



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG  
SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES

“You can be whatever you want in this world, but  
not un-vaccinated.”

– Understanding Covid-19 anti-vaccinators  
in Modern Democracy

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# Abstract

Sweden's approach for covid-19 has been considered mild compared to other countries', but despite the Public Health Authority's, the government's, and the politician's relatively relaxed approach towards the pandemic, there have been a lot of questions raised regarding the work and management of this crisis both from those that asked for a firmer handling and from those who criticised the regulations all together. There are citizens in Sweden who have had a growing resentment towards the vaccination and the vaccination card, which has come to result in people connecting and establishing movements against the covid-19 vaccination through protests and demonstrations.

This study will investigate the growing resistance against the covid-19 vaccination in Sweden through both participation observations and interviews. The thesis is based on a total of six interviews with seven participants, which is complemented with two observations that were made in Gothenburg and Malmö, both in the year of 2021. To be able to act in public is a fundamental part of democracy, since it allows citizens to use their political voice, and this thesis wanted to develop knowledge on who the people demonstrating are, as well as their motivations. Therefore, the aim of this thesis is to investigate personal and political motivation among people who have chosen to participate in the demonstrations against vaccinations. The object is to create a further understanding of why people oppose vaccination and how to make sense of it in modern democracy and society. Through the work of Hannah Arendt, Eric Voegelin, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau the material will be analysed and discussed to explore the different ideas and rationale the participants articulated against vaccination.

From the data collected three main perspectives were found. First, the participants own perspectives on their activism, secondly the Medical Perspectives, and lastly Social-Political Perspectives. Issues concerning trust, freedom, and truth, have become central in understanding why people protests against vaccination, and it has become clear that regardless of who the actor is, the question regarding vaccination relates to power and how we as individuals make sense of different power dynamics.

## **KEYWORDS:**

Covid-19, Sweden, activism, freedom, representation, demonstration, control, togetherness, truth, vaccination.

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# 1. Introduction

In several countries around the world there has previously been a rising heat from unsatisfied citizens who gathered to demonstrations against covid-19 vaccines. Within countries such as Canada, France, Germany, a core term that has come to emerge frequently during the protests is 'Freedom' (Judd 2021; Gouvy 2021; Morris, & Beck 2020). Demonstrations and protesting are one of the main outlets to foster your political voice. Among the people who are demonstrating it seems to be a complex mixture of reasons to refuse vaccination; people who are against any regulation in a pandemic; people who don't believe in the existence of the virus; troublemakers; people who are always against the government; people who enjoy demonstrations because they are bored, etcetera. To understand the contemporary political relevance of these demonstrations, we need to know who these people are and what their reasoning is for protesting. It is when we learn what makes these demonstrations important and meaningful for the participants, that we can understand their participation, activism and political beliefs, in modern democracy and society.

What has unfolded during the pandemic is the various contradictions of views within public opinion regarding the best way to manage the spread of the virus. Among the majority of people, the hope was to bring back the pre-pandemic lifestyle, and to grant security and freedom is through mass vaccination. However, some people who do not agree, argue that the strict politics regarding covid-19 creates fear, insecurity and the danger of covid-19 policies annihilate democracy (Kwok, Heimans, & Singh 2021, 11). In the west there is a profound mistrust that has grown regarding the excessive immunisation protocols and tracing of covid-19. Simultaneously, there has also grown a mistrust for big enterprises in medicine which are seen as profit makers instead of working to develop and produce medicine and vaccinations for the good of the common people (Stolle et al 2020, 4484).

The outbreak of covid-19 has proved to us how interconnected we are, both in the sense of the global economic and political impacts, both also how we view and understand this virus in the sense of fact, information, media, and news outlets. This is a result of how globalisation has altered the relationship between time and space, meaning that the world has become bigger since it has become more moveable and accessible through technology and information. Since the world is so interconnected, globally, and locally, in both the private and the public realm, citizens all around the world are therefore connected through globalisation. The fast spread of

new information is a crucial part of covid-19 and our global connection. Through technology, media and governance, it is clear in the context of covid-19 that this virus affects us all globally. The pandemic has proved to us that what happens in one part of the world can directly affect other parts of the world (Campbell, MacKinnon, & Stevens 2010, 2-3).

The phenomenon of vaccine refusal is not something new, but what is interesting in this pandemic has made this movement more organised and stronger than before. This thesis will bring together Global Studies and Political Philosophy, through the empirical case of covid-19, focusing on the demonstrations of the vaccine and the people who are engaging in these demonstrations. Through both participant observations on demonstrations against covid-19 vaccinations, and semi structured interviews, this thesis hopes to contribute with an insight into how people experience this situation. These interactions can provide a greater understanding of individuals' motivations against the covid-19 vaccination, as well as to why they choose to refrain from the vaccination, which can further help clarify essential aspects of modern democracy.

## 2. Background on covid-19

After covid-19, also known as coronavirus, was identified in the capital Wuhan of the Hubei Province, China, in January 2020, and the world realised how highly transmissible and pathogenic the coronavirus is and a state of pandemic was declared by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on March 11, 2020 (WHO 2020). We live in a fast-evolving world and our interconnection and mobility resulted in an intense spread of the virus globally (Bruinen de Bruin et al. 2020, 1). Covid-19 is a respiratory virus, meaning that it primarily spreads when people are in close contact through droplets coming from the airways. A person who is infected spreads the virus through coughs, sneezes, exhales, and speaks droplets (Folkhälsomyndigheten, A 2021). Some of the common symptoms that have been reported are fever, hard to breath, altered taste and smell, and pain in joints and muscles. The virus affects everyone very differently and for some people the symptoms can last for a long time before fully recover. In the worst-case scenario, the result of the virus can also be death. In an international estimation, about 0.5-1 percent of the people infected pass away. There is also a clear connection between old age and increased mortality, meaning that the older you are, the higher the risk (Folkhälsomyndigheten, B 2021).

In the end of 2020, Sweden started to give out the first covid-19 vaccination shots. The most used vaccine in Sweden is from Pfizer-BioNTech named Comirnaty (Folkhälsomyndigheten, D 2022) However, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) did not approve the vaccine until august 23, 2021 (FDA 2021). What is different with the production of this vaccine is that it is developed around the messenger RNA (mRNA). Vaccines usually consist of dead or weakened parts of the actual virus. But with mRNA one can use the protein in the virus's outer membrane and produce a blueprint of that viral protein. The copies that are created outside of the actual virus are called 'spike protein'. The immune system will not recognize this protein and start to produce antibodies. These new antibodies will remain in the immune system memory, and if a person gets infected by the virus these antibodies can find and destroy it (Jain, Venkataraman, Wechsler, and Peppas 2021, 6). Further, according to the Swedish Medical Products agency (Läkemedelsverket), there have been a total of 100 942 side-effects reported in Sweden from the vaccines Pfizer, Moderna and AstraZeneca. Some of the side effects reported are fever, muscle aches and fatigue (Läkemedelsverket, 2022).

According to The Public Health Agency of Sweden, also known as Folkhälsomyndigheten, there are both individual and public benefits from being vaccinated against covid-19. Folkhälsomyndigheten have the responsibility for public health issues and

with an expert authority they support and develop activities to improve the nations preparedness for health threats and to promote health (Folkhälsomyndigheten, F. 2018). On the Folkhälsomyndigheten webpage they urge everyone to take responsibility to prevent the spread of infection. They mean that everyone has their own individual responsibility to act in a way to both protect yourself and others in this pandemic. They also state that vaccination is the best way to avoid getting seriously ill from the virus and to avoid spreading it to others (Folkhälsomyndigheten, C 2021). More, looking at the public benefits from taking the vaccine the public health authority argues that for example that the vaccine indirectly protects those who were not able to get vaccinated, or people who are more exposed to the virus due to an underlying disease. Another argument is that the vaccine benefits the possibility for herd immunity, which means that it is harder for the virus to spread and mutate (Institutet för hälsa och välfärd, 2020).

Further, there is a dilemma for workplaces that for example are requesting that in order to work their employers need to take the vaccine. However, it would be inappropriate for them to require a mandatory vaccination on their employees, it would also be inappropriate to force a vaccination but at the same time as people are being encouraged to take the covid-19 vaccine for the common good. Commonly individuals are framed as responsibility-taking and self-steering citizens, this means that the vaccination is a personal discussion because we are individually responsible for our own and others' health (Kwok, Heimans, & Singh 2021, 11).

This leads to the idea of what is understood as the 'appeal to nature'. This perception is usually referred to the anti-vaccinators who see themselves as 'naturalist bias'. They claim that vaccines are unnatural for the body because it is manmade and therefore inferior to our natural immunity (Stolle et al. 2020, 4484). Those who have this appeal to nature commonly argue that the covid-19 vaccine is unnecessary because we have the body's own "natural defence" and that this defence is better at protecting the body from infections (Deleniv, Ariely, & Peters 2021).

## 2.1 Approaches to covid-19

Communication has been an essential part in mitigating the pandemic risks. Through communication, authorities of the state hoped to achieve public understanding, building trust, compliance, and acceptance for their security measures. Official communication during the pandemic has usually been structured in information and news on different websites, all in the



attempt to spread awareness on what is happening in the world, but also to bring information regarding new restrictions and laws. Health within the EU is regarded as a national responsibility and so every country has their own application of mitigation measures for covid-19 (Bruinen de Bruin et al. 2020, 5).

### 2.1.1 Swedish approach to covid-19

During the pandemic the Swedish pandemic strategy was different from many other nations. While other nations in Europe decided to go into lockdown, Sweden chose to ban public gatherings. The Swedish strategy was coordinated by the government with guidance from the Public Health Agency and one main goal in Sweden was to avoid societal shutdowns. To reach this goal the individual responsibility was put in centre for the Swedish strategy and has primarily been structured by different recommendations, there was also an insinuation that this goal was going to be reached through a ‘natural’ herd-immunity of the public. Further, the strategy also included an aim to protect elderly, risk groups, avoid overwhelming healthcare systems and to prevent major consequences for society and individuals. Regarding education, distance learning was established for university students and older teenagers in high school (Brusselsaers et al. 2022, 2). The Swedish constitution declares that “Swedish citizens have the right to move freely within Sweden and leave the country”, based on this claim the government insistence that it would not be legal to have a general lockdown. This resulted in a more laissez faire approach with recommendations and nonbinding ‘soft laws’. At one point in the pandemic the parliament conducted a temporary amendment to the law named ‘Communicable Diseases Act’, which enabled the government to implement stronger measures, such as increasing distance-work, closing airports and restaurants (Brusselsaers et al. 2022, 4-5).

### 3. Aim and Research Purpose

The pandemic has forced the world into global, regional, and national recession and with a constant debate regarding the best way to govern the pandemic of covid-19. During this pandemic there have been citizens all around the world who have been far from pleased with the work from one's government, that later crystallised into protests against the covid-19 vaccines, restraint on freedom of movement and covid-19 certificate, such as vaccination cards. The resistance towards vaccination has raised a curiosity among many people within the public debate, raising questions such as who are these people and what are their reasons for demonstrating. The aim of this research is to investigate the rationality and reasoning among the individuals who have actively chosen to participate in the demonstrations against the covid-19 vaccination. The object of this thesis is to see what it is that makes people oppose or rebel against the covid-19 vaccine and the governing of covid-19 in modern society and democracy. Alternatively, this study can create a wider understanding for those who want to find ways to meet and create a dialog with people who are against covid-19 vaccinations.

#### 3.1 Research Questions

Therefore, my research questions are as follows:

1. What kind of personal and political motivations and explanations do different individuals who are against covid-19 vaccination present against vaccination?
2. How may these be understood as individual and political expressions within modern democracy?

## 4. Delimitation

Since the pandemic and resistance of covid-19 vaccination is a broad topic there will be delimitations in the study, and two of the main delimitations will be presented below.

A study from Harvard University showed that the growing conspiracy around covid-19 is connected to the growing mistrust in experts and institutions. The study also showed that people who are less self-informed about what is happening around the pandemic are more prone to believe in conspiracy theories or be a coronavirus non-believer. The study also finds that believers in different Covid-19 conspiracies are more prone to be relinquished from their government's guidelines (Freeman et al. 2020, 12). There is also empirical evidence which has connected conspiracy beliefs with the perception of threat out of societal change (Federico, Williams, & Vitriol, 2018). With that in mind, this thesis wants to go beyond the understanding that those who refuse covid-19 vaccine are simply conspiracy believers. However, this perspective needs to be mentioned to fully understand the different perspectives around the covid-19 vaccine refusers in modern opinion and democracy. Another note regarding the use of the term 'anti-vaccers' is that it will not be used throughout this thesis due to its strong link to the idea of conspiracy theorists and for the purpose of going beyond this belief I want to avoid this power dynamic of putting labels on people.

Moving on, another limitation that needs to be addressed is needle phobia and how it relates to covid-19 mass vaccination. Since the vaccine for covid-19 has emerged, the fear of needles has become more prominent than before and in a recent study from the University of Oxford it shows that treating needle fears may in fact reduce the hesitation of taking the covid-19 vaccine rates by 10 percent. The study contained a survey with more than 1,500 adults who were asked about their anxieties regarding blood and needles, they were also asked about their willingness to take the covid-19 vaccine. What this survey showed is that needle phobia plays a bigger part in mass vaccination than previously believed (University of Oxford, 2021). However, this hesitation of the covid-19 vaccine will not be addressed in the thesis.

## 5. Role of theory

In this thesis I will let the interviews lead the research to what is relevant for the thesis. I have found several theorists and concepts which have valuable knowledge for my research. Which is Hannah Arendt (2020), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2012), and Eric Voegelin (1987), and even though these theorists lived and worked in another time period and their reality was much different from ours there are still valuable reflections and meanings that are applicable to several of today's worries. I choose to go directly to older theories instead of more up to date theorists because I want to have a clear connection between their ideas and values in my analysis. By doing this I believe it can provide a grounded role in my theory section where their thoughts can give an insightful understanding of how modern society and democracy works today.

### 5.1 Hannah Arendt; 'Freedom' and 'Revolution'

Hannah Arendt was a German-American political philosopher who wrote an essay in 1961 named *Freedom to Be Free* with keywords, 'freedom' and 'action' (2020). In her essay she presents how action is the most important tool within politics, and freedom cannot exist without action, and action cannot be without freedom. The performances 'to act' and the ability to make new beginnings are connected with each other and in every human activity there is an element of action (Arendt 2020, 46-7). Since this thesis wants to understand what it is that makes people want to act, Arendt's understanding of action then becomes interesting since it provides tools for analysing activists and the demonstrations against the covid-19 vaccination. Which according to her, is a combination of different performances to achieve the never-ending goal of becoming free and reclaim one's liberty to have their own right to choose over their healthcare and bodies.

Further, in her work, she argues that if there are only a few initiatives it will result in action becoming automatic and losing its meaning, leading people to start wishing for miracles to solve their problems instead of acting in moments of spontaneity (Arendt 2020, 49-50). Even if her work is a product of her time, she helps us see why action becomes so important in modern politics. And that is because action can create new beginnings, through the engagement in political movements where people can express their dissatisfaction. Since freedom is something that can be enjoyed together in public, this means that to be heard and seen from others also demands equality regarding public freedom. Arendt's ideas help us to find a critical

approach regarding political action, but also suggestions on how we can understand and even improve the dignity of politics.

## 5.2 Eric Voegelin; ‘Truth’ and ‘Representation’

Eric Voegelin was a German-American political philosopher and in his book from 1987 *The New Science of Politics* has two important keywords, ‘Truth’ and ‘Representation’. His work highlights the connection between symbolism and the value of ideas which he means is necessary to understand if one wants to explain how modern democracy functions. By understanding the ‘value of ideas’, Voegelin (1987) will provide the thesis with tools to understand people’s thought, ideas, and perception on vaccination and how it interacts with modern democracy and representation in society.

Voegelin (1987) pointed out that leaders of past empires, such as the Roman empire, had the possibility to persuade the citizens to certain truths that were in their own interest, instead of the people’s interest. An important point since persuasion is considered an authoritarian behaviour (Voegelin 1987, 54). However, looking at modern politics and comparing these concepts in relation to the pandemic and the governance from public health authority, the government, and the politicians, persuasion and representations are crucial for their leadership. To remain a trustworthy source of information and to be truthful leaders in the pandemic their representation and social status is important.

### 5.2.1 Arendt and Voegelin on freedom

Everyone as individual citizens behave and play different parts in the modern society, and so also the modern democracy. Through ‘representation’ we present ourselves in society. This representation can be seen in our political interest or through our activism. We have statesmen representing our political system, and the monarchy presenting the country. However, both Arendt (2020) and Voegelin (1987) highlights that freedom always is in relation to other people. So, if we wish to be free and since freedom is always in relation to others, it means that either you must accept or refuse these various kinds of representation that currently exist.

Further, as Arendt (2020) stated, every individual is unique, so the civil society contains different unique views and understanding of reality resulting in plurality seemingly becoming a contradictory condition of humanity. As a result, we have several perspectives of what is true,

what is just, and how we are about to claim these perceptions. Meaning that our experiences are distinct in that no person can ever be interchanged or have the exact same experiences as another person, but when we stand in front of the political system every person is simultaneously distinct and equal. We are equal in that we are human beings with rights to have rights.

### 5.3 Jean-Jacques Rousseau; ‘Common Good’ and ‘Social Contract’

Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote an essay in 1762 named *The social contract* which illustrates the connection between dependency, agreements, and common good. All of which comes to be connected under the ‘Social Contract’. Here we also find ‘the general will’ which is generated through the citizens’ desire to have the best outcomes for everyone. In his work the idea is that if everyone is involved in making decisions, for instant voting in an election, everyone would vote in such a way that the outcome would benefit the whole social order. Supposedly this will result in the general will of the community, meaning that the general will is when a people has a collective thinking (Rousseau 2012, 170). Further, for Rousseau a legitimate political authority is one that is in consensus from all the people and has done this by entering the social contract for the purpose of mutual preservation. He meant that in a civil society we all are responsible for certain things such as taxes or fighting for one’s country (Rousseau 2012, 166-167). However, Rousseau could not predict how society and politics would look in the future and that issues that existed back then still remain today but in different forms. His words and ideas may feel out of date, but there is still room for interpretation and how it would apply in a modern democracy. Even though he lived in another time his thought about society and the construction of the public and people becomes relevant in the thesis because of how his work still articulates and permeates our ideal and perception of how a democracy is supposed to function. Society consists of a plurality of ideas but our idealisation of society and what we think is obvious as a general will may in fact be problematic since generalise people’s opinions. In turn it neglects political minorities, such as the people against covid-19 vaccinators, who becomes forgotten in the whole. Also, since this minority fights with our idea of what ‘the general will’ should imply in a crisis it provides us an understanding of how frustration among citizens can lead to further antagonism.

### 5.3.1 Arendt and Rousseau

Rousseau writes about the public interest and the private interest in regards to voting. The true foundation of society is according to Rousseau (2012) the act whereby a person becomes a part of the people. Which gives us the establishment of the agreement of majority rule. Which presents the basis that it is the minority's obligation to submit to the majority's choices. The social contract entails that everyone votes for the greater good from the whole community. Yet, in modern democracy it is more in that we have different association representatives. Focusing on the personal best instead of the common good, these aspirations are instead interested in protecting and defending one's personal interest instead of the people.

## 6 Introduction to Previous Research

This chapter will present both previous findings concerning covid-19, and research that are in some way touching the main body of this thesis.

### 6.1 The Individual Responsibly

The individual responsibilities have been one of the core arguments when promoting safety during the pandemic. In the contemporary western neo-liberal conception of power and governance, there is a conceptualisation through which governmentality has transferred responsibility to the individual agents by the mechanism named ‘appeal of freedom’. Governmentality focuses on the technologies, ethical problematizations and rationalities from which governance, usually exercised from the state, can be pursued indirectly, remotely or through a mode of ‘subjectification’ (Pyysiäinen, Halpin, & Guilfoyle 2017, 215). Meaning that the fate of the individual agent will predominantly depend on their own actions and decisions. Hence the subject alone carries the consequences from their action because they are solely responsible (Ibid, 218). The neoliberal ‘responsibilization’ is produced form of self-hood or subjectivity for individuals who are living under this governing of ‘the self’. It is from ‘the self’ where individuals will look for explanations for their concerns or problems rather than an external agent. The ‘responsibilization’ can be understood as an ascribed autonomy for individuals. Simultaneously this creates an individual urge for personal freedom and increased quality of life (Ibid, 216). Through this appeal of freedom and the individual responsibility there is another factor that comes into play, which is the responsabilization over threat on personal control. This idea feeds on expectations of fear, feeling uncertain and threatened to lose control over different situations. This is called “responsibilization through threat to personal control” (Pyysiäinen et al. 2017, 221). The individual reaction will depend on their own appraisal of a situation, for example those who disagree with the mass vaccination. To regain control over the situation their appraisal will lead them to seek more information, planning and direct action. Resulting into a creation of their own sense of freedom and security, which are utilised in their own autonomy (Ibid, 222). Taking the pandemic and demonstrations against the covid-19 into this context. We can see that the Individual’s action on this situation appears to be quite limited. Yet, one’s actions can also be a way to ‘fight back’ for their own



beliefs and as an attempt to prevent losing or try to retain their control in the situation (Ibid, 230).

Let us elaborate how information and actions comes into play in the situation of covid-19 and vaccination. As individuals in the western world, we have the capability for our own information seeking. It has been proven that threats together with anxiety influence people's political and social attitudes. This means for example that people with high anxiety tend to interpret equivocal information from the government as threatening. Also, if people feel threatened by an external danger it intensifies their beliefs of conspiratorial activity from an enemy. Examples of this can be politicians, organisations, or powerful people that are considered 'elite' (Grzesiak-Feldman 2013, 102). This brings us to what is thought to be fact or fallacy in one's personal control under uncertainty. During the pandemic we have seen a consistent, and more exposed, mistrust towards the medicine development regarding vaccination production. For those who question the vaccine might arrive at the conclusion that there are more risks in taking the vaccine than there are benefits, as some virologists argue (Stolle et al 2020, 4483).

## 6.2 Fear in politics

From the crisis created by the covid-19 pandemic the description of fear has come more common as a result from this emotive period. However, fear also has become an important source of motivation within the dynamic of politics. Fear in crisis and democracy has been a well-studied subject. To understand this notion in the times of covid-19 two different thinkers' work will be presented (Degerman, Flinders, & Johnson 2020, 1). One of them is Judith Shklar (1989) who was a Professor in Government. She conceptualised *fear* as a way to achieve a functional liberal state, by using it as a driving force for the liberal government to refuse fear. Her work also recognized how governments can use fear itself as an instrument for oppressive social control (Shklar 1989, 21)

Another way of understanding fear in politics in this pandemic is Zygmunt Bauman's (2006) idea on 'liquid fear'. He suggests that

'Fear' is the name that we give to our uncertainty: to our ignorance of the threat and what is to be done – what can and what can't be – to stop it in its tracks – or to fight it back if stopping it is beyond our power (Bauman 2006, 2).

For him fear is most vivid when it is scattered, unclear, diffuse, and free floating. What covid-19 has shown us is that fear exists just as much within us as it is between us. That is because fear is a function that lives in the unpredictability within the world arounds us, meaning that fear can haunt us since it has no visible reason or rhyme (Bauman 2006, 2). As covid-19 became a part of a socio-political crisis it also became a part of the politics of fear which is a relation of other fearful events, such as global financial crisis, climate changes crisis, or the crisis of democracy (Degerman, Flinders, & Johnson 2020, 9).

### 6.3 Truth and Knowledge

In an article written by the educational scholars Henry Kwok, Stephen Heimans, and Parlo Singh (2021), who bring forward the dynamic between truth and knowledge in the context of covid-19. They do this by critically engaging ‘post-truth’, ‘the will to truth’, and knowledge, through the French philosopher Michel Foucault and the British sociologist Basil Bernstein. First, they argue that the conditions for ‘post truth’ are mirroring Foucault’s ‘will to truth’, which challenges the systems that determine truth and knowledge. Second, they argue based on Basil Bernstein’s work that the post truth has two characteristics in regard to the conditions of knowledge. The first conditions are that conflict within knowledge production will constantly recontextualise as it becomes more visible and intense. The second condition is that higher level of exposure to uncertain, high-stake knowledge increases social anxieties that leads to bio politicisation. This can for example be seen in how the pandemic gives in to the feeling of uncertainty, how collective agents and individuals view themselves as main responsible for their own health, fate and it affect the fear of losing security and control, which is intrinsic to the neoliberal thinking of governance (Kwok, Heimans, & Singh 2021, 2).

During the pandemic of covid-19 it is crucial to understand how knowledge is presented in different outlets towards the public sphere and how the information is made to be truthful. When you explore the social conditions for knowledge in communication on social network platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Facebook, one notices that it produces a multitude of highly vocal opinions which produces a multitude of truths within the public. With this mass production of different truths there will simultaneously arise a dismiss, articulation and renewal on both new and previous truths. Meaning that some statements posted on social media regarding the vaccine will be considered true, and some statements will be considered false.

The centre of analytical gravity on ‘post-truth’ is not the age-old question about the existence or disavowal of truth and knowledge per se, but the exclusionary practices under which such ‘truth’ claims are articulated, dismissed, and renewed. This, he called ‘the will to truth’ – the set of selective practices whose function is to establish distinctions between false and true statements (Kwok, Heimans, & Singh 2021, 5).

With greater access to technology and more people engaging on social media it has produced a new field to express their ‘will to truth’ and their knowledge about covid-19. Leading to new actors, agents and agencies producing, recontextualised and manifested knowledge in ‘post-truth’ (Kwok, Heimans, & Singh 2021, 5).

The acceleration of knowledge circulation during the pandemic has escalated the tensions between the recontextualization and production of medicinal knowledge. An example of this is when people who are not ‘experts’ in the topic, who sometimes are called ‘keyboard warriors’, have received more influence over the translation of high-stake knowledge. Further, as algorithms and fast data forge the flow of information on once social media outlets it generates very specific knowledge bubbles for every user, which then influences their access to knowledge and what they are more likely to interact with online. Resulting in that the condition of ‘post-truth’ has an effect on the production and recontextualization of knowledge in modern society (Kwok, Heimans, & Singh 2021, 7).

## 6.4 The Human Togetherness

During the pandemic of covid-19 a ‘new normal’ had to be developed out of the restriction and political policies, this resulted in a reflection and examination on how solidarity, responsibility, political community, and trust has evolved in the process of covid-19. By engaging Hannah Arendt’s (1958) work on human togetherness in this matter we see how there is a capability to forge new forms of ‘human togetherness’ in the worlds ‘new normal’ pandemic lifestyle. According to Arendt (1958) the world is a space for human togetherness and covid-19 has forced us to ask questions about how the political community correlates with public space and togetherness. She also describes how political action is the human capacity to bring new beginnings into the world, viewing action as boundless, unpredictable, and fundamental practice for human freedom. With the ‘new normal’ in our daily lives, the covid-19 virus has interrupted our previous unreflective assumptions on our society, politics, and reality. Further,

our new experiences shape our political beliefs, and so it also shapes our relation of togetherness, as human togetherness is: concerned with how we, as members of a political community, shape the public space we share. (Arendts 1958, 52; Gardiner, & Fulfer 2021, 152).

During this pandemic citizens should be aware of how the physical life in some societies become prioritised over their political life. This focus of physical life entails political concern regarding psychical survival. This resulted in a political governance and justification made in the name of public health, suggesting that restrictions and temporary laws imposed during covid-19 are an extension of state power. The extension of state power is an attempt to stop the virus from spreading and to save lives. This can be seen in the use of new technological surveillance tools, a power that may become legitimised and stay even after the pandemic has ended. (Gardiner, & Fulfer 2021, 153).

Looking at obedience in the sense of human togetherness it brings out the concern of trust and distrust. Both in regards to citizens having trust for their politicians, but also citizens having trust for their fellow citizens within the space of togetherness. If the politicians lack transparency, it can erode their public trust. However, in the space of together trust also goes out to your neighbours, in the public there are for example those who do not practise the guidelines set out from the government or the public health officials, this creates a friction within our togetherness. The different compliance that every individual has from the public health officials' orders can either bring us further apart or closer together. It is suggested that solidarity in action such as 'social isolation' can bring a sense of 'being in this together' by working neighbourly and collaborating, but if there is friction there may create a sense of otherness (Gardiner, & Fulfer 2021, 154-155).

## 7. Choice of research design and methods

It needs to be mentioned that in this research there are only seven participants in six interviews, therefore will the analysis be a humble judgement from the data that have been collected, because the participants that have been a part of this research do not speak for everyone who is against vaccination, they do not represent the whole movement against vaccination. This is of course a common problem within this kind of research, but even more so when it comes to this community, since it firstly is very sparsely researched, second, seems to be more diverse than most social movements.

To understand and find the underlying meaning of a phenomenon makes it possible to explain how individuals create values, that is why it is suitable to have a discussion on positionality and hermeneutics before presenting the interviewees. First regarding my own positionality it is relevant to acknowledge how my interpretation of the gathered material, meaning that I have to reflect on my role as an interviewer in the context of covid-19, and how my position may affect this study. So before conducting the interview I had already created an idea of my own pre-understanding on the pandemic and covid-19, but also how my education, and theoretical and political interest makes it hard to become objective and unconditional since I will consciously and unconsciously put the data collected against previous presumptions. However, recognizing this tendency makes it easier for me to go beyond my presumptions and challenge the ideas and values I have, which in turn will lead to a greater understanding of those who have different values and how something someone believes in becomes meaningful. Further, this also means that if someone else were to interpret the material collected it may have turned out very different because we, as individuals, have unique positionality and ways to make sense of the world (Gilje & Grimen 2007, 179).

Moreover, through interpretations, humans create an individual picture of what the society they live in is like. To understand an individual's worldview is essential for this thesis since it cultivates individuals' own reflection on subjects such as truth, freedom, threats and actions and how it relates in a civil society. By interpreting a person who is against covid-19 vaccination we can see how they visualise their perception on what role they have in society, but also we can better understand their beliefs, values in society and how they wish the world would look like (Gilje & Grimen 2007, 175).

## 7.1 Presentation of Interviewees

As mentioned in the theoretical framework in this thesis Hannah Arendt's idea of taking actions will be used as a guideline for choosing the participants being interviewed. For this reason, purposive sampling was used, so all participants in the interviews have been doing different actions to show their political dissatisfaction, such as joining a freedom march against covid-19 or moving to another country (Bryman 2016, 410). This thesis conducted a total of six interviews with seven participants. The majority of participants were found at demonstrations against covid-19 vaccination, three participants were found through snowball sampling. The interviewees were in the age range between 25 to 41. With three who identify as women and four who identify as males. For the purpose of anonymity, the interviewees will be referred to without any specific significance. Two interviews were made face-to-face, the rest were conducted over online on Zoom. The interviews lasted around one hour each, some even up to one hour and a half. Three participants out of seven had not gone into higher education, such as university. The participants lived all across Sweden.

Since there is a great variety of different perspectives and opinions regarding the covid-vaccine, one goal was to make sure that the interviewees were feeling comfortable when expressing their thoughts. For this reason, the interviews were more conversational, yet still structured so that I can reach the aim of the research (Mikkelsen 2005, 169). Semi-structured interviews allowed this flexibility, while also presenting the possibility for new and different questions to occur during the interview.

During the interviews over zoom it did occur some technical disturbances such as 'hacked' sound and image. This is something that is hard to escape, fortunately it did not interfere too much and I was still able to understand what the participant was saying. Sometimes there occurred a delay in the meeting which made it a little hard to read the other person. What was important to me was to pay attention and see when the respondent had finished speaking and wanted to move on to the next point so that I would not interrupt the respondent when they might just be in the process of articulating their thoughts. All interviews that were conducted were documented via recording and then transcribed afterwards, so it was necessary to have a relatively quiet or completely quiet environment during the conversations.

## 7.2 Participant Observation

Since this observation was limited to the marches themselves it can be referred to as a form of micro-ethnography, where the focus is on one particular aspect. For this reason, I limited my observation to two freedom marches/demonstrations. The way I accessed both of the 'freedom marches' during my observation was to merge with the crowd. I had my notebook up and did some minor notes when needed. One can say that I was both in an overt and covert role. I was overt to the people I talked and asked questions to, I had some minor discussions before the march started and there I explained where I was from, and my reasons for being there. On the other hand, I was for most people there in a covert role. Even though I did not enter that role intentionally it became as such because the people at the march did not know I was there to observe them, and so since they were unaware of my presence. This also means from an ethical point of view that the majority of people were not given the opportunity to decline their participation in my observation (Bryman 2016, 425-426).

However what needs to be considered is that this was a public march where the goal of the participants was to spread their words and aspirations about the covid -19 vaccination. It would be impossible for me to go around and ask everyone there for consent. Another reflection can be that if they knew about my research it may have felt watched and resulted into a disruptive pattern in the event (Bryman 2016, 129).

The first march I went to was in Gothenburg on the 27th of November at Gustaf Adolfs Torg and the march was set out to start at two o'clock in the afternoon. This march was arranged by several different actors, seven of the more known were the following: Frihetsrörelsen, Awake Göteborg, Stå upp för barnen, Sann frihet, Vaken.se, SoulAwake, and Awake kulturarbetare. Through an open Facebook event one could join the event to follow the feed and get more information about the day (Facebook, A 2021). The second march I went to was in Malmö. This freedom March was also created as an event posted on Facebook and like the event in Gothenburg, one could easily follow the updates on the event there. The march was on Saturday the 18 of December 2021 and started at two o'clock in the afternoon, located at one of the city's plazas named Stortorget. The March was arranged by two private people who are very active and well known in the anti-vaccination community (Facebook, B 2021).

During the demonstration I used my iPhone to take photos on their poster-signs, but also to videotape the march and some of the different speeches. Since there were a lot of different impressions at the observations this was a good technique to help me look back and remember the settings (Bryman 2016, 440).

## 7.3 Ethical Consideration

Interviewer qualifications and positionality are crucial parts within qualitative interviews. As an interviewer I must have an awareness of my ethnicity, gender, level of education, class and how it can come to play an important role within the process of my research. That also includes the possibilities or difficulties to gain access or becoming a trusted outsider (Bucerius 2013, 692). An additional reflection is that the interviewees may also have their preconception towards me, as a young female student who is fully vaccinated. During the interviews I answered honestly that I have taken the vaccines when they asked about it. I was prepared for this potential collision of values and however I was met by respect from my participants regarding my choice. Further, since I was conducting interviews with people who often are viewed in a bad light, it was important for me to assure them that what they say will stay with me and that I handled my data with care (Hallin & Helins 2018, 47-49). Moreover, I have promised to share the finalised version of the thesis to the participants who wished to read it and see how they contributed to the research.

## 7.4. Methodical Analytical Framework

### 7.4.1 Cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance is when an individual is experiencing the discomfort of two, or more, divergent cognitions. Cognitions can be understood as a mental representation of beliefs, attitudes or knowledge which then reflect into one's behaviour. When an individual is experiencing discomfort it motivates them to look for a way to reduce that dissonance. Individuals do this by discrepancy reduction which involves an altering of cognitions which can then reduce their cognitive discrepancy. However, the cognitions can through this attempt to reduce dissonance change from the original experience. Meaning that one may add, adjust, or subtract the significance of the cognitions. This creates a meaningfulness for the individual and a way to justify their reality (Hinojosa et al. 2017, 173). How do people who are against covid-19 vaccines solve their own cognitive dissonance, and what beliefs and knowledge made them end up at the conclusion that they have? By looking at their answers we can understand



how they used their logic to reduce their cognitive discrepancy and how it may motivate them to be against the covid-19 vaccination.

#### 7.4.2 “Who are you?”

To understand what motivations people against covid-19 vaccines express during demonstrations one must look at the individual. Especially how individuals create their subjectivity. According to Arendt (1958) we actively reveal our unique personal identity through our speaking and our actions. Who you are is disclosed in the articulation in one’s words and deeds. Peoples’ physical appearance in the human world reveals how the “who” contradicts to “what” a person is, which are their qualities, talents, gifts, and shortcomings, which one can choose to hide or display. However, regardless of this it becomes implicit in everything they say and do (Arendt 1958, 179). More, human plurality is seen as the basic condition for both speech and action. In plurality we are all beings of uniqueness. When we distinguish ourselves and others, it creates an otherness. This means that it is not possible “to say what anything is without distinguishing it from something else.” (Arendt 1958, 176) Just as we can distinguish others there is also a sense of togetherness. “Who are you?” is a question that every newcomer is asked in the beginning before their voice and action turns into meaning. In this analysis identity and the sense of togetherness has been crucial in understanding both political and individual explanations during demonstration. To understand people’s deeds and words in this demonstration you also need to understand the individual motivations.

## 8. Result Analysis

### 8.1 Observation, The two Marches

There were two participant observations made for this thesis, the first one was executed in Gothenburg (November 27, 2021) and the second one in Malmö (December 18, 2021). In the next two subheadings following there will be an overall description on both of the marches, this will give the reader a description on the events and an insight of how these events can be understood in modern democracy. What was found interesting during the observations will be presented along with the result analysis of the interviews in the next section. During the marches the aim was to demonstrate against the political reforms regarding covid-19 control and vaccination. According to Arendt (2020) we have different performances to achieve the never-ending goal of becoming free which is all manifested in what one chooses to do or in what one has the knowledge to do, therefore action is the most important tool within politics because it brings the ability to create new beginnings (Arendt 2020, 46-7).

#### 8.1.1 The march in Gothenburg

I decided to arrive 20 minutes before the march in Gothenburg was supposed to start. Looking around the plaza, there were only about 20 to 30 people in the beginning. I started to paste around the area, I recognised one of the people there. He was the organiser of this event in Gothenburg and was also the moderator for this march. He is well-known in the discussions on covid-19 vaccine and has a lot of local followers on social media.

I approached him with the hope to get a small conversation going before he had to start the march. As I walked up to him, a person I have never met before, he greeted me with a hug – at a time when hugs were a rarity due to restrictions – and said that I was very welcome to the march. I introduced myself and my project and asked him about his purpose for the day and how he came to be involved in the freedom march. He told me that he has always been active in different movements and that activism has always been close to his heart. Further, he told me that vaccination and vaccination cards are an important topic which people should get more involved with. Unfortunately, our conversation did not go further since he had to manage things in the background and take photos with some fans.

As time went by I watched the plaza becoming more crowded. I saw an old man standing by himself, I asked him what his purpose was for this march. He told me that the vaccination on children will in the long run result in infertility among humans and that we need to wake up. He congratulated me for coming there and that I too must have had the walls in front of my eyes breaking down. He told me that 'higher powers' (he did not specify these powers), powers that we did not know, are controlling our choices and we need to help the children that are not able to make their own choices.

Next, I talked to a young adult. I asked him what his purpose was for coming here today. He told me that he thought that the vaccination cards were dividing society, that it put up walls between people. What is interesting here is that in Sweden the vaccination card was not activated for a long time in society, and there was no obligation to grant a vaccination card as well if you did not intend to travel abroad. Further, He also told me that people like him (who are not vaccinated against covid-19) are looked down upon. I asked him about what he thought about the vaccine, he said we have our immune system for the purpose of protecting our health. That is why we do not need the vaccine. Continually, he told me about his friend that unfortunately got narcolepsy after the swine flu vaccine back in 2009.

Before the march started there was an introduction speech by the man which I had a quick conversation with earlier. He was talking about love and that he could see the light in our eyes, that we are here for a common goal and that we are allowed to be here to say our truth. The plaza was now crowded with people who had gathered to walk together. Music was playing in the background. The speaker used phrases such as 'vaccination terrorism', 'they say vaccination cards, I say slave cards', 'globalist media are false', and 'against totalitarianism'. A walking drum started to bang, and the 20 minutes march was on. Homemade posters were held high as a crowd was created around the side-lines examining the us walking in the Freedom march. While walking in the march they sang 'Yes to life, no to vaccination cards' and 'Yes to Freedom, no to vaccination cards'.

### **8.1.2 The march in Malmö**

I arrived at the plaza in Malmö about 20 minutes before the event was set to start in the aim to feel the environment and the atmosphere. While I had a more defensive approach this time, I took a more passive position from the side of the plaza. I did this because I wanted a different approach, compared to the first demonstration I went to in Gothenburg. My hope was to see if

I would catch further depth in my observation by engaging in the demonstration in two alternative ways. What I noticed was that there were a few people doing the same thing as I did: observing the gathering on the plaza from afar. What this created was a safety net, we stood close enough so we could observe what was happening in the plaza, but far enough that it made one feel safe and not 'exposed'. As the time grew closer to two pm more and more people had gathered, and the people who were standing in the same distance as I, had started to move closer to the centre of the plaza. This enabled them to blend into the crowd, and to be more anonymous.

What I realised quickly was one of the main differences between the two manifestations was the number of children present. In Gothenburg, the event was supported by a group who are against child vaccination and so there were more parents and children at that event. In Malmö there was an older crowd. What I also noticed was that there were some Danish citizens who participated.

There were several different speakers during the demonstration, both Swedish and Danish. The majority of the speakers referred to one another and to the crowd as sisters and brothers. Repeatable times they also cried out 'wake up Sweden, we have had enough', leading to a rhythm which became a mantra for the whole crowd and a majority were cheering on together with the speaker. As the walk through the city started, hand flares were lit up among some of the protesters. The atmosphere among the crowd in Malmö was excited and the people walked proudly through the streets. There were police forces on every side of the train, they followed the train to its destination and each of the officers had a section of the train that they controlled during the march.

## 8.2 The interviews

In this section there will first be a review on action and how the participant understands their own voice, deeds, and activism against the vaccination of covid-19. In the interviews there are mainly two groups of arguments against vaccination: One is Medical Perspectives and the second is the Political-Social Perspectives. These will be the following two subheadings.

A common theme in interviews was how the participant uses the notion of "weighing risks and benefits". Everyone is in some way or another either using this specific phrase or are implying this way of thinking regarding the danger of the vaccine, and this will be seen throughout the whole result analysis.

## 8.2.1 On action

- It was amazing.
- The important thing is the message you want to convey. It's a nice atmosphere.
- I got a lot of goosebumps; I can say that. So, it was nice.

Arendt argues that what is significant for human action is that it can start something new. We use our imagination to see how things can be different and action can make people go beyond the orders or propositions that are given to the public. Hence action is the very thing that politics are created from, because

We are free to change the world and to start something new in it (Arendt 1972, 5).

When asked about their feelings during the demonstration every one of the participants had a positive attitude. Further we discussed how they defined their activism and one participant said:

For me, it is a physical stance to show for myself and for loved ones and for others that this is something I believe in. And not just something that I sit and share over the phone, but that I also want to physically get involved with and show where I stand and what I believe in.

This illustrates how they see their political activism as a way to spread truth and utilise their movement of freedom. During the observation on the demonstrations in Gothenburg and Malmö, a common denominator for the two was that they conceptualised the significance to act for what you believe is right, and the importance to enlighten and spread awareness about the harm covid-19 have on society as one of the speakers said to the crowd 'We cannot give away our freedom'. The demonstrations encouraged people to speak their truth, but also to show bystanders that there exists resistance. These speeches together with the marches emphasised that their presence on the plaza was meaningful, that this was a statement for them to be visible for the politicians and for the people outside watching.

However, what is important from this angle is that the covid-19 demonstration is an initiative 'to act', that people are not going to sit around and wait for a miracle to happen and do nothing, instead they act in moments of spontaneity which may bring new beginnings to life within politics and society (Arendt 2020, 105). One participant described the conceptualisation from bystanders and how they actually have the same goal both just different methods:

They say ‘what are those lunatics really doing’, why do they care so much? Why do people care so much, why are they even going to demonstrations, and writing on social media every day. It’s because we care. I also want it all to be over. It would have been great if everything was just fine again.

These demonstrations can also be a way to articulate and show society and government officials their dissatisfaction through action. Through the interviews the participants explained how they are limited in the way they can express themselves and that they have not been given and are not accepted any space within the political conversations that already exist. What this indicates is that if action of dissatisfaction does not occur, the power will fall to the people who already obtain some, which are the political official representatives, and democracy may lose its purpose, which is to present the voices of the people.

#### **8.2.1.1 Action and Passion**

Political freedom entails action, because freedom is implying what one can do, what one wants to do with an unlimited imagination of thoughts, this means that inner freedom is not political freedom because it cannot be concealed inside one person. Being able to act can grant people a space to be seen, and to be effective in politics (Arendt 2020, 59). One interview participant expressed that:

I felt it was important to make this visible. To pay attention to this. I felt that you must stand up, you cannot just sit at home and with your thoughts. It’s one thing to sit at home and be opinionated. But it may be a different matter to still show the public that – something is happening in society which is not good.

Further, in an interview one participant said that:

In general, I think that if you are passionate about something and love something, if you have something that you think is a matter of the heart, I think you should get involved. We all humans are strong individuals, and we all have something we are passionate about. So, it is our differences that make us a whole.

Looking closer at the relationship between action and passion, one sees that there is a linkage between truth and ideas as well. Passion is referred to as the opening of the soul and here lies the ideal that represents what is considered to be the truth, both regarding human and social existence (Voegelin 1987, 67).

However, according to Rousseau (2012) when we give our power to a representative it also means that we are as citizens accepting to let go of our freedom. That is because society oppresses people of their natural birth right, which is the human right to physical freedom meaning that the civil society does not uphold the individual liberty and individual equality that once was promised (Rousseau 2012, 166-167). But with broken promises and poor persuasion of the public translates the demonstrations as dissatisfaction from the people who are against the covid-19 vaccine and so their action can be viewed as an action to reclaim this freedom that has been given away.

As one of the spokespersons during the demonstration said, 'It's not about a virus under control, it's about getting the people under control'. By demonstrating their action of dissatisfaction, it can proclaim their wish for new representatives that are more in line with their own individual and political ideals, to break free from their perception of control posted by authorities, politicians, and government.

Yet there was also hesitation among the participants regarding the actual effect that demonstrations have on their fellow citizens and political officials. One participant said:

I mainly think that it will not affect that much to demonstrate. I have that little confidence in the government. However, it may have affected the government. You do not know that.

A reflection on this hesitation can be related to the thought "that politics is compatible with freedom only insofar as it guarantees a possible freedom from politics" (Arendt 2020, 35). The demonstration can be seen as an attempted shake of the governance from the officials, to fight to regain their freedom. Yet, politics will still be present no matter how visible or invisible it may seem to be, because freedom and politics relate with each other. You can not have the one without the other, like two sides of one coin. The demonstration may or may not have affected the decision from the public health authority. However, the uncertainty that this crisis has presented us makes hold on to the idea that freedom is free from politics because it was them, the politicians, government, and public health authority, who forced the society into this condition of tighter regulations and control. Another reflection is how the demonstration may affect the people who are watching and listening to it, and since power emanates from the people the demonstration may lead to more people asking questions and wanting to act.

### **8.2.1.2 To act together**

Everyone is given a length of time between birth and death, and we are all born into the world with a uniqueness which makes us all inherit the quality of otherness. When entering the human world all activities are practised by the fact that we exist in a human plurality and that we one way or another live together (Arendt 2020, 25). The realm of human affairs is composed from a web of human relationships, when we insert ourselves in a new web as newcomers, we also come together in a new process which can disclose who we are through our deeds and word (Arendt 1958, 184). As the resistance of covid-19 vaccination brought people together to act and it also has grown stronger during the pandemic in one interview a participant said:

And now that there were such large demonstrations, I felt like I wanted to be a part of this. This is how you get to meet people who have a similar way of thinking. You get a network of like-minded people.

This illustrates how this web of relationships encourages the process of action to grow and evolve further. Since we are born into the same world it also means we supposedly should be treated equally and have the same opportunities. However, are we born in an unequal world that shapes us and our thoughts, everyone has their unique perspective on reality and so when people find a connection, a togetherness within the movement against covid-19 vaccination it may present a bond that become even stronger since there are people who object and look down at those who do not take the vaccine.

In another interview one participant emphasised the importance of action to illustrate the distinction from the other:

Because you must show the politicians that; no, we are not a few people, we will not back down. And so, it is important for those who are unsure; should I take the vaccine, it's not just me but quite a few others who also think like this. So, I think it builds support for each other above all.

Looking back to both demonstrations and the speeches made, the spokespersons also emphasised that 'this is a force that we all are a part of'. That the people who have gathered at the demonstrations are not alone and that there are more people 'like you', also that your criticism towards the vaccine, the vaccination cards, and the governments' leadership are welcomed. During the demonstration it was a strong sense of 'we are in this together'. Despite the differences between the participants, what occurred was a unification in this fight to



strengthen their political voice, but also to take action to claim their rights to have a freedom of choice when it comes to medication and deciding over your own body.

### 8.2.2 Medical Perspectives

During the interviews some participants did express themselves in a way saying that it is better to rely on your immune system instead of injecting something into your body. Or as one participant said:

You should not trust what you put into your body, you should try to be more natural, and not blindly trust what the state says, the participant continued and said I look at it more logically; that it is not natural to inject anything. It's not natural. Our ancestors survive.

These motivations can be understood as naturalist bias and an appeal to nature, this means that vaccines are seen as unnatural for us to consume, and it is much better to create a natural defence than to inject something manmade into your body (Stolle et al. 2020, 4484).

Weighing the benefits and the risk regarding the vaccination of covid-19 is something everyone has done. The people who are against covid-19 vaccination believe that there are more risks in taking the vaccine because of the side-effects and the unknown consequences that may unfold in the future. One participant expressed that:

Since you do not know one hundred percent how good or bad it is in the long run, I think that there are risks if we all take and vaccinate ourselves.

Another one said that the government and political officials:

They only say the risk for the vaccine is less than the risk to get covid. That's the only thing they say. But they don't say 'oh you can get heart disease and you can get this or that'.

What can be understood from these two quotes is that there is fear of the unknown and unconfirmed long-lasting effects of the covid-19 vaccines. This vacuum on not knowing creates scepticism, and since each individual wants to take the best decision in order to protect oneself from becoming seriously ill from the virus, it also intensifies a hesitation that demands room for consideration and reflection regarding the vaccine.

However, this scepticism may originate from past mass vaccination programs. Looking at the Swine flu there is a history in Sweden where vaccination turned out to be dangerous

which can have fed into the fear of side effects. Some of the participants remember the Swine flu and wish that they did not take that vaccine now when they look back (The Local 2020). Another source of scepticism towards the vaccine is how booster shots have become more normal now and it is not unusual to have taken three or four shots of the covid-19 vaccine (Folkhälsomyndigheten, E 2022). Which contributes to the scepticism of people who are against the vaccination of covid-19 since it creates a dis-belief in the effectiveness of the covid-19 vaccination itself. This hesitation also has its roots in the new technology that is being used for the construction of the vaccine. One participant said:

Here is a completely new technology, most recently today I read that people have started talking about a fifth syringe to be approved for New Year. It's interesting, who really benefits from this, I mean those who have vaccination companies are many billionaires now thanks to this.

To understand this mass vaccination and encouragement of booster shots in modern democracy the bio-power form Foucault can provide an insight on how to resonate within this aspect. Bio-power is defined as [a] power leaders and biopolitics who control the population through exerting life with a positive influence that is through the practices of comprehensive regulations and precise control to let life live or die (Daher-Nashif 2022, 5). This essentially means how politics have shaped covid-19 public health policies. It is nothing new that the state wants to preserve the health of their citizens, and this is just a way that the state acts in a crisis. Covid-19 did not unmask these politics, it can rather be understood as these politics are a continuum of previous health policies that became more intensified and visible during the pandemic. The government wants healthy, strong bodies in their society, however the people who are against the covid-19 vaccination are sceptical if the government, politicians and public health authority really know what is best for their body, and this can be a motivation for them to engage in the fight against covid-19 vaccinations.

Furthermore, there have been criticisms regarding the flexible of declare the covid-19 vaccine as 'effective and safe' without the data on efficiency and long-term safety that is normally gathered for other types of vaccines, which have led to many questions and suspicions regarding the biomedical evidence to defend covid-19 as a valid vaccine (Cáceres 2022, 624). One participant explained that:

I'm not a big fan of big pharmacies. I think they think more about profit than keeping people healthy.

Among the interviews several of the participants expressed that they had a distrust of modern medicine and the intentions of *big pharma*. They found that there was a lack of transparency from big pharma regarding how the vaccine was developed, the purpose of fast speeding the process when developing the vaccine and what their ‘real’ motives are. One participant said:

I am very hesitant about this vaccine because of this new technology that has not been used in vaccines before. This MRNA technology. I’m very sceptical about that. That it has never been used before and now all of a sudden after such a short production period, it is being used. Then you become a little, or I become a little ... ‘What is the purpose of this?’

What is the purpose of this? With this sceptic view on big pharma there were also some participants that mentioned the phenomenon of global elites and that they had connections with the development of this technology. One participant explained that the global elites

They are the richest in the world, who want to implement a control system.

They have, as it were, declared that they want an economic restart, called ‘the great reset’ and a control system for humanity to create a new world order. This also includes that civilians will stop owning anything, that everything will be rented and that the elites will have the power over everything. One participant mentioned an expression used among the global elites which is that:

Covid-19 is the greatest opportunity for great reset.

The great reset includes that global elites want all nations to have less sovereignty so that they can gain money and benefit from their big companies, such as big pharma instead. The elites would then more or less own everything. Further, this will eventually lead to a greater economic gap in society resulting in the extinction of the middle class. These participants also mentioned that there are a few elite monopolists who govern and control a lot globally.

Through the use of cognitive dissonance, one reflection can be provided on the way some of the participants talk and understand these global elites and their untouchable power. Covid-19 has put global capitalism under distress creating both social and economic crises. The system of global capitalism is assembled on the exploitation of racialized and gendered global working classes, together with nature and material exploitation in the global south. (Stevano, Stevano, Dafermos & Van Waeyenberge 2021, 2). In the global north the effects of covid-19 have impacted different socioeconomic groups that have unequal ability to follow the measurements that their government has put out due to job type. Rousseau (2012) argued organised labour private property creates artificial inequalities in the social systems, a system

that permits exploitation and domination on some people from other people and this inequality became visible in the pandemic. Depending on what kind of employment one may have, the pandemic has had different consequences for the workers' earnings, risk to become unemployed, capacity to work from home and risk to become infected. Covid-19 exposed how multiple inequalities are constructed and re-formed through the fragments from the global working classes (Stevano et al 2021, 3-4). This exposure resonates with the cognitive dissonance that is presented above, where they mention the extermination of the middle-class society. Furthermore, pure capitalism is not really what exists either, it is rather a chronic capitalism where there are a few big companies competing against each other, which are benefiting the selected few (Reeves et al 2011, 8). What the word capitalism really presents is an expression of power, and the notion of gaining more power and wealth and to not share that with others. Which is essentially what has been explained in some of the interviews. Notice here that this is only one aspect of what the global elites are and do. More of what they do will be discussed further down.

## 8.2.3 Social-Political Perspectives

### **8.2.3.1 Truth, transparency, and Representation**

The pandemic has left a mark on people's faith for authority, politicians, and government to bring trustworthy information, safety, and leadership. According to Rousseau (2012) we have different association representatives in modern democracy which allows us to focus on the personal best instead of the common good. This inspires us to protect and defend what we as individuals find is best for our personal interest, this can help explain how different representations have appeared during the pandemic and within the covid-19 demonstrations. One participant expressed that:

But what I have experienced among people is that they have become very tired of every single political party expressing the same opinion. There has been no one who has raised their voice. I think this has damaged this whole social contract

In the interviews, none of the participants felt that neither politicians or activists, within of covid-19 vaccination, can fulfil the representation of their ideas or values. What makes this important is the lack of connection between the people and a leader's representative, which can be either to an activist, politicians or the leadership from the government.

This can be a result from how the Public Health Agency throughout the pandemic presented barely any data or official documented communication for the public, they claimed that the pandemic and the spread of covid-19 was decreasing, despite the evidence indicating the opposite. They also downplayed their lack of communication and coordination during the pandemic, reflecting a lack of transparency in their work. On this note, another key issue has been the miscalculation and misinformation on covid-19 patients in hospitals. It has been shown that the statistics from hospitals can be misleading since all patients who test positive were included in the statistic even though they are coming to the hospital for other medical issues (Brusselaers et al. 2022, 9; Törnquist 2022).

For Arendt every organisation, may it be political or social, ultimately relies on people's ability to give promises and to keep them (Arendt 1972, 92). Since the facts and information have been falsely presented from several sources and organisations who are supposed to protect the people, has changed their information the participants in the interviews have gained a lack of trust in their transparency and Representation. This lack of transparency and the distance of communication from officials have resulted in a one-way trust. The entire population was expected to have faith in the authorities, yet the authorities did not have enough trust in the people to be transparent in their strategy and communication.

If the government and authorities are not honest and transparent towards the public about the virus, how it spreads and the risk to them (individually and collectively in society), then how can individuals make responsible, informed Decisions? (Brusselaers et al. 2022, 11).

Simultaneously what can be seen from this pandemic is an obsession with numbers and statistics. There has come a point where numbers and paper are more important than humans. There is less room for emotions and the subjective and more space for charts and bars. The obsession over measure has become a way to control knowledge. However, this intensive focus to overlook or disregard others will deprive us humans of both our curiosity and sense of self (Bornemark 2019, 13). One participant expressed how the obsession of number was an issue and said:

But the problem is, I think every single person who gets hurt is important. The problem with a lot of people is that as long as it is not themselves or anyone else in their vicinity who gets hurt it's okay. But no one wants to be in that one percent. Because then it suddenly becomes 'no, because then it's close to you'. All of a sudden you do not take the risks and that's what I think a lot of people forget.

A reflection on this is that the faith we have had in statistics has been a gateway for the authorities to bring them more legitimacy to their statements while also trying to illustrate the seriousness of the situation with numbers. However, if one becomes just a number in the statistics, the official loses touch with the people and fear will be created instead of trust. On the side there are those who feel that the pandemic and the spread of covid-19 is bigger than yourself. You submit your body to the state because you feel that you do not have the answer to this crisis, and it is better to give trust and give the power to those that have chosen to take decisions through democratic elections. So, you hope that the state officials have tools to solve the situation and the people take the vaccine and follow the recommendations that are presented from the officials.

In Sweden the governance during the pandemic has been different from the international mainstream. Instead Sweden has presented “soft law instruments” that are non-binding rules that push individual responsibility issuing accountability for the public which causes confusion among people (Brusselaers et al. 2022, 10). We have organisations that are representatives for the truth (Voegelin 1987, 75) and when they fail the public individuals may seek other truths and way to understand the crisis, together with the lack of trust and faith, can all be different ingredients to why people start looking for other ways to make sense of the pandemic and the vaccination resulting into a questioning of the vaccine. Because from their point of view they weigh the risk and benefits against each other, and since they do not trust the state officials the individual responsibility and risk factors found in the vaccine makes them want to be in control over their own security of their own health, one participant expressed:

I think it has been back and forth, very unclear, there has been no clear leadership at all. I think that is very important in crises like this. Where you do not hide; you really are there and show yourself. You really are involved. I think that's a big difference, and that everyone (political officials) blames others all the time. I do not think that has contributed much to improving it either.

Which raises the dilemma whether the government, the hospitals, and public health authority are representing credibility. When new promises are being made from previous failures that did not succeed either it creates a perception of unaccountability, and as a result with each new promise there will also be less faith in their words and deeds.

### 8.2.3.2 The Common Good and Togetherness

The lack of overall representation and trust contributes to search for other directions of support from people who are already sceptical towards the officials. The common criticism towards the government during the pandemic has become a mutual meeting point or factor where people from different backgrounds come together. One participant motivated this by saying:

We have a common denominator and that is against the vaccine and the vaccine cards. Then everyone has different degrees for what they are against and what their thoughts are with it. Everyone can agree around this common subject. I've made contacts, we may not talk so much about other opinions, but we may be more similar as people.

A similar observation has been made by Mikael Brunila, a PhD student in Geography at McGill University, Montreal, who was a guest speaker at the Swedish podcast *Apans anatomi* hosted by Mathias Wåg. Brunila decided to visit Ottawa where the so-called 'Freedom Convoy' had blocked the inner city with trucks to protest the vaccine cards. He found people regardless of their background (cultural, racial, socio-economic classes), came together to be a part of the resistance towards vaccines and vaccination cards. The dissatisfaction against government officials somehow united groups within society that usually do not associate with each other (Apans Anatomi n.d.).

The demonstration has created a feeling of solidarity between people who otherwise would not connect. A reflection on this phenomenon is that it breaks the idea and expectations that everyone in society should think and behave somewhat the same since they arise from the same world of common good. Meaning that it breaks the idealisation of how society's *general will* should be like in a crisis. Simultaneously as a consequence of the feeling of being pushed into a treatment one does not want, it has resulted into people gathering to stand up against the covid-19 restriction and vaccination, a unification that goes beyond individual ideological beliefs.

Moving forward on the note of solidarity. One major argument throughout the pandemic has been to

Vaccinate against covid-19 for your own and others' sake (Region Östergötland n.d.) or to create a herd immunity among the public. But also, as mentioned before, putting the responsibility on the public, creating a new kind of pressure among civilians 'to do the right thing'. One of the participants explained that:

My health is also my responsibility. No one else will take responsibility for my health if I get sick from the vaccine. It's not that the people who say: but vaccinate you for the sake of others, will give me money when losing my salary.

Looking at risk and benefit, there is a pressure to vaccinate for the greater good, but if something goes wrong, everyone who has supported you to take the vaccine may not be that supportive anymore since it was your own decision to vaccinate. This creates a duality; everyone is there for you if you do the right thing but if there are bad consequences; then it was your own decision to take the injection and hence lack of support from others, such as friends or government support. Also, when does this kind of idea of solidarity end, how much are we accepting in this social contract, in one interview a participant argued that:

Because I can always take someone's place in a hospital because I have a broken leg, or I have an accident or something like that. Where is the end? Where is the beginning, where is the end from this thinking?

The laissez-faire approach from the government has in some part worked because some may feel that the restrictions have not been too hard and therefore presented a high trust in the authorities in Swedish. However, this laissez-faire approach has also led to further polarisation among the public, between those who support the official and those who criticise and raise questions (Brusselsaers et al. 2022, 12). A reflection on this is that those who do not want to be in the mainstream narrative will suffer the consequences of being at risk of feeling threatened for not being accepted as part of the government safety net. A participant said in an interview that some people:

They do not want to be excluded, they do not want to be the irresponsible ones, it is he or she who is unvaccinated, the egoist. So, I think most people think 'let me just take it'.

The public responsibility has led to civilians pressuring each other, what the participants in the interviews have described as 'bullying each other'. What this tells us is that there exists a shaming tool to further influence fellow citizens to vaccinate. Or rather do we have a one-dimensional vaccination culture? But as mentioned before we all do a risk and benefit analysis before taking the vaccine, and in one interview a participant said:

There is more pressure to vaccinate yourself than a free decision and I think most people do it because they want to be free, and they want to do all the things they have done before.



There is a question and rejection of why 'I' should risk my health for something that is yet uncertain. Since there is no faith in the covid-19 vaccination itself, there is also no motivation to take it for others sake since the risk is too high. Another participant also mentioned an old anecdote:

In the old times they always say divide the people, because when the state is whole; when all the people have the same opinion, it is hard for the politicians to get against it. But if you have one side and another side. People are pushing each other and not the politicians. So, you have it easier to control.

This proved an understanding of how different behaviour in civil society may intensify the division and otherness while at the same time strengthen the togetherness of those who become excluded from their friends, co-workers, or society. The people who resists the vaccinations consist of a combination of individuals who want to wait and reflect whether to take the covid-19 vaccination or not, and of individuals who have come to the conclusion not to take the vaccine at all. They all come together with their perspectives in the conversations on covid-19. Alternative views of covid-19 vaccination have had no room in the political or social space, meaning that there has also been little or no diverse reflection on the vaccine, hence no representation or space to discuss the multiple attitudes regarding the pandemic. This deepened the division between those who are for and those who are against the covid-19 vaccine, and fostered greater antagonisms because they can not rationally convince each other. As one participant mentioned:

I can say that the reason I became more and more reflective was people's behaviour. Because I noticed over a year ago that people became so incredibly aggressive, that it is not normal. It is not normal to be so outspoken towards a person who has chosen not to get vaccinated.

Which led us to what has one participant described as:

a matter of principle because they have driven it so hard and forced it so much.

Looking back at Arendt's (2020) idea of identity and the idea that we live in human plurality where everyone has their own uniqueness, it offers an understanding of how different individuals have fostered their perception of self and their role within this crisis. As division creates both otherness and togetherness, it means that distinction can be pushed and be declared from both sides. For those who are against the covid-19 vaccine it may have become a way to express their individual dissatisfaction. Just as those who are pro covid-19 vaccination have their way of treating and pushing people who have not vaccinated. Yet there is also an

inclination that those who are against covid-19 vaccination do the same, through one participant own observations they mention that:

We humans are a bit of a herd animal, we want to fit in as well and feel a sense of belonging. Here it is that you are bullied out of the herd for not following the narrative as well.

Yet, when you are going against the narrative this will eventually lead you to fall into another narrative, whether it is intentionally or not. One aspect is that being against the mainstream narrative is a way to construct a part of one's identity and build their personality around this deviation from mainstream values and ideas. This can help explain how some people who are against vaccination claim that they have the true knowledge and have found the truth. It creates a power dynamic between the people who are enlightened with the true reality versus the mainstream people who just follow the stream and live in denial.

Moving forward, one participant expressed that state officials:

ignore people's will. They just go on pushing everyone to become vaccinated, without people being given the opportunity to think for themselves.

Looking at this phenomenon at a national level, we are all members in modern society and politics; we are all an indivisible part of the whole, because we are also representatives of society (Voegelin 1987, 37). Thinking then of representation and the movement against the covid-19 vaccination, and the role of the institution to advocate truth and freedom, we see that individuals live in relation to one another, and once freedom may be at the determination of someone else because "[f]reedom to be free has always been the privilege of the few" (Arendt 2020, 95). Resonating from this perspective, the people against covid-19 vaccination has become a social and political minority in modern democracy. Since they are a minority in the political space it also includes a feeling of not being seen in modern democracy which explains the rising activism in Sweden.

This brings us to the idea of *symbolism*. Through the vaccination cards we are creating a symbol, a social reality that reflects structures, ideas, and relations between one another in modern democracy. This social symbol transcends the individual experiences and by being a part of this the individual by virtue becomes a participant in a whole. Human society creates their own understanding through various symbols, and it does this through self-interpretation and a critique of previous existing social symbols (Voegelin 1987, 27-28). One participant mentioned the Second World War and the way they link the force of vaccination and control of vaccination cards:

Because the government wants to say ‘look at these bad unvaccinated people, hate them, hate them. Follow them. Go vaccinate them yourselves.’ Soon we need to wear stars on our shoulders. Many compare it with the Second World War in Germany with the situation when the Jewish people were followed. it is creating such a division in society; don’t they realise the consequences.

Just as this card can be a symbol of division: a symbol of who is in and out of society. It can also be understood from these interviews as a symbol of control because it can either decline or give access to individual freedom. However, for those who are pro vaccination, the card can be seen as a symbol of freedom, to have access to travelling, and their “normal” life they had before the pandemic. Meaning that the vaccination card benefits those who have taken the vaccine and it presents them with an easier way of living since they, with this card, have access to society again. Thus, it is also harder for those without a vaccination card to live and belong in society. One participant mentioned that:

If you did not have a covid card, you are suddenly a second-class citizen. Suddenly you are not worth as much as someone who was vaccinated. And all of a sudden, if you were not vaccinated and did not have a covid card, you could not go out and travel. It is very monitored. That they with small steps limit the freedom and increase the control of whoever you want. So, that is a lot of power. It’s dangerous. This has been proven under the Coronavirus.

One way to view this phenomenon is that the implementation of restrictions and limitations is a way to make life more difficult for people without vaccination cards, so that the individual who did not originally want to take the vaccine does it because it gives them access to their freedom again. They take the risks they consider the vaccine carries in order to be free.

One participant said:

Is it freedom? Is it democratic? Forcing someone to do something for that person to keep their job and to be able to live as usual. In my world, it’s not democratic.

What this participant expresses are how restrictions and temporary laws during covid-19 have created a disguised desire to make life easier after the vaccine, so that it becomes a relief when you are vaccinated. This desire, they argue, is disguised because it originates in hidden obedience, surveillance, and control. For example, an individual who perhaps is working as a truck driver, must take the vaccine in order to continue working because they need to cross several national borders where there is a control on vaccination cards. In this position there is not really a choice whether to not take the vaccine, because they are dependent on their work

to earn a salary. In this situation the vaccination, something that is considered to be a free choice, becomes inevitable.

However, do the public have different responsibilities in a democracy during a crisis like the covid-19 pandemic, Rousseau (2012) once said

Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains (Rousseau 2012, 156)

Even if we are free people who have more, or rather new ‘chains’ on us in a time of crisis than before, we still have to ask; when does compliance turn into obedience? One might suggest it is necessary for the public to be compliant: to do what is best for the collective interest and have the general will in mind when taking decisions and to follow the restrictions from Public Health Officials. But then again, these laissez faire approaches in Sweden have made it confusing for citizens to follow the ‘the right thing to do’. Citizens are responsible to obey laws, yet in this crisis there have been no covid-19 laws in Sweden. Therefore, the public have had strong expectations to follow the authority’s restrictions. However, what we have seen so far about the discussion of responsibility is that it has become a question of interpretation. The individual responsabilisation we take on ourselves looks different from person to person. If the public health authority, government, and politicians want the whole public to act in accordance with what is understood to be the general will and work in solidarity with each other in this pandemic, they need to establish a more founding trust between them and the citizens.

### **8.2.3.3 Freedom and Control**

Voegelin (1987) brings up the concept of how persuasions from ruler’s representation can lead to gained trust among the public, and through such preservation people are willing to believe the truth from these representatives. However, the leader(s) has the power to alter existing values to satisfy both the civilians and their politics. Voegelin (1987) recognised that it helps the leader(s) if they take on the responsibility to protect values that the society represents to them (Voegelin 1987, 73). This means that if they can target the level of desires among the citizens, they can also influence their relationship to information and in turn affect people’s attitudes towards knowledge. This becomes important in the context of covid-19 since we live in a constant stream of new information from various kinds of outlets such as research, social media, and traditional media. Yet this also results in leader(s) needing more intense measurements to ensure that what is presented to the public is desirable and in their view correct. In one interview one participant expressed that:

I think the majority of people are content to watch TV on SVT or tv4 or something like that. Read a little Aftonbladet, Expressen, then they are satisfied.

In the critique of judgement, freedom appears as a prediction of imagination. We have our thoughts, but these are limited by the reality which we are in, meaning that depending on what we have access form our way of thinking about a topic, and so it can also influence the things we want and our will. Which means the freedom of thought depends on the opportunity we have to advance our thinking. Also, freedom is dependent on the exercise of the will, and the possibility to be able to do what one wants. Being politically free is therefore dependent on free will, and the ability to perform our thoughts through action (Arendt 2020, 58-60). But as one interview participant mentioned:

I can't understand why they vaccinate because that's not a free decision and nobody asks for it, and nobody is critical about it, they just do it and 'okay I have to do it, so I do it'.

Together with the loss of faith, trust and exclusion from society, this angle also emphasises the lack of debate in the topic of covid-19. It expresses a feeling of not being able to elaborate on once thoughts or motivations on why not take the covid-19 vaccine.

A reflection on this is the question of different generations and access to information. Information has thanks to globalisation and the neoliberal governance come to have a new meaning. We see a rising lack of trust in some information because there is so much information elsewhere, and since there is a constant stream of information it results in that the cup of information is always full. However, the negative side of this is that it is hard to distinguish what is true and what is real. As individuals we argue that we are logical beings with our own logical thinking that helps us navigate what is correct and what is not. In an interview one participant said:

I think nobody asks. They take the normal newspaper as their opinion, and you don't read different things about it.

Here we can see that there is a temptation to seek further, for other outlets of truth beyond narrative, to test the limits of can, will, and think. However, modern society seems to have blurred the lines between the two spheres of the political public and the political private, resulting in freedom moving to be understood as a concept of I-can, I-will, and I-think. And since these concepts are all manifested in what one chose to do or in what one has the knowledge to do (Arendt 2020, 47), it indicates the search for further knowledge and other truths is not as desirable for those who are pro vaccination.

But in this crisis, we have been faced with a new unfamiliar ground, where the information is almost always fresh. So, this makes it hard to build a clear picture on what the truth is. New facts will come in and change what ones have been distinguished to be true and in this case it is good to be sceptical. Yet, in this pandemic it has raised questions and suspicion on the work of government, the public health authority, and politicians regarding their health guidelines online and information speeches towards the public. However, they did not know how deadly the virus was, and it is their job as chosen representatives to guide the people through a crisis. But since information is constant and changes more quickly than ever, some may overlook these situations.

The constant flow of new information, that has been published on several different outlets, such as social media, traditional media, and others makes it more difficult to track and distinguish the dissemination of different information on covid-19 virus. To solve the issue of disinformation and publication on content that are seen to be ‘harmful and dangerous’ most governments all over the world have found the solution in the use of censorship (Niemiec 2020,1). One participant expressed that:

This censorship is very serious, and they have deprived people of their freedom of speech. There are many side effects from vaccines that the media have darkened.

The government’s motivation behind the use of censorship is usually broad and vague which leave room for interpretation so that it does not interfere with the freedom of speech (Niemiec 2020, 1). However, when it revolves around social media platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook, who are private companies, they can decide what opinions the users on their platforms are allowed to express. In 2020 some of the most influential companies on social media made a joint statement to combat misinformation regarding covid-19, which followed that they are

Jointly combating fraud and misinformation about the virus, elevating authoritative content on [their] platforms (Meta 2020).

For this reason, they are also using censorship to correct misinformation about covid-19. Some may argue that this means that moderation on these platforms is politically biased, which can appear as a contradiction for what these social media platforms are sought to be, a place for various expressions (Niemiec 2020, 1). Further, taking into consideration that access to information online and on social media platforms is owned by a few big private tech companies who dominate the sources of news, it becomes inevitable how they shape the information

online. And so, it also becomes inevitable that it shapes the users views, which reveals the power these few big tech companies have on the public opinion (Niemiec 2020, 1).

In the interviews some participants mentioned another view to understand this power of controlling information. They argued how globalists own the media and their aim is to deceive people through control and manipulation. To solve this Cognitive dissonance revolving increased censorship on information and media these participants argue that the public are under a mass psychosis. One participant explains that:

It is always said that whoever owns the media owns the people as well. They control what we think. You just follow the flow. I find that a little uncomfortable, when you are not allowed to look at both sides, “what about this opinion?”, “no obey, obey, obey”.

Another participant argues that:

I have noticed how people are so brainwashed and it is this cognitive dissonance, that they constantly deny, they just say “no, no three four syringes is good, no but a hundred thousand side effect reports does not matter”.

They argue that people who ‘just follow’ the mainstream are denying the truth, which is that the vaccine is dangerous, that people who ignore the risks of side effects and continue to take booster shot after booster shot are unlogical beings. They argue that the media pushes a dangerous vaccine that in the end will only benefit the global elite. They believe this because of how the contamination continues without herd immunity and since citizens consistently take these booster shots the elites will become even more wealthy and result in further control globally. These participants explain that since the majority of citizens are under mass psychosis and there is no real debate in any of the mainstream media outlets, it makes them look for other places to find recognition and information that confirms their reality. Since people do not feel recognized there will always be a risk or a further divergence.

However, big tech companies do have a commitment to the public in regards to the freedom of speech online. But how do their censorship face questions regarding the risk of manipulation on public views and opinion in the case of covid-19. Simultaneously as these companies try to present what is considered true information it also increases the fear of power abuse because of their power position. To be a representative, which these big social media companies are, means to guide, and with the power they occupy, they have become to some degree the police of ideas.

Furthermore, another point that is worth mentioning is how leaders will work with values in their own favour in the perception of civil threat of violence from an external actor,

such as the virus. This threat has the power to reunite a sense of a united representation from their national citizens and in turn how the public can unite to defend their country. These policies can redirect the nations the social conditions and problems because the terror of violence. Alternately this also changes the public needs and foundation for freedom (Voegelin 1987, 70). We can look at the fear of violence pitted against social conditions and the threat of something external, such as covid-19, can be used as a tool to create a sense of solidarity. But also a way to ensure that people follow the recommendations regarding covid-19. Yet some participants took another direction when discussing the dilemma between freedom and control during the pandemic and argued the government's policies instead creates a different system, they said:

It will be a slave system. You become a slave.

Indicating that there will be further control and the fear in politics will install further control on the public because it is an attempt to secure the people from a threat which establishes a consensus between the public and the leaders. While these policies become accepted the people also accept increased limitations on their freedom without noticing. Another participant said:

I think the demonstration will help, I think it will put pressure and slow down the development of this kind of Chinese controlled society.

Though cognitive dissonance one reflection on this statement can be that the vaccination cards are seen to be the beginning of something greater. They look at how China controls their citizens and predict that their social credit system may come to Sweden in the near future.

China's social credit system

rate each citizen's trustworthiness', based on a vast national database that compiles fiscal and government information, including minor traffic violations, and distils it into a single number ranking each citizen (Hansen & Weiskopf 2021, 110).

They argued that the globalists want to introduce this globally and that vaccination cards are a gateway to further control and increased surveillance, leading to that our society as we know it will eventually develop a controlled social credit system. This brings us to the phenomenon of paternalism. The core of both the social credit system and paternalism is considered to be very similar, with a system for digital surveillance and social control (The Economist 2016). One participant said that

The state paints itself as a mother figure who takes care of you when you get sick.

What this implies is a tension between the public wanting freedom versus paternalism. One wants to be liberated from the state to gain their freedom back. However, liberation and



freedom are not synonyms, liberation is a shape of freedom, but freedom does not have to result in liberation. What this means in the context of covid-19 is that one can be liberated from oppression without having the freedom to live a political life (Arendt 2020, 86). The restrictions may be lifted but the public will have no influence or say in the matter. The stronger presence of the state and their political paternalism have revealed the power from political officials and how they can, in times of crisis, change the way we live during the pandemic very drastically. During the pandemic people therefore insist on their liberty rights regarding choosing what is best for their health and to be free in that decision. But at the same time there is an expectation that the government will take care of you if you get sick and nurture you back to a healthy person again. This idea again reflects how power dynamics within modern democracy have become more visible during the pandemic.

## 9. Conclusion

Vaccination has always been a highly debated topic, but during the pandemic of covid-19 the attitudes towards vaccination have been many and various, all over the world. Vaccine refusals is not something new, but what has happened during the covid-19 pandemic is a growing, more organised, and collective vaccination refusal, which has also merged with other strands of protesting.

Covid-19 have brought groups of people together that do not usually connect, which also means that there is a diversity among the individual motives to why you oppose the vaccine. One line of thought may be more prone to the argument about *natural bias* and that vaccination is unnatural and foreign to the body. Another line of thought may be that control and obedience is the most important subject to resist in this fight. Nonetheless the demonstrations have connected people in very unexpected ways. Since most participants have a feeling of injustice that needs to be heard and recognized, this has led people who had been fighting against covid-19 vaccination to find a greater affinity and togetherness during this pandemic. What is important in this thesis is to highlight the political activism that has risen in relation to a sensitive topic which people usually have felt ashamed to talk about. Yet, despite this they still choose to be on the streets open and show the public and officials that there is resistance, but also a hope to create a space for discussion.

According to Arendt (2020) it is a trend for modern politics to fall into an automatic loop which demands action to break it. Politics depends on people's actions and decisions, but we as citizens also carry the consequences of our actions and we all act for what we believe is right. The struggle against covid-19 vaccination can be seen as an attempt to break this loop of automatic thinking, the participants note that they can manifest their thoughts and ideas through demonstration in the aim to proclaim that there are other ways to solve and think about vaccination. That there is more than the mainstream narrative understanding of vaccination and vaccination cards, but also that there is a need for more room for other perspectives to be taken into consideration as well.

One of these considerations is the medical perspective, this section showed how past events in Swedish medical history have impacted the way some might resonate regarding present medical treatments. One participant may argue that the vaccination is an act of responsibility for yours and others health, and as individuals in the neoliberal 'responsibilization' politics, we are accountable for our own knowledge intake, health, and decisions. What has been indicated as meaningful for the participants in the interviews is

personal autonomy, to have the right to decide over your own body, and not risking your health for the sake of others. Because what we all want is the liberty to decide over our body freely.

Weighing risk against benefits has been a big factor for the participants when motivating their action and values, one of which is the risk of side-effects. Especially with the use of new technology which has brought scepticism on the effectiveness in vaccination. What this scepticism made visible is the lack of trust in the intentions from “big pharma”, the majority among the participants view big pharma companies as profit driven companies that do not have the peoples best in mind. Leading up to a big mistrust in the development and production of their products.

Moving forward to the social-political perspectives, it was illustrated how the deficiency of transparency on the work from state officials affected the trust from the public. On one hand there are those who feel that the pandemic is greater than themselves and still have faith in officials. But on the other hand, there were also those who developed a lack of faith for the state officials in general, resulting in a loss in connection between themselves and the leader(s) representatives.

What this has done is to create a division within society: those who are against vaccination and those who are pro vaccination, since it contains a possibility to enable society to ‘go back’ to a pre-pandemic state. However, everyone wants what is best for their own health, but what we saw is a narrow-minded vaccination culture where people feel bullied into a treatment.

Another point is how identity came into play in this phenomenon. Some of the participants saw themselves as being *natural bias* and then being *natural* became one of their characteristics. Another aspect is how identity became formed in the sense of going against the narrative all together, creating a togetherness that also implies that being different is a characteristic which can be applied to their personality.

Since people’s position in the question of covid-19 vaccination have created diversity, it needs to be understood that it is not single individuals that pit themselves against the customs of the community and covid-19 recommendations. What has become clear in this research is that the resistance against vaccination is an organised minority, and what has also been revealed is the strong sense of both togetherness and otherness from both majority and minority perspectives.

This brings us to the perception of control, both in terms of covid-19 vaccination cards, but also in the form of information regulation with censorship on different media platforms. Starting with the vaccination card, it is proof that you have taken the vaccination, and thereby

have the right to access parts of a 'normal lifestyle' again, such as travelling. The card was understood by some in the anti-vaccination movements as an indicator on how it is possible to make life hard for those who are against the official discourse and solutions, to make them follow the lead again. Some participants expressed how the card created division and labelled people as good or bad. Creating a dysfunctional relationship between the two groups is minimising the possibility for a healthy discussion. Participants especially pointed out that the focus of these two groups has been on pointing out all the wrongdoing of the other one, and in this finger pointing game people tend to forget the role the government, politicians and authorities have had in this pandemic.

However, what is important to note is that to be free from control does not mean a total freedom from state officials. The pandemic did disclose the power of politicians and authorities may hold upon the public. However, what needs to be dissolved is the idea that freedom is only reached when we are free from politics, what needs to be considered instead is how people can live and express themselves freely within society, because freedom can never exist without politics.

Next on the perception of control is the reflection on the media and the power from big tech companies but also how this pandemic has taught us is how easy it is for knowledge to change, transform and spread. Censorship has had a big part in this pandemic and especially through private companies who can be seen as politically biased. There is a good point that participants make, when pointing out the risk we all take in trusting these few big tech companies because of the risk of information manipulation. But since these companies are the biggest outlet for information and conversation among people, one could argue that we already accepted their control since we use their platforms.

What has become visible in this research is that in the end it is all about different versions of power, regardless of the actor – government, the individual, big pharma or private tech companies – but it is important how we make sense of this power, and how it becomes meaningful for each person. This gives us the tool to understand how one individual's 'logic' becomes another individual's 'illogic'. We saw by using cognitive dissonance how people can solve their own cognitive dysfunction, which illustrated how power can carry different faces and through this it can portray various explanations on the circumstances around the covid-19 pandemic.

But is it possible to organise political life in this pandemic with a common aim when such division exists? What is worth recognising is that both people who are against vaccination and pro vaccination perceive a strong link between health and responsibility. The aim is the

same, to live life as we once knew it, however their motives are separating them. However, if state officials want a greater compliance from their citizens, they need to improve their management and sufficiency of information when enlightening the citizens, so that future crises can act in accordance with their guidelines for the best result of the whole community.

Moving forward, there was no previous research made in this specific aspect, the only interviews with people against vaccinations were from news reporters or private youtube channels. So looking for future research it would be interesting to have more interviews and to see if the participants who are active in this movement also have a history from being engaged in other political movements or demonstrations. This would make it possible to see if this event has brought out people who usually are not engaged but the circumstances around the pandemic made them motivated to express their political values through demonstrations. This would enable us to contextualise people who are against covid-19 with a greater reliability.

Even though data saturation was achieved in this research it would be interesting to conduct, in future research, a content analysis on different open Facebook groups for people against vaccination, where uncandid material could be collected to get more unfiltered thoughts and articulation. But also, to get a wider view of actions inspired by dissatisfaction that has been taking place and being expressed in relation to covid-19. People tend to express themselves differently online since they usually feel more protected behind the screen, hence more open to express themselves and so revealing other aspects that may not come to light in a face-to-face interview where every word they use is recorded.

Most importantly what needs to be remembered is that every individual is the creator of their own story. Everyone is given a length of time between birth and death and their life will be told as a story. A story that we are not producers of since we are an outcome of our actions and that creates history.

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