portrayal of the assailants are not found in all studies. Roy and Ross (2011, 298) argue for a general tendency of portraying all extremists, including Islamist extremists, as lunatics working alone, and to diminish the explanatory importance of ideology and social factors: “Terrorism is not represented as a form of extreme protest against social inequalities, dominant groups, cultures, and ideologies but as the heinous aberrance of lunatics and zealots”. In a study of how ingroup violence is portrayed in the Norwegian and Israeli press Samuel-Azran et al. (2015) find a tendency of adhering to “professional norms of impartiality” by labelling the assailants as terrorists, rather than trying to “repair” their image as suggested by previous research of the US and UK media.

As I have exemplified here, frame analysis has become an increasingly applied method in studies of news reports on terrorism during the last decade, both comparatively (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira 2008; Powell 2011) and looking at specific cases (Falkheimer & Olsson 2015). The methodology got a revival in the 90’s, largely because of the work of Robert
Entman (1993). His frame analysis of media reports on US foreign affairs is one of the most prominent, arguing that the “Cold War frame” of the 20th century has been replaced by the “War On Terrorism frame” or just “Terrorism frame” (Entman 1993; Reese & Lewis 2009; Norris, Kern & Just 2003).

In sum, there is quite a wide range of previous research on the news media portrayal of violent assailants motivated by ideology, especially those whose deeds are generally labelled terrorism. The results vary slightly, some arguing for differences that are not found by others. A few different factors could be argued to explain this disparity. Firstly, there might be differences in the news framing of different countries. The US has a different history with both Islamist and right-wing extremism than Europe, which in turn has different experiences from one country to another. Since a majority of previous research is done in a US context – and research focusing on Sweden is practically non-existent – this thesis will add new perspectives in that sense. Furthermore, most previous research focuses on one specific case, or on comparing different cases within the same ideological movement to previous findings. Outside the US, there is a lack of previous studies that compare cases of Islamist and right-wing extremism to one another. By focusing on two ideologically different attacks that were executed in the same culture-sharing society within the relatively short time-period of one and a half years, I wish to add to this less extensively covered part of the field.

There is one final aspect that might add to explaining the differences in results of previous research. As I will get back to in the research design section, there is recurring criticism directed towards qualitative content analysis, claiming that it lacks in reliability (see Matthes and Kohring 2008). One of the main problems is argued to be when little or no explanation is given to how the analysis is carried out, for example, what categories are included in a frame analysis, or on what grounds. This critique could in fact be directed towards the authors of many of the studies presented here (Powell 2011; Roy & Ross 2011; Samuel-Azran et al. 2015). In this thesis, I have made an attempt to salvage this problem by including deductive framing elements in my code, closely connected to theory. A more general application of similar categories throughout the field of research would make it easier to compare studies, and identify which differences exist in news framing between countries, or over time, and which can more likely be because of differences in research design.
Theoretical background

This thesis is based on two theoretical assumptions regarding sociology of the media: Media reports are formed by the social context within which they are created (Fairclough 2003; van Dijk 2013; Lindell 2015; Manning 1996) and in turn shape public discourse, and thus, our perception of culture and social phenomena (Gitlin 1980; Reinke de Buitrago 2014; Ben-Yehuda 2005; Fairclough 2003).

American sociology and journalism professor Todd Gitlin (1980) has stated that media helps create and reinforce ideology by providing people with the images that they rely on “for concepts, for images of their heroes, for guiding information, for emotional charges, for a recognition of public values, for symbols in general, even for language” (1980, 1). In a paper discussing the use of Pierre Bourdieu’s social theory in communication and media studies, researcher Johan Lindell (2015, 362) develops this idea, arguing that “all media and all communication are located in social contexts”. Without the understanding of what social processes and phenomena influence and shape, for example, news reports – media studies lack any real explanatory power (Lindell 2015, 364). This gives us an indication of the benefit of sociological media studies. Moving on, I will present some of the main theoretical concepts that will be applied in this study, focusing primarily on discourse, deviance and framing.

The concept of discourse is based on the idea that all expressions of language – written as well as spoken – are structured and shaped by cognitive factors of the world in which they are created. Consequently, discourse analysis is a way of studying the way we talk, write and in other ways communicate about the world. According to Michel Foucault (2002, 30), one of the first and most important contributors to the field, the purpose of discourse analysis is to answer the question “what was being said in what was said” (Foucault 2002, 27). Discourse analysis has been developed further since and is used in research within various academic disciplines today. One approach that emerged in the 1970’s is critical discourse analysis (CDA). Developed by scholars such as Norman Fairclough (2001; 2003) and Ruth Wodak (Wodak & Meyer 2001), CDA is an interdisciplinary approach to studying content, combining linguistic with discourse analytical, psychological and sociological analysis (van Dijk 2013, 15). At the base of the approach is the idea that “texts have causal effects upon, and contribute to changes in, people (beliefs, attitudes, etc.), actions, social relations, and the material world.” (Fairclough 2003, 8). Another important contributor to CDA, Teun van Dijk
(1998; 2005; 2013), specifically uses it to study news reports, stating that “news should be studied primarily as a form of public discourse” (2013), and that journalists are part of a “symbolic elite” (van Dijk 2005, 88) who have the power to form public opinion.

The main purpose of the news media, according to van Dijk (1998), is to provide readers with new information. In order to do so, journalists need to use various rhetorical tools to persuade the reader that the information is relevant and true. Standard strategies of doing so include (1) emphasis on facts (reliable sources, eyewitnesses, numbers and quotes), (2) organizing new information into an existing context by relating it to related events, and (3) the use of information that involves or creates strong emotions (1998, 85). It is this logic that makes crime such a strong and popular theme in the news: A report on a violent crime can easily include all these rhetoric features: hard facts, witnesses, numbers, opinions, connection to related events and, maybe most importantly, strong emotions.

van Dijk (1998, 123) rates “deviance and negativity” as one of seven news values that influence the selection process of what “makes the news”. Other news values include, for example, novelty, recency, and proximity. The occurrence of deviance and negativity in news reports function as “a test of general norms and values” since it “provides ingroup members with information about outgroups or outcasts and the application of a consensus of social norms and values that helps define and confirm the own group” (van Dijk 1998, 123). For this to work, conformity on what constitutes deviance is required. Furthermore, counterimages that further reinforce the norms and values of the ingroup are needed as a contrast: “Stories about problems, conflicts, or disasters also require happy ends” (van Dijk 1998, 123).

American sociologist David L. Altheide has also done extensive work on the representation of crime in the media, more specifically regarding the relationship between media and fear (Altheide 1997; 2007). Altheide argues that the media uses a “problem frame” in the selection and presentation of news reports, putting emphasis on violence and fear (1997, 647) and that this problem frame has “contributed to the reporting of and fascination with fear” (Altheide 1997, 658).

For the purpose of this study, I draw on various theoretical concepts of Critical Discourse Analysis, such as the influence of the media on public opinion and how themes such as deviance and fear affect news reports. However, the main theoretical concepts – as well as the research design – are based on another form of study of discourse: Frame analysis. Erving Goffman has defined frames as a “schemata of interpretation”, that helps make meaning of what happens around us by providing tools to “locate, perceive, identify, and label a
seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its limits” (Goffman 1986). The concept can be seen as a metaphor for an actual, physical frame, the presence of which creates boundaries and context to its content. Framing takes place on various levels in the process of communication, meaning that frame analysis can be used to explain both how a text is created by the author and how it is perceived by the reader. Because of this, frame analysis is particularly useful for the study of news media in general – and of news media reports on violent crime in particular. In “Framing terrorism”, Pippa Norris, Montague Kern and Marion Just state that “conventional news frames of terrorism are important because they furnish consistent, predictable, simple, and powerful narratives that are embedded in the social construction of reality” (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 5). The functions such a frame serves are both cognitive – by linking facts and events together – evaluative – through blame attribution – and political – by allowing leaders to communicate with the public and promote “perceptions of ‘friends’ and ‘enemies’” (Norris, Kern & Just 2003, 15).

Robert Entman (1993), one of the most prominent scholars within contemporary frame analysis, suggests that frames have four (or more) locations: (1) Frames shaped by the (conscious and unconscious) beliefs of the communicator (journalist), (2) frames manifested through “keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences”, (3) the receiver’s (reader’s) own frames which help determine what will actually be concluded from reading the text and (4) the general culture, described by Entman as “commonly invoked frames”, of a social group. Since this process takes place at multiple levels at once, we can never predict exactly how a text will be received by the reader (Entman 1993, 7).

Entman (1993) defines the process of framing as “to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text” (Entman 1993, 52). Salience entails to highlight certain information and making it more noticeable and/or rememberable in the text. Salience can be affected by placement (headline versus middle of text), repetition and by association to “culturally familiar symbols”. Another process of framing is the selection of which information is included in the text and, of equal importance, what is consequently being omitted (Entman 1993). According to Entman, framing is made up of four main functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation.

“Frames, then, define problems – determine what a causal agent is doing with what costs and benefits, usually measured in terms of common cultural values; diagnose causes – identify the forces
creating the problem; make moral judgments – evaluate causal agents and their effects; and suggest remedies – offer and justify treatments for the problems and predict their likely effects.” (Entman 1993, 52)

I will come back to these elements of frames later on, since they hold significant relevance to my forthcoming analysis.

In sum, frame analysis can help understand the creation and perception of news reports on an event such as a violent crime (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira 2008), by providing tools to study how the events are interpreted on all levels – by journalists, interviewees and newsreaders – at the same time. The purpose of this thesis is to explore this meaning-making process in two cases that are both clear examples of deviance and that test the general norms and values of the ingroup (van Dijk 1998). As discussed in the previous research section, some earlier studies have suggested significant disparity in how violent and deviant individuals of different ideological and ethnic backgrounds framed in the news.

‘International’ or Islamist extremists tend to be “depersonalized” (Powell 2011), “fantasized” (Roy & Ross 2011) and treated as part of an ‘outgroup’ that poses a larger threat, while ‘domestic’, right-wing extremists are “personalized” (Powell 2011), “depoliticized” (Falkheimer & Olsson 2015) and treated as mentally ill lunatics with individualized motives. In other words, previous research and theory suggests that there might be interesting differences in how the Anton Lundin Pettersson and Rakhmat Akilov were framed in the news. Based on these insights, I specify two more detailed research sub-questions alongside my main one: How are the actions and ideologies of Anton Lundin Pettersson and Rakhmat Akilov framed in Swedish news media? These questions are:

RQ2: To which extent are the assailants’ motives and the attacks ideologized/politicized?

RQ3: To which extent are the assailants’ motives and the attacks psychologized?

Research design

As established in previous sections of this thesis, the objective of sociological media studies is to unveil how media reports are shaped by, and in turn help shape, our culture and perception of social phenomena (Gitlin 1980; Ben-Yehuda 2005 et. al). This can be done using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the purpose of this study the main focus will be
on qualitative media analysis, particularly framing analysis. In their argument for the benefit of a qualitative approach, Altheide and Schneider (2013) claim that qualitative analysis is the only way to truly understand the underlying meaning of a text, as opposed to just analysing the words and sentences it is made up of. We have established that frame analysis is a form of discourse analysis that seeks to reveal how the writer – and reader – of a text create and interpret it. I have also presented various examples of how frame analysis has been used to study media reports on violent crime (Papacharissi & de Fatima Oliveira 2008; Falkheimer & Olsson 2015; Powell 2011 et al). The next step is to specify how these concepts are employed in this particular study.

The methodology of this thesis is based on the work of Robert Entman (1993), whose development of frame analysis is among the most commonly cited (see Matthes 2009), and the functions which he argues make up the outline of all frames (problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation) (Entman 1993). I also draw on the work of Baldwin Van Gorp (2009) and Jörg Matthes (Matthes 2009; Matthes & Kohring 2008), who have both operationalized Entman’s functions of frames in order to use them at the basis of their analysis. This manner of breaking down frames and coding their elements is common in frame analysis. Matthes and Kohring (2008) argue for this approach, given that “single frame elements can be more reliably coded than holistic, abstract frames”. However, they are also critical of the tendency of researchers to construct these categories inductively, and in a way which makes it hard for the reader to follow the process. The operationalization of Entman’s functions of frames is presented as a way of getting around this, by setting up deductive categories based on theoretical concepts that are central to the methodology.

When setting up a frame analysis, Matthes (2009, 351) urges the researcher to begin by answering a few basic questions: “(a) whether the analysis is text-based or number-based, (b) whether frames are determined inductively or deductively, (c) whether coding is manual or computer-assisted, and (d) whether data-reduction techniques are used to reveal frames or whole frames are coded as such.” The answers for this particular study is that the analysis is text-based, follows a mixed methodology of coding based on both inductive and deductive frames, is manually coded and using a frame reduction technique, thus, only arriving to conclusions of specific frames in the very last part of the analysis.

The reason to include both deductive and inductive coding in my analysis is twofold. I originally set out to do the very type of analysis critiqued by Matthes and Kohring (2008);
categorical coding based on categories derived in an exclusively inductive manner. In the middle of this process, I found the method of using Entman’s frames as categories in the coding, in contrast to considering them as purely theoretical concepts. By connecting theoretical and methodological concepts in this way I would be provided with stronger analytical tools while at the same time increasing the reliability of the study. During this process, I also found that Van Gorp (2009) actually promotes including two phases – one inductive and one deductive – in the coding, which made it natural for me to add the second step without discarding the work I had done so far.

The first step of Van Gorp’s (2009) methodology entails coding the “manifest elements” of the frame into inductively created categories, referred to by Van Gorp as framing devices. These elements could be metaphors, themes, different actors, connections, appeals, historical examples and others. The five frame elements used in this analysis, which derived from an initial read-through of the entire material and are presented and operationalized later on, are Denominator, Description, Counterimages, Comparisons, and Context. Throughout this initial coding, the results are inserted into a frame matrix made up of these five categories.

The second step means applying Entman’s four functions of frames – problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation – to the material in the frame matrix. These four categories are referred to by Van Gorp (2009) as reasoning devices. The first step of the coding (using framing devices) can be regarded as more mechanical – a way to process and categorize a large material of text – while the second step (the reasoning devices) adds a more analytical, reasoning – hence the name – dimension to the material, that I found to be necessary in order to truly understand the framing.

According to Van Gorp, the significant difference between the framing and reasoning devices is that “reasoning devices do not need to be explicitly included in a mediated message”, since they are made up in the connection “between the text, the frame and the individual schema” (Van Gorp 2009, 91). Reducing the text to its relevant components through the coding of the framing devices increases our knowledge of the text significantly, making it easier to understand and unveil its implicit messages and framing through the reasoning devices that follow. Moving on, I will give a brief description of how the elements in the analysis – both framing and reasoning devices – can be understood and operationalized, beginning with the framing devices:

**Denominator.** What is the assailant called/referred to as in the text? In this category the assailant’s actual name as well as other denominators such as “the terrorist”, “the school
shooter” or “the 21-year-old man”, are all included. Analysis of denominators (also referred to as “nomination” or just “naming”) is common when studying presentation and representation in discourse analysis (see van Dijk 1988 et. al.). As a category in this particular analysis it also has the benefit of being quite precise, as there is rarely a question of whether something should be considered and coded as a denominator or not.

**Description.** How is the assailant portrayed in the reports? This category consists of all descriptions of the personalities, backgrounds, physical appearances and – of great significance for the present thesis – possible motives of the assailants. This is a major category which practically includes everything mentioned about the assailants that does not categorize as a denominator. This category is of utmost importance to the thesis, since its main purpose is to study how the assailants are portrayed.

**Counterimages.** This category seeks to unveil the contrasts of the text. What images, events or actors are put forward as the ‘sunshine stories’, ‘good guys’ or ‘happy endings’ in the reports? This category is included because of the theoretical assumption that stories about horrible crimes also need to include contrasting pictures, in order to establish the norms and values of the ‘ingroup’ (van Dijk 1998, 123). By identifying the counterimages of the reports, we also learn more about that which they are being put into contrast with.

**Comparisons.** How are comparisons used to describe the attack and attacker in the reports? This category includes all references being made to other events, individuals, situations or contexts, such as other attacks, assailants or political debates. Comparisons are commonly used as a variable in frame and discourse analysis. The assumption is that we can learn a lot about how something is considered by looking at what it is being compared to. For example, much can be revealed from looking at whether the present attack is compared to previous ones, and whether they were generally deemed acts of terrorism – or of pure lunacy.

**Context.** We have already established that framing takes place at different levels, and that it can both be affected by and in turn affect our society and culture. Thus, we cannot study the representation of the assailant without taking into account the context in which he operates, and how this is being portrayed. In what societal and/or political context is the attack presented? Does it become part of a current political debate? Are there problems connected to legislation, or lack thereof? Are other actors than the attacker himself presented as sharing in the guilt? Everything in the texts that answers one of these questions will be included in this category.
It is my intention for these categories to be broadly defined, but at the same time as descriptive as possible. This step in the coding needs to include the categorization of all relevant material, in order to make sure that nothing is ‘lost in translation’, and consequently missed in the final results. Too much will be included in the coding rather than too little. The final frame matrix also includes notes on who is the actor behind a certain description, comparison, reference to context, et cetera. Is it the journalist, a politician, a family member of the assailant, or someone else?

After coding all the material using into these five categories, the next step is the application of the reasoning devices. My operationalization derives largely from that of Matthes and Kohring (2008).

Problem definition: What is the issue and how is it presented by different actors in the reports? This device seeks to answer the question of how the attack, and attacker, themselves are portrayed. It derives largely from the material collected in the Denominator and Description categories during the first step of the analysis.

Causal interpretation: Why did the attack happen? To unveil explanations of causality in the reports, we look primarily to the Context category, and to what societal or political issues are used to explain the actions. The descriptions of the assailants’ motives, found in the Descriptions category, will also add to this understanding, as well as Comparisons where the causality of the previous event is well established.

Moral evaluation: According to Matthes and Kohring (2008, 264) moral evaluation “can be positive, negative, or neutral and can refer to different objects” and is often presented by actors in the reports. In this study, the category of Counterimages gives interesting insight into this process, since the main function of the information. By studying the contents of this category, not only do we learn about what is being presented as positive in the reports, but also how it is put in contrast to the negative aspects, such as the attack and attacker themselves.

Treatment recommendation “can include a call for or against a certain action” (Matthes & Kohring 2008, 264). How could this kind of attack be prevented in the future? Are there calls for policy changes or other types of reforms? To learn more about these processes in the texts, we look mainly at Context and Comparisons.

The reasoning devices seek to answer four main questions: (1) What is the problem? (2) Who/what is responsible? (3) What moral distinctions are made in the text? And (4) What
solutions are suggested? I will follow all steps in the analysis for the two news events – Trollhättan and Drottninggatan – respectively and end my analysis by looking at the results side by side. This way I will learn about the individual framing of the cases, as well as what similarities and differences can be found when comparing them. Throughout the coding process all the coded material is placed in a code matrix but is presented here as a condensed, coherent text because of space constraints, and to make it easier for the reader to follow.

Critique of frame analysis as a method has mainly been concerned with its alleged lack of reliability and validity or claiming that it is too subjective (Matthes & Kohring 2008, Van Gorp 2009). Both Fairclough (2003) and Van Gorp (2009) argue that some level of subjectivity is unavoidable in any text analysis. In order to make connections between text and society – with frames emerging somewhere in the middle – some interpretation will always be necessary. However, there are steps that can be taken to increase the reliability and validity of frame analysis, making it a useful tool for the study of news reports. Including a deductive element in the analysis, like we have done in this thesis, is argued to limit subjectivity and increase reliability, making it possible for different coders to reach the same results (Van Gorp 2009). Van Gorp also suggests ending the study off with a quantitative process of cross-checking the results with the original material, in order to increase the validity of the study. This step should be executed by another researcher and is thus not feasible to accomplish within the frames of this thesis. It should also be noted that it would not add to the analytical conclusions of the study, but only to assert their validity. The only applicable alternative here, choosing a quantitative method rather than a qualitative one to begin with, would not be a good fit, since it would take away the explanatory power of the meaning and influence of text (Entman 1993; Van Gorp 2009).

Selection of sources and material

This study includes the reports of four newspapers during four days after each attack. All news articles about the events have been included, bringing it to a total of 89 articles about Trollhättan and 173 about Drottninggatan. The reason that I have chosen to focus on the first days following the attacks is that I am interested to follow how the story develops: How is new information presented, and what assumptions are made when information is still lacking? The limit at four days was determined by the size and content of the material. Because of the constraints of the thesis, my initial proposed sample of seven days had to be limited further.
This was made by conducting a brief pre-study of the seven-day material, during which I found that most main pieces of information about the assailants emerged within the first four days of both reports.

Only news articles, no editorials or analysis pieces, are included in the sample. Including these types of material would unveil more opinions and theories on the assailants and their motives but would also have to be separated from the news articles in the analysis. Also, the political colour of the newspapers’ editorial sections would have to be taken into account. For the purpose of this study, I am primarily interested in the opinions that are presented or included and made salient by a journalist. Opinions do occur in news texts, in quotes for politicians and others, but are ultimately selected and framed by the journalists themselves.

The newspapers included are the two main Swedish evening newspapers (Expressen and Aftonbladet) and two daily newspapers (Dagens Nyheter and Göteborgs-Posten). Dagens Nyheter has been included because it is the biggest newspaper in Stockholm, where the Drottninggatan attack took place, while Göteborgs-Posten is the biggest in Gothenburg and its surroundings, which includes Trollhättan where the other attack took place. They are all established newspapers with a high readership that operate online as well as having a daily printed edition. Only the printed articles are analysed in this study, but it is safe to assume that all the information from the printed edition has also been published online (as the same article or in a slightly different form), which makes the readership online relevant to note as well. The political label of the papers is really only relevant for the editorial pages but are noted here anyway.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper</th>
<th>Dagens Nyheter (DN)</th>
<th>Göteborgs-Posten (GP)</th>
<th>Aftonbladet (AB)</th>
<th>Expressen (Exp)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digital reach</td>
<td>620 000</td>
<td>317 000</td>
<td>3 059 0000</td>
<td>1 968 000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print reach</td>
<td>625 0000</td>
<td>308 000</td>
<td>538 000</td>
<td>508 000</td>
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<td>Opinion label</td>
<td>Independent</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>liberal</td>
<td>social-democrat</td>
<td>liberal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Orvesto Konsument (Kantar Sifo 2018)
Because of the confinements of the study, the placement of the articles and the pictures used to illustrate them are not taken into account. Both of these aspects would be interesting to follow up on. For example, the types of pictures used to introduce and visualize the assailants might be interesting to study. Are they pictured smiling on a family holiday or illustrated by surveillance photos? This could add new dimensions to the understanding of how the assailants are personalized and/or politicized in the reports.

Looking at the material one day at a time, the content of the different newspapers ended up being almost identical. The evening newspapers had a bit more detailed information about the assailants, but no major piece of information was excluded from any of the papers. It is my assumption that most information during the first four days – such as arrests, criminal charges and new information about suspects and victims – was mainly provided by police, prosecutors and lawmakers in press-briefings, leaving the different newspapers with fairly similar information. Furthermore, all the newspapers included in the study have online editions where the articles, or parts of them, were published hours before, making it possible for the others to be inspired or even quote or refer to new information from a source, or an exclusive interview with someone who knew the assailant. Other similarities might be explained by the fact that there is a strong media logic to these kinds of events, as we will see in the results. Because of these extensive similarities, the results of all sources will be presented without any distinctions, except for when specifically called for.

Results

The results of the coding of the five framing devices are presented below, each of them followed by a summary of how the reasoning devices draw from these insights. The results of the two cases are presented separately and put in relation to one another at a later stage. For the purposes of coherence and comprehensibility, the results of the categories “Denominator” and “Description” are presented together, as well as the results of the categories “Comparison” and “Context”. All the references made in this section are to journalists or newspapers, i.e. to the empirical material.
Denominator and description

Murderer motivated by xenophobia, mental illness – or music?

Anton Lundin Pettersson was killed during the attack, making it quite easy to identify him as the assailant. Thus, his full name was published in all newspapers form the first day after the attack. Apart from by his name, he is most frequently referred to as “the murderer” in the reports. Only one person – the mother of one of the victims – refers to him as a “terrorist” (Broström 2015). Mona Sahlin, former politician and Nationell samordnare mot extremism (The national coordinator to safeguard democracy against violent extremism) at the time, also suggests that the act should be considered to be terrorism but does not refer to the assailant specifically (Alexander 2015).

The descriptions of Anton Lundin Pettersson are quite detailed from the first day after the attack. The reader is introduced to a quiet, shy – maybe even lonely – 21-year-old man, with a big interest in computer games and hardcore rock music. His music interest is one of the most frequent themes, and also appears in relation to the attack itself. The description of a young masked man, dressed in all black, playing the song “Dragula” by heavy metal musician Rob Zombie while walking through the school with a sword in his hand recurs in all newspapers. Other artists and groups he liked – such as Rammstein, Sabaton, The Sisters of Mercy, Pain and Suicide Commando – are referred to and some of their song lyrics are even quoted in the reports. An old classmate describes his style as influenced by subcultures like rock and emo: “He almost always wore black clothes or camouflage patterns”, he tells Aftonbladet (Granlund, Svahn, Tagesson & Nordström 2015).

There is no confirmation of any motives by police or politicians during the first day after the attack. The newspapers have, however, gone through the assailant’s internet history and found that he “glorified the Nazi ideology and showed clear right-wing extremist sympathies online” (Svensson & Dahlberg 2015). This information, along with the fact that the school had a high proportion of foreign-born kids and that Lundin Pettersson himself had not gone there, are all presented as suggesting that the motive could be xenophobic. The police do admit that they are investigating this kind of motive and add that the assailant most likely acted alone.

Two days after the attack, the police confirm that they are labelling the attack as a hate-crime. It is revealed that a surveillance video shows how the assailant “attacked only dark-skinned students and left light-skinned unharmed” (Wierup & Lisinski 2015). The police also tell the media that they have found a letter from the assailant confirming the suspected motive of the
attack: “He has written that he is dissatisfied with the immigration policies and felt forced to act”, a police officer tells Expressen (Malmgren 2015). We learn that the assailant had no prior convictions or known involvement in right-wing extremist group. He has, however, taken an interest in the political party Sverigedemokraterna (The Sweden Democrats, SD), particularly in a campaign demanding a referendum about Sweden’s migration policies. This political interest is a theme that will be recurring in the reports and is discussed further as part of the “context” portion of the results.

Everyone who knew Anton Lundin Pettersson express utter shock over the reports on his actions and motives. The words ‘nice’, ‘friendly’ and ‘normal’ all recur when people are asked to describe him. “It’s a total surprise for everyone (...) he grew up in a good environment with good parents and all that (...) it’s completely inconceivable” one person tells Expressen (Petersson 2015a). “There was nothing strange about him (...) He was just like anyone else”, a neighbour tells Aftonbladet (Hagberg 2015). “He played video games and listened to hard rock, that was it. Never caused a fight and wouldn’t hurt a fly”, and old classmate says to DN (Wierup & Lisinski 2015).

The experts (mainly psychiatrists and criminologists) interviewed all treat Anton Lundin Pettersson’s actions based on previous knowledge of school shooters and put forward primarily psychological explanations for his actions. One psychiatrist specialized in profiling tells Göteborgs-Posten that people who commit this kind of attack (e.g. school shootings in the US) are all pretty similar: “They share rare interests, they are not disorderly but rather quiet and cautious, and they are radicalized in some way” (Höglund 2015). Furthermore, the psychiatrist argues that “inner hatred” and a feeling of alienation can be contributing factors, suggesting that such an attack “could be an attempt to commit ‘suicide by cops’”. Another psychiatrist tells the same newspaper that “this kind of assailant (...) is generally described as a bit odd, but with a friendly manner” and suggests that he might have been depressed, or even suffering from some kind of mental condition (Wierup & Lisinski 2015). Criminologist Jerzy Sarnecki states that you can assume that the assailant had “pretty severe psychological issues” (Minell 2015). Terror expert Hans Brun adds that he does not want to speculate but adds that these kinds of attacks are usually motivated by “a need for acknowledgement and attention”.

Politicians serve an important role in reacting to and explaining the attack. In his first statement, Sweden’s prime minister Stefan Löfven describes it as a “tragedy” for “all of Sweden” (Svensson & Dahlberg 2015 et al). He especially emphasizes that all children should
have the right to feel safe in school, thus suggesting that the attack could jeopardize this. At this point in the timeline, the prime minister does not want to discuss any possible right-wing extremist connections or xenophobic motives to the attack, saying that “later on we’ll know about motive and details” (Holmqvist, Svensson, Nordström & Tronarp 2015). Löfven and Anders Ygeman, Sweden’s interior minister at the time, are both quoted pointing out that attacks of this kind are very rare occurrences. Other politicians consistently express shock and astonishment over the events. Many also point out that the school should be a place where children are supposed to be safe, which they argue makes the attack even worse. Gustav Fridolin describes it as “not an attack directed at a school, but at all of Sweden” (Kihlström, S., 2015).

The denominators and descriptions of Anton Lundin Pettersson provide us with the first indications of which reasoning devices are used in the reports. In regard to problem definition, two competing – and to some extent overlapping – frames emerge: One is that of a racist hate crime committed by a man with a clear interest in Nazi and right-wing extremist ideologies, and a growing hatred towards immigrants. Equally prominent, however, is the treatment of the attack as a ‘school shooting’ (albeit, using a knife and not a gun) committed by a lonely, possibly mentally ill young man driven by ‘inner hatred’ or ‘a need for attention’. The framing of the events as a terrorist attack is practically non-existent.

**Cold-blooded terrorist or family man? Radicalized or normalized?**

Rakhmat Akilov was arrested on the evening of the attack, but his name was not published by the press until three days afterwards. The first day he is referred to in the passive tense, or as a “person” or “man” when necessary. The truck itself is put forward as the subject in most descriptions of the events. The second day the press start calling him “the suspected terrorist” or “terror suspect”. He is only referred to as “a murderer” twice, once in a headline (Asplid 2017) and once by Swedish prime minister Stefan Löfven (Hougner 2017a). In the very same quote Löfven goes on by calling him a terrorist as well.

Although his name is not yet published, some personal information about Rakhmat Akilov occurs in the newspapers from day one. We learn that he is a 39-year-old man from Uzbekistan, who is said to have expressed sympathy for the terror group ISIL by uploading or sharing propaganda videos online. According to sources, he has already confessed to the attack, which is being investigated as a suspected terror attack. We also learn that he is previously known by The Swedish Security Service, and that the police do not want to rule out that he might have had some kind of accomplice. Witnesses give chilling accounts of how
the assailant “mowed down people as if he was hitting pieces of cardboard” (Vaccari 2017) and of how the truck “zigzagged down Drottninggatan in order to hit as many people as possible” (Giertz & Tengblad 2017).

At the same time, we also get some more personalized, and positive, descriptions of Akilov. An acquaintance is quoted in Aftonbladet saying that the suspect “never talks about politics or religion, all he ever talks about is getting more work so that he can send money to his family back home” (Aschberg, Tenitskaja Carlsson, Micic & Tagesson 2017). As reports become more detailed throughout the second day after the attack, these kinds of quotes pile up. Akilov is described as a “polite” and “calm” man, whose primary goal was to support his family back in Uzbekistan. Just like in the case of Anton Lundin Pettersson, everyone who knew Akilov express shock or surprise when they hear what he is being accused of. An acquaintance describes his actions as “unimaginable”, as Akilov is, “a completely normal family man”, who “partied and drank alcohol” and showed no signs of religious extremism (Wierup 2017). Another acquaintance tells Aftonbladet: “I never saw any signs that he was fanatic” and goes on by saying that he is “intellectual and well-read” and “emphatic and sensible” (Nilsson 2017).

During the third day, Rakhmat Akilov’s full name and unmasked picture are published by all media outlets. At this point, there is a shift in the reports. There are no more descriptions of Akilov being a normal, emphatic family man. Instead, we learn that he got fired from his job because of his poor performance, and that he did not manage to get a new one. We also learn that he was denied asylum in Sweden a few months earlier, since his reasons for applying were revealed to be a “hoax” (Malmgren 2017; Eriksson, Nilsson & Tagesson 2017). Instead of getting deported, he managed to go underground and stay that way until the attack.

Some information from the interrogations with Akilov also reach the media. Akilov has supposedly claimed that he “is a Muslim and part of the terror group ISIL” (Eriksson, Johansson, Tagesson & Thornéus 2017) and that the group ordered him to commit the attack as revenge and an attempt to stop the military interventions with the terror group in the Middle East. He is also said to be happy with the attack, which was planned beforehand and directed towards “infidels”. Police confirm that Akilov is known to have shown sympathy for terror groups, mainly ISIL. The fact that he has managed to get his hand on “a sharp object”, which he used to pick his teeth, while in custody, further helps form the picture of a radicalized and dangerous man.
There are very few comments by experts on Rakhmat Akilov’s motives on a more personal level. The criminologists and terror experts interviewed are generally focused on the attack from a bigger perspective, which we will come back to in the “context” section. All the experts note that attacks using a truck in Western cities is something that the terror groups Al-Qaida and ISIL have both promoted, as a way of “creating fear, suspicion and polarization in Sweden, as means to undermine the core values of society” (Kruse 2017). Criminologist Leif GW Persson tells Expressen that Akilov “is clearly deeply dissatisfied with something” and goes on by referring to him as a “Muslim Breivik”, without really specifying what that entails (Lundberg Andersson 2017). He continues: “At least now he gets to stay in Sweden until he dies”. A few of the experts also point out that Akilov does not have to be a member of an organized terror cell but could have acted alone after becoming radicalized online.

Prime minister Stefan Löfven is one of the first officials to clearly suggest that the attack should be considered an act of terrorism. In his first statements, published by newspapers on the first day afterwards, he does not refer to the assailant in person but describes the events as an attack by ‘them’ – the terrorists on a more general level – directed towards ‘us’ – the entire population of Sweden. “Sweden has been attacked (...) The terrorists can never defeat Sweden. Our message is clear. We will not be suppressed. We will not fold. You can never ever win” he adds (Olsson 2017).

Politicians from other countries all express solidarity with Sweden and have some common themes in their condolences: They all perceive themselves as united with Sweden against the threat of terrorism, which seeks to frighten ‘us’ by attacking our lifestyle. Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission claims that “An attack on one of our member states is an attack on all of us” (Lund 2017). Both Norway’s prime minister Erna Solberg and Denmark’s Lars Lökke Rasmussen talk about “Our Swedish brothers and sisters” (Göteborgsposten 2017).

Compared to the framing of the previous case, the problem definition of the attack on Drottninggatan is quite clear: It is considered terrorism, or at least suspected terrorism, in all reports. There is however some discrepancy regarding on what level this problem should be defined. It is sometimes framed as an attack by a radicalized individual but, more commonly, as an attack executed by “the terrorists” directed towards “the West”, where any individual factors are taken out of the equation.
Counterimages

The hero versus the villain

From the first day after the attack one of the victims – a teacher's assistant named Lavin Eskandar – becomes a main character in the reports alongside Anton Lundin Pettersson. The newspapers refer to witnesses describing how the young man “died like a hero” and that he “sacrificed himself to save the children” (Nilsson 2015). The hero description of Lavin Eskandar recurs throughout the reports, and he is consistently put in contrast to Anton Lundin Pettersson by getting praised and described as a well-loved friend, son, and teacher.

Apart from Lavin, the accomplishments of the police and teachers of Trollhättan are contrasted to the attack and attacker: Stefan Löfven praises the police and adds that “it is extremely important to show what kind of society we want and that together we stand up for the equality of everyone”. “Sweden is to be characterized by solidarity, community and consideration. That is Sweden, especially during this fall we’ve seen how many forces of good there are”, he tells Dagens Nyheter (Kärrman 2015), referring to all the Swedes who have helped refugees during the recent migrant crisis. Löfven’s own way of handling the attack is in turn praised by Anna Kinberg Batra, at the time the leader of the biggest opposition party Moderaterna (Moderate Party).

A few days after the attack, a rally is organized to “remember the dead and fight the xenophobic forces that are believed to have been the motive” (Asplid 2015a). Participants, including Lavin Eskandar’s relatives, are quoted, delivering messages about solidarity, love and unity as Swedish citizens. Lavin’s father is even quoted in GP saying that he does not feel hatred against his son’s murderer (Sydvik 2015).

Moral evaluation is made by putting Anton Lundin Pettersson in contrast with different ‘forces of good’. Löfven claims that Sweden “is” solidarity and consideration. Helping and welcoming refugees is framed as the opposite of the assailant’s acts. Lavin Eskandar becomes the primary example of this contrasting process. The police investigation has later concluded that Lavin Eskandar was attacked instantly upon Lundin Pettersson’s arrival at the school, and was given no chance to protect anyone, not even himself (Erlandsson 2017). In a way, this makes the theme of the hero versus the murderer even more compelling, because it underlines our urgent need to find light in times of darkness, even if it needs to be created.

Sweden stands strong against terrorism

Just like in Trollhättan, counterimages play an important role after the Drottninggatan attack.
The hero in this case is not a single individual but large groups of people: Police, hospital staff and the people of Stockholm are all praised both by journalists and different actors throughout all reports. It starts with stories about the hashtag #openstockholm, and of how people offered each other help in the direct aftermath of the attack. Prime minister Stefan Löfven is quick to praise these efforts: “In these hard times Sweden also shows its strength. Police, medics and rescue services all work hard to help and make others feel safe. People in Stockholm have opened up their homes and workplaces to one another, and show compassion, warmth and respect”, he says in his initial statement (Expressen 2017). Löfven presents this as proof that the “terrorists’” attempts of turning people against each other will never be successful: “We know that our enemy is these kinds of atrocious killers – not one another”

The prime minister is not the only one to express that Sweden might come out of the tragedy even stronger than before. Politicians, civilians and other formal representatives (such as the king and crown princess of Sweden) all emphasize this – and join in commending the people who helped out during the attack. Dagens Nyheter (Schori, Jörnmark & Nordh 2017) writes that the police is “praised by everyone” and all the newspapers describe scenes where people, especially children, give flowers and hugs to the policemen. Two men who both tried to stop the attacker or warn people are referred to as “heroes on the street” (Svensson 2017a).

One of the media outlets, Expressen, even starts its own digital campaign where you can “send love to Stockholm”. It is mentioned that they did the same thing after the attack in Trollhättan. Just like in Trollhättan, rallies are soon organized to “stand up against violence and terror”. It is clear that the attack is considered to be an assault on all of Sweden and the country’s culture and lifestyle. The moral evaluation is that whoever attacks this, must represent the very opposite. All actors also make sure to emphasize that Sweden will not be changed by the efforts of terrorism. If anything, ‘we’ will become even stronger.

**Comparison and context**

**School as a target: A Swedish ‘school-shooter’ or racism on the rise?**

When it comes to explaining the contemporary context of the attack, two main themes can be found in the reports: The comparison to American ‘school shootings’ (even though the weapon used in this case was not a gun) and the subsequent issue of safety in schools, and the indication that racism is yet again on the rise in Sweden, leading to a discussion of what political and societal factors might have created this development.
The comparison between the attack in Trollhättan and school attacks in other countries is imminent and made by all newspapers, by politicians and experts as well as the journalists themselves. The phenomenon is mostly associated with ‘school shootings’ in the US, but examples from Finland – and in single cases England, Germany, China and Pakistan – also occur in the texts. Some of the experts point out that it was only a matter of time before a Swedish school would be attacked. “Sooner or later we all feared that this would happen”, criminologist Jerzy Sarnecki tells DN (Delin 2015a), arguing that the outcome could have been even worse if the assailant has used a gun. Many of the experts also mention that these kinds of assailants may be hard to identify beforehand. The municipality of Trollhättan claims that the attack “could have happened at any school” (Asplid 2015b). We also learn that the school in question has been criticised for providing an unsafe environment for its students, partly because of the fact that the cafeteria where the attack started is open to the public. “How can something like this happen? The school should have had better security”, the mother of one of the victims tells Expressen (Broström 2015). We also learn that many Swedish schools have received threats the days following the attacks. Sveriges Skoledareförbund (The Swedish Association of School Principals and Directors of Education) tells GP (Arvidsson 2015) that the attack will bring about changes: “The idea of school as a safe place is threatened and the openness must be reconsidered.”

The other main comparison in the reports is to events that happened during the 90’s, when Sweden is described as lastly being plagued by right-wing extremism and crimes with xenophobic motives. Trollhättan is described as “a stronghold for racists” at the time. The aggravated assault of a young Somali man in 1993 and the fire in the town’s mosque the same year are put forward as the main examples. “Many of Anton Lundin Pettersson’s victims are children of those who experienced the violent 90’s with asylum centres being set on fire and racists dressed in uniforms parading the streets”, Expressen (Olsson 2015) sums it up in an article comparing the two time periods. The same year as the events in Trollhättan, Lasermannen (“the Laser man”) John Ausonius was convicted of shooting eleven people, most of them immigrants, in Stockholm and Uppsala during the previous two years. The politician Rossana Dinamarca, who grew up in Trollhättan, is quoted saying that the attack “throws you back to the time around Lasermannen” (Pettersson 2015b).

Both experts and others describe how threats against immigrants are yet again increasing: “I’m black and I need to be prepared that something might happen just because I’m black” a resident in Trollhättan tells GP (Domellöf-Wik 2015). Mona Sahlin is quoted saying that the
threat of right-wing extremists – as well as Islamist extremists – has clearly increased, referring to both as possible terror threats (Alexander 2015; Delin 2015b). Philipe Charbel Nehme, the man in Trollhättan who was almost killed by Nazis in 1993, argues that the racism and hatred is even worse today (Petersson 2015b). Mentions of recent fires at asylum centres also show how the current development resembles that in the 90’s. Reports of threats towards foreign-born Swedes and of the attack being praised by right-wing extremists online, also illustrate this development. The only person to actively question the suggestion that right-wing extremism is currently on the rise is the author Anna-Lena Lodenius, who argues that this movement has posed an equally large threat during a long period of time.

Single comparisons are made to violent attacks and assailants with right-wing extremist motives during other time-periods: The neo-Nazis who killed 15-year-old John Hron in 1981, Peter Mangs who shot people with immigrant background in Malmö between the years of 2003 and 2010, and the Norwegian right-wing terrorist Anders Behring Breivik.

Swedish politicians acknowledge the issue of racism in regard to the attack, but do not present any specific political solutions. Prime minister Stefan Löfven argues that racism and hate crime can be prohibited by creating a society where people can find work, get by if they are unemployed and where the school system works (Eriksson & Melin 2015). Interior minister Anders Ygeman says that “the open Swedish society in itself is probably protection from these kinds of attacks” (Holmqvist 2015). There is, however, another political debate that emerges from the reports. The question is raised of whether the current political debate on migration – an extremely hot topic at the time of the attack – has somehow influenced or affected the assailant. 2015 was the peak of the European migrant crisis, and the agreement between the government and the opposition on efforts to decrease the number of migrants arriving in Sweden was finalised almost at the same time as the attack. Expressen describes a divided political climate: A majority of Swedes support the previous migration policies, but at the same time the political party Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats, SD) gain popularity in the polls promoting stricter policies on migration.

Different actors make the claim that SD might be to blame for a general increase in xenophobia in Sweden. An 18-year-old living in Trollhättan is quoted in Aftonbladet saying that “racism has increased since SD entered parliament. And as soon as it’s a Swedish assailant he is described as mentally ill, but if it’s an immigrant it’s a terrorist”. There are even suggestions being made that the party may have influenced Anton Lundin Pettersson specifically, since he is known to have sympathised with them online. Anders Bergman,
author and expert on right-wing extremism, is quoted in Expressen (Petersson 2015b) saying that the apocalyptic rhetoric parties like SD use to describe the consequences of migration can have an effect on people like Lundin Pettersson. Liberal politician Bengt Westerberg accuses SD of creating an agitated discussion on migration, the same way he argues that the party Ny Demokrati (New Democracy) did during the 90’s. Asked by both Expressen and Aftonbladet, representatives for SD naturally deny these suggestions, arguing that Lundin Pettersson is a Nazi who has nothing to do with their politics whatsoever.

Since two problem definitions (racist hate crime and ‘school shooting’) are found in the reports, it is natural that two types of causal interpretation can be identified as well. As a xenophobic attack, it is framed within a general rise of right-wing extremism in Sweden at the time, just like that which plagued the country in the 90’s. This development is interpreted as a reaction to the increase in immigration, as part of the international migrant crisis, and the political debate this has created. The political party SD are accused by different actors of contributing to the new rhetoric, or even of inspiring the assailant.

When the attack is interpreted as a ‘school shooting’ there are no causal interpretations to be found at the contextual level. We can find individualized and psychological explanations in the description category, suggesting loneliness, mental illness and a need for attention to be possible motivational factors. There are also few explicit treatment recommendations to be found in the texts. The experts point out that school attackers are practically impossible to identify beforehand and the discussion of whether the school could have had better security ends quickly. Treating it as a xenophobic attack, representatives for the government only put forward vague ideas of how “the open Swedish society” and an increase in social welfare can thwart the increase in right-wing extremist violence on a more general level.

**Unavoidable link in a chain of terror – or the consequence of failed policies?**

Three main contextual themes emerge from the reports on Rakhmat Akilov: The ongoing threat of people with connections to ISIL launching attacks in Western cities, the “terrorism export” of Uzbekistan and the lack of security measures and terrorism laws making the attack possible in Sweden.

When news about the attack broke, comparisons are immediately made to the truck attacks in Nice, Berlin and London, that had all taken place within the last year. Experts, witnesses and the newspapers themselves all make the connection. In an article with the headline “Vehicles are the new weapons of terrorists”, DN (Björklund & Gripenberg 2017) mention that all
previous attacks have been connected to ISIL and Al-Qaida. Expressen state that “Stockholm is now part of a tragic chain that goes from Nice, Berlin and London” (Falkehed 2017).

Politicians, experts and civilians all seem to agree that it was only a matter of time before this kind of attack hit Sweden. “I warned you that this would happen”, criminologist Leif GW Persson tells Expressen (Brask 2017). Terrorism expert Magnus Ranstorp tells Aftonbladet (Hougner 2017b) that Sweden has been living on borrowed time. Former prime minister Carl Bildt is quoted in the same newspaper saying that the attack follows a pattern that is now part of “the world we live in”. The experts all agree that Sweden is a symbolic target, a representative of “the West”. The attack is framed as a consequence of “the situation in Europe and the world”, where Sweden is merely a symbol of the “liberal, open, multicultural democracy that fundamentalist, militant, Islamist groups despise” (Kruse 2017). The goal of the attack is framed as to create fear and polarization in the West in general – and strengthen the position of the jihadist movement. In his first statement after the attack, prime minister Stefan Löfven gives the same kind of explanation: “The goal of terrorism is to undermine the democracy (...) in order for more people to start hating and disbelieving one another.” (Expressen 2017).

Apart from assuming that Rakhmat Akilov had been inspired by recent attacks, it is also suggested that his actions might inspire others. Reports of a Russian citizen getting arrested with a bomb in the Norwegian capital the day afterwards becomes an example of this, and witnesses share in the idea that terror can happen anywhere today: “People say that you can go to Nice or you can’t go here or there but, in that case, you can’t go anywhere because it can happen anywhere, at any time”, a Stockholm citizen tells GP (Vaccari 2017). The newspaper also interviews an American tourist, who has the same feeling: “It’s a reminder that we live in a world of terror”.

Another theme, if not as prominent, is the nationality of the assailant: A recurring question in the reports is why Uzbekistan “exports” (Larsson 2017) jihadists who join the ranks of ISIL in the Middle East or commit attacks in Europe. Recent terror attacks in Istanbul and Saint Petersburg where Uzbek citizens have been involved are mentioned, and the reports paint an image of Uzbekistan as a country characterized by dictatorship, oppression and hard measurements against all Islamist groups.

A few other comparisons are made once or twice in the reports; a suicide bomber who detonated a bomb at Drottninggatan in 2010 but only killed himself, the double homicide at Ikea in Västerås (where the attacker had also been denied asylum), and previous attacks in
Sweden that has been considered terrorism, such as the Amalthea bombing in 1908 and the West German Embassy siege of 1975, both committed by left-wing extremists.

The final theme, which especially characterizes the reports during the later days included in the study, is the discussion of what could have done to prevent the attack, and what policy measure should follow in its wake. Loud criticism is expressed from the political opposition after receiving the information that Rakhmat Akilov was supposed to be deported from Sweden in February, and that the Swedish Security Service had information about him showing sympathies for ISIL. In this context we also learn that a total of about 12 000 people have escaped deportation from Sweden, and that the police’s resources to locate them are slim. Jimmie Åkesson, the leader of Sverigedemokraterna, is quoted in Expressen (Svensson 2017b) saying that the holds the government responsible for the attack, which might even have been preventable if the government had listened to the party’s warnings. He does not explicitly suggest keeping everyone who has been denied asylum locked up but argues that necessary precautions need to be taken. Although not putting it the same way as SD, all the major opposition parties demand action. Stefan Löfven describes the situation as “frustrating” and invites all the parties in the parliament – apart from SD and Vänsterpartiet (Sweden’s Left Party) – to discuss measures to prevent terrorism. The specific topics of these talks are not presented, but it is suggested that means to deport those who have been denied asylum will be on the agenda. Apart from this, some other practical policies are being discussed during the days after the attack, such what changes can be made in order to make it harder to hijack trucks, and if different kinds of barriers could prevent trucks and cars from driving onto pedestrian streets.

Just like the problem definitions, the causal interpretations of the attack appear on a macro as well as a micro level. The macro level interpretation is that “the terrorists” as a global movement aim to create polarization and fear in “the West”. In this context Stockholm, or even Sweden, is merely a symbol, and the attack could just as well have taken place somewhere else. The micro level interpretation is that Sweden has failed to prevent terrorism, since people who have been denied asylum have been able to remain in the country. The framing of Akilov as a representative of people from Uzbekistan who get radicalized to a higher extent than people of other nationalities could be considered a third, meso level, interpretation.

The framing of the attack as global terrorism is not followed by any treatment recommendations: As a part of a “tragic chain” of terror the specific attack is presented as
almost unavoidable. The same goes for the development in Uzbekistan, where no suggestions of treatment follow. On the micro level, however, it is suggested that policy measures could prevent terror attacks from happening. Among the possible treatments we find stricter laws against terrorism, increased resources to the police that are responsible for carrying out deportations, and ways of making sure that everyone who is denied asylum leaves the country – even if that means locking them up until it happens.

In this section of the thesis, I have given a detailed account for the framing and reasoning devices that can be found in the reports on the two cases respectively. I will finish by summarizing the reasoning devices, before moving on to the final discussion where the two cases are discussed comparatively.

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In this thesis, I set out to study the framing of the actions and ideologies of Anton Lundin Pettersson and Rakhmat Akilov and – more specifically – to what extent they were politicized or psychologized in Swedish news media. The first few days after a shocking and violent crime has taken place, everyone is still trying to understand what actually happened: Who is the assailant? What was their motive, and are they part of a larger organisation of some sort? Information is usually scarce, which makes framing a particularly important – and powerful – tool for explanation and meaning-making, that might go on to shape the permanent perception of what happened as well as creating and reinforcing ideology on a greater level (Gitlin 1980).

Based on previous research, one could expect the two assailants to be framed differently, as domestic (ingroup) versus international (outgroup) assailants (Powell 2011; Falkheimer & Olsson 2015). Some studies suggest, however, that they would be similarly framed as terrorists (Samuel-Azran et al. 2015) or lunatics (Roy & Ross 2011). As presented in the result sections, both types of framing can in fact be found in the reports.

The attacks in Trollhättan and at Drottninggatan are both put in a context with strong connections to what happens around them at the time: the migration crisis and asylum centre fires of 2015, and the international threat of ISIL in 2017, symbolized by a series of truck attacks executed within the past year. Another similarity between the reports is the prominence of counterimages, as suggested by van Dijk (1998). Both of the assailants are put in contrast to a society that shows solidarity, compassion and fights back against evil. Just like in Powell (2011), people are described as heroes simply by being victims of the attack. The most prominent counterimage in the case of Anton Lundin Pettersson is another individual, Lavin Eskandar. In the case of Rakhmat Akilov, he is rather contrasted to large groups of people (the police, the citizens of Stockholm, et cetera). This could possibly have to with the fact that Lundin Pettersson is individualized to a higher extent than Akilov, as I discuss in further detail below. It is, however, impossible to tell whether the same kind of hero story could have emerged from the reports on the Drottninggatan attack, would there have been early reports that one of the victims tried to save others or stop the attack from happening.

These counterimages serve to manifest an ingroup/outgroup dynamic in both cases, where the events are being framed as attacks not just on the victims, but on all of Sweden and “our”
shared values. In both cases, the prominence of counterimages show a common need to reinforce the norms and values of the ingroup (van Dijk 1997), framing Anton Lundin Pettersson as part of the outgroup, just like Rakmat Akilov. Stefan Löfven’s claim that Sweden “is” solidarity and consideration serves as an example of this process in the reports on the Trollhättan attack. Yet, this theme is significantly stronger in the case of Rakmat Akilov. He is depersonalized to the extent that he is at times only seen as a representation of “the terrorists’” agenda of creating fear and division in “the West”. In his speech after the attack, Stefan Löfven enforces this by referring to the “the terrorists” as responsible for the attack, rather than the specific assailant. In a way Drottninggatan, Stockholm and Sweden are also just symbols. The attack is largely being framed as something that could have happened anywhere, a link in a chain of terror where each attack is given little explanatory power in itself, but rather considered a part of the terrorism frame and “the binary between ‘the West and the rest’” (Roy & Ross 2011).

There is a depersonalized aspect of the framing of Anton Lundin Pettersson’s acts as well. The idea that racism will increase from time to time in a society, almost cyclically and following roughly the same pattern when it does, is present throughout the reports. The political party Sverigedemokraterna are accused by some of contributing to a more agitated debate on migration – or even to specifically trigger assailants like Lundin Pettersson – but no solutions are presented to thwart the general development of racism on the rise. In this sense, the acts of both assailants are seen as part of a cycle (or chain) where their personal beliefs or prerogatives are given no explanatory power, and little attention is given to “causes and solutions” (Roy & Ross 2011) in general.

However, alongside the xenophobic motives, experts put forward psychological explanations when trying to make sense of Lundin Pettersson’s. The portrayal of a lonely – possibly mentally ill – school attacker with an interest in computer games and hardcore music is one that we recognize from the US context: Ever since the Columbine High School Massacre in 1999 – and most recently after Nikolas Cruz’ attack in Parkland Florida in February of 2018 – there is an ongoing debate about the possible influence of media violence on school shooters (Salam & Stack 2018). Although there is no explicit suggestion that this could have influenced Lundin Pettersson, the frequent mentions of these specific interests can be argued to allude to that debate.

These psychological explanations are nowhere to be found in the case of Rakmat Akilov. Although some of his acquaintances are interviewed straight after the attack, he is much less
individualized than Lundin Pettersson. His actions are framed as terrorism motivated by a higher ideology, and no personal or psychologized motives are presented. We learn some facts about his personal life – such as a desire to support his family back home and that he was recently being denied asylum in Sweden – but they are never put forward as possible motives or triggers to explain his actions. The possibility of Akilov suffering from some kind of a mental illness is never discussed.

In sum, the framing of Anton Lundin Pettersson and Rakhmat Akilov is reminiscent of what was suggested by Powell (2011), but the differences are smaller than expected. Akilov is highly politicized and quite consistently put in a terrorism frame similar to those found in previous research (Entman 1993; Norris, Kern & Just 2003 et al), whereas competing frames are presented for Lundin Pettersson. He is both psychologized and politicized to some extent, framed in part as a mentally ill school-shooter, in part as a symbol of racism on the rise in Sweden. Although the case of Anton Lundin Pettersson has many of the critical components that could define him as a terrorist, this does not happen. Post 9/11 the “terrorism frame” seems to include only deeds committed by people with an Islamist ideology (preferably ISIL), leaving other types of attacks much harder to define.

The unwillingness to frame Lundin Pettersson as a terrorist probably has to do with the media’s tendency to adopt the definitions of the government (Ben-Yehuda 2005; Lazar & Lazar 2004). In the case of Akilov, Sweden’s prime minister suggests that the attack could be considered terrorism from the very first day, which he does not in the case of Lundin Pettersson. Another explanation for this difference in framing can be found by looking at who are interviewed. Psychologists are asked about Anton Lundin Pettersson, alongside criminologists and terror experts. In the case of Rakhmat Akilov, no psychologists are quoted in the reports.

The framing of Lundin Pettersson as a “school-shooter” is particularly interesting. What defines a school-shooter? Lundin Pettersson does not use a gun and the target of his attack is not a school that he has any personal connections to. Rather, the main defining feature of the attack is that it seems to have been directed towards people of an immigrant background, with the aim to affect Swedish policies on migration. Could he just as well have carried out his attack on a busy pedestrian street? And in that case, what would he have been labelled as?

This thesis builds on the understanding that media influence works on different levels simultaneously: That they are shaped by, and in turn shape, society. At this point, the way the public actually perceive the assailants can only be assumed based on previous research. To go
even deeper into this, semi-structured interviews with news consumers on how the assailants are being perceived, would add to this. This would add yet another level to the understanding of the influence of media and the different levels of meaning-making through framing.

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Literature


Newspaper articles

Trollhättan

Drottninggatan