Russian and Swedish stories of a failing country

An interpretivist theory-consuming narrative study of the interaction between strategic narratives and political myths in Sweden

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Abstract
In this thesis I have conducted an interpretivist narrative study on the correlation between strategic narratives and political myths. The strategics narratives were found by analyzing articles written by Sputnik, and the political myths are identified in previous research. This was done against the theoretical background that when strategic narratives and political myths share similarities the narratives and the myths are more powerful than when told on their own. This study found that the Russian strategic narratives and the political myths in Swedish Democrats share multiple similarities. The two actors tell the story of anti-immigration, how the liberal left is failing the people, and how Sweden have gone from a once wonderful country to a state in decline. Additionally, the two actors portray Sweden Democrats as the saviors that can save the common man from its enemies, i.e., the liberal left and the migrants. This relationship between the narratives and the myths indicates that they have a lot in common and thus the myths should be more powerful and be able to target and convince a larger audience according to the theoretical assumption of this thesis.

Keywords: Russia, Sweden, Strategic Narratives, Political Myths, Sweden Democrats, Sputnik.
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1. Introduction

1.1 Research problem
Strategic narrative is becoming increasingly interesting, especially focusing on Russian foreign policy. Narratives in themselves are central to human interaction and thus it is central in international relations. As our forms of communication evolves, so does the production in narratives. In the 21st century social media and online news outlets made it easier for actors to interact with each other and thus allows for new forms of strategic narrative to take place. Most noticeably, access to online information and social media has allowed actors to reach an audience that was previously impossible to reach (Miskimmon et al., 2013). Strategic narratives are tools used by political elites to drive forward their agenda, shape the opinion of the public and to control the behavior of domestic and foreign actors. In the long term, convincing people that your strategic narrative is true allows the narrator to control what the audience thinks of their interests, their identity, their role in international relations and where the world is headed (Miskimmon et al., 2013).

Miskimmon refers to another author in their book, Castell’s Communication Power (2009). In Miskimmons judgement this work is at the very foundation of their own work, and furthermore the work displays a fundamental understanding of the relation between power and communication. Castell introduces a new concept in his publication, “Network Society”. This, at the time, new idea suggests that with the increased access to the internet and social media have changed the playing field for communication and in turn for power. Communication and power are highly dependent on each other. If one drastically changes, so does the other. The introduction of easily accessible information is no exception. Previously, the ability to broadcast your narrative to a large audience was gatekept to the political elites and major institutions. With social media and the internet, the ability to broadcast narratives and spread information was all of the sudden accessible for everyone. This accessibility complicates the control of power for the elite, especially in the sense of controlling the narrative. The very core of strategic narratives is to change and affect behavior and opinions of the targeted group. Strategic narratives are used to convince the audience that your opinion is the right one, legitimize the narrators’ policies or actions as well as delegitimizing your opponents’ policies and actions. This power has been recalculated and redistributed, which makes it increasingly difficult for the elite to legitimize their policies. Everyone can create
their own narrative and no single actor in the free world owns the narrative (Miskimmon, 2013; Castell, 2009).

Powerful states largely utilize strategic narratives. When they do, they simply describe the world in binary absolutes; good or evil and democratic or authoritarian. Doing this helps the narrator to distinguish between friend and foe. Strategic narrative helps powerful states to compete for global power in international relations. There are three building blocks for how great powers use strategic narratives. First it is how the international order works, then it is what their role in this international order is, and finally how can they maintain or improve the international order (Miskimmon et al, 2013). Much of this book focuses on the use of strategic narrative from the US. While this is also important to fully understand strategic narratives, it is less relevant for this thesis. What is vital to understand from this publication is that Russia is not a lone actor in this arena, rather, great powers all use strategic narratives to cement their position of power.

In 2014 Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula as a reaction of the Euromaidan revolution in Ukraine (Szostek, 2017). Russia have used state media as a weapon during the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. One example of Russia’s weaponised media is how they use their media outlets to create a narrative of Ukrainians as dangerous and a threat to the Russian majority living in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. By doing this, Russian media can convince its consumers that taking control of areas populated with a Russian majority in Ukraine is not only desirable, but necessary.

Szostek (2016) explored Russia’s use of strategic narrative as a tool in foreign policy. Mainly Russia’s strategic narrative is pro-Russian and anti-western and anti-American. Not only do Russia use media outlets and social media to brand themselves as welcoming, but they also use massive state-funded projects such as hosting the Olympics and the 2018 men’s Football World Cup. The Russian authorities recognizes the importance of strategic narrative because they need to be able to counter the narratives produced western media. Overall, Russia uses strategic narrative and massive media communication to improve the general opinion of Russia both domestically and internationally, as well as to undermine negative western media (Szostek, 2016).
Russian strategic narrative in the Ukrainian conflict is not an isolated event. Russia has used strategic narrative in multiple instances, and Sweden is not an exception to this. Deverell, Wagnsson, and Olsson (2020) wrote an article about the narratives that Russia have created for the Nordic countries. These strategic narratives are used by Russia to target the Nordic countries. The study got their narrative through the state-owned media outlet Sputnik News (Deverell et al, 2020).

To conclude, it is suggested that Russia use strategic narrative to affect their targeted audience regarding a specific subject. Russia does not hesitate to use strategic narratives, and they target those who Russia deem needs to be targeted. Furthermore, Russia is known to have political interests in Europe, especially in the northern and eastern region of Europe. This political interest is not exclusively portrayed by strategic narratives but also through information warfare and disinformation to affect the agenda and political outcome of general elections in target nations, where Sweden is one of the affected countries. It is not out of the ordinary that the preferred outcome of general elections is a victory for right-wing conservative or populist parties, which is true also in the Swedish case (Diesen, 2019: Butt and Nyman 2020). This in turn leads to the research problem. What is the Russian strategic narrative of Sweden and how well does this narrative correlate to the already pre-existing political myths in Swedish right-wing party Sweden Democrats?

1.2 Research gap
There is no scarcity on research of strategic narrative, this will be developed further the thesis’s second chapter. This holds true to Russian antagonistic narratives targeting Sweden and the Nordics as well. However, this research mainly finds what the narratives are and thus it is important to build onto this research by finding how the antagonistic narrative affects Sweden. In order to contribute to the previous research, it is required to use this information and create something new. As said in one of the articles:

Additional research is also required to expose the political consequences of the systematic denigration of the ‘other’ in international relations (Wagnsson and Barzanje, 2020:253) There is a lack of research with focus on how the narratives affects Swedish politics, more specifically how the antagonistic narratives can divide Swedish politics and increase the support for right-wing populist parties in Sweden. This is done by adding on to Schmitt’s research of political myths and narrative. While Schmitt looks at the correlation between French political myths and Russian strategic narratives, this thesis will conduct similar
research with Sweden as the target nation. By studying the correlation between political
myths and antagonistic strategic narratives, this study will add to the previous literature on
antagonistic strategic narratives by adding another dimension. By looking at the relationship
between narratives and myths this study adds further investigation on the use of information
in an antagonistic sense. Similarly, this also adds to the findings in Schmitt (2018) by
replacing France with Sweden. Thus, there is an increase in subjects investigated. Lastly, this
study adds to the literature by further researching the antagonistic strategic narratives
targeting Sweden, thus building on to previous study in this area by looking at narratives
found in later years compared to previous research (Wagnsson and Barzanje, 2019: Deverell
et al, 2020). While the study of political myths in SD have been done (Hellström and
Wennerhag, 2013) it has not been done in connection to Russian antagonistic narratives.

1.1 Aim and research questions
The aim of this thesis is to add to the existing academic debate on strategic narrative. This
thesis will add to the debate by examining the correlation between Russian antagonistic
strategic narratives and political myths found in the Sweden Democrats. The questions that
this thesis aims to answer are as follow:
1) What is the strategic narrative of Sweden found in Sputnik?
2) Is there a correlation between the political myths within the Sweden Democrats and the
strategic narratives of Sweden?
The first questions asked allows for data collection on Russian strategic narratives. It is
important to understand exactly what the narratives are. The last question will be attempted to
be answered in the analysis. This question will allow for a discussion of how both narrative
and political myths correlate and what this means.

1.2 Thesis outline
This thesis will consist of five chapters. With the first chapter discussing the research
problem, aim and research questions, the following chapter will cover the previous research
and theoretical discussion. The next step is to introduce the methodology and research design
which logically will be succeeded by the analysis. Lastly the conclusion and future
recommendations will finish the research.
2. Previous research and theory
In this section I will present the previous research and the general academic debate on strategic narrative. In doing this I can simultaneously present the research gap that I will attempt to fill with my research as well as the research’s relevance in current academic debate. I will divide this chapter into subchapters discussing the different findings in previous research.

Miskimmon, O’loughlin, and Roselle (2013) is a good introduction to the basics of strategic narrative. In the book the authors cover the actors in strategic narrative, how it is used, when it is used, why actors would use strategic narrative, as well as the impact that it has in international relations. It is an introductory book for the core of strategic narrative in order to study it further. By using strategic narratives, they explain how great powers and emerging BRICs powers use strategic narratives to present themselves as strong states (Miskimmon et al, 2013). Like this, another article argues that with the quickly changing landscape of media and the BRIC states rising to power, strategic narrative is the new way to understand international relations, similar to how soft power was the way to understand IR back when the Cold War ended (Roselle et al, 2014). While this book serves a meaningful purpose by introducing strategic narratives in such a way that actors, purpose and end goal become clear to the reader, the use of strategic narratives as a weapon is not discussed. While this is not a critique of the work that Miskimmon et al put forward, it is namely stating a limitation of their work. It is not necessary to expand on the weaponization of narratives for a fundamental understanding. However, it is important to understand how great states, as well as other actors, use strategic narratives with a hostile purpose rather than simply cementing their position is the status quo. This book provides a clear understanding of the concept and in this thesis, Miskimmon et alς work will serve as a foundation for the deeper investigation of strategic narratives as an offensive as well as defensive weapon. How strategic narratives are weaponized will be discussed further in the following sections of this thesis.

2.1 Strategic narrative and soft power
Roselle, Miskimmon, and O’loughlin (2014) wrote an article about strategic narrative as a form of soft power in the 21st century. Their criticism of soft power studies was that it has become too broad and thus has no explanatory power. The authors suggest that strategic
narrative is a new addition to soft power. Whereas soft power can be described as “(...) the ability to influence others through the attraction of culture, values, and policies (...)” the authors instead believe that it should be recognized as the power to create a consensus of shared ideas (Roselle et al, 2014). The authors do not aim to replace soft power with strategic narrative, but rather show how strategic narrative can be used as a power resource to help understand the complexity of soft power and international relations (Roselle et al, 2014). The authors urge scholars to study the use of narrative between states because the relationship between two state actors is affected by narratives. This is true even to the extent that military intervention can be justified based on the relation and narrative of two states. Not only can narrative be used to justify military action, but it can also help the researcher understand the aspects of the conflict. Furthermore, it can be used to understand the origin of conflicts (Roselle et al 2014). This paper is a great addition to the introduction of strategic narratives. As Miskimmon et al (2013) in an excellent way introduce strategic narratives and its basics, Roselle et al (2014) successfully develop on this and discuss strategic narratives and their relation to war and conflict. Roselle et al (2014) argue that narratives and media will be continuously linked to war and conflict. Further recognize strategic narratives as a part of the broader soft power instead of being a challenger of soft power. This point is interesting to dissect, as soft power in short is the ability to make someone do what you want them to do without forcing them – it is power without threat of consequences (Roselle et al, 2014). This is in large what Miskimmon (2013) and Castell (2009) discussed in their work. The relation between power and communication and the role that strategic narrative plays in power dynamics and control. We have previously explored the role of new technology and its effects on power dynamics. If we then look at strategic narratives as a means of soft power and a way to, as Roselle et al (2014) put it, use strategic narratives to legitimize military interventions, it becomes obvious that this soft power is a powerful tool, that can now be used by multiple actors in the international arena. How strategic narratives are used to legitimize military interventions will be further explored in this thesis, with a focus on Russian military intervention. These findings are important for the understanding of the power of narratives. Strategic narratives are not simply stories told to only paint a picture. They are used as a tool in international relations and conflicts. They are executed with a specific goal in mind and understanding this allows us to fully grasp the gravity of narratives.
and soft power comes down to the two main ways a state can use its power to enforce change or affect foreign states against their will for your own benefit (Nye, 2008). The two powers have unique and distinguished characteristics that set them apart. While hard power is the use of force to reach the desired outcome, soft power is using narratives and convincing the counterpart to want the same outcome as the narrator themselves want. Joseph Nye writes

If I can get you to want to do what I want, then I do not have to force you to do what you do not want. (Nye, 2008: 95)

This shows the attraction of soft power. Instead of having to force someone to do something that they do not want, political leaders can use soft power in order to persuade their targets through attraction and seduction. Szostek argues that there is a grey area between soft and hard power as opposed to what Nye had concluded before. While Nye had argued that soft power is whatever hard power is not, Szostek claims that the distinguish is not a clear cut (Szostek, 2017b: Nye 2008). This discussion of hard and soft power is valuable to this thesis, as it shows the potential of soft power and how to utilize it; for good deeds or bad deeds, soft power is an incredible means to your end. However, what has become obvious in its absence is the discussion of the use of both hard and soft power. Hard power and soft power do not necessarily have to exist excluded from each other. As we see in Russia’s aggression towards Ukraine for example, soft power, more specifically strategic narratives, have been widely executed to legitimize the aggression. During the annexation of Crimea and the following conflict in eastern Ukraine, Russian state-controlled media played a vital role. Russian media portrayed Ukrainians as barbarians, legitimizing the aggression and conflict both domestically and internationally (Szostek, 2017). Russia as an actor is very skilled in strategic narratives and use of disinformation to persuade the receivers of their perception. As quickly mentioned previously, Russia used strategic narratives and information warfare prior to their aggression in Ukraine, as well as during the ongoing conflict. The academic debate of hard and soft power should consider this connection in more depth than they do. Nye (2008) mention it briefly when discussing the United States and their post 9/11 narratives, and Szostek (2017) dwell deeper into the subject when discussing Russian aggression in Ukraine. However, this deserves more attention given the impact that strategic narratives have in current international relations and the power it holds to legitimize an armed conflict. In short, hard power and soft power do not exist separately. Indeed, the two can be used in isolation, but they can also, as we have seen in previous literature, be executed as a pair.
Not only is soft power a tool for authoritarian states to affect vulnerable democratic states, but soft power is also used to keep western liberal democracy out of their authoritarian states. This has become clear from the development of authoritarian states in the past decades. After the cold war, the ambition was to allow authoritarian states to integrate into western society and eventually become democracies, however, through information warfare and soft power measures, these authoritarian regimes, Russia, and China, have become more and more authoritarian (Walker, 2016).

Walker (2018) has, in the desire to create a theory for the use of antagonist soft power coined the term sharp power. Sharp power, like soft power, aims to change the desire of the target actor. However, instead of using the force of attraction and conversion, sharp power refers to undermining and exploiting the target. By exploiting the openness of western democratic society, antagonistic states can infiltrate the media and portray their own narrative in the target’s media. Thus, the antagonistic state can expose the population to their favored narrative and undermine the mainstream narrative in the target thus affecting and ultimately shifting the desire of the target state.

The theory put forth by Walker, sharp power, is an attempt to merge both hard power and soft power to an offensive alternative to soft power. As information and narratives evolve, as Castell (2009) discusses, so does soft power. This evolution can seem to change the explanatory power of soft power and make it seem less capable of explaining the new environment of power. However, I do not recognize that this evolution of soft power, from the cold war and to current international relations, requires a new theoretical approach. Rather than creating a new perspective, scholars should be aware of this change and instead apply soft power as we know it to the contemporary field. Soft power and offensive soft power still hold explanatory power in the 21st century. In his article, Walker himself argues that we should not perceive sharp power and soft power as opposites. States can wield both sharp and soft power. This point further damages the point Walker is trying to make; in essence, states use soft power to different ends. If the end goal is to be hostile and delegitimize your opponent or if the end goal is to legitimize yourself, the mean is still soft power. The power to persuade your target audience that your perspective is true, which is the very core of soft power. While it is true that authoritarian states such as Russia and China use soft power, strategic narratives included, to hurt the perception of free democratic states, this does not differentiate it from the soft power used by democratic states with their ambition to legitimize
their perception, rather it is simply a hostile approach to soft power (Roselle et al., 2013; Miskimmon et al., 2013). This school of thought will be investigated further in the following section.

2.2 Russian strategic narrative

Previous research has in large focused on how states use strategic narrative to portray themselves in a positive light thus granting themselves a better reputation and legitimacy. Recently, however, the focus has shifted to finding how states use strategic narrative to antagonize a target state. In this section I will introduce what other researchers have found from studying Russian strategic narratives. First, I will explore the research done with Sweden as the target followed by exploring how other countries have been displayed by Russian media.

However, prior to exploring the strategic narratives from Russian media it is necessary to clarify the role of the truth in narratives. While it is important that some part of the story that is created in a part of narratives contain some truth, it is not unusual that it is some twisted variation of the objective truth. Neither is it rare that subjective, interpreted fact, truth is reported as the objective and only truth. The use of social media and free internet allows for this fabricated truth to be further from the actual truth (Till, 2020).

2.2.1 Sweden

First, I will look at the narratives displayed from Russian media that covers Sweden. Wagnsson and Bazanje (2019) wrote an article on Russia’s use of strategic narrative. The focus of this study was to highlight Sputnik’s narrative of Sweden. What the authors wanted to find was what specific strategies states use when creating stories about other states to display themselves in a better way. The authors use Sputnik News for this study, and they reviewed over 200 articles written between 2014 and 2018. What the authors found to be the main narrative is that Sweden is a country in decline. Of course, the narrative portrayed by Sputnik is created by carefully choosing what to report and what to not report; Sputnik chose to focus on the negative news coming from Sweden. As well as what till argued, what Sputnik News chooses to report is not necessarily the real truth but a fabricated version of the truth. While the main narrative is that Sweden is in decline, the authors found that Sputnik had several subplots over the years. They paint a picture of Sweden as a polarized and heavily divided country, a country that is unsafe for swedes due to immigration, and lastly it is portrayed as an ultra-modern and overtly sexual society with no shame. Furthermore, the
authors introduce the actors presented in the narratives. The political elites are portrayed as fools that have lost control. The victims, the regular swedes, and particularly the Swedish men, are beyond salvation. The heroes, the Sweden democrats, are not able to save Sweden because they are being shut out. The villains’, the Muslims, and the immigrants, are portrayed as dangerous and taking over the country. However, the villains are also portrayed as radical feminists. Thus, Sputnik convince its readers that Sweden is a ridiculous country, making it look weak. This article argues that suppression, destruction, and direction are crucial to antagonistic strategic narrative. First, suppression is used to increase the narrator’s status and damage the status of the target. This is done by portraying the behavior, culture, population or the politicians of the country in a negative way while the narrator portrays themselves as a good and respected state. Second, destruction is used to portray the target as weak; by creating an image that the target is weak affects its reputation in the international arena. It makes the target an unattractive partner, makes them appear weak and unreliable, and unable to defend themselves. Third, direction is to direct the target to a behavior that is favorable to the narrator (Wagnsson and Bazanje, 2019). This article offers the reader good insight into what the narrative of Sweden is from the perspective of Sputnik News. By analyzing the news published by Sputnik News the authors successfully captured the strategic narratives portrayed on the news outlet. However, that is a limitation of the article. It is mainly descriptive of strategic narratives. Indeed, it does capture strategic narratives portrayed by the state-controlled news outlet Sputnik News of four Nordic countries, compares it and gives the reader a greater understanding of the facts. However, as the authors themselves point out, they do not investigate further into the effects of strategic narratives. The findings of the article are however of importance to this thesis as it creates a foundation for further investigation of the strategic narratives of Sweden from Russian state-controlled news outlets. The authors continued their research and investigated the effects of strategic narratives further in a later article.

Deverell, Wagnsson, and Olsson (2020) wrote an article on Russia’s narrative of the Scandinavian countries. The purpose of this study is to find the negative consequences of strategic narrative. Overall, what the authors found was that with strategic narrative Russia could divide not only the Scandinavian states but also the EU. This study builds on Wagnsson and Bazanje (2019) in the sense that it uses the findings in that study to test the method on the Nordic countries (Deverell et al, 2020). While there is no concrete evidence that Russia use narrative to harm others it is vital to recognize that this is a real possibility. Furthermore, it is
important to understand that Russia use narrative to recreate themselves as a global superpower. Therefore, they use narrative to contest the western alliance because they recognize the west as their main opponent (Deverell et al, 2020). As this article builds on the work of Wagnsson and Bazanje (2019) it is not surprising that they also use the suppression, destruction, and direction strategy introduced in that article. As the authors used similar methods to gather data it is not surprising that they came to similar conclusion of the data; Sweden is an ultra-liberal country ruined by feminism and immigration, where people are overtly sexual and perverted (Deverell et al, 2020). To conclude this article, the authors found what narratives Sputnik create about Sweden and the Nordic countries using the suppression, destruction, and direction strategy.

The two studies by Wagnsson and Bazanje (2019) and Deverell, Wagnsson, and Olsson (2020) showed Russia’s strategic narrative of Sweden. The strategy of suppression, destruction, and direction was applied appropriately and demonstrated how this strategy was used by Sputnik when creating the narrative of Sweden. As the authors point out, future research should focus on the political consequences and how the target will react (Wagnsson, 2019). These findings are valuable to this thesis. By effectively displaying the Russian strategic narratives of Sweden as well as how the narratives are used to inflict harm to the target nation, they provide an understanding of narratives and its consequences. Connecting back to Miskimmon et al (2013) and Roselle et al (2014) the findings in Wagnsson and Bazanje (2019) and Deverell, Wagnsson, and Olsson (2020) further prove the power of narratives. As argued previously, strategic narratives are a form of soft power with the intention to persuade the target that the narrator’s view is correct. What Deverell, Wagnsson and Olsson (2020) provide to this is the finding that strategic narratives can be used as a form of harmful soft power, with the intent to hurt the target. This is valuable to this thesis as it suggests the possibility to use strategic narratives with harmful intent to negatively affect the target, which will be explored in this thesis as well.

Concluding, Russia shows interest in challenging Sweden and the Nordic. Other authors that studies and confirms Russian interest in Sweden is Kragh and Åsberg (2017). These authors claim that Russian foreign policy has become more dependent on information warfare and creating narratives through public and international news outlets such as Russia Today and Sputnik. Since 2014, narratives and communication against Sweden have become a greater part of Russian foreign policy strategy and there is an overarching attempt to spread
misinformation and antagonistic narratives of Sweden. The end-goal of this strategy is ultimately to hinder NATO-involvement in Sweden and destabilization to ensure Russian hegemony in the region (Kragh and Åsberg, 2017).

2.2.2 International
Ukraine has been affected to a great length by Russian narrative and they have for a long time been a target for information warfare. Ukraine is not only geographically close to Russia; the two nations share a long history together. Prior to the Euromaiden in early 2010’s Ukraine was viewed in positive light. However, following Euromaiden the narrative and perception of Ukraine shifted drastically to an increasingly negative tone. Research showed that people who had a positive view of Ukraine decreased from 74 percent in 2012 to 28 percent in 2014. This is not by accident according to Khaldarova (2019). Rather it is the result of a campaign from Russian media and officials. The narrative of Ukraine through Russian Channel One is examined. The authors claim that Russia skillfully through media manipulation can change the perspective of much of a population (Khaldarova, 2019).

While not linked solely to Russian narratives, Bennet, and Livingston (2018), explore the effect of narratives and disinformation again democracies. The authors claim that while democracies are strong in other aspects, the media of a free democracy is highly fragile and easy to manipulate. Using strategic narratives, trolls, hackers, and disinformation campaigns, authoritarian states, can infiltrate and control political narratives as well as radicalize people in the west (Bennet and Livingston, 2018).

Russia is not only using strategic narratives in order to target foreign states, but in order to protect itself as well. By using anti-western and anti-American narratives, Russia can protect its identity of a great nation. Russia is very keen to been recognized as a great nation as it historically has been one of the main actors but also because of its ambition to challenge the west. Russia uses communication and information to reach their end and they skillfully use communication to challenge other states. This holds true in their national branding as well. By using narrative Russia not only brands itself as a great state, but it also challenges the criticism it receives from the west (Szostek, 2016).

While it is not targeting another nation, Russian news Sputnik and Russia Today are used as weaponized news in the sense that the two news outlets act as damage controllers and
targeting disinformation. The two news outlets were active in both the UK and the US with fake news and pro-Russian campaigns. The outlets are active in other European democracies as well with campaigns targeting national politics, spreading anti-immigration news and anti-social justice propaganda (Ramsay and Robertshaw, 2019).

These studies provide a broad understanding of how Russia use strategic narratives in international relations. It is not exclusively used for antagonistic purposes; rather Russian strategic narratives serve multiple purposes. It is also not exclusively targeted towards smaller states where Russia is also the greater state. Russia’s extensive use of strategic narratives is used against the western world as an entity, against the USA as well as smaller states – however the intent changes for the different targets. Understanding Russia’s highly extensive use of strategic narratives, in all its shapes and for all of its purposes, is vital for understanding the gravity of strategic narratives, which is what these findings provide.

2.3 Russia and the western right-wing
Building onto the previous section, Russia is not only targeting Sweden or the Nordics, but Russia is interested in much of European politics and through different means they aim to alter elections in favor of themselves. Diesen (2019) explores connection between Russia and the western right-wing populists. Most right-wing populist parties, Sweden Democrats included, have two things in common: rejection of western liberalism, and an embrace for Russian authoritarianism. What the right-wing populist parties aim to do is bring back the conservatism of old times and reintroduce family values and nationalism. According to the author populism grew as a response to excessive liberalism and the declaration of liberalism as the one true ideology in the west, following the Cold War. Russia’s response to this is of course positive and they hold the role as the leader of a conservative Europe with pride. There are political leaders in France, in the United Kingdom, Germany, Austria, and in the US on the right-wing that look to Russia with respect and see Putin as a strong leader and a role-model (Diesen, 2019).

Butt and Byman (2020) further research this connection between Russia and western right-wing populist parties. The authors argue that with the support that Russia grants the right-wing, it makes it more challenging than it would otherwise be. Russia is, as written in their article,

(…) encouraging them with propaganda, providing them with a haven, and otherwise making them stronger and more dangerous (Butt and Byman, 2020: 137).
The authors further argue that Russia use this instability that they create abroad to stabilize their own country. By creating a chaotic scene in western liberal states, they attempt to convince people that the Russian authoritarian right-wing approach is the superior alternative. Russia uses their intelligence and power to affect election outcomes to their own favor. By using media outlets such as RT and social media, Russia successfully infiltrates national debate and topics as well as polarize subjects previously left untouched. Overall, the authors describe how Russia uses their power to influence right-wing politicians, give them support while simultaneously attempting to divide the liberal west for their own winning (Butt and Byman, 2020).

Tyushka (2020) explore how Russia weaponize narratives to destabilize Europe and eventually challenging Ukraine’s sovereignty through the annexation of Crimea. As explored in Szostek (2017a), Wagnsson and Barzanje (2019) as well as Deverell, Wagnsson and Gardell (2020) Russia use narrative and information warfare to challenge foreign countries in favor of Russia. Tyushka (2020) build onto this by researching how Russia in various ways use narrative in an aggressive manner to destabilize and threaten Europe. What is found in the article is that through narratives, Russia could successfully affect European politics, for example in the Brexit campaign, the Catalonian independence movement and by supporting European right-wing narratives (Tyushka, 2020).

2.4 Political myths
Schmitt (2018) argues that Russian propaganda and strategic narrative have been highly successful internationally, especially since the conflict in Ukraine. The Russian information warfare uphold such quality that it receives support from foreign political groups all over Europe. The reason for this success is said to be that Russian strategic narrative build on the already existing narratives within the target. Schmitt argues in this article that there is a correlation between how effective the strategic narrative is and how well it relates to pre-existing domestic political myths. The study concludes that to understand how strategic narrative is received, it is important to study political myths (Schmitt, 2020).

Schmitt introduces three myths in his works. The first myth is The Golden Age which is the idea that society and politics was allegedly better in the past than it is today. This myth is more commonly found in conservative political communities as progressive communities tend to aim for drastic change in politics. This political myth takes a very solid shape from Donald
Trump’s 2016 campaign slogan *Make America Great Again* where it is suggested that America today is in decline and that it is necessary to take it back to its former glory days. This myth also exists in Swedish political communities on the conservative front. Another example of a political myth is found in France, the *grandeur*. This political myth argues that France in international politics is a great power. They have nuclear powers, permanent seat in the UN Security Council, and a balance between great powers. France is considered a friend and an ally, but never aligned. Thus, they want to cooperate in a multipolar world where France is one of the main powers to create a safe international arena, but they align themselves to strictly follow another country and be obedient to them (ibid). The third and final political myth found in Schmitt is the idea of a *savior*. This savior is supposedly a political strongman that with a firm and decisive hand can lead a country back on the right track. In French right-wing populism there are some historical figures that are given as example, but what’s more interesting is that the French party National Rally\(^1\) stated that Putin would be a good French leader due to this strongman persona (ibid).

Building onto political myths, a study of the political myths in Scandinavian right-wing populist parties was done by Hellström and Wennerhag (2013). The aim of this study was to find out what the political myths in right-wing populist parties in social democratic Scandinavia are. The Swedish party they study is the Sweden Democrats (SD). The political myths looked at in this study is the *national exclusiveness* and the *common man* myth, both of which are present within SD (Hellström and Wennerhag, 2013). The myth of national exclusiveness refers to shared national symbols such as the national flag, the national anthem, the monarchy, and the shared national holidays. It is also the idea of a shared nation and spirit within the borders and a people that belongs in the country as well as what makes the nation different from every other nation (Hellström and Wennerhag, 2013). The *common man* is a myth that wants to highlight the issues facing what the narrator calls the common man. The common man in this myth is the average middle-class worker in Sweden that lives a normal Swedish life which stems from generations of workers and farmers. The myth points to that the common man are being ridiculed and taken for granted from the political and economic elites in Sweden (Hellström and Wennerhag, 2013).

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\(^1\) Nationally Rally was previously called National Front or *Front National* in French. The party is led by Marine Le Pen. The party is labelled as a far-right populist party.
2.5 Theoretical assumption
This paper will be using the theoretical assumption that strategic antagonistic narratives have a greater effect on the target nation when they correlate to the existing political myths in the target nation, as presented in Schmitt (2018). This theory stems from the article written by Schmitt (2018) where the author investigates when strategic narratives are as most effective. The argument is that strategic narratives are as most effective when they correlate to already pre-existing political myths. Therefore, Russia has been so efficient with their narrative, they put pressure on an already dividing debates. The political myths used in this thesis is the common man and national exclusivity which are highlighted in Hellström and Wennerhag (2013) and presented later in this section.

Another use of myths in politics is the previously mentioned political myths. Schmitt (2018) writes about this concept, and the simplified definition is as following,

Political myths are not understood in the pejorative sense of false stories, but rather as a framework providing individuals with a meaning and interpretation of events (Schmitt, 2018:491). Thus, political myths do not need to be stories told with false information, rather it is a way for politicians to provide a narrative explanation of events and by doing this further their own interests. Neither are myths a form of distortion of reality, but it is a way for politicians to create a community where the myth is what holds the community together (Schmitt, 2018: Hellström and Wennerhag, 2013). Myths, according to Schmitt, are constantly evolving and they are never fixed. To keep the myths relevant, it needs to be developed and applicable to current events. Myths are in essence a form of narrative. However, what separates the political myth from a common narrative is that political myths are made to help political communities make sense of their political experience. In this way, political myths create significance for its audience and that it affects the political conditions in the community. This community can exist on different levels, but this thesis will focus on the national political myths (Schmitt, 2018).

As mentioned previously, there are multiple political myths in society, and it is therefore important to be mindful of how the myths are received. Schmitt argues that it is vital to keep in mind the dispersion and coherence of political myths. The dispersion of a political myth suggests how well the narrative will be received, while the coherence refers to how well the narrative will coexist with the other myths already existing. The myth needs not only be well
accepted by the target political group, but simultaneously it needs to play well with the already existing myths to be successful (Schmitt, 2018).

Why a strategic narrative becomes more powerful when it follows political myths is that the narrative gives the politicians more power to their words as more people agree with them. If you want to catch a group’s attention and have them agree with you, it is of course necessary that you create narratives that they also believe. There are a few requirements that need to be fulfilled for the narrative to work as efficiently as possible. (1) there needs to be a common theme of content. The stories need to follow the same line, be it immigration, lqbtq+ rights, feminism, crime, and so on. (2) The structure of the strategic narrative needs to work well with the political myth. The strategic narrative must push the narrative of the myth further while simultaneously interacting with the actors, setting, space, timing, and plot (ibid).

Another article by Ringsmose and Börgesen (2011) suggest five “grammatical rules” for strategic narratives to be as powerful as possible. (1) The goal of the narrative should be clear and realistic. It is important not to lose track and dive into several subplots, but to stay on course. (2) The narrative should hold legitimacy in a both objective as well as a subjective sense. Not only should the narrative be reasonable within the legal framework but also within the cultural framework. (3) A solid strategic narrative promises to deliver success on a certain cause. (4) The narrative should be persistent in a consistent fashion. In other words, it should be created to exist within the current political discourse to decrease its resistance. (5) The narrative should fit the overall strategic communications plan, it should not exist within a vacuum, rather it should be a part of the major communications. These two, Schmitt (2018) and Ringsmose and Börgesen (2011), describe somewhat different criteria for a successful strategic narrative. The two different sets of criteria refer to two different purposes of the strategic narrative. Schmitt’s rules are set to a successful strategic narrative for affecting political opinion, while Ringsmose and Börgesen’s rules are designed for a successful strategic narrative of legitimizing war. While both are valuable for the study of strategic narratives on a larger scale, this thesis benefits more from Schmitt’s rules as this thesis aims to investigate the relation between narratives and political myths. It would be inappropriate to apply Ringsmose and Börgesen’s rules to this thesis.

When a foreign actor creates a narrative that complies with the political myths of a community, this is a way to actualize the myth. This correlation between myth and narrative makes the myth real and gives more power to the teller of the myth as it suggests that their
narrative is correct and always has been correct, while simultaneously telling that those opposing the narrator is wrong and always has been wrong. Thus, when a political that is using myths is backed by foreign narratives this further increases the audience’s trust in politicians as it confirms their myth, without any actual proof. The narrative alone is enough to confirm the reality of the myth (ibid).

According to this theoretical assumption, when a strategic narrative follows the same line as pre-existing political myths, the narrative becomes stronger and more efficient. As this thesis aims to study the interaction between political myths in the Sweden Democrats and strategic narratives from Sputnik, it is important to understand what those political myths are. I have previously discussed Hellström and Wennerhag’s attribution to the field. The authors display the political myths found within the Sweden Democrats in a satisfying way. Here I will further display the political myths found in the Sweden Democrats. Overall, two myths are persistent within the party, the myth of national exclusivity and the myth of the common people. (Hellström and Wennerhag, 2013)

National exclusivity is deeply rooted in nationalism and conservatism. With symbols such as the national flag and the celebration of June 6th a boundary between those who belong and those who do not. It is a way to create a sense of national belonging. This is further implemented through the loudly communicated goal of the “sameness of the people”. Furthermore, the myth of national exclusivity portrays the idea of what is commonly recognized as “the heartland”. In Sweden, and especially within the Sweden Democrats, this is referred to as “folkhemmet”. This myth paints a picture of a positive life and is rooted in the past while simultaneously promising a brighter future by promising folkhemmet. The myth displays a homogenous community with shared values and history which is upheld by the people and challenged by the elites. The myth of national exclusivity furthermore tells stories of how “our nation” is different from every other nation through stories and ideas as well as shared virtues, tolerance, social cohesion, and human rights for example. By doing this, the myth also excludes “others”. “Others” can refer to other nationalities or religions. “Folkhemmet” is portrayed as something exclusive to Sweden and swedes. Folkhemmet in Sweden is rooted in the historical Swedish identity to the welfare state. For almost a hundred years leading political actors have used a narrative of the nation and democracy, which links the state and the people together to protect two vital freedoms, the freedom of the nation and of the individual. Simultaneously, the narrative shifted from discussing “class” to discussing
“the people” to create a narrative of “swedishness”. The Sweden Democrats have applied this myth liberally in their political discourse, referring to themselves as New-Folkhemmet-party. In the first party programme the Sweden Democrats early and clearly state that they believe that an ethnically and culturally homogenous nation is necessary for peace and development, as opposed to a multi-cultural state. Since then, the party have moved away from their earlier and more extreme views. Contemporary Sweden Democrats look advocate for a reasonable immigration policy, harsher integration policies as well as advocating for a return to Folkhemmet. This political myth aims to fuse the people and the state together, the Swedes and Sweden, by expressing the desire for social cohesion and cultural homogeneity. The Sweden Democrats do not imply that Swedes are superior to any other ethnicity, rather they imply the notion that Sweden is the land of the Swedes where Swedes can freely exist. At the same time, they claim that the multi-cultural society is a threat to the stability and cohesion of Sweden. (Hellström and Wennerhag, 2013)

The common man is a political myth rooted in the idea of “the people” which is a populist notion. This myth portrays a struggle between the common people (the lower class and uneducated) versus the privileged cultural elite. The common man, those who build the country, are overshadowed by the elites as the elite political elite ignores them while the cultural elite ridicules them. The myth does not only distinguish between the common man and the elite. It also divides the common man from the lowest social class – the immigrants that are, according to the myth, more prone to crime and less willing to partake in the Swedish culture. This myth is commonly used withing populist parties as they attempt to mobilize the people against the elite and the ideas and values held by the elite. The common man refers to an individual who knows the reality of things and does not need to be guided or taught by the elites. In Sweden, the myth of the common man is deeply rooted in history as well and is not exclusive for the Sweden Democrats. It refers to the freedom-loving and democratic worker that is a central figure to folkhemmet. In the Sweden Democrats application of the myth, the common Swedish individual is tired of being ridiculed by the political and cultural elite for their opinion on immigration. According to the Sweden Democrats, the common man consists of three pillars. (1) The Swedish national identity is being ridiculed, (2) the immigration of culturally different groups has damaged the welfare state, (3) the embrace of a multi-cultural society has had negative consequences for integration as it does not require immigrants to assimilate. These three pillars all negatively effect the common man who, according to this myth, have paid the highest price as the welfare state is in demise, rising levels of criminality
plague society and Swedish traditions and values that historically have created a sense of belonging disappears. The notion of the common man further address “swedishness”. To be Swedish is not exclusive for ethnic swedes, rather it refers to those who conform to a Swedish identity and is regarded by themselves and others as Swedish. In short, everyone can assimilate into the Swedish identity if they desire. (Hellström and Wennerhag, 2013)

These two political myths are as mentioned displayed in the work of Hellström and Wennerhag which is a ten-year old study. As politics are constantly developing, there would be a possibility for critique towards using material this old. These narratives of the common man and national exclusivity is central to Sweden Democrats narrative. As the political ecology evolves, it is likely that the party’s opinion of different matters will change too. However, these myths are the spirit of Sweden Democrats, and they will not change from one election to another. As noted in Hellström and Wennerhag (2013) the Sweden Democrats began as a radical far-right party and have between the years 1989 to 2013 seen a lot of changes being made and becoming a more establishment-friendly party. However, the very core of the party, to turn Sweden into a homogeneous national community with a like-minded people, that every ethnic swede deserves the same democratic rights, and lastly to represent the people and oppose the establishment and the elite, remains. Thus, I deem these findings in Hellström and Wennerhag (2013) to remain satisfactory for this study.
3. Methodology
In this chapter I will introduce the method for this research. The method will be presented and why this is the optimal method for this thesis will be discussed. Following this the method for data collection will be presented as well to clarify how I will obtain the material used for analysis.

“Research design” refers to the basic structure of a research project, the plan for carrying out an investigation focused on a research question that is central to the concerns of a particular epistemic community. (Schwartz-Shea and Dvora, 2012: 16).

When creating research design, it is vital to provide arguments as to why the methods chosen are superior to the alternatives that are available. As a researcher you want to argue for why this is the ultimate way to conduct your research and will be the most efficient way to reach the aim of the research (Ibid). As a researcher you want the results to be persuasive, the methods chosen must be consistent with the research. In short, research design is used to describe how you will answer your research questions and to justify your way of getting from research problem to conclusion (Ibid). A high-quality research design is crucial for a study’s validity and reliability as it allows the readers to understand the logic of the research and how the author collected and operationalized their data.

3.1 Interpretivist study
“Epistemology poses the question: how do we know what we know about politics?” (Bevir and Rhodes, 2015: 4). As an interpretive researcher there is a common understanding of what knowledge is and how it is acquired. As opposed to the positivist assumption that there is an objective truth and social facts about people in political science, interpretivists argue that knowledge and truth is found by analyzing the world and social behavior. There is no absolute truth about political science, the truth is what we interpret it to be (Ibid). In contrast, positivist argue that there is such a thing as objective knowledge, and they believe that the rules that apply to natural sciences are just as applicable to social sciences (ibid).

3.2 Narrative study
As the aim of the study is to find the strategic narratives of Sweden it is appropriate to use narrative studies as the method for interpretation of the data.

Through narratives we make sense of the world, produce meaning, articulate intentions, and legitimize actions. Whereas traditional science assumes that language is transparent and that its significance is easily intelligible, a narrative approach considers language not simply as a mode of communication but as part of the being of what is understood. (Wibben, 2016: 62).
As suggested above, the words, written or spoken, is a crucial part of the message that is received. Therefore, it is vital for the communicator to choose their words carefully as the change in vocabulary can change the narrative and story that is portrayed. With narratives it is possible to find reoccurring stories told in the material.

While the previous section is important in order to understand the study of narrative in political science it is merely an introduction to narrative studies. However, following this it is vital to understand how the study of strategic narratives is different from simply studying narratives. When reading the news stories, it is important to look for not only what is being told but how is the stories being told. When investigating strategic narratives, it is also important to keep in mind how the stories come to life, how frequently it is being told, how it changes and for how long it is relevant. It is also vital to understand the events, actors, and the problems introduced in the stories as well as why the problem is recognized as a problem and what solutions and outcomes there will be as a result of the problem. Building on this, when reading one story it is important to keep all of this in mind whilst at the same time putting the single story in the larger context of all other stories being told. This allows the researcher to understand how the story relates to the other stories and what its relation and connection is to the overall picture. It is also important to keep in mind how this story is placed in timing and order related to other stories, or in other words, the stories temporality, place, and causal emplotment. Temporality and place relate to how the story is placed in time related to other stories, whereas causal emplotment concerns where in the order the story is placed and what connects this story to other stories following it. (Wagnsson and Barzanje, 2019).

3.3 Theory-consuming approach
This study will use a theory-consuming approach. Esaiasson et al (2017) discuss this approach in depth. A theory-consuming study use a theory to provide an explanation to the study. The theory becomes an explanatory factor to make sense of the empirical data by analysing it through the assumption of the theory. In this thesis this is exemplified by the theoretical assumption that strategic antagonistic narratives have a greater effect on the target nation when they correlate to the existing political myths in the target nation, as presented in Schmitt (2018). As the aim of this study is not to create a theory explaining the effects of a correlation between strategic narratives and political myths it would be inappropriate to conduct a theory-developing study. Theory-consuming approach and theory testing are similar.
to some extent. Both methods use a pre-determined theory to explain the empirical data. The difference between the two is derived from the intention of the study; the results can be generalized or not. A theory-consuming approach does not require the study to be generalizable, as it merely provides a tool to understand the empirical data. Theory testing on the other hand uses a case or study to test the theory and thus must be generalizable for further studies (Esaiasson, 2017). As this thesis uses the theoretical assumption presented in Schmitt (2018) to comprehend the data, it is appropriate to conduct a theory-consuming study.

3.4 Data collection
As discussed in previous research, there are studies on Russia’s strategic narrative of Sweden. While my first research question is aimed to find the strategic narrative of Sweden, I draw on previous studies for inspiration. The aim is not to use these as second-hand sources and copy their result. Rather, the aim is to extend upon their findings by using an updated timeline. Wagnsson and Barzanje (2019) and Deverell, Wagnsson, and Olsson (2020) both used Sputnik\(^2\) as their source of news article and limited themselves to articles written between 2014-2018 (Wagnsson and Barzanje, 2019) and 2014-2019 (Deverell et al., 2020).

The data collection will be delimited to two months per year so as not to be overwhelmed with data. The two months per year that will be used are September and October. The reason for this is to avoid months with major holidays in Sweden such as easter, June 6\(^{th}\) and Christmas to ensure that these holidays does not take the spotlight in the news. Furthermore, I want to avoid the summer months June through August as these months are filled with vacations and Sweden is not in its normal pace and thus this can affect how Sputnik report on Sweden. September and October are both months where Sweden exists in a normal state where no major happening will take the attention. The years that I have chosen to collect data from is 2019, 2020 and 2021. This fulfils the aim to use more recent sources of data compared to previous studies done on Russian strategic narratives of Sweden.

This selected timeframe also excludes any articles written following Russia’s unjustified and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, which occurred in February 2022 and is currently ongoing. While it would be interesting to investigate Russian strategic narratives during wartime, it is my assumption that this is not fitting to this research. Furthermore, following the invasion of

\(^2\)Sputnik is a Russian news network founded in 2014 via a merger of state-run Russian news network RIA Novosti and the Voice of Russia radio service, both disbanded in 2013. Sputnik headquarters is in Moscow, Russia, but has regional offices in several big cities. The news network aims to reach an international audience rather than Russian nationals and produces news articles in over 30 languages (Sputnik International, N.D.)
Ukraine Sweden’s role in international relations have changed too as Sweden applied in May 2022 for a NATO-membership (Regeringen, 2023). It is true that Sweden and NATO have a long-shared history with Sweden being one of NATO’s closest allies, however, applying to become a full-scale member shifts the power-dynamic between NATO, Russia and Sweden. It is therefore not sensible to include narratives of Sweden after the invasion of Ukraine, as the relationship between Russia and Sweden have changed and the two states position in international relations have shifted. Russia is an armed aggressor in an unjustified invasion while Sweden is on route to become a full-scale member of NATO. This selected timeframe is nonetheless recognized as a delimitation of this study. The investigation of Russian strategic narratives of Sweden during the Ukraine war should be conducted and it is important to understand how Russia portrays Sweden in this evolved international arena during war times. However, for this data collection to be fair, I choose to exclude these years and instead investigate how Russia portrays Sweden during peaceful times.

While it would be satisfactory to study every article posted where Sweden is brought up, this is not feasible for a study of this size. Thus, I have decided to delimit this study to this timeframe. Like previous studies (Wagnsson and Barzanje, 2019; Deverell et al, 2020) this research will delimit itself to articles posted by Sputnik where Sweden is mentioned in the headline to keep it relevant for the study. Furthermore, articles where Sweden is only briefly mentioned or where the information in the article is not relevant for the study will be skipped to maximize the efficiency. Whilst it is still necessary to have a large quantity of articles to find the narratives, it is also vital to not have too many articles to not be overwhelmed by material. The reason for my second limitation, to only chose articles with Sweden in the headline is applied to maximize the amount of useful information from the articles. When reading articles with Sweden in the headlines this increases the probability that the article is relevant.

3.5 Choice of political party
For this thesis the political community that will be examined is the Swedish Democrats. The reason for this can be found in the previous research on this topic. As explored in previous research, Russia supports the right-wing populist parties in Europe. It is no secret that Russia have previously supported the Sweden Democrats in various ways (Diesen, 2019: Butt and Nyman, 2020). In Sputnik, SD is often portrayed as the savior of Sweden or the hero in the narratives (Wagnsson and Barzanje, 2019). Thus, it is appropriate to study how the strategic narratives from Sputnik correlate to the political myths found in SD. As Schmitt (2018)
argues, and as the theory of this thesis suggest, political narratives are at most efficient when they interact with existing political myths it is fair to assume that Russia will have similar narratives to the political myths in SD.

3.6 Operationalization

In this section I introduce how the data collected is to be interpreted. This study will follow the template introduced by Miskimmon, O’Loughlin, and Roselle (2017) with further development by applying a method inspired by Wagnsson and Barzanje (2019). By applying these two methods the data collected becomes valuable for research. Miskimmon, O’loughlin, and Roselle breaks down narratives into five pillars: 1) Actors, 2) Setting and environment, 3) Conflict, 4) Tools or behavior, 5) Resolution or suggested resolution (2017). This research will not use all the pillars introduced, rather it will look for the actors, the setting, and the conflict in the stories. As inspired by Wagnsson and Barzanje (2019), and Deverell, Wagnsson, and Olsson (2020) is the examination of main plot and subplots for a country. This process will be done to every article gathered from Sputnik.

When examining the data, I will therefore ask myself the following questions:

1) Who is the main actor in this story?
2) What is the setting and where does the story take place?
3) What is the main story in the narrative?
4) What does this individual story add to the narrative?

Asking these questions when examining the articles allows for a deeper understanding of the story and how it is relevant, as well as why the narrator told the story. After asking these questions for each individual story it is important to bring the stories into the grand narrative and the subplots that is to be examined in this paper. Therefore, after reading the articles it will be categorized with other articles contributing to the same narrative. This will show the narrative patterns found in the data.

Applying this work to the data will allow for a greater understanding of what the data means and how it can be used in this study. The reason for choosing this method and following what previous research has done and this method is optimal for antagonistic strategic narratives portrayed in media, like the research that this thesis will carry out.
3.7 Ethical considerations

In this thesis I use information gathered from the news source Sputnik News. Following Russia’s unjustified invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 Sputnik and RT/Russia Today was suspended in the EU and is still as of December 2023 suspended from the EU (European Concil, 2022). According to the European Council, Sputnik News is under permanent and direct control of the Russian Federation and is used as an instrument in Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine through the spread of disinformation of both Ukraine and neighboring states. The European Council further claims,

The Russian Federation has engaged in a systematic, international campaign of disinformation, information manipulation and distortion of facts in order to enhance its strategy of destabilisation of its neighbouring countries, the EU and its member states. (European Council, 2022).

This claim from the European Council is coherent with the previous research in the field of strategic narratives. It is thus important to researchers using Sputnik News as well as RT/Russia Today to understand that what these news outlets publish is done so with a hostile intention. Indeed, it is vital for research in communication, political information, and security studies to understand what is being portrayed while simultaneously understanding that these narratives are fabricated versions of the truth and aims to harm the narratives targets.
4. Analysis
This chapter will introduce the data collected for this study and discuss it through the theoretical assumptions that strategic narratives have a stronger effect if they interact with already present political myths. The political myths that this study look at is the myth of the common man and national exclusivity as defined in the second chapter of this thesis.

It is necessary to highlight in this brief introduction that the following chapter displays what is written in Sputnik and the political myths in Sweden Democrats (SD). The opinions and stories are not influenced by me as a researcher, rather it is a detail of how Sputnik portrays Sweden.

4.1 Sputnik’s strategic narratives
During September and October over the years 2021 through 2019 Sputnik published a great number of articles where Sweden is mentioned. Of these I have used 87 articles that fit the criteria and had a relevant story. The general narrative of these articles was negative, and it was difficult finding a single article with a positive message. However, that is not what is interesting for this research. In this section I will present what narratives were found when reading the articles in Sputnik. The most frequently reoccurring narratives in Sputnik was anti-immigration, the liberal agenda, and Sweden is dangerous. While these narratives were frequent in almost every article written, the overall narrative that Sputnik wants to portray is that Sweden is crumbling and is being destroyed from the inside. This is what I will refer to as the grand narrative. Following this, I will present how these narratives are portrayed in Sputniks articles as well as how they correlate to the political myths found in SD.

Overall, the narratives found were consistent over the years 2021-2019 with no real change in tone. In 2020 there was an increased number of articles focusing on Covid-19. Otherwise, the stories followed the same lines of anti-immigration, how dangerous Sweden is, and how the liberal agenda is blind to contemporary politics throughout the years.

While I look at these stories told by Sputnik, there is no intention to find if the stories are true or not, nor to examine to which extent the stories relate to the truth. If the stories are fabricated, partly fabricated or entirely true does not matter in this research. The story is still being told and the audience is still consuming the media.
4.1.1 Sweden is falling apart
The grand narrative found when reading Sputnik's articles is that Sweden has failed its people, and that the nation is falling apart from inside. This is portrayed in a few different ways when reading the articles. The most obvious way this takes form is the constant negative mood when describing Sweden and news reports from Sweden. By this narrative, Sputnik aims to portray Sweden as a nation that is currently in a downwards spiral with no end. If there is no change the nation will simply be ruined by its continued existence. This narrative is carried out in multiple different ways. Either it is a story about how children in Sweden are receiving education with declining quality (S31), or it can be how gang-violence and immigration-related violence is killing and harming people in Sweden (S12, S26, S28).

While discussing the grand narrative it is also appropriate to mention who the main actors, the enemies, and the victims, are in the stories that are being told. The enemies portrayed by Sputnik are one of three actors. First it is the feminists and the left-liberals in stories such as when officials did not want to fight crime because they would be labelled racist (S71) or when Church of Sweden wanted to rewrite hymns to be more gender inclusive and remove the words ‘He’ and ‘Father’ when talking about God and replace it with ‘you’ and ‘God’ (S35). Second, it can be the migrants and Muslims, for example in stories such as a migrant Muslim that was jailed for threatening to behead the Swedish king and Danish queen (S29). Lastly, it is the gang-related violence in stories such as when gangs in Stockholm enforced illegal curfews in Stockholm’s suburbs (S15). As for the victims of these stories, it is almost exclusively the Swedish population that is seen as the victim. In most stories, it is the Swedish people that is falling victim to the enemies’ actions. Either it is by not recognizing the effect certain policies will have on the general population (S19, S33, S43) or it is by migrants and/or Muslims attacking or otherwise harming regular swedes (S41, S74).

This grand narrative portrayed by Sputnik has similarities to both national exclusivity and the common man. In national exclusivity, national unity and homogeneity are vital for a nation to be the best it can be. By having tightly regulated immigration and having migrants assimilate to Swedish culture and having a nation of citizens that recognizes themselves as Swedish in every meaning of the word a nation can thrive on cooperation and generosity. This is the fundamental idea of the welfare state, that citizens trust one another to always do what is best for the nation. Like the grand narrative that Sweden is falling apart as Sweden have lost its nationalist ideal that was so ever present in the 20th century. Along with this national
segregation and having suburbs and areas that are majority migrants that do not feel a national belonging to Sweden have led to an increase in crime and violence in these areas. This idea is largely present in national exclusivity and SD problematizes this in their political discourse. The grand narrative’s display of the political elite shares similarities with the common man. The idea that the political and cultural elite simply ignore policies that the common man finds important or that they would make fun of the common man for highlighting the importance of harsh immigration and integration policies nicely fits the narratives display of the left-liberals and feminists. Consequently, people do not feel safe in their own nation and trust towards politicians as well as their welfare is falling apart. Found in both the grand narrative and both political myths are the belief that the political elite ignores or fail to understand the consequences of poorly regulated immigration policies, the ridicule of the common man for displaying their concern on this matter, as well as the danger of a multi-cultural society where Muslims and/or immigrants are dangerous, especially towards Swedes. However, national exclusivity expands further than this grand narrative as SD refer to themselves as the “new Folkhemmet-party”; the only legitimate democratic option for those who wish to restore the former glory days of “Folkhemmet”. It is to some extent mentioned in the grand narrative too, but there, SD is merely described as one of the main protagonists of “folkhemmet”, while in the political myth national exclusivity SD is portrayed as the only legitimate option. This narrative is further expanded on in the subplot “anti-immigration”. If one of the goals of the strategic narrative is to influence the political opinion in Sweden and favor the radical right-wing parties, such as SD, it is interesting that SD is not portrayed as the savior in this grand narrative but instead in one of the sub-plots.

4.1.2 Anti-immigration
This narrative is present throughout the years in Sputnik and takes form in different ways. Important to note with this narrative is that this is not exclusively for migrants, but it also targets Muslims living in Sweden no matter their citizenship or national background. One way it is portrayed is by claiming that migrants are coming to Sweden and abusing the welfare system and not contributing to society (S13, S17, S27). Another way that this is portrayed is through the stories about how dangerous migrants and Muslims are (S61, S74, S85). For example, Sputnik writes about how a migrant assaulted an innocent Swedish girl while his friends were laughing and filming the attack (S85). Another form in which Sputnik continue this narrative is through stories of how Muslims are intolerable of Swedes and anti-Islam attitudes. When reporting on the story of the death of Lars Vilks, Sputnik chose to focus
on Vilks portrait of Prophet Mohammed in a pro-free speech campaign. Following this, the artist has been living under constant threat of death, was put on Al-Qaeda’s hit list and had a price put on his head, and lastly, he was the target of a shooting in Copenhagen when debating free speech (S61). Stories like these are used to portray all Muslims as one group of violent and intolerable people that want to instill Sharia-laws in the west. In this example, the story is not about Islam or Muslims per se, but Sputnik use Vilks connection to Islam in order to turn it into an anti-Islam story. Similar to this is the story of a Swedish MP, Hanif Bali, that is outspoken anti-immigration, but himself of Kurdish descent. Bali have been victim of vandalism and threats many times because of his political opinion and is thus thinking about moving to feel safe (S59).

This narrative and the political myth of national exclusivity share some similarities. For instance, national exclusivity aims for a society with a homogenous population where everyone belongs to the Swedish nationality and identity and people are generally safe. The anti-immigration narrative paints a picture of how divided society is and how Muslims and migrants are ruining the homogeneity through not assimilating to the Swedish culture and instead creating a highly segregated society. In the news stories of anti-immigration there is much focus on how the migrants and Muslims does not want to become a part of society and how there is a parallel society created. This is what SD wants to change in their political myth national exclusivity. Either you assimilate and become a part of the Swedish society, recognize yourself as a Swede and takes part in Swedish culture and accept Sweden as your country, or you repatriate (S80).

Another way in which this narrative share similarities with SD’s myth of national exclusivity is the idea of a shared welfare state where everyone contributes what they can to help those that are in need. This is portrayed in the idea of “Folkhemmet” which SD continuously refers to as the glory days of Sweden and the return to which is the very goal of SD’s politics. However, as told by Sputnik in the last decade with the mass-immigration migrants have come to Sweden and instead of working they live off welfare and take the money that could have been used to help those who need it (S27, S37, S45). This narrative displayed by Sputnik further connects to SD’s political myth national exclusivity as said myth warns for the consequences of a multi-cultural society where norms, traditions, national identity, and social cohesion is not shared between the citizens. Thus, Sputnik’s narrative and SD’s myth share the same idea that while Sweden is a generous welfare state, however the stability is
threatened by the political elite’s ignorance towards the effects of mass-immigration and irresponsible integration-policies.

Lastly, the anti-immigration narrative tells a similar story to *national exclusivity* in the sense that SD want to return to the glory days of Sweden and the way it was before. By pointing to a time in modern history where everyone in Sweden follows the same traditions and culture and everyone is integrated in the Swedish society and live under one united flag, SD tell a story alike the one told by Sputnik. By assimilating migrants and integrating them into society and taking more pride in their Swedish national belonging Sweden will be improved and citizens will be keener to contribute to society when everyone that takes part in it share the same history and culture.

Overall, it is evident that there are similarities between this sub-plot of anti-immigration and the political myth *national exclusivity*. The collective criticism of mass-immigration and irresponsible integration policies have led to both the decline of the once strong welfare state as well as the increased danger in Sweden which is largely blamed on the multi-cultural society created by the political elite. This in turn leads to the similarity to the *common man*. This political myth does not share similarities with the sub-plot to the same extent as the myth of *national exclusivity*. However, the *common man* sparks the clash between the common man, the political elite and the immigrants. The common man is a central figure of “folkhemmet”, which in turn have been cheated by the political elite and their political agenda, as well as the victim of the dangerous immigrants. The common man is further displayed as the victim as the welfare state is declining, as displayed in *national exclusivity* as well as in the sub-plot, and the rising levels of crime and the demise of Swedish traditions and culture. This sub-plot successfully includes both political myths in SD and consistently portrays the immigrants and Muslims as the danger, the common man as the victim and the political elite as the villain.

4.1.3 Liberal agenda
This narrative is found in various articles by Sputnik. What this narrative portrays is the inability of the liberal left, most notably the Social Democrats and the Green Party but also occasionally the liberal parties, to lead this country. However, this narrative is not exclusively for political parties, but also for feminists, LGBTQ proponents, pro-immigration, those fighting social inequality and climate change. Overall, it refers to those striving for *political*
correctness, or as I will refer to them as hereafter, the liberal left. In this narrative it is made clear who Sputnik recognize as the savior of Sweden. On multiple occasion is SD and the conservative opposition mentioned as the beam of light that can turn Sweden around and save it from collapsing.

The liberal agenda is portrayed in a few different ways. One way is through stories of feminist issues such as the story where a museum was deemed as sexist for portraying a majority of male animals compared to female (S87) when there were several logical explanations as to why they did so. Another story is that Swedish Liberal Party wanted to ditch the college test as women score less than men and thus it was not seen as an equal opportunity for the sexes (S70). Sputnik also portray the narrative of the liberal left through LGBTQ issues. One story told is the story of a priest that was let go from his job after having BDSM sexual relations with a teenage boy (S75), as well as a story of a gay priest that refused to wed straight couples to protest church rules that priests could refuse to wed homosexual couples (S64). Another story is the news that Church of Sweden is to produce more gender inclusive hymns and lyrics. Both by rewriting old lyrics and writing new lyrics. In this new text God will not be referred to as ‘He’ or ‘Father’, but rather as ‘You’ and ‘God’ (S35). Sputnik highlight the different ways that the liberal left wants to fight the climate change. For example, the story of how the new tax on plastic is completely useless and is simply tokenism and virtue signaling while making no real change (S55). Lastly, Sputnik tells the stories of people who want social justice and allow for mass-immigration. One example of such stories is the story of Frölunda HC, a hockey club that changed their logo to remove any association with Native Americans (S5). Another example is the article of Swedish Film Institute and their adaptation of Oscars’ new diversity rules in which a movie needs to fill several criteria of inclusion in order to be nominated for an award (S11). A third example is the story of a Swedish pupil that was forced to remove his cross because it is a religious symbol while Muslim girls was not forced to remove their headscarves, which also are religious symbols (S78). One final example is the story of how Swedish politicians failed to fight gang-violence as they did not want to be deemed as “racists”. The reason that this is an issue is because the majority of those involved in the criminal networks are either first generation migrants or have some form of foreign decent (S71).

The liberal agenda narrative takes shape in many ways as it focuses on a few different struggles which the liberal left value. This sub-plot does to some extent align with both
political myths. First it is the cultural aspect of *national exclusivity*. This aligns with the narratives description of social justice and mass-immigration policies, as well as the acceptance of the multi-cultural society, which is criticized in the political myth *national exclusivity*. Another aspect of this narrative is the political elites complete disregard for the policies and reforms that *the common man* deems important and instead focusing on social issues. This displays the clash between the common man and the political elite which is a central part of *the common man*. However, the political myths tend to not linger on what reforms or policies they are critical of and rather tend to highlight what they want to change and how that change is made, in other words, the return to “folkhemmet”. As shown, there is some interaction between the myths and the sub-plot, but this sub-plot largely serves to delegitimize the liberal left instead of legitimizing SD. There is some overlap, but overall, the myths and the sub-plot serve different purposes towards the same end, which is why they do not interact more.

However, there is another aspect to this narrative, and it is the governments and leaders’ inability to lead the country. One example is minister Morgan Johansson’s denial of a population replacement if the current immigration policy is continued (S69). This article argues that if the immigration policy is not changed it will lead to swedes being a minority in Sweden in year 2050, and Johansson refuses to believe this and thus he is incompetent. Similarly, Interior Minister Damberg who now admits that politicians and authorities have not done all they could to tackle gang-violence in the suburbs because they were afraid to be labelled as racist as most of the policies targeting the suburb gangs affects immigrants and people with foreign descent (S71). One article highlights how Prime Minister Stefan Löfven has just now realized the connection between immigration and rising rates of violence in Sweden (12). However, the article quickly turns to how SD’s leader Jimmie Åkesson was the one who pressured Löfven to make the connection and later that Löfven has never made these connections previously. People were surprised of this as Löfven has on multiple occasions labelled it as racist to make the connection between immigration and crime, mostly in response to the opposition, mainly SD, who had made the connection before (S12). These types of articles are used to show how the liberal left is unable to lead the country.

This narrative of Swedish politics as a naïve and ignorant and incapable to lead shares similarities with the political myth of *the common man*. SD highlights the problems of the common man and how the average person in Sweden is left behind while the liberal left
continues their path of political correctness and mass-immigration. Sputnik similarly tells the story of incompetent politicians and different unnecessary expenses and political changes to please the politically correct elite. Furthermore, while these political changes are made, the common man is left behind and no one is listening to what the working class and middle class want or need, rather politicians push for policy changes that is favorable for the political elite.

In relation to previous section of the liberal agenda is Sputnik’s solution to the problems in Sweden: SD and the conservative opposition. In both political myths SD states that Sweden is on the wrong track and if nothing is done, the nation will be lost, just like discussed in the previous section. The political myths portray SD as the only viable option for change. This narrative is also present is Sputnik’s narrative of Sweden. On several occasions have Sputnik used SD as an example of a party that seeks real change and with policies that will make a difference for the greater good (S45, S80). In other news, Sputnik has referred to SD and the conservatives as the only viable option to the current liberal left government that is currently leading the country (S74). In this story, Sputnik tells the reader how the current government have allowed gang-violence to escalate in the suburbs and how SD and their conservative friends in Moderate Party (M) and Christian Democrats (KD) have the solution for fighting gang-violence. This conservative block is also portrayed as heroes when Sölvesborg municipality, led by SD, M, and KD, decided to remove the pride flag from public buildings as only national flags should be allowed on public buildings. They argued that public buildings should not fly political symbols. This story of course outraged the liberal left and they deemed it as homophobic, but Sputnik recognized the three parties as brave and serious politicians that want to focus on “real” politics instead of the liberal agenda (S84).

Overall, Sputnik reports how the current political leaders are unable to lead the country, and the only viable option is a government led by SD. This would change the focus of the government and make sure that the Swedish people are the priority, as opposed to the politically correct liberal agenda, as it is today. SD wants to make a real change for real people, the common man. This is present in both political myths. In one instance Åkesson even claimed that the liberal left is responsible for terrorist attacks carried out by radical Islamists (S62). SD is the only party, according to themselves, that can save the common man and the only party that knows what is important for the common man as SD recognizes themselves as the people in their display of themselves as the “New-Folkhemmet-party”.
4.1.4 Sweden is dangerous
This last narrative, like the others before it, is present throughout the years and can be found in several stories. Most commonly this narrative is tied to gang-violence in the suburbs of Malmö, Gothenburg, and Stockholm and the violence that has been steadily increasing over the last few years. This narrative shares several similarities to the narrative of anti-immigration because much of the stories contain immigrants that commit crimes. However, the difference is that this narrative does not focus on the immigrants but rather the crime and the rising statistic of crime in Sweden and the danger of mass-immigration. It should be noted that not all stories are about crimes carried out by immigrants but rather it is a narrative of how Sweden over time has grown to be more and more violent and people are scared to leave their houses due to the risk of being victim or witness of a crime (S15, S38, S39).

There are several stories told about how migrants, Muslims, and people of foreign descent are violent and harass Swedish people and create a dangerous society. One such story is a rapper that told his fans to kill and enslave white people in Sweden (S41). Another take on the violence is journalists being attacked in what Sputnik refers to as a troubled migrant area (S40). Lastly, it is the story of how the public want to decrease levels of immigration because of the rising criminality linked to migrants (S28, S43). However, most of the stories told are about different crimes committed, such as explosions (S1, S86), rising levels of rape (S47, S52, S68), robberies and assault (S39, S85), and shootings (S74). This is the main theme of this narrative, but it is also portrayed through several stories of extremists (S79), different policy changes to battle criminality (S74, S76, S77), and innocent citizens finding explosives outside (S6, S23).

Sputnik use these stories to create a narrative of how dangerous Sweden has become lately and describe Sweden as a nation that cannot protect its own citizens. This problem, according from Sputnik, stems from a poorly managed government and a large number of migrants and Muslims in the country. This sub-plot connects to both myths, but its interaction with national exclusivity is greater than its interaction with the common man.

The narrative of a country that is becoming increasingly dangerous because of mass-immigration and irresponsible integration policies is familiar to the national exclusivity myth. However, while Sputnik might label immigrants and Muslims are the danger in itself, SD is keen to clarify that people of foreign descent and followers of Islam is not the cause of the
increased danger. Instead, the myth of *national exclusivity* states that multi-culturalism is the root of the danger. SD claim in their myth that Swedes are not superior to other ethnicities or Muslims, rather it is the lack of assimilation and national unity that is the cause. *National exclusivity* does not deny the possibility for certain people to become Swedish, rather it demands that those who want to become Swedish assimilate to the culture and regard themselves as Swedish. To create a peaceful society, citizen’s need to have similar values and traditions. Thus, while the myth and the sub-plot might describe a similar story, the two do not agree on the cause. It should be noted however that both the myth and the sub-plot agree on the fact that the increased danger is a consequence of mass-immigration and poor integration.

The sub-plot further portrays the common man as the victim of the violence which is a narrative also present in the myth of *the common man*. Sputniks narrative does not portray it as a clash between the common man and the migrants but as a violent attack of the common man done by migrants. This narrative follows the myth of *the common man* as it portrays the common man as the victim of mass-immigration and its consequences.

4.1.5 Interaction of strategic narratives and political myths

Schmitt (2018) argues that for a strategic narrative to be as effective as possible it needs to fulfil two criteria, (1). The stories need to share the content in which they are told, for example, immigration, lqbtq+ rights, feminism, crime, and so on. (2) The structure of the strategic narrative needs to work well with the political myth. The strategic narrative must push the narrative of the myth further while simultaneously interacting with the actors, setting, space, timing, and plot. The first criteria are clearly fulfilled, this becomes apparent when comparing the narratives to the myths. The same stories are told; the decline of Sweden because of poor immigration policies, the dangers of a multi-cultural society, how the political elite is oblivious to the effects of their own politics and how the only solution to save Sweden is the return to “Folkhemmet”.

The second criteria is to a large extent also fulfilled. The myths and the narratives portray the same actors. They refer to the common Swedish person who often is regarded as the victim. The political elite, the liberal left, is referred to on multiple occasions in both the myths as well as the narrative. SD have a similar role in both the myths and in the narratives, they are regarded as the protagonist, the savior of Sweden as the “New-Folkhemmet-party”. Lastly, Muslims and immigrants are also reoccurring actors in several cases. While the same actors
are portrayed in the narratives and the myths, their role or intention indicate some differences. First, the political elite is to a larger extent portrayed as incompetent and oblivious in the narratives. They are also portrayed as the enemies of the common man. Whereas in the political myths they are regarded as the reason for the current state and, while criticized, not regarded as completely incompetent, rather they are ignorant. The focus in the myths is that the political elite is the reason for the current state, while in the narrative the focus is largely their policies. Immigrants and Muslims are present in both the narrative and the myths. However, they are portrayed differently. The narrative portrays immigrants and Muslims as dangerous and the very reasons for the increase in violence. In the myths, they are not the cause for the increased danger, rather the segregation and multi-cultural society is to blame, not the people themselves.

The political myths of national exclusiveness and the common man and Russian strategic narratives of Sweden portray a similar picture of Sweden today. The two points to the same cause, as well as sharing the understanding of who the villains and the protagonists are. While some of the actors are displayed with some differences and with different motives, they are largely the same in both the narrative and myths. Lastly, they both share the same solution to the issue at hand. It becomes clear when analyzing the data and the myths that there is a obvious interaction between narratives and myths. Even if the two does not perfectly match, the overall story is the same. If we apply the theoretical assumption found in Schmitt (2018) it would indicate that Russian strategic narratives of Sweden become more powerful as they are supported by already existing political myths.
5. Conclusion
In this thesis I have conducted a narrative study with an interpretivist theory-consuming approach of the relationship between Russian strategic narratives in Sputnik and the political myths found in SD. The reason for pursuing this research is to fill the gap in the research of narratives and myths. While the study of strategic narratives of Sweden have been done and political myths have been mapped out, there is a lack of research on the connection of the two parts. It is important to understand the interaction between the two as the theoretical assumption is that when political myths correlate to strategic narratives, the strategic narratives become more efficient. Throughout this thesis I have attempted to answer the three questions asked in the beginning of the thesis; 1) What is the strategic narrative of Sweden found in Sputnik? 2) Is there a correlation between the political myths within the Sweden Democrats and the strategic narratives of Sweden? These questions have worked as a guideline for the research.

The first question is answered through a thorough investigation of the articles published by Sputnik on their website. By reading the articles of Sweden I was able to find the grand narrative of Sweden as well as three subplots. The grand narrative is that Sweden is falling apart from within. The once great nation of Sweden has through poor political leadership, feminism, and mass-immigration gone from being a nation of prosperity and success to a nation that is dangerous, fails to protect its own citizens, and a political leadership that is unable to make Sweden a great nation again. The three subplots follow along this line as well. First it is the anti-immigration narrative. This narrative is mainly used to highlight the negative consequences of mass-immigration and poor integration policies. Sputnik tells a story of how the migrants are violent, ungrateful, and creating a multicultural society where no one takes care of each other, as well a Muslim community that is growing larger and is becoming more dangerous. The second subplot is that of the liberal agenda. Here Sputnik is telling the story of the political elite and their obsession with identity politics and political correctness. Sputnik here highlights how the liberal left and the government are unable to lead the country as their focus is completely off. Rather than helping the common man, they want to please the political elite and use their power to instead focus on the liberal agenda, LGBTQ issues, feminism, mass-immigration, social justice, and similar issues. The last subplot is the narrative of how dangerous Sweden has become. Thanks to irresponsible politics and mass-immigration the citizens of Sweden is in constant fear of shootings, gang-violence,
explosions, terrorists, sex-crimes, and an increasing number of robberies and assaults being reported.

The last question is answered in the analysis by looking at the narratives and the myths and trying to find a connection between the two. What I found is that the myths are the narratives share several similarities. By examining the strategic narratives and myths through the two criteria posed by Schmitt (2018) I found that both criteria are largely fulfilled, leading to the conclusion of the interaction between Russian strategic narratives of Sweden and the political myths found in SD.

While Sputnik tells a story of a divided country that is facing many challenges, SD is telling a very similar story. The three subplots as well as the grand narrative share several similarities to the political myths. Both Sputnik and SD tell the story of a nation that is in decline due to the lack of national belonging and homogeneity in Sweden. Everything bad that is happening can be traced back to the lack of unity and national pride as well as the segregation in Sweden. Similar to this is the distrust for the government and the current political elite. Both Sputnik and SD highlight how the political leaders are focusing on the wrong things. Instead of making policies to benefit the working man and those who built the country the government is pushing the liberal agenda with feminist, LGBTQ, mass-immigration, and social justice. Both Sputnik and SD thus claim that SD is the only party that can lead the nation and rebuild Sweden to its former glory days. The strategic narrative and political myths do have some differences as well, as can only be expected when two different actors attempt to describe the same story. However, these two differences are not extensive enough to make the interaction between the narratives and the myths less valuable. As the two share such fundamental similarities, the intentions or portrayal of two actors are not enough to disrupt the interaction.

It is no doubt that Sputniks strategic narrative of Sweden correlates to the political myths found in the right-wing party SD when reflecting on the empirical findings of this study. On several points, these two actors tell, if not the same a at least very similar story of what challenges Sweden is facing. Connecting back to the theoretical assumption that is at the very basis of this study, the more a strategic narrative overlap with the political myths of a political community, the stronger they become. Schmitt mentioned two requirements for strategic narratives to affect political myths. First, they need to share the same content and second, it
needs to interact well with the myth, in other words, it needs to be able to push it forward by engaging with the story and the actors. Following this study, it is fair to conclude that the strategic narrative from Sputnik is interacting well with the political myths in SD. The strategic narrative points to all the political myths in this study except for the grandeur. Furthermore, in those cases where the strategic narrative engages with the myth it overlaps very convincingly. It is made clear that the content is shared, and the strategic narrative interacts with the actors and the story that is told in the political myths. Furthermore, it is obvious here that Russian strategic narratives are interacting with the political myths to highlight the negative consequences of the current political landscape, and they seek to change that by increasing the support for SD. Taking all of this into account, it is fair to assume that the relationship between Sputnik’s strategic narrative and SD’s political myths benefit SD. Mainly by convincing them that they are correct in their analysis and their assumptions but also in the sense that they receive foreign support for their claims. Thus, it is more convincing and easier to create a stronger narrative. Which is something that previous research have pointed to as a desire for Russia, to assist the right wing in Europe (Diesen, 2019; Butt and Nyman, 2020).

The findings in this thesis build on previous research in a variety of ways. Referring to Schmitt (2018), this paper adds to the research of interaction between strategic narratives and political myths in the sense that Schmitt’s theory is applied to another case, where it again showed a clear interaction between the narrative and the myths. Furthermore, this thesis adds to the research conducted by Wagnsson and Bazanje (2019) in the sense that it develops the empirical data. Wagnsson and Bazanje (2019) investigate the strategic narratives between 2014-2018 and with this addition of 2019-2021 we see the development of the narratives. The result of what the strategic narratives is have not changed drastically compared to previous research, rather it confirms the findings in Wagnsson and Bazanje (2019) while simultaneously adding another dimension to the debate by introducing political myths and finding a strong connection between Russian strategic narratives of Sweden and one of Sweden’s largest political parties. Deverell, Wagnsson and Olsson (2020) found that Russian strategic narratives of Sweden are hostile and are created with the intent to harm Sweden through suppression, destruction, and direction. If we assume that this is true, and these narratives are used to increase the support for SD, as suggested by Diesen (2019) and Butt and Byman (2020) then the findings in this thesis confirms Russia’s involvement in Swedish politics with the intent to harm Sweden. Furthermore, it raises the question why is it that
Russia desire to increase support for SD and other right-wing political parties, what other forms of soft power are used to achieve this goal, as well as what is their intention with the increased support of right-wing parties across Europe? The findings of this thesis confirm that Russian strategic narratives are used, if not least to amplify the political myths of SD, to increase the support of SD’s ideology by telling the same story that SD’s political myths are telling and portraying them as the only viable option for a safe Sweden. The findings of this thesis add to the research of Hellström and Wennerhag (2013) as well as it uses their findings of political myths in Sweden and compares them to strategic narratives of Sweden. This provides another dimension to political myths and their importance in politics as well as international relations.

While this thesis provides interesting findings to Russian strategic narratives, it is limited by its small database. Furthermore, it follows the same logic as previous and investigates strategic narratives told by Sputnik instead of expanding to several news sources. This limitation is also amplified by the language barrier. While it would be interesting to investigate the narratives in Russian as well as English it is not possible due to language difficulties. It is logical to assume that the Russian narrative of Sweden domestically differs from the narrative told internationally and is more pro-Russian than the international narrative. Another limitation is the year limit as well as the limitation of months. These can be expanded on for future research. However, I assume that the narratives will not be too different over different months. The larger difference would assumingly be found when investigating narratives told after the invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

While this study has focused on the relationship between Russian strategic narratives and the political myths in SD, future research should focus on a few different subjects. First, after that the relationship between political myths and strategic narratives is established, future research should do extensive research on how this relationship affects the political landscape in Sweden and how to counter the strategic narratives, as well a similar study of other nations and how they are affected by strategic narratives. Secondly, future research should investigate how small states and powerful states are affected by Russian strategic narratives. Is there a different approach to counter the narratives, are they targeted in different ways and so on? Third, and last, I recognize the need for further investigation on how strategic narratives can affect the target country’s security and what dangers it might lead to if countered in an inefficient way.
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S8: Church of Sweden to Ring Bells for Greta Thunberg's Global Climate Strike

S9: Controversy-Addled Pro-Islam Party Sets Sights on Swedish Parliament

S10: Couple in Sweden Barred from Naming Their Son Vladimir Putin
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S13: Daesh Terrorist Brags About Receiving Medical Treatment in Sweden Before Returning to Syria

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S30: Muslims Seek to Amend Swedish Constitution to Ban Mockery of Religion as Qurans Continue to Burn

S31: 'New Kind of Illiteracy': Reading Performance Among Swedish Children Hits Historic Low

S32: New Swedish Agency Promises Advertising Without Political Correctness
https://sputniknews.com/20191009/new-swedish-agency-promises-advertising-without-political-correctness-1076993712.html
S33: 'No Israel for Us': Swedish Star Journalist in Hot Water Over Comparing Europeans With Jews

S34: Off the Books: Half of Sweden's Libraries Reportedly Used for Drug Dealing

S35: Oh, Lord! Church of Sweden to Produce New Post-Pandemic Book of 'Gender-Neutral Hymns'

S36: Outrage Over Sweden's 'Absurd' Plan to Delete Ancient History From School Curriculum

S37: Political Science Prof Calls Sweden 'Demographic Experiment of Historical Dimensions'

S38: Quarter of Swedish Women Afraid to Leave Home – Survey

S39: Record Number of Swedes Say They Have Been Subjected to Robbery or Assault – Survey
https://sputniknews.com/20201009/record-number-of-swedes-say-they-have-been-subjected-to-robbery-or-assault--survey-1080714651.html

S40: Reporters From Swedish State Television Pelted With Stones in Troubled Migrant Area

S41: 'Shoot Them': Black Swedish Rap Artist Calls to Enslave, Kill Whites

S42: Star Journalist Calls Sweden 'Apartheid State' That 'Reeks of Gunpowder'

S43: Stone-Throwing, No-Go Zones & Rape: Sweden Starts Looking at Migration Problem With New Eyes

S44: Sweden Commences Work on Its First Holocaust Museum
S45: Sweden Democrats Call to Introduce Danish-Style Compulsory Work for Immigrants on Benefits

S46: Sweden, Denmark, and Norway Embark on New Military Cooperation Against 'Big Neighbour in the East

S47: Sweden Discovers Taxi Drivers Over-Represented in Sex Crimes

S48: Sweden Doubles First-Generation Immigrants in Less Than Two Decades

S49: Sweden Fines Imam for Calling Jews 'Progeny of Monkeys and Pigs'

S50: Sweden Raises Taxes to Finance Largest Military Investment in Modern Times

S51: Sweden Reclaims Its Daesh Women and Children Deported From Syria

S52: Sweden Sees Reported Sex Crimes Triple in Four Years

S53: Sweden Sees Rise of 'Middle Eastern' Thermos Bomb Trend – Reports

S54: Sweden's First #MeToo Monument Polarises Public – Photo

S55: Sweden's 'Green' Tax on Plastic Bags Slammed as Triple Fiasco

S56: Sweden's New Foreign Minister Pledges More 'Feminist Policy'
Sweden's Spread of Explosives Stuns US Police Boss

Swedes Scoff at Stats that Murders in Europe Have Been 'Steadily Declining Since the 15th Century'

Swedish Anti-Immigration MP Voices Plans to Move Amid Repeated Vandalism, Threats

Swedish Arab Book Fair Under Fire for Selling Literature on 'Jewish World Domination'

Swedish Cartoonist Who Depicted Prophet Muhammad as Dog Reportedly Killed in Car Accident

Swedish Democrat Leader After Beheadings in France: 'Liberal Left Have Blood on Their Hands'

Swedish Gangsta Rapper Dead in Gang-Related Shootout

Swedish Gay Priest Refuses to Wed Straight Couples

Swedish Gender Divide in Voting Habits Wider Than Ever Before

Swedish Government in Hot Water Over New Bid to Weed Out 'Islamophobia'

Swedish Grants Are Abused to 'Create Islamic Parallel Society', Researchers Warn
S68: Swedish Greens Want to Prosecute Sex Purchase as Rape

S69: Swedish Justice Minister Denies 'Population Replacement' Amid New Immigration Policy Proposal

S70: Swedish Liberals Want to Ditch College Test 'for the Sake of Equality'

S71: Swedish Minister: Authorities Failed to Tackle Crime Because They 'Didn't Want to Be Seen as Racist'

S72: Swedish Municipality Expecting Sensational Migration Profit Logs Record Losses

S73: Swedish National Broadcaster in a Pickle Over 'Propaganda Offensive' Against 'Fake News'

S74: Swedish Opposition Calls for Terror Laws Against Gang Crime After Bloodiest Summer in Modern History

S75: Swedish Pastor Defrocked for BDSM Sex With Minor Becomes School Principal

S76: Swedish Police Deploy Surveillance Drones to Stop Crime Wave in Blighted Areas

S77: Swedish Police Seek to Wiretap Unsuspected Citizens as Criminal Clans Harass Country

S78: Swedish Pupil Banned From Wearing Cross in School Photo While Muslims Allowed to Keep Their Veils

S79: Swedish Report Warns of Rising Extremism Due to Overseas Ties, Financing
S80: Swedish Right-Wing Leader Calls for Zero Immigration, Repatriation of Migrants

S81: Swedish Submarine Loaded Live Torpedoes Amid Major Russian Drill – Report

S82: Swedish State Epidemiologist Pins Faster COVID-19 Spread on Larger Immigrant Population

S83: Swedish Terror Researcher 'Predicts' Resurrected 'Daesh 3.0' After Baghdadi's Death

S84: 'Tradition Is Important': Swedish Municipality Stops Gay Pride Flag, 'Menstrual' Art
https://sputniknews.com/20190917/tradition-is-important-swedish-municipality-stops-gay-pride-flag-menstrual-art-1076821774.html

S85: Video of Man Knocking Out Random Woman on the Street Rocks Sweden

S86: Woman Injured As Explosion Hits City Centre of Lund, Sweden - Reports

S87: 'You Must Be Joking': Swedish Daily Mocked for Lamenting Museum Taxidermy Gender Disparity