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Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift

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Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift (The Swedish Journal of Political Science) is the Swedish journal for political scientists. The journal publishes scientific essays, review articles and literature reviews in all the subsidiary disciplines of political science and is the principle organ of the Swedish Political Science Association (SWEPSA). While Swedish is its main language, the journal also publishes texts in Danish and Norwegian and, in exceptional cases where the author does not have a Scandinavian language as his/her working language, English.

Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift is published quarterly by Lund University's Fahlbeck Foundation, and in 2019 will be issuing its 121th volume. The Foundation is led by a multidisciplinary board (professors of political science, history, fiscal law, administrative law, classical culture and social life, economics, economic history, social work, sociology and statistics), which decides on the journal's budget and overarching issues of policy. The editorial office, which is wholly independent as regards matters related to publishing, comprises an editor, a deputy editor, a literature editor, a technical editor and an active, eight-member editorial committee that meets at least twice a year. This committee is appointed in consultation with SWEPSA and represents the majority of political science faculties in Sweden.

All articles undergo an internal quality review by two members of the editorial office, and all published articles – excepting literature reviews, short review articles/opinion pieces and expert reports – an external quality review by two anonymous referees per article. Once the editorial office has made its decision to publish or reject a paper, a referees' statement will be sent to its author(s).

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Political Communication in the 2018 Swedish Election Campaign

Henrik Oscarsson & Jesper Strömbäck

Introduction

In many respects, Election Day is the most important day in an electoral democracy. Not only does it symbolize the essence of democracy: that each and every person has one and just one vote, equal for all (Dahl 1998). Election Day is also the day when the people, as a collective, decides the distribution of political power and hence exert its collective influence on policy-making during the upcoming term. In most established democracies, elections are furthermore still the most significant collective events in society.

A precondition is however that elections are free and fair, and that they are preceded by free and fair election campaigns where political parties and candidates campaign to win support and where there is a meaningful choice between different parties and candidates. Furthermore, elections require campaigns where the media devote resources and space to covering the issues at stake in a fair and balanced manner, and where voters have ample opportunities to and an orientation towards learning about the issues at stake, comparing the parties and candidates running for office, and hold elected representatives accountable for past performances and political results. In that sense, “the quality of elections hinges on the quality of election campaigns” (Strömbäck 2016: 275). Tellingly, while there are 132 electoral democracies around the world (International IDEA 2018: 7), only 86 are considered to be fully free in terms of political rights and civil liberties (Freedom House 2019: 8).

The importance of election campaign places *political communication* – in simple terms, the exchange of political messages and symbols between political actors, media, and citizens – at the heart of democracies and electoral processes (Blumler & Gurevitch 1995). Without free and fair political communication, there are no free and fair election campaigns, and without free and fair election campaigns, there are no free and fair elections, and without free and fair elections, there is no democracy.

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For this special issue on the 2018 Swedish election, we thus decided to focus on political communication in the 2018 Swedish election campaign. In January 2018, we launched an open Call for Papers, where prospective authors were invited to submit abstracts. Based on the submitted abstracts, authors were invited to submit full manuscripts. These were discussed during a day-long workshop in January 2019. All manuscripts then underwent a peer review process. The end result you will find in this special issue, the first of *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift* to focus on political communication.

The purpose of this introduction is twofold. First, for readers less familiar with Swedish politics, we will briefly describe the Swedish political and electoral system, and discuss the significance of the 2018 election. Second, we will provide fresh and mainly unpublished data with respect to key aspects of Swedish citizens' media behavior and electoral behavior. These data will be drawn from opinion polls published during the election period 2014-2018, the 2018 National Election Survey, the 2018 National Campaign Panel Study, and the 2018 Media Election Study.

This article will proceed as follows. In the next and second section, we will describe the Swedish political and electoral system and the main trends in electoral behavior, in order to put the 2018 Swedish election in perspective. In the third section, we will describe the election result in 2018. In the fourth section we will focus on the media and how citizens used media and other means to keep informed about politics during the 2018 election campaign, also in a historical perspective. In the fifth section, we will address the hotly debated question whether news media in Sweden is fair and balanced. Finally, in the sixth section, we will introduce the articles selected for this special issue.

The 2018 Swedish Election in Perspective

In terms of the political system, Sweden is a parliamentary democracy with proportional elections and a fixed election calendar with concurrent elections at the local, regional and national level the second Sunday of September every four years. To gain representation in the Swedish Riksdag, a party needs to win at least 4 percent nationally or 12 percent within a county.

For large parts of the 20th Century, Sweden was characterized by a very stable party system, heavily dominated by the Social Democrats (Aylott 2016). Between the 1920s and the 1988 election, the same five parties were represented in parliament, namely the Social Democrats, the Left Party (formerly the communist party), the Liberal Party, the Moderates and the Centre Party. Only in 1988 did a new party – the Green Party – manage to win representation. They lost their representation in 1991, however, when two other parties – the right-wing, populist New Democracy and the Christian Democrats – entered the parliament. New Democracy lost their representation in 1994, however,

when the Green Party re-entered parliament. The five-party system had been transformed and stabilized into a more fragmented seven-party system. That held until the 2010 election, when the Sweden Democrats – a radical right populist party – won parliamentary representation for the first time. Since then, eight parties are represented in parliament.

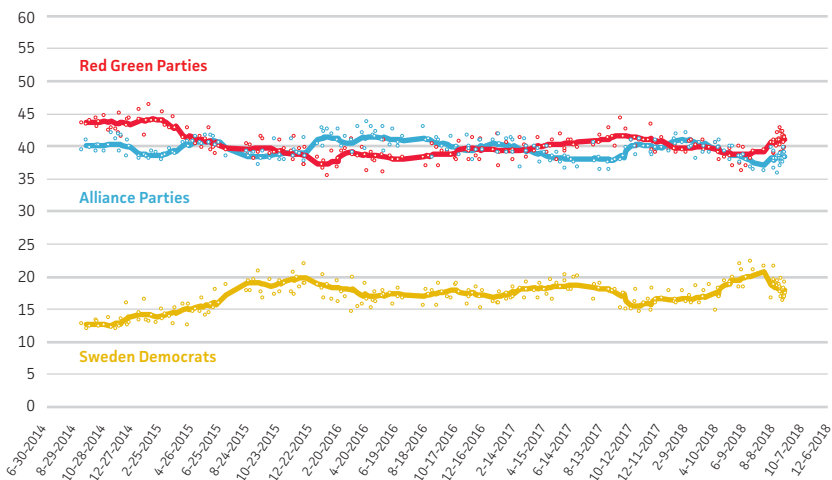
In terms of government, between 1936 and 1976, the Social Democrats continuously held government office, either alone or in coalition with other parties. Only in 1976 did the non-socialist parties – the Moderates, the Liberal Party, and the Centre Party – manage to break the Social Democrats' hold on governmental power. That held for two terms, between 1976 and 1982. The election 1982 saw the return of the Social Democrats to government, which it held on to until 1991. Then a new non-socialist government, now joined by the Christian Democrats – was formed. In 1994, the Social Democrats again returned to power, which it held on to until 2006.

The year 2006 represents a transformative change of Swedish politics. Before that election, the non-socialist, bourgeois parties, formed what was labeled the “Alliance for Sweden”, which represented a much closer cooperation and collaboration between the Moderates, the Liberal Party, the Centre Party, and the Christian Democrats than ever before. Under the leadership of the party leader of the Moderates, Fredrik Reinfeldt, the Alliance won two successive elections, in 2006 and 2010, and was – policy differences notwithstanding – widely recognized as having been more successful than any non-socialist government before. This changed the dynamics of the Swedish party system, or, in the terms of Sartori, “the system of interactions resulting from inter-party competition” (Sartori 2005: 39). Among other things, it forced a situation where all parties – including the Social Democrats – were expected to declare before Election Day what other parties they would like to form a government with. Put differently, if Swedish politics used to revolve around the Social Democrats, it turned towards revolving around the Alliance for Sweden.

Things started to change anew, however, in 2010, when the Sweden Democrats entered parliament with 5,7 percent of the votes. Being a radical right, populist party (Mudde 2007) with its roots in extreme right-wing and racist movements (Rydgren 2006; Widfeldt 2008), the other parties wanted nothing to do with the Sweden Democrats. They thus became subject of a *cordon sanitaire* (Jungar 2015; Strömbäck et al. 2016). That did not stop them from further electoral gains, however. In 2014, they won 12,9 percent of the votes and became the third largest party, while the parties in the Alliance for Sweden won 39,4 percent and the red-green parties 43,6 percent. Thus, neither the Alliance or the red-green parties could form a majority government on their own, while neither wanted to collaborate with the Sweden Democrats. In the end, the Social Democrats formed a minority government with the Green Party for the election period 2014-2018.

Since the 2014 election, the question of how to treat the Sweden Democrats and what the governing alternatives were have been key issues, shattering the old division of Swedish parties in two blocs and permeating Swedish politics. In the election period 2014–2018, most electoral volatility was triggered by events associated with the so-called refugee crisis in 2015 or discussions of whether or not to cooperate with SD, and in what form. In spite of some turbulence in the Moderates, leading to change of leadership and loss of support to other Alliance parties and to the Sweden Democrats, the overall support for the red-green and Alliance parties were quite stable in the election period, although the blocs were taking turns in being ahead in the polls (see Figure 1). It is clear that most of the Sweden Democratic upsurge transpired early in the election period, in the year following the 2014 election. In the three years before the 2018 election, the support for SD hovered between 15–20 percent.

Figure 1. Support for the Alliance (C, L, KD, M), the Red-Green Coalition (V, S, MP) and the Sweden Democrats According to Demoskop, Ipsos, Novus, SCB and Sifo Opinion Polls from September 2014 to September 2018 (percent)

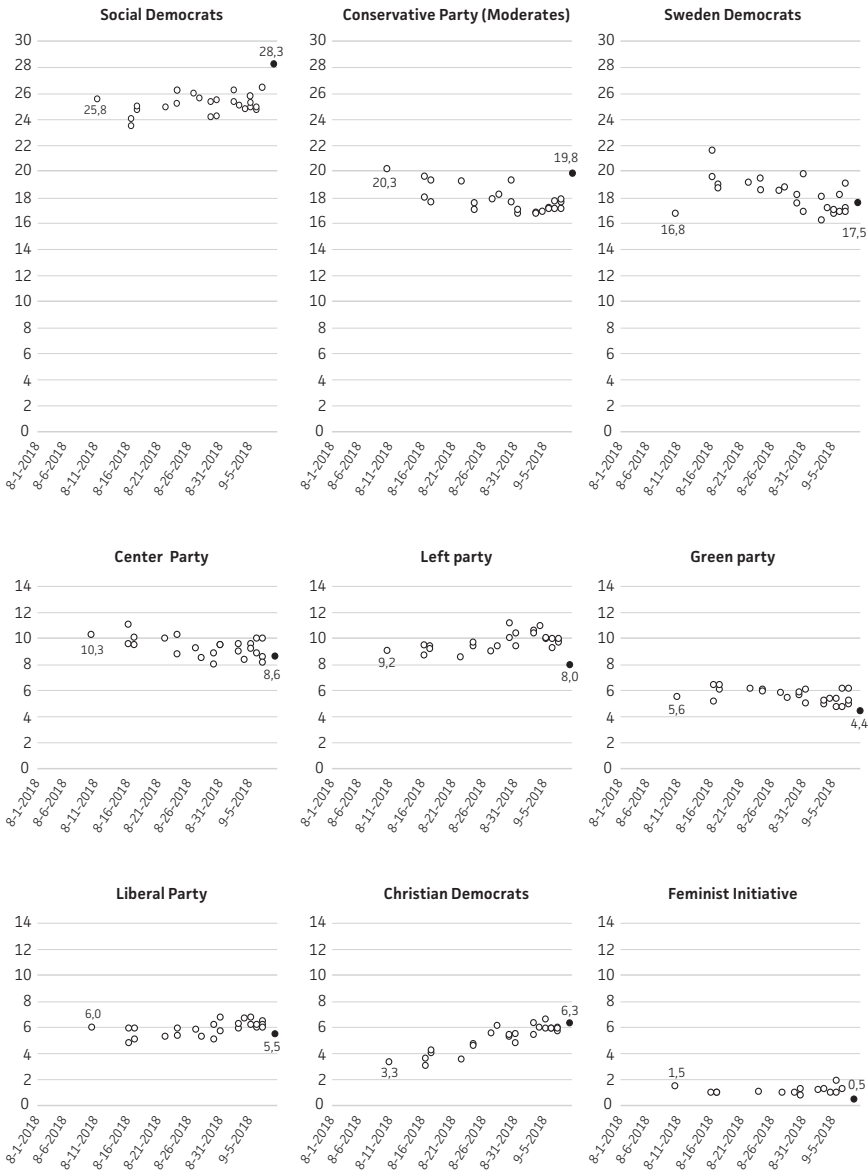


Note: The data shows the estimate of support for the red-green parties (Left, Social democrats and the Green party), the Alliance parties (Centre party, Liberal party, Christian Democrats, and the Moderates), and the Sweden Democrats. The estimates are based on a weighted poll of polls – local polynomial smoothing – of monthly polls from Demoskop, Ipsos, Novus, Statistics Sweden, and Kantar Sifo. For more information, and a table with all data, see Andersson (2018) from which the graph has been taken.

The results in Figure 1 underscore some key conclusions from previous analyses of the evolution of party support in Sweden: The most important formative moments shaping the power relations between parties most often take place not during the intense election campaigns, but rather in the periods in-between elections. Based on previous experiences from a large number of elections, once the election campaigns are about to begin, one would not expect large aggregated gains or wins for any of the parties (Oscarsson 2016) in spite of the fact that a good majority of the electorate nowadays claim to decide their party choice during the election campaign (Oscarsson & Holmberg 2016). Systematic comparisons of pre-election vote intentions and post-election vote recall show that the largest aggregated gain for a party during the Swedish election campaigns 1968–2014 was +4,1 percentage points (Liberal party in 2002).

As the parties entered the final stages of the election campaign, around one month before the 2018 Election, the polls showed that about 37 percent intended to vote for one of the Alliance parties, about 41 percent for one of the red-green parties, and about 18 percent for the Sweden Democrats (see Figure 2). Thus, there were still no fundamental changes in party support for the three blocs compared to the years before. In fact, at that time, it had been obvious for a long time that none of the traditional governing alternatives would be able to form a strong minority government, let alone a majority government. Still, in the final hours of the campaign, the coalition signaling from the red-green and the Alliance parties were set on forming governments based on the two established blocs.

Figure 2. Polling Results for Nine Swedish Parties During the 2018 General Election Campaign August 1st–September 9th 2019, and Final Election Result in the Election (percent)



Note: The data shows the estimate of support for the Red green parties (Left, Social democrats and the Green party), the Alliance parties (Centre party, Liberal party, Christian Democrats, and the Moderates), and the Sweden Democrats. Data come from publicized polls from Demoskop, Ipsos, Novus, Statistics Sweden, and Kantar Sifo in the period August 1st–September 9th, 2019. For more information, and a table with all data, see Andersson (2018) from which the graphs has been taken.

According to the polls, there were only small aggregate changes in party support for most parties during the 2018 campaign. While some parties seem to have suffered smaller gradual loss of support in public opinion in the weeks ahead of the election – such as the Green party, the Centre party, and also the Sweden Democrats – the Christian Democrats was a clear winner with a steady positive trend all through the campaign. The Christian Democrats almost doubled its support between August 10th (3,3 percent) and Election Day (6,3 percent). Why? Although the analyses of the reasons why are not yet fully completed, evidence suggests a combination of strategic voting mainly from Moderate voters that wanted to push the party over the four percent threshold (which is a long-standing tradition among right-wing voters in the case of the Christian Democrats), and a successful campaign message criticizing the incumbent parties for long waits for hospital care in combination with health care being the most important issue for Swedish voters in 2018 (see table 3 for more details) (see also Fredén 2019).

The two big parties, the Social Democrats and the Moderates, both scored a stronger election result than what the polls had predicted before the election. During the campaign, the Social Democrats polled around 26 percent but ended up with an election result of 28,3 percent of the votes. The Moderates had a weak negative opinion trend in the weeks before the election and polled around 17 percent in the days before the election, but picked up to 19,8 percent come Election Day. A tentative explanation for the late wins for the large parties may be the focus on the parliamentary situation and the coming government process. Another interpretation is that the two large parties were systematically underpolled (for an analysis of polling accuracy in the Swedish election 2018, see Oleskog Tryggvason 2018).

The Election Result

The Swedish general election 2018 resulted in a defeat for the two incumbent parties, the Social Democrats and the Green party (5,3 percent). However, since the Left party gained votes at the same time as the Alliance parties also suffered defeats, the red-green parties came out as the larger of the two traditional blocs in Sweden. Once the seat allocation in parliament was completed, the Red-green parties had a 144-143 advantage over the Alliance parties.

In Table 1, the final election result is described, affirming that Sweden has entered a new era characterized by three features: (1) that none of the traditional governmental alternatives (red-green parties versus the traditional Alliance or non-socialist parties) are close to reaching a majority of the voters, (2) that the Sweden Democrats have established itself as one of the major parties, and (3) that the system of interactions among the parties is in upheaval. Noteworthy in this respect is that it took more than six months after Election Day to form a

government. Before the current government, formed by the Social Democrats and the Green Party, could be affirmed, it was more or less forced into a formal agreement – *Januariöverenskommelsen* – to cooperate with the Centre Party and the Liberal Party on a number of policy issues. Also noteworthy is that the old centre-right four-party coalition “Alliance for Sweden” in effect does not exist anymore. The new government consisting of Social Democrats and the Green party took office on January 21, 2019.

Table 1. Election Results in the 2018 National Election

	Number of votes	Share of votes	Change 2014–2018	Seats in parliament 2018	Change 2014–2018
Left Party	518 454	8.00	+2.29	28	+7
Green Party	285 899	4.41	-2.47	16	-9
Social Democrats	1 830 386	28.26	-2.75	100	-13
Centre Party	557 500	8.61	+2.49	31	+9
Liberal Party	355 546	5.49	+0.07	20	+1
Christian Democrats	409 478	6.32	+7.75	22	+6
Moderates	1 284 698	19.84	-3.49	70	-14
Sweden Democrats	1 135 627	17.53	+4.68	62	+13
Feminist Initiative	29 665	0.84	-2.67		
Other parties	69 472	1.10	+0.10		
Valid votes	6 476 725	100.00			
Invalid votes – blank votes	53 084	0.84	-0.08		
Invalid votes – non-registered parties	2 120	0.03	+0.03		
Invalid votes – other	3 342	0.05	+0.02		
Turnout	6 535 271	87.18	+1.38		
Number of eligible voters	7 330 432				

Source: Oscarsson et al. 2018; val.se.

The election result 2018 confirmed some of the most visible and durable long-term trends in electoral behavior in Sweden. Voter turnout climbed for the fourth election in a row to the highest level (87,2 percent) since 1985. As the large parties suffered defeat at the same time as some of the smaller parties gained votes, there was also a new record with respect to the fragmentation of the Swedish party system, measured as the effective number of parties (Nord et al 2018:13). Furthermore, according to the Swedish Television exit poll (SVT/Valu), the 2018 election showed a record high voter volatility (40 percent), while the SOM-survey 2018 estimated the proportion of split ticket voters to a record high 33 percent (see Berg, Erlingsson & Oscarsson 2019). In addition,

preliminary analyses of the National Election Study point towards a record low level of strong party identifiers (13 percent).

As many recent analyses of political change in Sweden has pointed out (Oscarsson 2018; Demker & Oscarsson 2018), the rising salience of a cultural value dimension – sometimes referred to as the GAL-TAN dimension – is currently reshaping one of the most unidimensional party systems in the world into a two-dimensional issue space. This puts a lot of stress on the system and its actors. This development is the root cause of many developments currently in motion: increasing party polarization, internal party division, prolonged government formation processes, and unorthodox collaboration between left and center-right parties.

Things happening after Election Day notwithstanding, this was the political context in which the 2018 election campaign took place. In the following sections, we will therefore describe and analyze some key features of the 2018 election campaign in more detail, and in – where appropriate – a historical perspective.

The Media in the 2018 Election Campaign

The media occupy a key position in any political communication system (Blumler & Gurevitch 1995), traditionally constituting the main source of political information for the electorate, the main channel through which political actors can reach large segments of the electorate, and the main arena for public political debates. Modern politics has thus been described as *mediated* (Asp 1986; Shehata & Strömbäck 2014).

THE NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE IN 2018: THE MEDIA AGENDA

In every election, major Swedish news media devote significant space and resources towards covering the campaigns. That held true for 2018 as well, although research suggests that the amount of election news has declined since the 1980s (Asp & Bjerling 2014). However, such comparisons do not take the expansion of traditional news media's online presence, including various online-only formats, into account, making comparisons of the total election news supply across time complicated. For example, in 2018, both the leading tabloids *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* had broadcast news, interviews with party leaders and party leader debates on their online-only TV channels. For those interested in politics, there was certainly no shortage of election news in 2018.¹

1 In this section, all results come from the Media Election Study 2018. The content analysis includes the following news media during the last four weeks before Election Day: *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen* (tabloids), *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* (morning newspapers), *Rapport* (public service TV news program), *TV4 Nyheterna* (commercial TV4's news program), and *Ekot* (public service radio news program).

From an electoral perspective, one of the most important aspects of the media's election news coverage is related to the media agenda. By focusing more on some issues rather than others, the news media influence not only what issues people consider important (*agenda-setting*), but also what issues people make use of when comparing and evaluating the political parties (*priming*) (Iyengar & Kinder 1987; McCombs 2014). It is also well-established that political parties gain advantages when the news media coverage focus on issues that the parties have *issue ownership* of (Kiousis et al. 2015; Petrocik 1996; Walgrave et al. 2014). Thus, the parties fight hard to put their issues on the agenda and bring the debate to their home field.

In 2018, there were four issues that gained at least ten percent of the news media coverage and that can be considered top issues: health care, immigration, law and order, and the environment (see Table 2). What is striking when comparing different types of media is the high degree of similarity across media groups. More detailed analyses also show a high degree of similarity between individual news media. This supports the notion that news media largely function as *an institution*, which is an important aspect of mediatization theory (Esser 2013; Strömbäck & Esser 2014).

Table 2. The News Media Agenda in the 2018 National Election (percent)

	All news media	Morning newspapers	Tabloids	Broadcast news
Health care	15	13	16	15
Immigration	13	13	14	12
Law and order	10	8	9	12
Environment	10	8	10	12
Taxes	7	3	9	7
Education	7	11	4	7
Family policy	4	6	4	4
Economy	4	4	3	4
Social issues	4	1	7	4
Equality	4	2	5	4
Other issues	22	31	19	19
Percent	100	100	100	100
N	2 335	778	977	580

Comment: Morning newspapers=Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Tabloids=Aftonbladet, Expressen, Broadcast news=Dagens Eko (SR), Nyheterna (TV4), Rapport (SVT). Source: Media Election Study 2018; Johansson & Strömbäck 2019. The category "other issues" include a number of different issues that individually received less than four percent of the coverage.

In this context, it is worth noting that health care was an issue that the Christian Democrats campaigned on, while immigration is the preferred issue for the Sweden Democrats. Law and order were top issues for both the Sweden Democrats and the Moderates, while environment was a top issue primarily for the Green Party.

As always, the news media agenda was more or less mirrored in the results for Swedish voters' most important issues for their vote in the 2018 election. According to the National Election Study 2018, the most important issue for the voters when making up their minds on how to vote was, indeed, health care (32 percent) and immigration (30 percent). Schooling and education came on third place (23 percent), followed by environment (18 percent) and elderly care and pensions (15 percent). Interestingly, spontaneous mentioning of *law and order* as an important issue for party choice seem to have been comparatively less salient among the voters (7th place) than in the media's election campaign coverage (3rd place).²

Table 3. Swedish Voters' Ten Most Important Issues for Party Choice in the 2018 National Election (percent)

	All	SNES Pre election survey	SNES Post election survey
#1 Health care	32	35	29
#2 Immigration and integration	30	28	31
#3 Schooling and education	23	26	19
#4 Environment	18	20	16
#5 Elderly care and pensions	15	17	13
#6 Societal problems	13	13	12
#7 Law and order	8	9	7
#8 Economy	7	6	8
#9 Unemployment	6	6	6
#10 Taxes	4	4	4

Note: Results come from both pre- and post-election surveys. Only the top-ten categories are listed. The question wording was: "Are there any political issues that [are/were] important to you when it comes to what party you [are going to/voted for] in the Riksdag election September 9th". The total number of respondents in the analysis is $n=7\ 070$.

Source: Swedish National Election Study, 2018.

2 The annual SOM-survey, fielded just after the election, asks the standard question of the most important problem. In 2018, the SOM-survey showed the following rank order: #1 Health care, #2 Immigration and integration, #3 Schooling and education, #4 Environment, #5 Law and order, #6 Elderly care, #7 Societal problems, #8 Unemployment, #9 Democracy and rights, and #10 Economy".

It is rare in election research to have access to pre-election survey data. With the SNES we are fortunate to be able to compare voters most important issues for voting before the election, temporally close to when they made up their minds on how to vote, and after *fait accompli* when the election results is known (see table 3). In the data collected during the election campaign, the *health care* issue was clearly on top of the voter's agenda (35 percent), but was mentioned by fewer voters in the post election surveys (29 percent). The same goes for the categories *schooling and education*, dropping from 26 percent before the election to 19 percent after the election, and *environment*, dropping from 20 to 16 percent. None of these changes affects the overall ranking of the categories, but suggests that the voters' agenda during the election campaign was more concentrated to the top five categories.

BEYOND THE ISSUES: THE FRAMING OF POLITICS AND MEDIA INTERVENTIONISM

Beyond the issues at stake and on the media agenda, one recurring feature of Swedish election news is a strong tendency to frame politics as a strategic game rather than as issues (Nord & Strömbäck 2018). This is of course not unique to Swedish news media (Aalberg et al. 2012, 2017), but was nevertheless apparent also in their coverage of the 2018 campaign. Overall, an issue frame was dominant in 43 percent of all news stories, a strategic game frame in 46 percent, and a scandal frame in 11 percent. There was significant variance between different news media, however, with the daily public service radio news show *Ekot* framing politics as issues in fully 71 percent of their news stories – compared with just 33 and 29 percent in the tabloids *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*, respectively (Johansson & Strömbäck 2019). Another pattern that is familiar from earlier election campaigns (Nord & Strömbäck 2018) is that the commercial *TV4 Nyheterna* framed politics as an issue less often (44 percent) than the public service TV news program *Rapport* (60 percent) (Johansson & Strömbäck 2019).

Another pattern is that the news media's election coverage is highly, and in a longer-time perspective increasingly so, influenced by “media interventionism” and “news media logic”. Briefly, *media interventionism* refers to a media-centered reporting style in which journalists actively shape how the news is covered instead of more passively function as an arena and neutral transmitter for political and other social actors (Blumler & Gurevitch 1995; Strömbäck & Esser 2009; Strömbäck & Dimitrova 2011). Similarly, *news media logic* refers to how the news media shape their coverage to fit their own format characteristics, production and dissemination routines, norms and needs, and standards of newsworthiness (Altheide & Snow 1980; Asp 2014; Hjarvard 2008; Strömbäck & Esser 2014). The framing of politics as a strategic game is but one example. Another example is related to the news media's use of opinion polls. During the 2018 election campaign, the Swedish news media published 92 poll

reports, and in 78 percent of the cases, the media publishing the poll report had also commissioned the poll. By commissioning polls and then reporting them and interpreting the results, the news media get almost exclusive control over the news (Oleskog Tryggvason & Strömbäck 2018; Petersson et al. 2006). Furthermore, most of these polls – 83 percent – were so-called horse race polls, meaning that they focused on the political game (Strömbäck & Johansson 2019). Thereby, they both constitute a part of and contribute to the framing of politics as a strategic game.

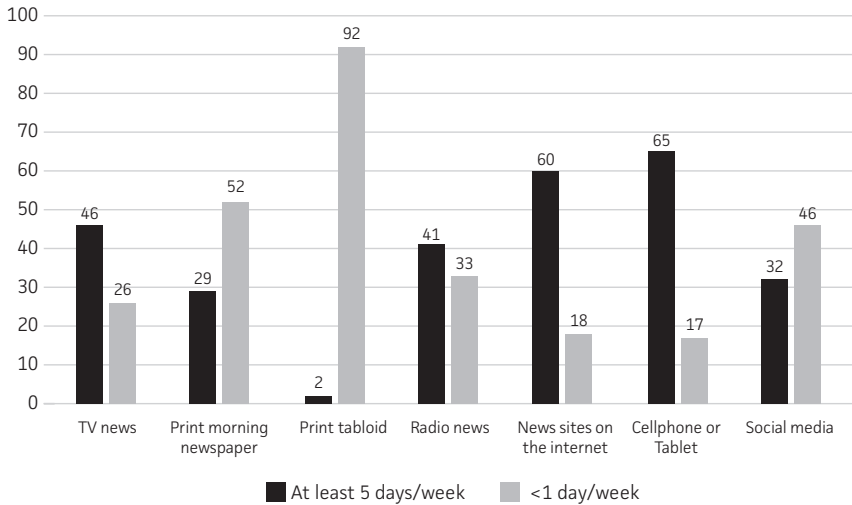
Other indicators of media interventionism and news media logic are a high degree of journalistic visibility, a quite frequent use of value-laden words, and different forms of journalistic interpretations. For example, altogether 19 percent of all TV news stories included a segment where a journalist – acting as an analyst – was interviewed by the anchor. As another example, 51 percent of all news stories included at least one clearly value-laden comment or phrasing from journalists (Johansson & Strömbäck 2019). Altogether, the Swedish news media coverage of the 2018 election thus show clear signs of mediatization, with the partial exception of the radio news program *Ekot* (Johansson & Strömbäck 2019). Compared to the Swedish news media's coverage of earlier campaigns in the 21st century (Nord & Strömbäck 2018), it cannot be claimed however that the degree of mediatization of election news increased in 2018.

MEDIATED AND DIRECT CONTACT WITH POLITICS IN THE 2018 ELECTION

One important aspect of political communication is related to how citizens get in contact with and learn about politics. That includes direct contact as well as indirect contact, through their use of various media – news media, digital media and social media. Historically, mass media have constituted the most important source of political information (Shehata & Strömbäck 2014), with direct contact with political parties being rarer (Oscarsson & Holmberg 2016). Much has changed though, with the rise of digital and social media and the declining use of news media (Mitchell et al. 2016; Newman et al. 2018). The decline is particularly apparent for print newspapers, although many continue to read newspapers online (Andersson 2018).

We will begin this section by investigating how often people use different means of following news about politics either regularly (at least five days/week) or almost never (less than one day/week). The results are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Political News Consumption on Different Platforms (percent)



Source: Election Campaign Panel Study 2018. Percentages rounded off. Results refer to Wave 1, in field between April 12 and June 6. The exact question wording was: “How often do you follow the news about politics by...”, and the exact response alternatives were: “Watching TV news”, “Reading print morning newspaper”, “Reading print tabloid”, “Listen to news on the radio”, “Visit news sites on the internet”, “Taking part of news on the cell phone or tablet”, and “Taking part of news through social media such as Twitter or Facebook”. N = 4293–4372.

The results show that the most important sources of political news were cell phone or tablet, followed by news sites, TV news and radio news. Compared to the 2014 election, these results suggest quite marked changes. Then, 55 percent followed political news on TV at least five days per week, while 41 percent used morning newspapers in print (Strömbäck 2015). Both these media platforms have thus become less important (see also Shehata & Strömbäck 2018). On the other hand, the share using news sites have increased from 44 percent, while the share for cellphone or tablet and for social media have increased from 38 and 21 percent, respectively (Strömbäck 2015). In short, traditional news media in their traditional formats have – with the exception of radio – thus become less important, while digital and social media have become more important.

At least this holds true in terms of using different platforms. This is however not the same as using different types of media. In fact, most political news is produced by traditional news media, the most important online news sites are those of traditional news media, and most of the news that are disseminated through social media have their origins in traditional news media (Bright 2016; Newman 2011; Newman et al. 2018).

Going into more detail into how often citizens used specific news media during the 2018 election campaigns shows that the most frequently used news media – putting the threshold at using the news media at least five days per

week – were *Ekot* (38 percent), followed by *Dagens Nyheter* (36 percent), *Rapport* (32 percent) and *Aftonbladet* (30 percent). The least frequently used news media were *TV4 Nyheterna* (19 percent) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (13 percent) (see Table 4). Thus, there is a mixture of print and broadcast media at the top and at the bottom, with public service broadcast media being used more frequently than commercial broadcast media.

Table 4. News Media Use in the 2018 Election Campaign (percent)

	Daily	5-6 days/w	3-4 days/w	1-2 days/w	More seldom	Sum
Aftonbladet	25	6	8	14	47	100
Expressen	16	4	7	12	62	101
Dagens Nyheter	31	5	7	10	47	100
Svenska Dagbladet	10	3	6	12	69	100
Aktuellt	15	13	18	21	33	100
Rapport	19	13	17	19	32	100
Ekot	28	10	13	13	36	100
TV4 Nyheterna	11	8	13	17	51	101

Source: Election Campaign Study 2018. Percentages rounded off. Results refer to Wave 5, in field between September 10 and October 1. The exact question wording was: “During the last week, how often have you taken part of news from the following news services (on paper or via the Internet” for newspapers and “During the last week, how often have you taken part of the following news programs (via traditional channels or via the Internet” for broadcast media. N = 3023–3040.

How does this compare to the use of digital and social media for getting information about politics and societal affairs? While direct comparisons are difficult to make – not least since much of the political news that circulate on social media come from traditional news media (Newman 2011), interesting in itself is to study voters’ internet activities during the 2018 campaign. The results – in terms of various self-reported internet activities – are reported in Table 5.

Table 5. Swedish Voters' Internet Activities During the 2018 Election Campaign (percent)

	Several times a day	Daily	5-6 times/w	3-4 times/w	1-2 times/w	More seldom	Sum
Took part of news about politics	21	19	7	8	8	37	100
Took part of information from the parties on social media (such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram)	6	8	3	5	6	72	100
Saw a film clip or ad from the parties	5	8	5	7	12	63	100
Reacted on a posting by 'liking' or 'hearting'	2	3	1	2	5	87	100
Shared political information to friends in your social networks	1	1	1	1	4	92	100
Posted texts about politics, parties, or the election	1	1	0	1	2	95	100
Commented on political issues or politicians	1	1	1	1	2	94	100

Source: Swedish National Election Study 2018. Percentages rounded off. The exact question wording was: "How often have you done the following on the Internet in conjunction with this year's election campaign?" The category "more seldom" in the table includes the response alternatives "more seldom", "never" and "no internet". About 18 percent of the respondents in the SNES 2018 considered themselves not Internet users. N: 2 738–2 749.

The results paint a picture where voters in general mainly use the Internet to take part of news about politics, and to some extent information from the political parties, but do not engage much beyond that. Thus, 47 percent took part of political news at least five days per week during the election campaign, while the corresponding share for taking part of information from political parties on different social media was 17 percent. Just a few percentages were active themselves in terms of sharing political information, posting political information, and commenting on political issues, suggesting that these interactive features of online internet activities among citizens during the election campaign were quite limited in 2018. Although the exact percentages cannot be strictly compared, these results are similar to what research on the political usage of the Internet during the 2014 election campaign found (Strömbäck 2015).

A similar pattern is shown in terms of whether voters used social media to follow any politician, party, journalist or news service during the election campaign (see Table 6): most people do neither. The most common form of

following politicians, parties, journalists or news services are on Facebook, while Twitter, Instagram and blogs are less frequently used. In fact, blogs – once so lauded and cutting edge – appear to be a media of yesterday in terms of the extent to which they are used by voters to follow political and media actors.

Table 6. Swedish Voters' Use of Social Media During the 2018 Campaign (percent)

	Facebook	Twitter	Instagram	Blogs	Other social media	No
Any politician	11	3	4	1	3	65
Any party	11	2	3	0	4	64
Any journalist	6	3	2	1	3	68
Any news service	11	2	3	1	13	56

Source: Swedish National Election Study 2018. Percentages rounded off. The exact question wording was: "During this year's election campaign, did you follow any of the following on the Internet?". The row percentages do not sum to 100 percent since the respondents can tick all alternatives. The percentage base are the entire Swedish electorate, including the 17 percent of the respondents that are self-reported non-users of internet (n=4 503).

Further insights into how voters use social media to follow news and politics is provided by the Election Campaign Panel Study 2018, in which voters were asked how often they – during the last week – had used social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram for a number of different purposes. The results again suggest that voters mainly use them to follow news about politics and societal affairs, with 25 percent during this at least five days per week (not displayed in tables). Other, more active forms of usage, are rarer. Interestingly, considering that social media allow people to follow news from other providers than traditional news media, and that criticism towards traditional news media is a key part of so-called alternative media's messaging and justification, just 6 percent state that they use social media "to take part of news that provide another depiction of Swedish politics than traditional media" at least five days per week, and with 11 percent doing it at least 3-4 days per week (the results refer to the 5th panel wave).

Taken together, these results hence suggest that voters mainly rely on traditional news media to get information about politics and society, and that digital and social media are used to complement rather than substitute for the use of traditional news media. Hence, the label "alternative media" that is often used to describe digital media with more or less explicit and party-affiliated political agendas seems misplaced and misleading. Furthermore, the overall low magnitude of social media use in the electorate during the otherwise very intense Swedish election campaign is a challenging find to the "conventional wisdom" that there are nowadays large potential effects of on-line activities per se.

This is not to say that direct contacts between parties and voters do not happen, neither that voters rely solely on different forms of (mass)mediated information. This is evident from Table 7, showing the share of voters that report different forms of direct contact with parties or campaign exposure during the election campaigns 1982–2018.

Table 7. Swedish Voters' Activities During Election Campaigns 1982–2018 (percent)

Campaign activity	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Direct communication from parties to voters											
Watched televised party ads	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	69	85	80
Read election pamphlets	56	58	52	56	59	60	59	56	52	56	60
Read party manifestos	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	53
Visited parties' homepages	–	–	–	–	–	8	9	14	19	20	26
Exposed to parties on social media	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	13	27	–
Attended campaign meetings	13	12	10	12	11	10	10	9	8	6	7
Subjected to party canvassing by house call or phone call	4	4	2	2	8	10	3	4	8	18	10
Work place contacts	9	8	8	8	7	7	7	5	5	4	5
Other campaign exposure											
Watched party leader debate in SVT	72	69	64	70	65	61	60	57	57	55	58
Used a voting advice application	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	27	28	47	55

Source: Swedish National Election Study 1982–2018. Percentages rounded off. The exact question wording was: "Before this year's election, did you do any of the following...?". Cell entries represent the share of respondents who self-report "yes, several times" + "yes, once" combined. The number of respondents vary substantially across time. The estimates from 2018 are based on 2 000–2 500 respondents.

As can be seen, the most common form of campaign exposure is watching televised ads, followed by reading election pamphlets. In terms of direct contact, 7 percent attended at least one campaign meeting, while 10 percent were called or visited by some party or parties and 5 percent had contact with the campaigns at their workplace. Looking at changes across time, there is a long-term if not linear increase in contacts through phone calls or canvassing at people's houses, in terms of visiting parties' homepages and in the use of voting advice applications, and a decreasing share who attend campaign meetings, have work place contact, and that watch the final party leader debate in Swedish Television. Of course, it has to be kept in mind that these numbers

represent self-reports, as is the case for the use of news media as well as digital and social media.

Fair and Balanced News Media?

One key question in every election campaign, and a recurring debate after each election, is whether the news media's coverage was fair and balanced. Not least on social media, there are recurring accusations leveled against news media for favoring one side or the other, with the most vocal critique coming from the political right, accusing Swedish news media for being leftist (Widholm & Mårtensson 2018). Among (extreme) right-wing partisan media, it is also common to accuse the news media for being biased to the left (Holt 2016a). This is similar to the U.S. situation, where Republicans for decades have criticized what they label "the liberal media" (D'Alessio 2012; D'Alessio & Allen 2000; Watts et al. 1999). In Sweden, research also shows an increasing polarization in media trust. While general media trust is quite stable at the aggregate level, it is much lower among those who sympathize with the Sweden Democrats (Andersson & Weibull 2018; Strömbäck & Karlsson 2017). This is a quite recent development: During the course of the 2014–2018 election period, trust in media in general, and public service in particular, became more politicized in Sweden.

In terms of Swedish voters' perceptions of the news media, results from the National Election Study 2018 shows that the share of voters that trust the media's election coverage far outweighs that of those who do not trust it. Interestingly, they also show a *declining* share trusting the news media's election coverage *during* the campaign. In the pre-election study, 49 percent expressed very or quite high trust in the media's election coverage while 12 percent expressed quite or very low trust (the others had neither high nor low, or no, opinion). In the post-election study, the share of voters expressing trust had fallen to 43 percent while the share of voters expressing low trust had increased to 20 percent.³ Similar patterns of decreasing media trust during election campaigns were found in research on the 2010 and 2014 election campaigns (Strömbäck & Shehata 2013; Nord & Strömbäck 2018).

It does not appear too far-fetched to assume that this pattern of declining media trust at least to some extent reflects different perceptions among voters in terms of what parties were disfavored or favored by the media. If someone perceives that the news media have treated his or her preferred party in an unfavorable and unfair manner, this is likely to have an impact on the level of media trust. This holds particularly among those who are strong supporters of a

3 The exact question wording was: "Generally speaking, to what extent do you trust the media's election coverage".

party. Whether it is objectively true or not matters less, as suggested by research on the *hostile media phenomena* (Hansen & Kim 2011; Perloff 2015).

A key question then is to what extent Swedish voters perceive the news media to have favored or disfavored the different parties in the 2018 election campaign, and whether there are any changes across time. The results are presented in Table 8. It should be noted though that the question asked about “TV” in the election campaigns 1982–1991 and about “mass media” in the election campaigns 2010–2018, so the results pertaining to 1982–1991 versus 2010–2018 are not fully comparable.

Table 8. Swedish Voters' Perceptions of Whether the News Media Favored (+) or Disfavored (-) the Political Parties in the Election Campaigns 1982–1991 and 2010–2018 (percent)

	1982		1985		1988		1991		2010		2014		2018	
	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
Left Party	7	12	8	6	9	6	2	13	9	13	9	8	16	6
Social Democrats	22	5	33	2	20	6	12	6	12	24	18	4	20	6
Green Party	6	25	1	59	25	18	3	29	21	3	17	2	15	14
Centre Party	11	5	7	9	10	5	4	6	13	4	13	3	26	1
Liberal Party	7	8	25	3	9	10	10	1	14	3	9	4	8	2
Christian Democrats	4	22	7	28	8	29	16	1	21	3	5	6	25	3
Moderates	18	3	22	9	8	7	21	0	35	3	19	6	18	3
Sweden Democrats	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	27	36	21	39	23	34
Feminist Initiative	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	27	13	4	26
Average	11,1		15,6		12,1		8,9		15,1		12,4		13,2	
N (min-max)	848/949		743/850		728/775		733/765		814/853		598/650		2455/2533	

Source: Swedish National Election Study 1982–2018. Percentages rounded off. The exact question wording 1982–1991 was: “Do you think that the total supply of programs on TV favored or disfavored any or some of the parties”, while the exact question wording 2010–2018 was: “Do you think that the mass media favored or disfavored any or some of the parties during this year’s election campaign”. The response alternatives were the same throughout the period: “Has been favored in the media”, “Has neither been favored or disfavored”, and “Has been disfavored in the media”.

The results show that some parties are perceived to have been more favored versus disfavored than others in each election campaign, but also that the party being perceived as being most (dis)favored varies across campaigns. For example, in 2010, the party most perceived to have been favored in the media was the Moderates (35 percent), while in 2014, it was the Feminist Initiative. The only consistent result during the last three election campaigns is that Sweden Democrats is the party that most perceive to having been disfavored in the media. Whether or not this reflects the rhetoric from the Sweden Democrats and partisan sites sympathetic to them and critical towards mass media (Holt 2016), and whether it has been influenced by the same rhetoric, is an open question.

Perceptions aside, the question is whether Swedish news media actually do favor or disfavor different parties. A crucial distinction in this context is related to the difference between being favored or disfavored *in* versus being favored or disfavored *by* the news media. A party embroiled in scandals is for example highly likely to be disfavored *in* the media, but the reason is not the media but the scandals. Hence, such a party is not necessarily disfavored *by* the media. Similarly, if a party receives a lot of criticism and attacks from other parties, this is likely to be reflected in the media coverage, causing that party to being disfavored *in* but not necessarily *by* the media. It is only when the media exacerbate negative coverage or positive coverage, and treat different parties with different standards, that a party can be said to be favored or disfavored not only *in*, but also *by*, the media (Asp 2011; Johansson & Strömbäck 2019; Niven 2002). Hence, the media coverage can be unbalanced without this necessarily indicating some sort of partisan bias. It might also reflect *structural bias*, i.e., that the circumstances of news production, prevailing news values and events on the ground at a certain point in time favor or disfavor a particular party (Hofstetter 1976). In the latter case, any imbalances should be unsystematic, meaning that different parties are (dis)favored at different points in time, while partisan bias should manifest itself by certain parties being systematically (dis)favored.

In the Swedish case, research on the media's treatment of the political parties have been done ever since the election in 1979 (Asp & Bjerling 2014). To summarize the media coverage of the parties, these studies rely on an actor treatment index that ranges from -100 to +100. In brief, this index captures how often a party appears in the news media as an actor plus how often and how the same party is being spoken about by other actors. Thus, high visibility plus praise lead to higher values while low visibility and criticism leads to lower values (Asp 2011; Johansson & Strömbäck 2019). As visibility is one key part of the actor treatment index, normally parties receive positive values: hence, positive values do not reflect an absence of the well-established negativity bias in political news (Esser et al 2017; Harcup & O'Neill 2017; Strömbäck & Shehata 2018).

What this research shows is that some party or parties do get better (or worse) treatment in the media in every election campaign – but also, that *different* parties get better (or worse) treatment in different election campaigns (Asp 2011; Asp & Bjerling 2014; Johansson 2017). Moreover, different media tend to cover different parties in similar ways, and over time, the media's coverage of different parties has become more alike. Hence, there are few traces of systematic biases. In each and every election campaign, some parties are disfavored while others are favored, but it appears to be driven by structural biases, (dis) favoring some parties in one election campaign and others in another campaign. Unbalanced coverage may for example be the result of real-world events, what parties are embroiled in scandals, the parties' standing in the polls, and

how effectively the parties' campaign and manage the news media, in conjunction with prevailing news values.

Turning to the 2018 election campaign, data from the Media Election Study shows that some parties fared better in the media than other parties did. Overall, the party that received the most favorable coverage was the Liberal Party (+41), followed by the Left Party (+36), the Christian Democrats (+33) and the Centre Party (+32) (see Table 9). The party that fared the worst was the Sweden Democrats, followed by the Social Democrats. Among both the parties that fared the best and the worst, we thus find parties to both the left and the right, indicating that the explanation for the results has to do with structural rather than partisan biases.

Table 9. The Treatment of the Political Parties in the 2018 Election Campaign (actor treatment index)

	All media	Morning newspapers	Tabloids	Broadcast news
Left Party	+36	+38	+38	+31
Social Democrats	+9	+19	+7	+11
Green Party	+26	+48	+21	+35
Centre Party	+32	+47	+30	+46
Liberal Party	+41	+55	+42	+50
Christian Democrats	+33	+48	+33	+39
Moderates	+18	+23	+16	+27
Sweden Democrats	-4	-4	-6	+2
Average	+24	+34	+23	+30

Source: Media Election Study 2018; Johansson & Strömbäck 2019. Entries show values on the actor treatment index.

It is worth noting though that in terms of the actor treatment index, the Sweden Democrats fared the worst not only in the 2018 election campaign, but also in the 2010 and 2014 election campaigns (Asp 2011; Johansson 2017; see also Nord & Strömbäck 2018). This mirrors the perception among voters that they have been disfavored in these election campaigns. At the same time, in both 2010 and 2014, they received much more coverage than warranted by their size, and in 2014, they were favored in the sense that their favorite issue – immigration – was at the top of the media agenda. More detailed analyses of the 2018 election campaign also show that most of the criticism against the Sweden Democrats came from other parties rather than journalists or the media (Johansson & Strömbäck 2019). As a right-wing populist party, it was criticized by the parties to the left as well as by some parties that used to be part of the Alliance, and this is reflected in their – relatively speaking – low value on the actor treatment index. The – again relatively speaking – low value for the Social Democrats

similarly reflects that it was the target of criticism not only from the parties in the former Alliance but also from the Sweden Democrats. In essence, being in a position of fighting battles on two fronts results in more criticism and attacks from opponents, and this gets reflected in the media coverage.

Altogether then, the results show that some parties in every election campaign are disfavored *in* the news media while others are favored, but being (dis)favored *in* the news media does not equal being (dis)favored *by* the news media, and there are very few traces of any kind of systematic partisan bias in terms of how the political parties are covered.

The Contributions of the Special Issue

Beyond this introduction, this special issue include six articles. Three of these focus on different aspects of party communication during the election campaign. In the first, Niklas Bolin and Kajsa Falasca investigate Swedish parties' assessment of different communication channels in the last three national elections, 2010–2018. That is followed by an article by Constanza Sanhueza Petrarca, Maria Tyrberg and Steven Lloyd Wilson, where they investigate how Swedish parties and candidates used Twitter during the 2018 election campaign. The third article, by Alexandra Feddersen, also focuses on party communication, and more specifically the influence of party communication on Swedish voters' opinion on asylum.

The fourth article, by Linn Sandberg and Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk, shifts the focus toward the interaction between right-wing so-called alternative media and social media during the election campaign, and investigates – among other things – links shared on Facebook and engagement around these links. The fifth article, by Emma Ricknell, also focuses on alternative media, but a more obscure form than Facebook and Twitter. More specifically, Ricknell in her article investigates how the 2018 Swedish election was debated on the anonymous discussion board 4chan and its sub-forum “Politically Incorrect”.

The final article in this special issue turns the attention toward one key – but too seldom investigated – group in the Swedish electorate, namely immigrants. In this article, Nora Theorin investigates and explores media use and media perceptions among immigrants during the 2018 election.

Altogether, we believe this special issue brings many new insights into contemporary political communication during election campaigns in Sweden, hopefully of interest not only to those interested in Sweden but also to those interested in political communication more generally. For better or worse, political communication systems and patterns are in many respects in upheaval across democracies around the world, making it both very interesting and important from a societal perspective to understand contemporary political communication during election campaigns.

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Reaching the Voter

Exploring Swedish Political Parties' Assessment of Different Communication Channels in Three National Election Campaigns, 2010–2018

Niklas Bolin & Kajsa Falasca

Abstract

The mediatization of politics denotes a long-term process through which political actors have become increasingly dependent on news media, the key mechanism being the adaptation to news media and news media logic by political actors. One aspect of this is related to how political parties communicate during election campaigns, and how important they perceive different communication channels to be. Against this background, the purpose of this study is to explore the assessment of different communication channels in election campaigns by political parties over time. This study analyses the ways in which political parties value the importance of traditional news media, social media and traditional methods for communication with voters during election campaigns. The empirical material covers the 2010, 2014 and 2018 Swedish national elections, enabling us to make comparisons within the same national context as well as to explore their development over time. The results indicate that news media is still considered the most important communication channel, although social media is levelling the field.

Introduction

During election campaigns, political parties are primarily vote-seeking. Thus, we can expect them to design their election campaign strategies in order to achieve as much success as possible in attracting the electorate's support (Farrell & Webb 2000). The news media have become increasingly influential in political communication over time; relatedly, the perceived need to communicate through news media is especially important in election campaigns (Plasser & Plasser 2002; Römmele 2003). A key concept to describe this long-term process is mediatization of politics, denoting the news media's direct or

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indirect influence on different spheres of society and growing incursion into the political process (Strömbäck & Esser 2014).

The process of mediatization of politics is defined as a process in which the news media are not only becoming more important in providing political information to the electorate, but also has spillover effects for how political actors reactively or proactively adapt to the news media and their needs in order to communicate (Esser & Strömbäck 2017). Altering one's communication behavior in election campaigns represents one type of adaptation used by political actors to meet the news media's requirements (Donges & Jarren 2014). Within political communication research, this is attributed to political actors guided by media logic rather than political logic (Strömbäck & Esser 2014). Media logic essentially refers to the needs and demands of news media while political logic refers to the needs and demands of politics, and these logics represents different *modi operandi*. Additionally, the introduction of social media and its increased use in political communication such as election campaigns has sparked a discussion of a new logic, a network media logic, since social media platforms are different in their format and hence logic (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). In other words, different logics are regarded as drivers of different communication behavior in politics.

On the basis of the above, this article seeks to contribute with empirical research concerning different logics as drivers for communication strategies in election campaigns. We argue that political parties strategically value and choose which communication channels to focus on in order to reach the voters. Political parties can focus on news media channels such as TV, newspapers and radio and be guided by media logic in their communication behavior (Strömbäck & Esser 2014), they can focus on the use of social media platforms to communicate with the electorate following a network media logic (Klinger & Svensson 2015) or they can focus on traditional methods for campaign communication such as election cabins, door-to-door canvassing, election posters and direct marketing (Plasser & Plasser 2002), which might be conceived of as adhering to a political logic. To date, research on political parties' election campaigns that combine an empirical focus on both news media and social media, as well as traditional direct forms of communication over time, is however rare. Instead, most studies specifically focus on one kind of communication channel (Lilleker et al. 2015).

Against this background, the purpose of this study is to explore political parties' assessment of different communication channels in election campaigns over time. Along these lines, the present study explores the ways in which political parties value the importance of traditional news media, social media and traditional methods for communication with voters during election campaigns. The empirical material covers the 2010, 2014 and 2018 Swedish national elections, enabling us to make comparisons within the same national context

as well as to explore development over time. The empirical material consists of party surveys with leading party officials from the eight political parties represented in the Riksdag, the Swedish national parliament, during the last three elections. By asking leading party strategists to compare different communication channels, we gain insights regarding how important traditional news media is perceived in relation to traditional campaign methods as well as social media.

In the following section, we discuss the theoretical background and research questions, before proceeding to present the data and method of analysis. Next, we conduct our empirical analysis. In the final section, we summarize our findings and discuss their implications.

Mediatization of Politics and Media Logic

Mediatization has become an important concept for understanding the impact of media in modern society, widely defined as a process through which the media becomes more influential and integrated into different spheres of society (Strömbäck & Esser 2014; Hjarvard 2013). The mediatization of politics describes the way in which news media independently processes and presents political information, employing news media logic as opposed to political logic, as well as how political actors adapt to this news media environment (Altheide 2013; Mazzoleni & Schulz 1999; Strömbäck & Esser 2014). A sign of increasing mediatization comprises how political actors become increasingly conscious of the news media's needs and adapt to news media. Esser and Strömbäck (2017) define the mediatization of politics as a long-term process through which the importance of the news media and its spillover effects on political processes, institutions, organizations and actors have increased. The influence of news media can be either direct or indirect, as political actors can adapt proactively as well as reactively. It is also important to emphasize the fact that mediatization is a dynamic process of increasing news media influence, and the degree of mediatization is expected to vary across time and space (*ibid*).

An important aspect of the concept of mediatization, is the difficulty in operationalizing and measuring media logic, as the term is generally used as a metaphor or catch-all term for a number of perceived and actual forms of communication, as well as the process that forms communication (Donges & Jarren 2014). Many studies in political and campaign communication have focused on the changing relationship between news media and political parties (see for example Plasser and Plasser 2002). Political campaigning has definitely changed and developed due to the demands of news media and the need for political parties to reach the electorate through news media (Gibson & Römmele 2009); Falasca & Grandien 2017; Farrell & Webb 2000). However, the degree to how much political parties adapt to media logic has not been

defined in previous studies. We suggest that the assessment political parties make of different communication channels in an election campaign can offer insights into how parties are affected and driven by different logics. In this study, we thus emphasize the role the political parties play and how they value the importance of news media channels in comparison with other channels for election campaign communication.

Political Parties and Political Logic

In contrast to media logic, political logic assumes that political actors' behavior is primarily driven by political factors. Thus, whereas mediatization theorizes that actors adapt to news media, a political logic perceives that political actors such as political parties are influenced by political factors (Mazzoleni 1999). Given that these may vary between different parties, we can also expect parties' actions to differ. Based on a rationalistic account, it is assumed that political parties are actors that operate strategically in order to fulfil the objectives of the organization (Scott 2015). Parties (or more precisely the party leadership) is therefore deemed to be office, vote and policy seeking (e.g. Strøm 1990; Strøm & Müller 1999). However, as these different goals might be difficult to fulfil simultaneously, parties must prioritize. During election campaigns, parties are obviously oriented towards vote seeking. After all, elections are ultimately about convincing voters to vote for one's party. Nevertheless, parties and their leaders are seldom free to adjust to the optimal strategy. First, such a strategy is not easily identified. Second, even if it can be identified, party leaders to varying extents are constrained and influenced by both external and internal factors. Externally, of course, campaign rules set the boundaries of legality (van Biezen 2010). However, whereas campaign rules are common to all parties, internal conditions can vary. Intra-party factors may thus stimulate party leaders to make different priorities and formulate diverse strategies.

Drawing on the seminal study of Panebianco (1988), we contend that parties' organizational characteristics are more dependent on their history than on any other factor. A political party's 'genetic' features may thus be important in understanding why political parties' organizational and behavioral characteristics differ (Gauja et al. 2018). In other words, parties' campaign strategies may vary between, for example, old and new parties as well as being dependent on ideology. For example, Lilleker et al. (2015) argue that centrist and catch-all parties are more inclined to regard all modes of communication as important, as they seek a broad swathe of the electorate. Fringe parties, that is, parties located at the ends of the political left-right spectrum, are in contrast more likely to focus their energies on new modes of communication, as these parties to a considerable extent can be expected to be marginalized by mainstream news media. Also important, even though many parties are turning towards

newer communication channels in election campaigns, most parties have not totally abandoned traditional campaign methods in order to reach voters.

New Challenges and a New Network Media Logic

In today's media landscape, social media have established themselves as important platforms for political communication and especially in election campaigns. Political parties have (to varying extents) adapted their communication activities to a social media environment (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley 2016) in order to communicate with the electorate. But as some research discuss the introduction of social media in political communication, they pinpoint that there are no established perceptions on how to define social media in relation to a political and media logic (Casero-Ripollés et al. 2016; Schulz 2004). Klinger and Svensson (2015), however, introduce a new concept of *network media logic*, defined as different from news media logic in terms of communication norms and practices related to media production, distribution and usage (p 1245–1246). Social media platforms thus open up new possibilities for political parties to produce content, distribute it through networks, and interact with their users. In other words, the use of social media platforms in election campaigns opens up new ways to communicate with the electorate that adheres to a network media logic rather than news media logic.

Communication Channels in Election Campaigns

Focusing on the fourth dimension of mediatization of politics (i.e. the degree to which political actors are guided by political versus news media logic) centers attention on political actors (Strömbäck & Van Aelst 2013) and raises the question of how political actors are governed and by which logic. Accordingly, the political actor-centric mediatization perspective places political parties at the center of analysis, as this perspective regards parties as actors that deliberately draw different logics into their own actions in terms of strategic adaptations (Blumler & Esser 2018).

One means of adapting to different logics is through the party's communication behavior in election campaigns that can be manifested by different communication strategies (Strömbäck & Van Aelst 2013). The ways in which election campaigns are planned, organized and conducted have changed considerably in recent decades, and political parties constantly employ new ideas and practices in order to communicate as strategically and effectively as possible (Norris 2000; Plasser & Plasser 2002). For example, political parties may conduct strategic adaptations in an effort to proactively shape the news media agenda and promote their own issues and frames in order to reach potential voters. An increased focus on communication through news media can thus

be regarded as a reaction in line with mediatization of politics. In contrast, increased focus on communication through traditional campaign methods such as door-to-door canvassing, election cabins, election posters and direct marketing can be regarded as part of a political logic. These campaign methods constitute tactics for winning public support in elections that are controlled by the political parties themselves and a communication strategy that does not involve mediated communication. Finally, during the last decade the use of social media has become more integrated into political parties' election campaigns. By focusing on social media platforms as a communication strategy, a political party can utilize these different platforms to reach voters. Social media can thus be used as a direct communication channel and be regarded as an indicator for reduced news media influence.

Rather than formulating specific hypotheses, we employ an exploratory approach where we study one particular aspect of the mediatization of politics, namely the perceived importance of different communication channels in an electoral context. We focus on how political parties value the importance of traditional news media, social media and traditional methods for communication with voters during election campaigns. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to explore parties' assessment of different communication channels in election campaigns over time. Our empirical analysis is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do party elites' perceptions of different communication channels in election campaigns develop over time?

RQ2: How do party elites' perceptions of different communication channels vary between parties?

These questions are applied to the case of Sweden, which is no exception in terms of the continuous development of election campaign strategies where new tools are continuously added to the campaign toolbox. Swedish political parties are thus regarded as professionalized and new ideas and practices are increasingly engaged in election campaigns (Nord 2013; Nord & Strömbäck 2018). Of course, differences between parties exist, and research indicates that developments in campaign strategies are led by parties that in some regard experience an uncertain or new situation, be it election defeat, an image problem or identity crisis (Falasca & Grandien 2017).

In line with the concept of the mediatization of politics, a survey of political MPs in 2007 that focused on how they perceive the importance of different campaign factors for explaining election outcomes revealed that news media coverage represents one of the highest-ranked factors (Strömbäck et al. 2013). Since then, the media environment has however changed considerably. Over time, we might thus expect that Swedish political parties develop their campaign communication in a manner that incorporates traditional methods, news

media and social media in order to reach the public. The rating and weighing by party strategists of different communication channels in the election campaigns of 2010, 2014 and 2018 will provide insights into how the importance of these channels are assessed over time and across different parties.

Methodology and Data

This study is based on party surveys from three consecutive national elections in Sweden: 2010, 2014 and 2018. The party surveys were answered by party secretaries in parties with seats in the Swedish Parliament: The Left Party, the Green Party, the Social Democrats, the Centre Party, the Liberal Party, the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats and the Sweden Democrats. The Sweden Democrats were not included in the survey in 2010 and the Centre Party was not willing to participate in the 2018 survey. The party secretaries in Swedish political parties are traditionally responsible for the organization and running of the election campaign, as well as for the party organization. They are thus the most knowledgeable persons in the parties concerning strategies and tactics in election campaigns. See Appendix 1 for details of the respondents in the party surveys.

The surveys were based on a structured questionnaire, with a number of questions concerning the perceived importance of different types of communication in the election campaign. In order to obtain comparable data, all three surveys used the same questions focusing on the importance of the news media, social media and traditional campaign methods in the election campaign. The surveys were conducted after the National Election Day in 2010, 2014 and 2018 by the Centre for Study of Democracy and Communication (DEMICOM) at Mid Sweden University.

MEASUREMENTS

In total, we make use of 13 items in the surveys regarding the importance of different types of communication channels. The respondents were asked to score the importance of each communication channel on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (“unimportant”) to 5 (“very important”).¹

In a first category of items, party secretaries were asked about the importance of traditional news media channels. Specifically, we included items that capture the importance of national as well as local newspapers, radio news, TV

1 There are three instances of missing data. We have no score for the importance of door-to-door canvassing for the Centre Party in 2010, Twitter for the Green party in 2014 and local newspapers for the Left Party in 2018. Generally, the missing data does not substantially affect the analyses that is based on our indices as these are based on relatively many responses. However, some caution is needed when individual parties are compared. Primarily when single survey items are analyzed, it is important to take into account that a small number of average scores are based on fewer responses (see also note in Appendix 2).

news and political TV shows. Second, we included three social media items. Party secretaries were asked to score how important Facebook, Twitter and YouTube were in their election campaigns. Finally, we captured the importance of traditional campaign channels by including four items concerning the importance of door-to-door canvassing, election cabins, election posters and direct marketing.

In order to evaluate the extent to which the parties deem the different types of campaign channels important, we constructed three additive indices. To attain comparable measure, we first recoded each item ranging from 0 to 4, before adding the scores from all items in each category. Finally, we divided the total score by 4 and the number of items included, leaving us with an index ranging from 0 to 1.²

Results

Let us now turn to the data. In the first part of the empirical section, we examine temporal trends, whereas the second part of this section is devoted to variations across political parties. Third and finally, we analyze intersections across parties and over time.

TEMPORAL TRENDS OF ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

In Table 1 we present the average scores for each of the indices across the three election campaigns: 2010, 2014 and 2018. The results show that communication through news media is deemed the most important channel according to the party secretaries of the Swedish parties. The total score is significantly greater than both the average score for social media ($p = 0.002$) and traditional campaign indices ($p = 0.000$).³ The social media index generally scores somewhat higher than the traditional campaign index. However, the differences are small and just fail to meet the level of significance ($p = 0.118$). In general, scores are high, indicating that many of the communication channels are considered important. Communication through news media channels reaches index values of about 0.9 in both 2010 and 2014, indicating an average score rather close to “very important”.

While the scores generally indicate that the parties deem most

2 The internal consistency of these indices vary. Whereas both news media index (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.903$) and the social media index (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.703$) reach, what is normally regarded to be, acceptable levels of reliability, our index of traditional campaign communication channels (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.410$) has a lower level of internal consistency. However, since our indices are additive and not primarily a way to capture underlying dimensions this is not problematic. On the contrary, our analysis shows that there are interesting variations within each group of communication channel, which we report and discuss in the result section (see also Appendix 2).

3 To determine whether differences in mean are statistically significant, we run paired sample t-tests in SPSS 25.

communication channels important, there is a rather clear declining trend in estimated importance. Moreover, the decline is about twice as great for news media communication channels as for social media and traditional communication channels. In other words, the differences in perceived importance are levelling out. Although we can see an average rated importance in 2010 somewhere between close to “very important” (i.e. 1.0) for news media channels, and somewhat below “important” (i.e. 0.75), the average scores for the most recent election are lower than “important”, albeit still above the mean score of 0.5.

Table 1. Temporal Trends in Importance of Communication Channels, 2010–2018

	Media	Social media	Traditional
2010	0.91	0.73	0.67
2014	0.88	0.69	0.63
2018	0.73	0.63	0.57
Change 2010–2018	-0.18	-0.10	-0.10
Average	0.84	0.68	0.62

While the indices render it possible to reach overarching conclusions regarding different types of communication channels, they mask potential differences *within* each type. When looking closer at the individual communication channels, we are able to identify whether specific communication channels drive both levels and changes in perceived importance, or whether perceptions of the different channels are consistent within each type of communication channel.

Indeed, the scores for the individual communication channels exhibit some variations (see Appendix 2). All included news media channels show similar patterns of declining perceived importance. However, the overall decline indicated by the index is most strongly driven by the decline in perceived importance of newspapers and radio. At the same time, the two different TV communication channels reveal only a small diminishment in perceived importance, and in 2018 continue to rank among the most important election campaign channels.

The individual scores for the social media channels show even more considerable variation. Most importantly, communication via Facebook is one of only two channels in the study that increases in perceived importance. In fact, in 2018 Facebook was deemed the most important channel (cf. Lilleker et al. 2015). Conversely, Twitter represents the communication channel that has lost most in importance and is perceived to be the least important of all included channels in 2018 (cf. Grusell & Nord 2012).

Finally, the traditional communication channels also show considerable variation. Other than Facebook, direct marketing is the only channel that

has increased in perceived importance. The other three traditional channels included in the study (election posters, door-to-door canvassing and election cabins) are deemed relatively unimportant in 2018, only having higher scores than Twitter.

VARIATIONS IN PARTIES' ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

In Table 2 we turn to differences between political parties. Unsurprisingly, the overall trend revealed in Table 1 can be seen here as well. On average, the parties assess communication via news media as the most important channel in election campaigns. The only exception is the Social Democrats, who on average score social media as slightly more important than news media.

The Christian Democrats, the Moderate Party and the Greens score highest on the news media communication channels, whereas the Liberals and especially the Sweden Democrats score markedly lower. This echoes prior research that has shown that there exists marked distrust regarding how the party has been handled by the established news media (Bolin 2012).

The Social Democrats, followed by the Christian Democrats and the Left Party, score highest on the social media index. Here, the Centre Party and to some extent the Sweden Democrats are the low-scorers. Finally, the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats put comparatively high trust in traditional communication channels, whereas primarily the Greens and the Liberals are less convinced about the effectiveness of such channels.

In order to investigate the extent to which parties are more inclined to perceive all campaign modes important, we sum the indices to attain a total score. As expected, there is clear variation. Moreover, in accordance with Lilleker et al.'s (2015) reasoning, catch-all parties such as the Social Democrats and the Moderate Party seem to consider most channels important. Similarly, we find that the Sweden Democrats score low. However, importantly we also find that the Christian Democrats and the Left Party regard many channels important.

Table 2. Average in Importance of Communication Channels Across Parties, 2010–2018

	Media	Social media	Traditional	Total
Left Party	0.82	0.75	0.71	2.28
Green Party	0.92	0.63	0.40	1.95
Social Democrats	0.81	0.83	0.75	2.39
Centre Party	0.90	0.50	0.70	2.10
Liberal Party	0.71	0.61	0.42	1.74
Christian Democrats	0.97	0.78	0.79	2.54
Moderate Party	0.93	0.69	0.67	2.29
Sweden Democrats	0.60	0.58	0.56	1.74

In Appendix 2, we also present information regarding each party's average score for all individual communication channels. Again, we find some indications that there are interesting variations masked when collapsing several different communication channels into indices. The low score for the Sweden Democrats on the news media channels is, for example, largely driven by the party's skepticism towards national (daily and evening) newspapers.

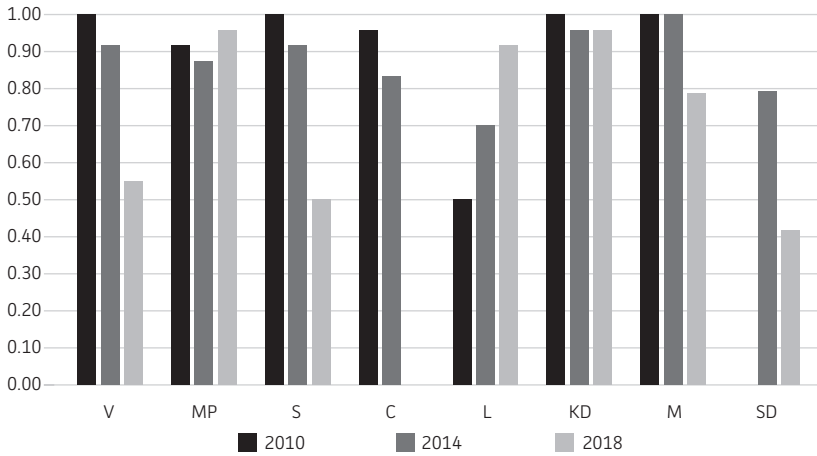
Another feature that stands out is that Facebook is clearly perceived as the most important social media channel. With the exception of the Greens, who on average score YouTube higher, Facebook is rated higher than other social media. In fact, no party has ever scored Twitter as more important than Facebook.

Finally, if we turn to the individual traditional communication channels, we can observe quite a large degree of variation. In particular, the perceived importance of direct marketing and door-to-door canvassing vary between parties. The Sweden Democrats, the Left party, the Christian Democrats and the Centre Party score high on direct marketing. When it comes to door-to-door canvassing, the Social Democrats and the Moderates are much more positive than the rest of the parties, echoing the fact that these two parties have systematically launched such campaigns (Nord & Strömbäck 2018).

TEMPORAL VARIATIONS BETWEEN PARTIES' ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

As a final step, we investigate the intersection of variations over time and across parties. In Figures 1–3 we present data for each party for all three elections by the three different types of communication channels. Given that the general pattern is one of decreasing importance for each of the different types of communication channels, it is primarily interesting to highlight parties that deviate from this trend. In Figure 1 we present the development regarding the perceived importance of news media as a communication channel in election campaigns. With the exception of the Liberals, all parties valued news media as an important channel in 2010. The temporal trend discussed above is seen in how most parties score lower in 2018 than in 2010. Nevertheless, the Liberal Party clearly stands out as a deviant case, as we can note an increase in both 2014 and 2018. At the other end of the scale, we find the Left Party, the Sweden Democrats and the Social Democrats. These parties score news media much lower in 2018 than for previous election years.

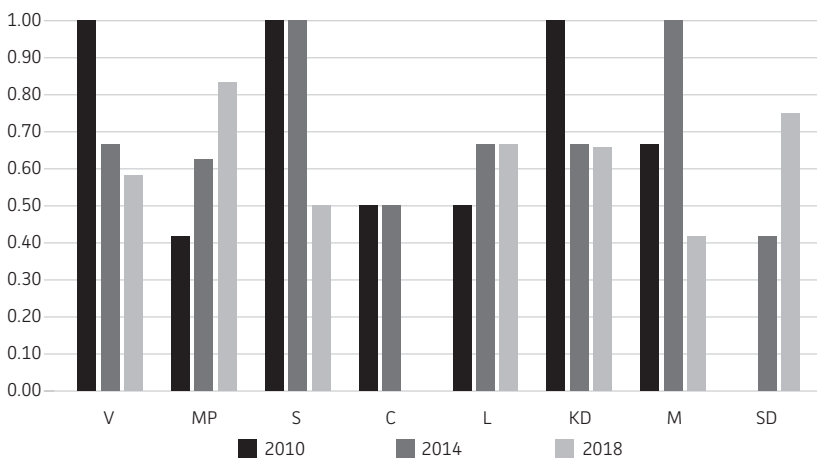
Figure 1. Importance of Media Communication Channels by Party, 2010–2018



Note: Party abbreviations: V: Left Party; MP: Green Party; S: Social Democrats; C: Centre Party; L: Liberal Party; KD: Christian Democrats; M: Moderate Party; SD: Sweden Democrats.

In Figure 2 we also encounter a couple of instances going against the declining trend. First, it can be noted that the Sweden Democrats in 2014 have the lowest score on the social media index. In the latest election, however, only the Greens score higher. In other words, social media as a communication channel in election campaigns turned from being perceived as the least important to becoming the most important, indicating that parties can quite drastically alter their evaluations of the relative utility of different communication channels.

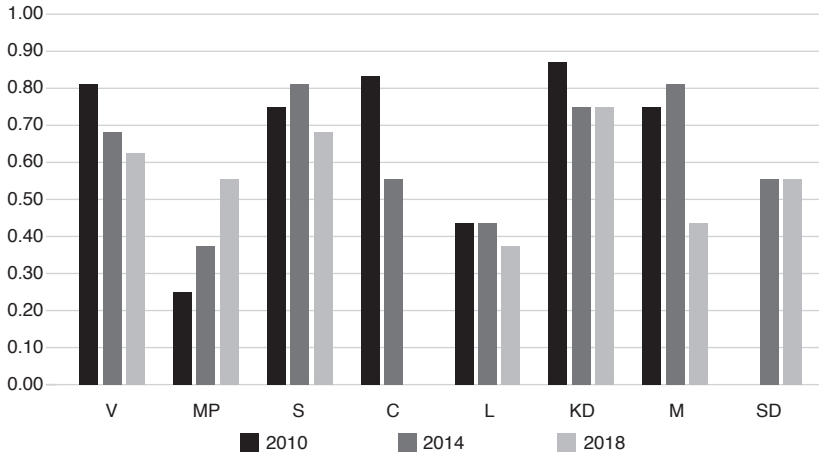
Figure 2. Importance of Social Media Communication Channels by Party, 2010–2018



Note: Party abbreviations, see Figure 1.

Finally, Figure 3 reveals that the Greens again develop counter to the general trend, as their score on traditional campaign channels increases in both 2014 and 2018. However, it is important to note that the score is still relatively modest in 2018.

Figure 3. Importance of Traditional Communication Channels by Party, 2010–2018



Note: Party abbreviations, see Figure 1.

Conclusion and Outlook

Whereas previous research on political parties’ election campaigns has focused on one kind of communication channel (Lilleker et al. 2015), the aim of this study was to explore the assessment of various types of communication channels. More specifically, we set out to investigate how Swedish political parties assess the importance of different communication channels in election campaigns, both over time and across political parties. Using an exploratory rather than a deductive approach, our results must be interpreted with caution and primarily as a way of identifying important avenues for future research.

Our temporal analysis reveals that while news media is considered the most important campaign communication channel, its perceived importance is on the decline. Most specifically, this decline is evident in parties’ evaluations of radio and newspaper, whereas TV as a communication channel has lost less in importance. Generally, communication through both social media and traditional channels has also lost in perceived importance, albeit to a lesser extent than news media communication channels. The finding of a general decline in importance of all communication channels is interesting and suggest that other tools not included in this study potentially are perceived as more important over time. This should be addressed in future research. There are also important

differences within each type of communication. Most evidently, Facebook is becoming a more noteworthy campaign tool, whereas Twitter appears to be on the decline. Among the traditional channels, direct marketing stands out as the only one on the rise.

The analysis also reveals interesting differences across parties. Whereas some parties seem to consider most channels important, others take a narrower approach. As suggested by Lilleker et al. (2015), catch-all parties such as the Social Democrats and the Moderates cast their nets widely. However, parties not usually characterized as catch-all parties (such as the Left Party and the Christian Democrats) also score most channels relatively high. With the exception of the Social Democrats, Swedish parties generally assess communication through news media as the most important channel. While this is also true for the Sweden Democrats (albeit with a very thin margin), the analysis also suggests that radical right-wing parties in general are more skeptical of established news media than the other parties, in line with prior research. Moreover, we find that the Sweden Democrats are becoming more skeptical over time. To some extent, and again partly in line with Lilleker et al.'s (2015) suggestions, the analysis implies that this lack of trust in the traditional news media is being replaced by greater reliance on social media as a key channel to reach voters. Next to the Sweden Democrats, the Green Party is the only party where there is a marked increase over time in the perceived importance of social media.

What do these results tell us more generally about political actors' election campaigning? An important reflection drawn from our study is that it is not viable to expect a full adaption to one media logic by political parties in election campaigns. Rather, there appears to be a dynamic interplay between political logic, news media logic and network media logic that affects strategic decisions with regards to the choices of communication channels in different election campaigns. In other words, political parties do not simply adapt to news media logic. As rational actors, they also respond and react to changes in their environment. These changes can be contextual (such as the ongoing development of the media environment) as well as internal organizational opportunities and constraints (Strömbäck & Van Aelst 2013). For example, previous research has demonstrated the ways in which electoral losses and changes in party leadership may affect behavior (Harmel & Janda 1994). From a less rationalistic perspective, political parties' behaviors are additionally influenced by their genetics (Panebianco 1988). Parties do not only differ in terms of ideology and age, but also organizational culture (see e.g. Barrling 2013). All of these aspects constrain the party leadership from adapting to the most effective strategy (as if it were easily recognizable in the first place).

Another important development is the centrality of social media in contemporary election campaigning. With the increased use (and hence importance) of different social media platforms by citizens for information and political

communication (Boulianne 2015; Dimitrova et al. 2014), political actors must respond and react to this domain, in addition to the traditional news media. The results from this study indicate that political parties increasingly regard specific (albeit different) social media platforms as almost as important as traditional news media for communication in election campaigns. Should this be regarded as part of a mediatization process where political actors are governed by media logic, or as a process whereby political actors become increasingly independent from media logic as they control their own communication platforms as well as their own messages (Casero-Ripollés et al. 2016)? We believe that the increased importance of social media platforms as communication channels in elections, such as Facebook in 2018, implies that parties also adapt to a new network media logic, in which political actors are able to control their communication with citizens at the same time as they adapt to the platforms (Chadwick & Stromer-Galley 2016). This means that social media can be regarded as a tool for political parties to reduce the influence of the news media and the process of the mediatization of politics. In light of these findings, we believe that future research should focus on which factors affect the dynamic interplay between political logic, news media logic and network media logic. This would require more in-depth studies of the strategic decisions that political parties do when planning their election campaigns.

Finally, a few words about the limitations of this study. First, the empirical analysis is based on a fairly limited period of time and specifically at the national level. Although much happened in this period, primarily in terms of the development of social media tools, we cannot draw overly far-reaching inferences about longer trends, neither can we assume our results travel to election campaigns at other territorial levels. Second, as the respondents are not the same over time, individual scoring must be interpreted with some caution. Although we see no obvious reason why different party secretaries would interpret the importance of the survey questions or communication channels differently, we cannot completely disregard this possibility, and it may have affected within-party comparison. Third, our analysis has not taken into account that parties' election campaigns can be targeted towards different audiences. While the campaign ultimately is about reaching the voters to attract their votes on Election day, recent research suggests that some platforms such as Twitter are used primarily in order to influence journalists rather than directed directly towards voters (Kreiss et al. 2018). With the data available for this study, however, we are not able to determine *how* parties believe their campaigning would affect vote choices. Instead, we have emphasized *what* channels they perceive as important.

With these caveats in mind, we still believe that our study reveals important empirical patterns. Moreover, our approach of combining different types of channels as well as our discussion of how to place social media within a

mediatization context may lay the groundwork for future studies seeking to improve our understanding of political parties' priorities during election campaigns.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Respondents in the Party Surveys

	2010	2014	2018
Left Party	Anki Ahlsten	Aron Etzler	Aron Etzler
Green Party	Agneta Börjesson	Anders Wallner	Amanda Lind
Social Democrats	Bo Krogvig	Nina Wadensjö	John Zanchi
Center Party	Michael Arthursson	Michael Arthursson	
Liberal Party	Erik Ullenhag	Anders Andrén	Maria Arnholm
Christian Democrats	Lennart Sjögren	Acko Ankarberg	Acko Ankarberg
Moderate Party	Pär Henriksson	Per Nilsson	Per Nilsson
Sweden Democrats		Björn Söder	Richard Jomshof

Appendix 2. Importance of Individual Communication Channels by Year and Party

	Media					Social media				Traditional			
	Daily news-paper	Evening news-paper	Local news-paper	TV news	TV political show	Radio news	Facebook	Twitter	YouTube	Election posters	Direct marketing	Door-to-door canvassing	Election cabins
2010	0.89	0.86	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.93	0.75	0.64	0.79	0.71	0.57	0.58	0.79
2014	0.91	0.88	0.78	0.94	0.94	0.81	0.75	0.75	0.59	0.75	0.75	0.38	0.63
2018	0.64	0.68	0.71	0.82	0.86	0.68	0.93	0.36	0.61	0.54	0.71	0.50	0.54
Change 2010-18	-0.25	-0.18	-0.22	-0.11	-0.07	-0.25	0.18	-0.29	-0.18	-0.18	0.14	-0.08	-0.25
V	0.75	0.92	0.75b	0.92	0.92	0.75	0.92	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.92	0.42	0.83
MP	0.83	0.92	0.83	1.00	1.00	0.92	0.67	0.38b	0.75	0.58	0.33	0.08	0.58
S	0.83	0.83	0.75	0.83	0.83	0.75	0.92	0.75	0.83	0.75	0.67	1.00	0.58
C	1.00	0.75	0.75	1.00	1.00	0.88	0.63	0.50	0.38	0.88	0.88	0.00a	0.63
L	0.75	0.58	0.67	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.75	0.50	0.58	0.58	0.33	0.33	0.42
KD	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.83	1.00	0.92	0.75	0.67	0.83	0.92	0.58	0.83
M	0.92	0.92	0.92	1.00	1.00	0.83	0.83	0.58	0.67	0.58	0.58	0.92	0.58
SD	0.38	0.38	0.75	0.63	1.00	0.50	0.75	0.38	0.63	0.50	1.00	0.00	0.75
Average	0.82	0.81	0.81	0.90	0.91	0.81	0.81	0.58	0.66	0.67	0.68	0.48	0.65

Note: Party abbreviations, see Figure 1. Figures for parties are averages for three elections (2010, 2014 and 2018) except the figures for the Centre Party (did not participate in the 2018 survey) and the Sweden Democrats (not included in the 2010 survey) which are based on two elections. In addition, there are three other instances of missing data where figures are italicized. a indicates figure based on one single survey response, b indicates figure based on two survey responses.

The 2018 Swedish Election Campaign on Twitter

Constanza Sanhueza Petrarca, Maria Tyrberg & Steven Lloyd Wilson

Abstract

How did Swedish parties and candidates use Twitter during the 2018 election? And what topics were discussed the most? Using an original dataset containing over 9.1 million tweets collected over the four weeks of the electoral campaign, this paper explores candidates' campaigning strategies online. We show that candidate's individual characteristics and political career have significant effects on the adoption of and use of Twitter, yet party and district-related factors also explain some patterns in online campaigning.

1. Introduction

In September 2018, general elections were held in Sweden to elect 349 members of the national legislature, the Riksdag. The Swedish political elites have quickly recognized the growing popularity of social media usage in the general population and the potential of using it to communicate with voters. All Swedish parties and sixty-five percent of the elected members of parliament had an official Twitter account in 2018. And, to give a sense of the scale of Twitter usage by Swedes, despite a population of only ten million, Swedish is the 12th most used language on Twitter (GNIP 2018). The study of social media usage in political campaigns is still in its nascent stages, and as such exploratory work is a critical step in documenting the state of play in order to set the stage for causal work. This paper investigates two key features of the 2018 electoral campaign online using an original dataset including over 9.1 million tweets collected for the period of the electoral campaign, which lasted four weeks. We make a descriptive contribution to the literature on electoral campaigning by exploring the usage and popularity of Twitter among parties and candidates and shedding light on the content and congruence of the e-campaign between parties, candidates, and voters.

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2. Theory

In recent years, social media has become increasingly popular among citizens around the globe. While Facebook remains by far the most popular social network platform, the micro blogging platform Twitter now has more than 130 million active users worldwide. In Sweden, Twitter is very popular. Around 25% of the population has a twitter account, compared to 23% in the United States¹. Campaigners and politicians have quickly recognized the growing popularity of Twitter and its potential for campaigning and to communicate with voters. Based on data collected in 2013, Larsson and Kalsnes reported that 58% of the Swedish members of parliament had a Twitter account. By the end of 2018, we found that the share of newly elected Swedish deputies on the platform had increased to 65%.

Twitter presents many advantages for candidates running for office. Politicians are able to instantaneously reach a wide audience with one simple click. Moreover, unlike other communication channels, candidates' tweets are less likely to be under centralized control by the party giving candidates the possibility to show their own preferences and views. For researchers, Twitter data is particularly interesting for the examination of electoral campaigns. Unlike Facebook, Twitter provides access via programming interfaces for researchers to systematically collect data, allowing the analysis of campaign strategies of parties and candidates alike. Moreover, as Twitter is one of the most popular social network platforms among candidates, but also in the general population, it is possible to assess as well how parties and candidates compare to the general population in terms of their political activity online. Lastly, Twitter requires users to create personal accounts, and when such accounts become of public interest such as these from politicians and parties, the company verifies the identity of the owner. This one-step verification process makes the data analysis more reliable and less prone to manipulation.

The rapid adoption of social media and its use during electoral campaigns has awakened the interest of political scientists. A stream of research has evaluated individual factors affecting candidates' twitter adoption. Age is an important factor in predicting the level of adoption of social media as individuals of younger age have higher computational skills and are more likely to adopt new technologies. In the U.S., Lassen and Brown (2011) assessed factors affecting Twitter adoption among members of Congress and showed that Twitter users tended to be younger. Similar evidence is found in other countries like the Netherlands (Vergeer & Hermans 2013) and in Sweden (Larsson and Moe, 2012). Besides age, another individual characteristic that is likely to affect the use of social media is gender. Empirical research shows that there are differences in terms of the use of social media by gender, as women are more likely

1 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/623048/twitter-users-in-sweden/>

to use social media than men (Hargittai 2007). At the same time, there is evidence of a gendered usage of social media. For example, men are reported to use Twitter to a greater extent than women to search for political news online (Abraham, Morn & Vollman 2010) while women use social media more socially than men do (Pujazon-Zazik & Park 2010). Data on the users of different social media platforms reveal important gender differences between the platforms as well: while 52% of Facebook users in the US in 2018 were female, women represented only 34% of Twitter users (Statista 2019). While these gender differences are less likely to be reflected on Twitter adoption at the elite level as a result of the professionalization of electoral campaigns, the persistence of patterns of gendered bias against women – such as the increasing evidence of death threats and harassment against female politicians (Krook 2017) – is likely to affect how female candidates use this platform.

Besides these individual characteristics, candidates' political career and party have been also shown to affect candidates' campaigning strategies online. Newcomers, candidates with less experience, and candidates running in competitive districts can use Twitter to increase their visibility. Candidates whom are ranked lower on the party list may benefit from actively using Twitter to gain visibility during the campaign. Moreover, in the analysis of the 2010 Dutch election, candidates from parties that had lost seats in the general elections of 2006 were observed to be more likely to subscribe to Twitter, suggesting that they sought new ways to reach out to voters (Vergeer & Hermans 2013). This ability of candidates to bypass traditional gatekeepers and address the public directly is a critical and distinct element of social media usage by politicians (Jacobs & Spierings 2016).

Furthermore, there is evidence indicating that parties also influenced the Twitter adoption of their candidates. In a study in the U.S., Lassen and Brown (2011) show that Twitter users in Congress were more likely to have an account if they were urged by their party leaders to tweet. Similarly, in a comparative study of Dutch and British elections in 2010, Graham, Jackson and Broersma (2016) showed that parties that encouraged their candidates to use the platform were also more active on Twitter. In many cases these parties offered their candidates advice and training on its use. At the same time, the authors show that populist left and right-wing parties in the Netherlands and the Conservative party in the UK actively restricted and controlled the communication of individual candidates to avoid scandals.

Further analysis examining the linkage between party ideology and candidates' e-campaigning is inconclusive. Liberal parties have been observed to be early adopters in the use of new technologies and socials media during campaigns (Copsey, 2003). Examining over 30 parties in Europe, Sudulich (2010) shows that left-wing parties used more interactive applications on their websites, which may favor their use of twitter among their candidates. Similarly,

in a study conducted in the US in the 2004 and 2008 elections, Williams and Gulati (2013) show that Democrats were more likely to use Facebook. At the same time, other studies do not find a correlation between party ideology and the use of social media by candidates. For instance, Vergeer and Hermans (2013), do not find evidence that party ideology effected the use of Twitter in the Netherlands similar to Larsson and Karlsen (2014) in their analysis of politician's use of Facebook in Sweden and Norway.

A general pattern observed is that candidates use the platform to broadcast information and to mobilize electoral support (Lamarre & Suzuki-Lambrecht 2013). Social media data provides scholars with rich text data to examine politicians' policy positions, which has been proven to provide reliable estimates to conduct micro and aggregate level analysis (Ecker 2017). Building on the research presented above, we explore the activity of politicians on Twitter during the 2018 electoral campaign in Sweden, focusing primarily on the decision to adopt Twitter and the content of tweets.

In the next sections we present our data, empirical strategy and results.

3. Data and Methods

This paper examines the 2018 Swedish electoral campaign on Twitter based on an original dataset containing 21 million tweets collected over 83 days (from June 20th to September 10th). In this paper we focus on the electoral campaign period in the 28 days leading up to the election plus election day itself (from August 12th through September 9th), which accounts for a total of 9.1 million tweets.²

We used a complex data gathering technique that collects data from four sources: 1) tweets from accounts of parties and candidates, 2) tweets matching a set of political keywords, 3) geo-coded tweets, and 4) tweets identified as being in the Swedish language and matching a set of 100 Swedish language stop-words. All tweets were downloaded using custom software that accessed the Twitter streaming API in order to download and process tweets in real time. This data included the full text of each tweets along with meta data about the user posting the tweet such as number of followers. The streaming API is a programming interface in which all tweets matching specified search criteria posted to Twitter worldwide can be downloaded in real time by appropriate software.³ The API provides hooks that allow programmers to pull down subsets of that stream based on queries of two types: geocoding and keywords. We utilize both in this project.

2 Note that the time series graphs also include the day after the election (September 10th) in order to make the expected spikes of activity on election day itself visually distinct.

3 Search results are capped at 1.5% of the overall Twitter stream (the so-called "firehose") at any given time, however none of the queries performed in our project come close to that threshold.

The first source are those tweets that are posted in the official and verified accounts of parties and candidates. We collected all twitter handles for all members of the Riksdag along with those running for office (EveryPolitician 2018), and then scraped from the API all tweets posted from those accounts during the duration of the time period of the study. This amounted to 76,397 tweets.

The second source of tweets have been gathered as they match at least one of the keywords that we have identified were related to the election. Keywords include political slogans, hashtags, and relevant dates such as debates and elections (a detailed list of the keywords used is in the Appendix). These keywords were carefully selected such as to be specific enough to the Swedish elections as to not produce false positives (particularly about entirely unrelated popular issues). This set of data represents some 2.9 million tweets.

The third source include all those tweets that were posted from within Sweden itself. Approximately 1.5% of all tweets are geocoded, which means that a set of latitude and longitude coordinates generally accurate to within two meters is attached to the tweet at the time of its posting. This is generally based on the GPS functionality of a smart phone or similar device used in the posting. By downloading *all* tweets regardless of topic from within Sweden during this period, we gain three things. First, this serves as a proxy of a denominator for the keyword matches. Second, it allows us to investigate whether major political speech is occurring without our identified keywords. That is, are our keywords subject to selection bias of some sort by the researchers. Finally, the geocoded tweets allow us to evaluate whether the keywords selected were well bounded and returning primarily content from Sweden. All keyword matches geocoded from within Sweden should be in both the keyword set of tweets and the geocoded set of tweets. Of the geocoded keyword matched tweets, 85% originated from within Sweden, giving us confidence that our keyword selection was well bounded.

Finally, using a standard “stop-word” list of the Swedish language (i.e. common semantically meaningless words such as prepositions and particles) we downloaded all Swedish language tweets matching such keywords. Nearly all tweets written in Swedish should contain at least one stop word, which means that this set of tweets gives us a rough proxy for the total number of tweets originating from all Swedes. This accounted for 17.1 million total tweets. In addition, this provides an additional robustness check in that 94% of the geocoded tweets in the stop-word tweets did in fact originate from within Sweden, giving us additional confidence in our approach as capturing Swedish communication without foreign false positives.

On average, Swedes posted 249,000 tweets per day, of which 13.8% matched one of our identified political keywords, 26.9% of which included links and 58.6% of which consisted of retweets, that is reposts of original posts (which

often contain additional commentary). Figure 1 features the basic characteristics of the Twitter activity during that period. The volume of tweets increased in the week prior to the election, while keyword matches spiked on days particularly salient to the election. For instance, note the spike on election day itself, along with August 14th, the day when car fires occurred at several places across cities in western Sweden. Figure 2 renders a similar pattern, showing only the totals of tweets posted by official politician or party accounts by day.

Figure 1. Number of Tweets per Day - Swedish Language Matches (Solid), Political Keyword Matches (Dashed)

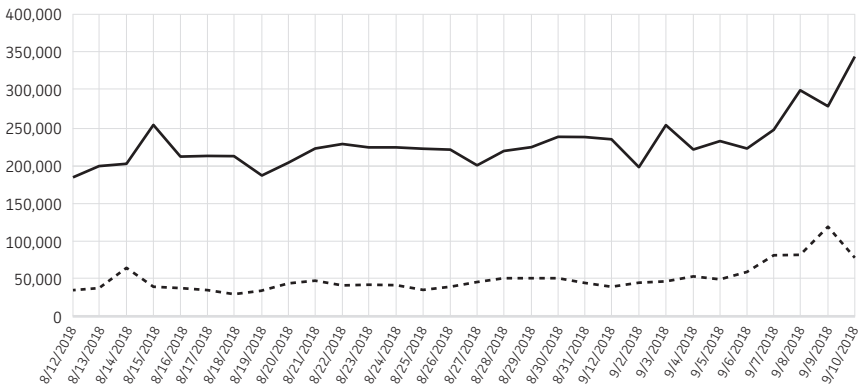
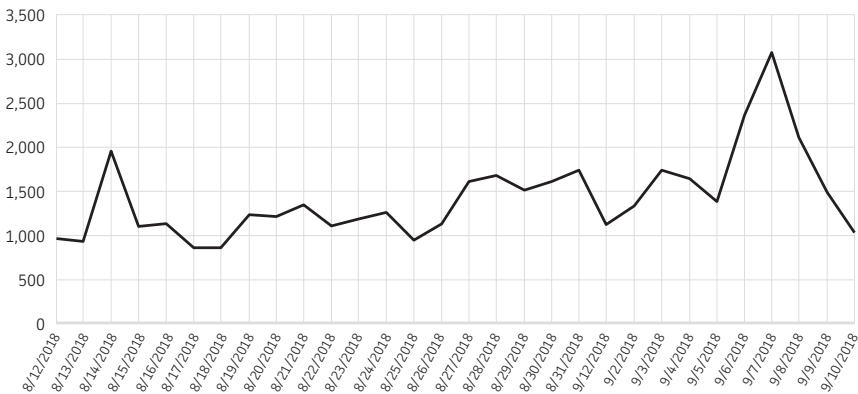


Figure 2. Number of Tweets per Day by Politician (or Party) Accounts



Candidates' characteristics such as age and gender, and their political careers has been gathered from the Riksdag's open data base. We use the Chapel Hill Expert Survey Data to measure party ideology (Polk et al. 2017; Bakker et al. 2015).

The empirical analysis relies on the quantitative examination of the factors that influence a candidate's usage of social media during the campaign and the analysis of the topics discussed online. The first part of the analysis presents the results of logit and negative binomial models (Table A2 in the Appendix presents the summary statistics). The second part uses computerized content analysis in three ways: an unsupervised model to identify the primary dimension of political discussion, an affinity model in which public tweets are statistically matched with political parties, and a dictionary-based approach comparing the political topics focused on by the public and candidates for office.

4. Candidate Campaign Online

How did candidates use Twitter in the 2018 election? And, what factors influence the online campaign strategies followed by candidates? Across countries, Twitter has become a central tool in election and politicians have massively adopted Twitter across Western Democracies. In Sweden, 229 (65%) of the 349 elected parliamentarians elected in 2018 had official Twitter accounts. In order to understand what drives adoption of Twitter among elected candidates the first model presented in Table 1, presents the results of a logit model where the dependent variable indicates if the candidate had an official Twitter account or not. The regression results show that age has a significant effect on twitter adoption, as younger candidates are more likely to have a Twitter account ($p < 0.001$). A unit increase in candidates' age decreases the odds of twitter admission by 0.04. At the same time, we observe that there are not significant differences between females and males. Yet in terms of the political careers, placement in the party list has a negative and significant coefficient ($p < 0.0001$) indicating that for one unit decrease in party list placement measured as a candidates' rank in the list from first to the successive positions, the log odds of twitter adoption (versus not having a twitter account) decreases by 0.04. However, we do not find a significant effect for incumbency, party leadership, opposition, ideology or representing urbanized areas such as Stockholm, Göteborg, and Malmö on twitter adoption.

We find evidence that politicians' use of Twitter varies. Over the 28 days of the campaign, the 228 candidates with Twitter accounts produced over 23,900 tweets and an average of 108.8 tweets per candidate (considering only those that had an account). Jan Ericson, candidate from the Moderate, was the candidate with the largest number of tweets with over 2,300 posts recorded in this period, followed by Tobias Billström ($N=1,178$), also from the Moderate party and Annika Strandhäll ($N=1,173$) from the Social Democrats. Among the top

five candidates most active in this platform there are two candidates from the Moderate party, one from the Social Democrats and two from the Left party, including the party leader from the Left Party, Jonas Sjöstedt.

Model 2 (Use) explores whether individual characteristics, career, party affiliation and district characteristics influence online campaigning. The model presents the output of a negative binomial regression where the dependent variable is total number of tweets by candidate. The results of the model indicate that the number of tweets was not significantly affected by a candidates' age or gender, incumbency, ideology or type of district. However, challenger candidates, that is candidates that were not in parliament during the legislative period prior to the election, were significantly more likely to tweet than incumbent candidates. The difference in the logs of expected tweets is expected to be 1.01 lower for incumbent candidates, while holding the other variables constant in the model. We also find that party leadership is close to statistical significance, indicating that party leaders were more likely to tweet than other party members.

Our data allows us to count the number of times the official Twitter username of a candidate (Twitter handle) was mentioned during the campaign. The candidates with Twitter account were mentioned over 350,000 times during the campaign that is an average of mentions of 1,549 times by candidate with a twitter account. Out of the five candidates with the highest number of mentions, we find four party leaders including the leaders of the Center Party, the Liberal party, the Left party and the Green party. Interestingly, Hanif Bali of the Moderate Party ranks second in terms of twitter popularity, which may have been influenced by his use of harsh rhetoric when commenting on current political events.

The third model (Mentions) presented in Table 1 explores the relationship between candidates' characteristics, their career, party affiliation and districts on the one side, and the number of mentions they had on Twitter on the other. In this model we control for the total number of tweets posted by a candidate as their activity online is likely to influence their visibility online. The model presents the results of a negative binomial regression, where the dependent variable is the total number of mentions. The coefficient for candidates' age is close to reaching statistical significance while is not significant. Furthermore, most factors associated with a candidate's political trajectory, party affiliation and district do not have an effect on their visibility online. However, we do find that party leader status increases significantly the chances of being mentioned on Twitter as the difference in logs of expected mentions is expected to be 3.8 higher for party leaders compared to other candidates while holding other variables constant in the model. Last, we observe significant and positive effect for the number of tweets that the candidate posted ($p < 0.001$ level) which shows that candidates can also influence their visibility online by being very active on Twitter during the campaign.

Table 1. Candidates' Adoption, Use and Mentions During the Campaign

	Model 1 <i>Adoption</i>	Model 2 <i>Use</i>	Model 3 <i>Mentions</i>
Age	-0.0438*** (-3.67)	0.00414 (0.23)	-0.0332+ (-1.78)
Female	0.275 (1.11)	-0.367 (-0.81)	-0.498 (-1.12)
Incumbent MP	0.0525 (0.19)	-1.010* (-2.15)	-0.142 (-0.34)
Position in Party List	-0.0490*** (-4.04)	0.00323 (0.09)	-0.0119 (-0.39)
Party Leader	0.625 (0.74)	1.947+ (1.71)	3.826*** (3.64)
Candidate Opposition Party	0.444 (1.29)	0.953 (1.54)	0.0244 (0.04)
Party Position Left-Right	0.0646 (0.80)	-0.188 (-1.36)	0.115 (0.89)
Urban District	-0.0343 (-0.11)	0.887 (1.64)	0.275 (0.54)
Total Number of Tweets			0.00792*** (5.09)
Constant	2.086** (3.06)	5.225*** (4.87)	4.877*** (4.08)
N	349	228	228

t statistics in parentheses

Sources: Own Data 2018, Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2017)

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Summarizing, in this section we show that a candidates' age – which reflects a generational digital divide – as well as their rank in the party lists are associated with the adoption of Twitter. Yet, the platform was particularly used by challenger candidates and party leaders to spread their campaign messages across. Last, party leaders received more mentions online, yet as our evidence shows, candidates could also increase their visibility online by increasing the number of messages they posted online.

In other words, we find that candidates' age, party leadership, a candidates' position in the list and the challenger status explains part of a candidate's decision to campaign online. In terms of the effectiveness of these strategies, we observe that party leaders received the most attention on Twitter, yet candidates could increase their visibility online by being active on the platform⁴.

4 We also run models including party dummies (Table included in the Appendix). The results do not change substantially when we control for party membership.

Now that we have established the factors that influence the likelihood of campaigning online, in the next section we examine the factors that influence the content of candidates' Tweets.

5. Candidate Social Media Messaging

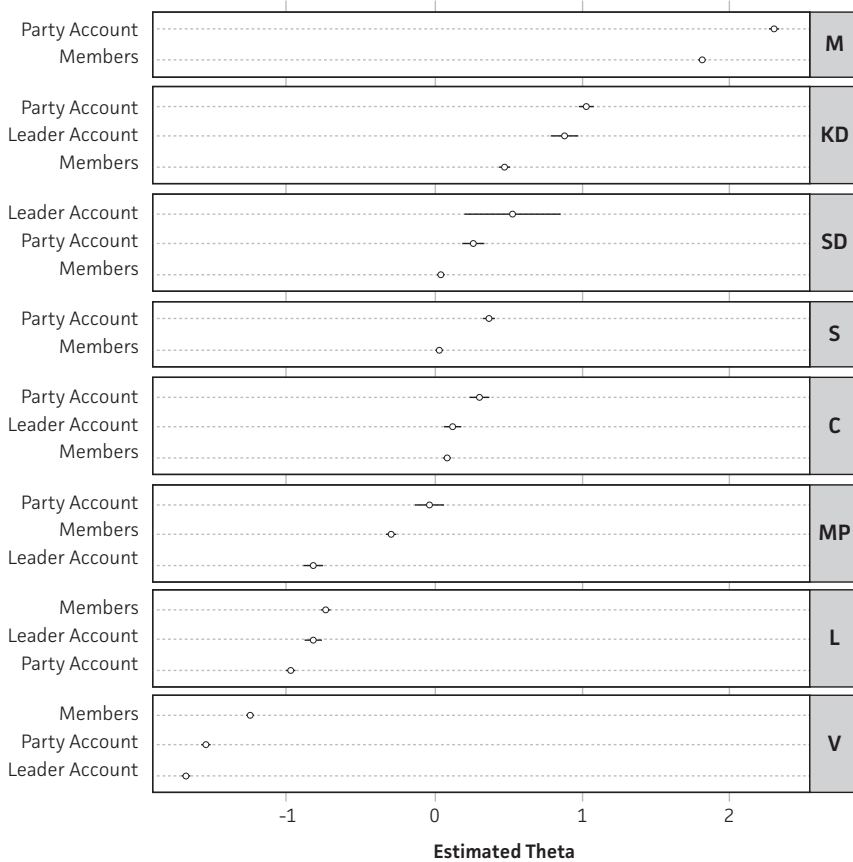
In this section, we examine how parties and elected candidates used social media by leveraging a variety of content analysis techniques to quantify their topical focus and strategies.

We first present the results of a naïve text analysis model that scales all tweets posted in the official party, leaders, and elected members accounts along a single ideological dimension. Wordfish is a unidimensional algorithm that assumes that the underlying texts have a single primary dimension along which they vary and estimates each text's position based on word frequencies. This algorithm has been used to great effect for identifying left/right positions of party speech in a variety of legislative settings (Slapin and Proksh 2008). The produced numbers are unitless and arbitrarily scaled (i.e. they are meaningful in comparison to each other, not in absolute terms). As such, we defined the direction of the scale such that the Christian Democrats were to the "right" of the Social Democrats to have an intuitive orientation. Figure 3 shows the results of this process, grouped by party and ordered from "right" (top) to "left" (bottom), with three different measures per party: the party leader (such as @BuschEbba, denoted by "Leader Account"), the official party Twitter account (such as @kdriks, denoted by "Party Account"), and the aggregate of the Twitter accounts of all members of the party (indicated by "Members").⁵

The dimension captured is clearly not precisely left to right in a traditional sense, since the Moderates are the furthest along one end of the dimension. However, other measures are intuitive. For instance, the Christian Democrats are essentially on the opposite end of the spectrum from the left wing Left party and the Greens. In addition, the Center Party is fittingly the exact center of the gradient. Yet, some interesting patterns emerge. First, in the case of five of the six parties with a party leader tweeting, the party leader's score is closest to the official party account, reflecting the leader driving the official party dialog. The exception to this is Isabella Lövin, who is significantly different from both the average Green Party member and the official feed itself. This may be reflective of the Green Party's usage of dual spokespeople (unfortunately the other, Gustav Fridolin, does not actively tweet).

5 The Moderates and Social Democrats do not have separate leader accounts in use, and thus only have the other two data points. In addition, we left off the Feminist party as they did not win any seats in the election.

Figure 3. Wordfish Positioning of Party, Leader, and Mean Party Member



The evidence presented above provided some empirical evidence across and within parties during the electoral campaign. Subsequently, we further examine these differences by applying an affinity model to our data. Affinity models are a supervised text classification model that takes as an input a set of texts that have been identified as belonging to different researcher-defined categories. The relative frequencies of words in the texts are used to create a statistical model of each category. These models can then be applied to other texts, classifying them into the modelled categories (Perry & Benoit 2017). We used the tweets from the accounts of parties and party leaders as training data for an affinity model such that each party was its own category, with its own training set ⁶.

We then applied the affinity model to the 2.8 million election-related tweets that we collected during the campaign, in order to classify to which party's

6 In order to test the accuracy of the affinity model, we used 50% of the over 7,000 tweets posted in the accounts of the parties and party leaders during the campaign and then applied to classify the remaining 50% of the data. When applied to the data, the model showed a 90% accuracy.

speech each tweet was closest. Table 2 shows the results of the affinity model. Overall, we see that there is great variation in the affinity between the tweets of the population and the different parties. We observe that there is greater affinity online with the Green party, the Sweden democrats and the Left party, that is with the parties that have the most extreme positions in the left-right spectrum. At the same time, we find evidence of less affinity with the Christian Democrats and the Moderate Party, while the Center, Feminist, Liberal and Social Democrats have similar scores of around 8 percent.

Furthermore, our evidence reveals important disparities between the vote shares of the parties and the affinities with voters. We find that compared to the percentages of the votes received, the Feminist, Green and Left parties score higher on affinity. This means that despite the actual support in terms of votes (together the three parties obtained around 12% of the votes), citizens reflected online concerns that were also raised by these parties, such as gender equality, the environment and income inequality. For instance, what we observe in relation to the relevance of the environment during the campaign may be explained by the fact that the Swedish election took place at the end of the summer after the country had experienced what is considered the hottest July in over 260 years, sparking heated debates over climate change and the environment. At the same time, it is also worth noting that there are lower affinity levels recorded for the two largest parties, the Social Democrats and the Moderate, which are parties that have broader political agendas. The affinity analysis provides some evidence of strategic voting behavior by citizens, in which there is strong sympathy for the restricted breadth of issues discussed by single-issue parties like the Greens and Feminists, while voters nonetheless cast votes for broader based parties.

Table 2. Affinity and Tweet Reach by Party

Party	Vote Share	Affinity	No of Tweets	Tweet Reach
Centerpartiet (Center)	8.61%	8.64%	38,308	2638
Feministerna (Feminist)	0.46%	7.29%	32,350	6374
Kdriks (Christian Democrats)	6.32%	3.69%	16,366	2641
Liberalerna (Liberal)	5.49%	7.73%	34,292	2496
Miljopartiet (Greens)	4.41%	27.60%	122,246	2932
nya moderaterna (Moderate)	19.84%	5.74%	25,453	2459
Sdriks (Sweden Democrats)	17.53%	16.87%	74,849	1546
Socialdemokrat (Social Democrats)	28.26%	8.26%	36,655	2126
Vansterpartiet (Left)	8.00%	14.18%	62,889	1856

In order to dig into what the patterns of discussion looked like, we developed keyword-based policy areas that allow to examine the political issues discussed during the Swedish electoral campaign. The comprehensive list of keywords by policy area are reported in the Appendix, but the categories examined are: defense, the environment, the elderly, gender, occupation, education, health-care, law, immigration and the economy.

Figure 4 shows the breakdown of how the population's Twitter activity compared to that of elected candidates during the weeks of the electoral campaign. These figures were arrived at by searching the entire Swedish language database of tweets in order to draw from an unbiased sample of Swedish social media activity. Elected candidates talk about these political topics in general at twice the rate of the population's general discussion, which is to be expected. Therefore, for comparative purposes we scale this discussion by the total number of political topic matches for each group of Twitter users. This allows us to evaluate whether the two groups discuss political topics at equivalent levels, when discussing political issues in the first place.

Looking at the data we observe significant differences in focus between the two groups. Elected candidates are far more likely to speak about environmental issues, healthcare and the state of economy while the population is more likely to speak about employment, law and order, immigration issues and national defense. We do observe, however, a greater level of congruence on topics that are not the most salient ones, like the elderly, gender, and education.

Figure 4. Topic Discussion by Elected Candidate vs. Population

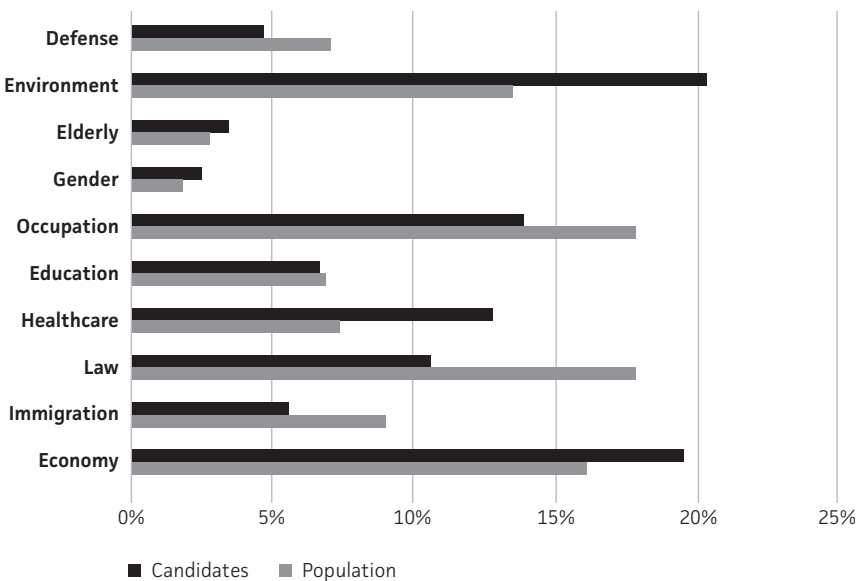


Table 3. Relationship Between Candidate Attributes and Frequency of Tweeting About Topics

	Dependent variable:									
	Defense (1)	Environment (2)	Elderly (3)	Gender (4)	Occupation (5)	Education (6)	Healthcare (7)	Law (8)	Immigration (9)	Economy (10)
Age	0.035*** (0.010)	-0.012 (0.010)	0.023** (0.010)	0.011 (0.011)	0.009 (0.006)	-0.008 (0.010)	0.015* (0.009)	-0.008 (0.006)	0.006 (0.007)	0.011* (0.006)
Female	0.062 (0.217)	0.831*** (0.221)	0.299 (0.202)	0.703*** (0.257)	0.073 (0.119)	0.348* (0.209)	0.445** (0.186)	0.120 (0.124)	0.131 (0.150)	0.241* (0.131)
Incumbent MP	0.239 (0.241)	0.223 (0.231)	0.515** (0.251)	-0.306 (0.263)	0.056 (0.132)	0.424* (0.228)	-0.132 (0.205)	0.190 (0.142)	0.629*** (0.177)	0.293* (0.150)
Position in Party List	-0.025 (0.022)	-0.121*** (0.041)	-0.008 (0.028)	-0.026 (0.028)	-0.041*** (0.015)	-0.026 (0.025)	-0.036* (0.019)	-0.014 (0.012)	-0.002 (0.014)	-0.025* (0.014)
Party Leader	-0.370 (0.466)	0.073 (0.501)	0.216 (0.397)	0.681* (0.405)	-0.239 (0.248)	0.526 (0.419)	0.179 (0.434)	-0.016 (0.267)	-0.248 (0.302)	-0.350 (0.306)
Candidate	0.148 (0.325)	0.153 (0.330)	-0.881*** (0.230)	0.139 (0.347)	-0.261 (0.165)	-0.399 (0.277)	-0.019 (0.264)	-0.190 (0.174)	0.408* (0.228)	0.072 (0.193)
Opposition Party	0.145** (0.065)	-0.023 (0.065)	-0.018 (0.047)	0.095 (0.068)	0.051 (0.034)	0.015 (0.058)	0.059 (0.057)	0.114*** (0.035)	0.094** (0.042)	0.037 (0.040)
Party Position Left-Right	0.151 (0.246)	0.511** (0.245)	0.049 (0.219)	-0.044 (0.271)	-0.230* (0.136)	0.089 (0.232)	-0.146 (0.223)	0.081 (0.137)	0.560*** (0.164)	-0.058 (0.155)
Urban District	-6.996*** (0.580)	-3.096*** (0.564)	-5.652*** (0.569)	-6.411*** (0.750)	-3.888*** (0.328)	-4.321*** (0.522)	-4.695*** (0.536)	-3.882*** (0.326)	-6.108*** (0.414)	-4.253*** (0.374)
Observations	349	349	349	349	349	349	349	349	349	349
Log Likelihood	-303.413	-440.968	-214.452	-187.102	-381.746	-285.003	-381.725	-376.242	-278.268	-422.905

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Sources: Own Data (2018), Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2017)

Table 4. Summary Table of Relationship Between Candidate Attributes and Topical Speech on Twitter

Variables	Defense	Environment	Elderly	Gender	Occupation	Education	Healthcare	Law	Immigration	Economy
Age	+		+				+			+
Female		+		+		+	+			+
Incumbent MP			+			+			+	+
Position in Party List		-			-		-			-
Party Leader				+						
Candidate Opposition Party					-	-			+	
Party Position Left-Right	+							+	+	
Urban District		+			-				+	

Finally, we examined how candidate attributes were associated with which topics they tweeted about. Table 3 shows the results of ten regression models, one for each of the primary topics of political discussion in Sweden, using as covariates candidate attributes.⁷ The dependent variables are the number of tweets posted in that category by a candidate. As this is count data, we use a negative binomial model, with the total number of tweets by each candidate as an exposure variable, and a zero-inflation step to account for the multidimensionality of excess zero values.⁸

Table 4 summarizes the results strictly in terms of the positive/negative statistically significant relationships between each topic's discussion and attributes of the candidates.

Exploring whether individual and the political trajectories of the candidates affect the topics that the candidates discussed online, we do not find clear patterns.

In terms of the individual characteristics we find that older candidates were more likely to show concern about national defense, elderly issues, healthcare and the economy, while female candidates expressed themselves on issues related to the environment, gender issues, education, healthcare and the state of the economy.

Incumbent candidates discussed the elderly, education, immigration, and the economy more than challengers. However, candidates that were ranked higher in the party lists – who were therefore more likely to be elected – discussed the environment, occupation, health care, and the economy to a higher extent than candidates in the lower ranks in the party lists. Party leaders were more likely to discuss gender issues than other candidates.

Party characteristics also affect the topics of the campaigns online. Being a candidate of opposition and the ideological stances of the parties affected the issues discussed online by individual candidates. As the models show, candidates from opposition parties were less likely to address elderly issues, occupation and education and more likely to discuss immigration than candidates of the governing parties. At the same time, candidates of parties in the right of the political spectrum were more likely to discuss about national defense, law and order and immigration than center-left and left-wing candidates. Lastly, our evidence shows that candidates from urban districts were more likely to

7 It is true that individual candidates belong to parties, and generally in regression analysis involving candidates' behavior in campaigns a multilevel approach is used. In our case however, we believe that a hierarchical model is theoretically invalid: we believe that the social media usage of individual candidates is independent from each other, even if correlated with each other along party lines as candidates are able to circumvent gatekeepers and directly communicate with citizens (see for example Jacobs and Spierings 2016). A hierarchical model is appropriate if the data points are not independent.

8 As with classic zero inflation examples, zeroes in the dependent variable here can be due either to the candidate not mentioning these terms in their tweets, or because they do not tweet at all.

talk about immigration and the environment and showed less concern about occupation than candidates from rural areas.

When taking into account which topics were more relevant for voters online (based on our data, the topics that were most mentioned online by citizens rank-order as follows: 1) occupation, 2) law and order, 3) economy, and 4) immigration) we observe that candidates' individual characteristics, party affiliation and district are more likely to explain the extent to which candidates aimed to campaign on these issues online.

To conclude, in this section we have presented the empirical examination of the topics on which the elected candidates campaigned. We have showed evidence on the position of candidates between and within parties, and in relation to the citizens. Furthermore, we have empirically tested what candidates' factors (individual, partisan, district) affect the choice of topics of their online campaigns. We find that candidates' attributes, party and the districts they represent do influence their choice to discuss specific topics.

6. Conclusion

The study aimed to assess candidates' online strategies during the 2018 Swedish electoral campaign. On the basis of 9.1 million tweets collected over the four weeks of the campaign for all 349 newly elected candidates to the Riksdag. We found that the majority of the elected candidates uses Twitter during the campaign. We observed that candidates' age and political career were related with the adoption and use of Twitter as an additional campaigning tool.

Moreover, using several text analysis techniques, we also explored potential factors that influence the topics mentioned by candidates in their tweets. Our evidence show that individual factors plays an important role on the topics addressed online, as much as partisan and district-related factors.

More generally, the findings of this study show that the ability of Swedish candidates to employ vote-maximize campaign strategies using Twitter may be constrained by candidates' own digital literacy (younger candidates use this tool to a greater extent). Furthermore, we show that individual and career attributes, and the characteristics of a candidates' party and districts affects the choices of topics candidates address in their campaigns online.

In contrast to previous studies conducted in the context of other national elections, we do not find that parties have a strong influence on whether and how Swedish candidates use social media during electoral campaigns as including party dummies yielded similar results than the ones presented in the main analysis.

Future research should focus on the effects of electoral competition and constituency socio-demographics on candidates' online strategies during campaigns.

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Appendix

Table A1. Keywords Used to Gather the Keyword-Based Data

Category	Keyword	Category	Keyword
Party leader	stefanlofven	Party leader	isabellalövin
Party leader	stefan lofven	Party leader	isabella lövin
Party leader	stefanloefven	Party leader	isabellalovin
Party leader	stefan loefven	Party leader	isabella lovin
Party leader	stefanlöfven	Party leader	gudrun schyman
Party leader	stefan löfven	Party leader	gudrunschyman
Party leader	annielöf	Party leader	gitanabavi
Party leader	annie löf	Party leader	gita nabavi
Party leader	annieloof	Debate	13 juni
Party leader	annie loof	Debate	13 juni 2018
Party leader	jimmieåkesson	Debate	29 augusti
Party leader	jimmie åkesson	Debate	29 augusti 2018
Party leader	jimmieakesson	Debate	7 september
Party leader	jimmie akesson	Debate	7 september 2018
Party leader	jonassjostedt	Debate	partiledardebatt
Party leader	jonas sjostedt	Debate	partiledardebatten
Party leader	jonassjostedt	Election	riksdagsval
Party leader	jonas sjostedt	Election	riksdagsval2018
Party leader	ulfkristersson	Election	val2018
Party leader	ulf kristersson	Election	valet2018
Party leader	janbjörklund	Election	svpol
Party leader	jan björklund	Election_date	9september
Party leader	janbjorklund	Election_date	9september2018
Party leader	jan bjorklund	Parties	socialdemokraterna
Party leader	ebbabuschthor	Parties	socialdemokrat
Party leader	ebba busch thor	Parties	centerpartiet
Party leader	gustavfridolin	Parties	kristdemokraterna
Party leader	gustav fridolin	Parties	kdriks

Category	Keyword
Parties	sverigedemokraterna
Parties	sdiiks
Parties	nyamoderaterna
Parties	nya moderaterna
Parties	moderaterna
Parties	liberalerna
Parties	vänsterpartiet
Parties	vansterpartiet
Parties	miljopartiet
Parties	miljöpartiet
Parties	feministerna
Parties	feministisktinitiativ
Parties	alliansen
Parties	rödgröna
Slogan	framåt
Slogan	framåt!
Slogan	likaföralla
Slogan	lika för alla
Slogan	klimatekkanintevänta
Slogan	Nu
Slogan	klimatek kan inte vänta
Slogan	ettsverigeföralla
Slogan	ett sverige för alla, inte bara de rikaste
Slogan	frihetmåsteförsvaras
Slogan	frihet måste försvaras
Slogan	försvara friheten
Slogan	förändringpåriktigt
Slogan	förändring på riktigt
Slogan	trygghet och tradition
Slogan	trygghetochtradition
Slogan	stoppavinstjakten
Slogan	Ett starkare samhälle. Ett tryggare Sverige
Slogan	För ett samhälle där alla tar ansvar
Slogan	välståndslöftet
Slogan	du ska kunna lita på sverige
Slogan	klartvikan
Slogan	klart vi kan

Category	Keyword
Newspaper	@dagensnyheter
Newspaper	@SvD
Newspaper	@Aftonbladet
Newspaper	@Expressen
Newspaper	@metrosverige
Newspaper	@sverigesradio

Table A2. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. dev.	Min.	Max.
Adoption	349	0.63	0.47	0	1
Number of Tweets	349	71.4	235.7	0	2306
Mentions	349	1012.1	6341.3	0	73741
Age	349	45.1	10.6	22	85
Female	349	0.46	0.49	0	1
Incumbent	349	0.69	0.46	0	1
Position in Party List	349	5.38	11.7	1	63
Opposition Party	349	0.66	0.47	0	1
Left-right Party Placement	349	5.7	2.12	1.7	7.7
Urban District	349	0.17	0.38	0	1
Defense	349	4.48	4.67	0	50
Environment	349	5.25	17.31	0	164
Elderly	349	0.97	3.97	0	46
Gender	349	0.59	2.21	0	26
Occupation	349	3.61	9.66	0	93
Education	349	1.39	4.1	0	36
Care	349	2.86	10.14	0	124
Law	349	3.39	8.53	0	67
Immigration	349	1.71	4.86	0	53
Economy	349	4.85	16.07	0	201

Sources: Own Data (2018), Chapell Hill Expert Survey (2017)

Table A3. Candidates' Adoption, Use and Mentions During the Campaign - With Party Dummies

	Model 1 <i>Adoption</i>	Model 2 <i>Use</i>	Model 3 <i>Mentions</i>
Age	-0.0474*** (-3.80)	0.00839 (0.45)	-0.0312 (-1.42)
Female	0.127 (0.49)	-0.579 (-1.16)	-0.550 (-1.21)
Incumbent MP	0.0805 (0.28)	-1.346** (-2.60)	0.0778 (0.17)
Position in Party List	-0.0330* (-2.49)	0.0167 (0.41)	-0.0174 (-0.51)
Party Leader	0.460 (0.53)	2.214+ (1.87)	3.596** (3.21)
Candidate Opposition Party	0.692+ (1.82)	1.245+ (1.91)	0.284 (0.47)
Party Position Left-Right	0.153 (1.33)	-0.0996 (-0.60)	0.0948 (0.57)
Urban District	-0.198 (-0.60)	0.728 (1.29)	0.418 (0.83)
total Number of Tweets			0.00754*** (4.83)
Constant	1.842* (2.40)	4.935*** (4.10) (19.67)	4.402*** (3.55) (19.25)
N	349	228	228

t statistics in parentheses, party dummies excluded from table

Sources: Own Data 2018, Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2017)

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A4. Categories of Discussion and Associated Keywords

Economy	Education	Environment
Ekonomi	Skola	Klimat
Skatt	Friskola	Miljö
Inkomst	Segregation	Utsläpp
Tillväxt	Betyg	Flyg
	Skolval	Bil
Immigration	Occupation	Defence
Invandring	Sysselsättning	Försvar
Flykting	Jobb	Nato
Integration	Arbetslös	Hot
Asyl	Arbete	Militär
Nyanlända		Säkerhet
Arbetskraft		
Law and order	Gender equality	
Lag	Jämställdhet	
Ordning	Samtyckeslag	
Brott	Kvotering	
Straff	Föräldraförsäkring	
Kriminalitet	Me too	
Trygghet		
Health care	Elderly issues	
Vård	Äldreomsorg	
Omsorg	Pension	
Kömiljard	Garantipension	
Vinster	Premiepension	
Sjukvård		

Figure A1. Public Discussion of Political Topics Over Time

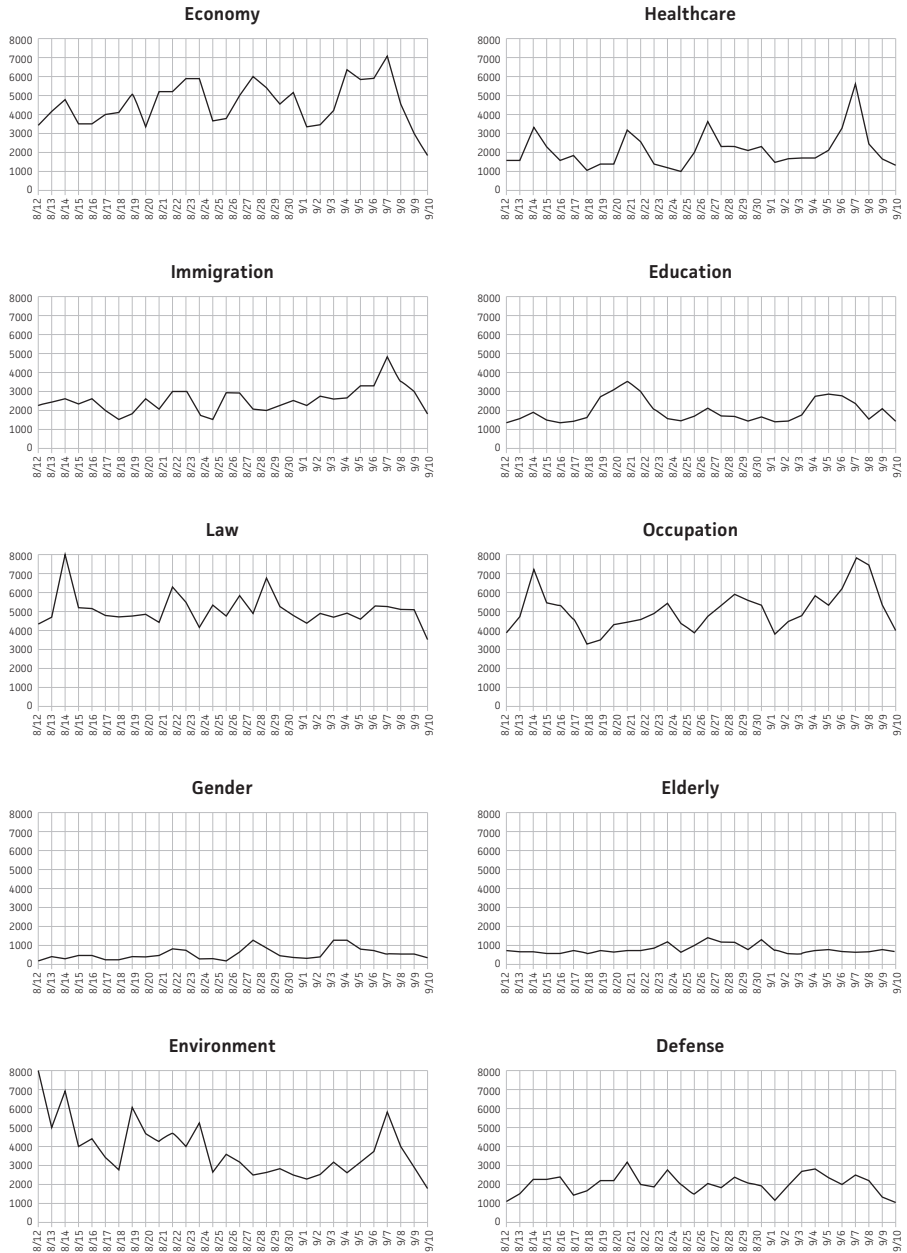


Table A5. Relationship Between Candidate Attributes and Frequency of Tweeting About Topics with Party-Dummies (dummy coefficients not shown)

	Dependent variable:									
	Defense (1)	Environment (2)	Elderly (3)	Gender (4)	Occupation (5)	Education (6)	Healthcare (7)	Law (8)	Immigration (9)	Economy (10)
Age	0.029*** (0.010)	-0.010 (0.009)	0.012 (0.010)	0.010 (0.009)	0.002 (0.005)	-0.014* (0.008)	0.010 (0.007)	-0.008 (0.006)	0.007 (0.007)	0.006 (0.006)
Female	-0.068 (0.223)	0.564*** (0.210)	0.149 (0.192)	0.883*** (0.169)	0.040 (0.112)	0.251 (0.172)	0.535*** (0.165)	0.029 (0.123)	0.046 (0.149)	0.007 (0.123)
Incumbent MP	0.178 (0.234)	0.574*** (0.222)	0.360 (0.242)	-0.055 (0.204)	0.045 (0.124)	0.100 (0.195)	0.016 (0.184)	0.087 (0.137)	0.515*** (0.177)	0.128 (0.137)
Position in Party List	-0.020 (0.023)	-0.051* (0.030)	-0.012 (0.032)	-0.017 (0.025)	-0.024 (0.016)	-0.020 (0.024)	-0.010 (0.019)	-0.015 (0.012)	0.001 (0.013)	-0.008 (0.014)
Party Leader	-0.047 (0.459)	0.011 (0.442)	0.580 (0.382)	0.582** (0.241)	-0.257 (0.224)	0.356 (0.342)	-0.039 (0.364)	0.163 (0.258)	-0.262 (0.297)	-0.115 (0.265)
Urban District	0.156 (0.242)	0.315 (0.222)	0.007 (0.209)	0.196 (0.208)	-0.326*** (0.124)	-0.061 (0.187)	-0.005 (0.183)	0.035 (0.133)	0.443*** (0.157)	-0.205 (0.137)
Constant	-5.994*** (0.537)	-4.382*** (0.520)	-4.940*** (0.530)	-6.209*** (0.520)	-3.291*** (0.283)	-3.482*** (0.417)	-4.259*** (0.389)	-3.305*** (0.301)	-5.799*** (0.374)	-3.536*** (0.308)
Observations	349	349	349	349	349	349	349	349	349	349
Log Likelihood	-294.261	-413.648	-197.858	-163.828	-363.200	-254.823	-349.211	-367.801	-266.408	-394.146

*p<0.1, **p<0.05, ***p<0.01

Sources: Own Data (2018), Chapel Hill Expert Survey (2017)

Party Communication and Public Opinion on Asylum in Sweden

Alexandra Feddersen

Abstract

This study analyzes the influence of party communication on Swedish voters' opinion on asylum, in a time when Swedish parties increasingly communicate on the migration issue, and heavily shift their positions. Combining data on voters drawn from the 2014–2018 panel of the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) with a large corpus of party press releases collected to measure party communication, this paper analyzes how Swedish voters' positions on asylum have changed between the last and the current election. We find a partisan cueing effect, whereby voters take cues from their preferred party. The study of partisan cueing effects and parties' role in the polarization of public opinion has important implications for the study of mass-elite linkages, as well as for future party strategies towards the migration issue.

Introduction¹

All across Europe, the migration issue² has become a crucial part of the political debate. While Sweden was the “odd case out” until very recently, with its mainstream political parties rather hesitant to engage in the migration debate (Odmalm 2011), the two recent election campaigns show that Sweden is not that much of an exception any longer. Not only has migration moved up on the agendas of several parties. Some political parties also shifted their attitudes. Most notably, the governing Social Democratic party (Socialdemokraterna) and

1 Acknowledgements: I am thankful to Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson, Jesper Strömbäck, Nora Theorin, James Adams, as well as the other contributors of this special issue and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on previous versions of this paper.

2 The broad term “migration” is used to designate all issues pertaining to asylum, immigration and integration. Debates in these sub-issues are strongly linked.

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the Green party (Miljöpartiet) went from a relatively liberal position on asylum policy toward advocating more restrictions (Strömbäck & Theorin 2018).

The overall importance of the issue has risen among voters as well (Oscarsson & Bergström 2015). On average, attitudes toward migration remain quite positive in the Swedish population during the last years (Strömbäck & Theorin 2018). However, several studies notice an increasing polarization according to party lines (Bergström et al. 2015; Bové & Oscarsson 2017; Demker 2015).

The question thus arises whether the shifting communication behavior of Swedish parties affects voters' attitudes toward migrants, and refugees more specifically.

Previous studies have shown, on the one hand, that partisan messages prompt voters to update their opinions (Carsey & Layman 2006; Feddersen & Adams 2018; Steenbergen et al. 2007; Zaller 1994). On the other hand, voters have been shown to shift their positions to be contrary to the stated positions of parties they dislike (Bischof & Wagner 2019; Feddersen & Adams 2018; Goren et al. 2009; Nicholson 2012; Zakharova & Warwick 2014).

Drawing on the 2014–2018 panel of the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) and a large corpus of party press releases collected between 2014 and 2018 to measure party communication, this paper analyzes the influence of party policy cues on Swedish voters' attitudes toward refugees. Below, the choice of issue area will be explained, and the recent migration debates in contemporary Swedish politics will be revisited. First, however, testable hypotheses about public responses to party press releases are developed in the next section.

Partisan Cueing and Backlash Effects: Hypotheses

Parties try to persuade voters. This basic expectation derives from parties' ambition to win elections, hold office and/or implement their policies (Ström 1990). However, scholars of mass-elite linkages have given very different accounts of how successful parties – or, more generally, elites – are at influencing citizens' policy positions. While the research on citizens' *policy priorities* finds encouraging results regarding parties' ability to influence public opinion, results are more mixed regarding the effects of party communication on citizens' *policy positions*.

The study by Neundorf and Adams (2018) looks at voters' policy priorities in Germany and the UK. The authors show that voters' issue priorities are influenced by their party attachment, and can be reinforced if parties emphasize these issues in their communication. In an experimental design, Hayes (2008) finds only weak evidence that candidates' messages on specific issues influence voter priorities. However, when the media coverage reflects a candidate's

campaign agenda, the agenda-setting effect can be considerable. Similarly, political communication scholars are almost unanimous about the agenda-setting effect of political news content on public opinion (e.g., Iyengar & Kinder 1987; Iyengar & Simon 1993; McCombs 2004; Soroka 2002; Walgrave & Van Aelst 2006).

In contrast, studies on parties' influence on citizens' policy positions find rather inconsistent evidence that citizens respond to parties. While scholars document that political parties adjust their positions on the left-right axis in response to public opinion (see e.g., Adams et al. 2004; Ezrow et al. 2011), studies focusing on parties' statements on the left-right axis only find weak effects of parties' influence on public opinion (for a review of this literature see Adams 2012). Most of these cross-national studies of public reactions to parties' policy statements rely on the codings of parties' overall left-right tone in their election manifestos, provided by the Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2017). According to these studies, citizens do not seem to update their perceptions of parties' positions, nor their own left-right position in response to parties' stated positions in their election manifestos. These results call into question whether parties can efficiently communicate their message to the public. Furthermore, they stand in contrast to the results of the research on public opinion, which shows the role of partisan messages in creating ideological opinion (Zaller 1992). Zaller (1994: 186) finds that, when political elites are divided, politically attentive citizens align their opinion "[. . .] with that segment of the elite which shares their party or ideology". This has led scholars of political parties to expand their analyses to consider other sources of party communication and to focus on more specific issue areas. Carsey & Layman (2006) study public responses to parties' positions on specific issues measured via voter perceptions in the U.S. They find that citizens only change their issue-related party preference if they are aware of party differences on an issue and consider that issue to be salient. Steenbergen et al. (2007) conduct an analysis on the very salient issue of European integration. In their study of the 2005 French and Dutch referendum campaigns on European integration, the authors find that parties both respond to and influence their supporters' views on this issue³. Their measure of party positions relies on the expert judgments provided by the Chapel Hill expert survey (Bakker et al. 2015). Similarly, Feddersen and Adams (2018) find that Swiss citizens' opinions on the migration issue are influenced by parties' positions as expressed in their press releases. The authors show that citizens take cues from their preferred party.

These latter studies thus document consistent policy cueing effects whereby citizens who prefer a certain party tend to take policy cues from this party,

3 Even though this paper focuses on parties' influence on voters' perceptions, it is likely that there is in fact a reciprocal effect between parties and citizens.

updating their own issue positions to bring them in line with their party's preferred position. This research motivates the following hypothesis on partisan cueing effects:

H1 (Partisan cueing hypothesis) Voters shift their issue position to be in line with their preferred party's position.

While voters are expected to shift their position in the same direction as their preferred party's position, it is unclear how they react to parties they dislike. Studies on negative partisanship in the Anglo-American democracies show that voters have negative feelings toward parties other than their own (e.g., Medeiros & Noël 2014; Abramowitz 2015; Caruana et al. 2015; Abramowitz & Webster 2016). In the U.S. context, this means that Democratic (Republican) voters distrust the Republican (Democratic) party and perceive its voters as very different from themselves (Mason 2015). Furthermore, the findings by Zakharova and Warwick (2014) indicate that voters differentiate parties other than their own according to their ideology. They show that voters in Western democracies evaluate parties on the opposite side of the left-right axis more negatively than parties on the same side of the left-right axis. These negative evaluations of rival parties have been shown to prompt voters to update their positions to be contrary to the ones stated by parties they dislike. Bischof and Wagner (2019) show that voters, who are situated on the left of the left-right axis, move further to the left when radical right parties enter parliament. Experiments by Goren et al. (2009) and Nicholson (2012) in the U.S. context find that Democratic supporters adjust their position to be contrary to policy statements labeled as Republican (and vice versa). According to Nicholson (2012), this effect might influence voters more strongly than the messages of their preferred party. In their study on Swiss citizens' opinion on the migration issue, Feddersen and Adams (2018) not only find partisan cueing effects, but also partisan backlash effects, whereby respondents adjust their issue positions to move away from parties they do not support. They find that backlash effects are especially strong with respect to out-parties whose ideologies clash with that of the preferred party, i.e., that partisans of left-wing parties will be especially hostile to the policies defended by right-wing parties, and vice versa. Citizens thus seem to reject messages that are inconsistent with their predispositions, a finding that resonates well with the research on public opinion formation by Zaller (1992). These findings motivate the following hypothesis on partisan backlash effects:

H2 (Partisan backlash hypothesis) Voters shift their issue position to be contrary to the positions of parties they dislike.

Before presenting the data, the following section revisits the recent developments of the migration debate in Sweden.

The Migration Debate in Sweden

Studying Swedish parties' communication on the migration issue and its influence on public opinion is an interesting case in European comparison. For a very long time, Sweden was the "odd case out" in terms of parties engaging on the migration issue (Odmalm 2011). Dahlström and Esaiasson (2013) notice an absence of anti-migration party success during the period of their analysis (1970 to 2006). Partly because of a lack of consensus and partly because anti-migration parties did not represent a credible electoral threat, the mainstream political parties were rather hesitant to engage in the migration issue, adopting a dismissive strategy toward this issue and radical right competitors (Dahlström & Esaiasson 2013; Odmalm 2011; Widfeldt 2015). Despite high party system fragmentation, the Swedish mainstream was, until very recently, divided into two blocs. On the one hand, the center-left bloc, which has been in government since 2014, is composed by the Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterna, S; 28.3% of the votes in 2018) and the Green Party (Miljöpartiet, MP; 4.4% of the votes), which is the junior coalition partner of the current government. On the other hand, the center-right "alliance" was composed by the Moderates (Moderaterna, M; 19.8% of the votes), the Liberals (Liberalerna, L; 5.5% of the votes)⁴, the Center (Centerpartiet, C; 8.6% of the votes) and the Christian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna, KD; 6.3% of the votes). Outside of these two blocs, we find the Left Party (Vänsterpartiet, V; 8.0% of the votes) on the left, and the anti-migration Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD; 17.5% of the votes) on the right of the political left-right axis. Mainstream parties are divided on the migration issue, both internally and among them (Odmalm 2011; Widfeldt 2015), while the Sweden Democrats hold a clear anti-migration position, which differs from all other parties (Widfeldt 2015). Party polarization increases since the early 2000s, especially in the field of asylum policy (Demker 2015). The two recent election campaigns show that Sweden is not that much of an exception any longer. Not only has migration moved up on the agendas of several parties. Some political parties also dramatically shifted their attitudes. Most notably, the governing Social democratic party and the Green party have moved from a relatively liberal position in asylum policy toward advocating more restrictions (Strömbäck & Theorin 2018). Other scholars also report a growing salience of this issue in the media, as well as an increasingly negative tone toward migration (Strömbäck et al. 2017; Bolin et al. 2016).

The overall importance of the issue has risen among voters as well (Oscarsson & Bergström 2015). On average, attitudes toward migration remain quite positive in the Swedish population during the last years (Demker 2015; Strömbäck & Theorin 2018). However, several studies notice an increasing polarization according to party lines (Bergström et al. 2015; Bové & Oscarsson

4 Formerly known as People's Party (Folkpartiet, FP) until November 25, 2015.

2017; Demker 2015). Demker (2015) reports that Swedish voters' opinions on migration is mostly driven by their party sympathy, their level of education, as well as age and sex.

In sum, in the course of a very restricted time period, Sweden has moved from a rather exceptional case in European comparison to a more "normal" one, where parties increasingly address the migration issue and have (for some) drastically changed their position on this issue. In this context, where parties decided to shift their previous strategies, it thus seems crucial to learn about parties' ability to influence public opinion, and to understand the consequences of this change of strategy toward the migration issue.

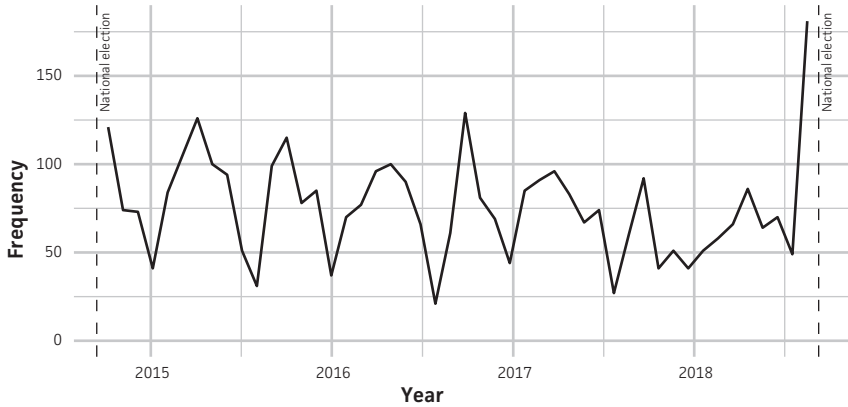
The next section shows how the previously formulated expectations are empirically measured in the Swedish context.

Data and Methods

This study draws upon two datasets. In order to measure party communication, a novel dataset is created based on political parties' press releases published between 2014 and 2018. The data on public opinion comes from the 2014–2018 panel of the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES). As the next section will empirically show, most Swedish parties shifted the emphasis of the migration issue in their communication and quite dramatically changed their position on this issue in between these two elections.

MEASURING PARTIES' EMPHASIS AND POSITION

Political parties' emphasis of the migration issue, as well as the position they adopt on this issue, is measured via content analysis of their press releases. The coding of press releases provides a rhetoric-based estimate of parties' emphasis and positions, which presents many advantages over other data sources. Firstly, studying parties' emphases and positions via their press releases allows for a *continuous* measure of party communication. Unlike other widely used sources such as party manifestos, which are published only at the time of elections, measuring parties' communication via their press releases allows for a better understanding of parties' strategies in between elections as well. Secondly, press releases come directly from the party and reflect its official priorities and positions. It does not contain an additional filter added by a third party, as would be the case for data derived from newspaper articles or other media sources. Finally, since press releases convey parties' official messages, parties and candidates have been shown to make their press releases easily available to the general public (Grimmer 2013).

Figure 1. Press Releases by Major Swedish Parties 2014–2018, *N*

In Sweden, parties publish their press releases either on their own website or via press agencies like *news cision* or *my newsdesk*. Table A1 in the Appendix lists the online availability and sources of parties' press releases in Sweden over the last 10 years. In order to match the party data to the voter data, as well as for reasons of availability, the corpus of press releases used in this study spans from election day 2014 (September 14, 2014) until election day 2018 (September 9, 2018). It contains a total of 3723 press releases published by the 8 major national parties in Sweden⁵. Press releases were gathered through web scraping using R's XML (Lang & the CRAN team 2017) and RCurl (Lang & the CRAN team 2016) packages. Figure 1 shows the monthly distribution of the total number of press releases published by Swedish parties. Without surprise, parties' communication peaks during election campaigns.

All special characters were standardized⁶ in order to allow for a keyword search to identify press releases about migration. The dictionary for the keyword search contains words relevant to the migration issue⁷. Table A2 in the Appendix shows how many press releases of each party are in the corpus, and how many of them pertain to the migration issue.

The position toward the migration issue is coded manually by one single coder in all press releases identified as relevant to this issue⁸. A distinction is

5 This corpus can be considered to be exhaustive, since, as already mentioned, parties make their press releases easily available to the general public. Furthermore, when contacted and asked about the availability of the press releases, all parties refer to their websites or press agencies.

6 ä to ae; ö to oe; å to aa, é to ee

7 The complete list of Swedish keywords is the following: asyl*, aalderstest*, aatervandr*, burka, ensamkommand*, flykt*, fraemlingsfientli*, heders*, hijab*, IS, islam*, imam*, integr*, invandr*, migra*, moskee*, minaret*, muslim*, maangkultur*, niqab*, nyanlaend*, nytillkom*, rasis*, SFI, segreg*, terror*, *vaaldtaekt*. Since the debates in all sub-issues of the wider migration issue are linked, they are all expected to influence voters' attitudes on asylum.

8 At the same time, the coder verified whether the press release was correctly identified as pertaining to the migration issue.

made between negative (restrictive), positive (liberal) and neutral statements. A value of -1 means a negative or restrictive position. Press releases calling for a more severe control over immigration or increased demands on migrants are coded as negative. For example, the Sweden Democrats (SD) published a press release on May 31st 2016, which reads:

The Young Swedes SDU launch a campaign against multiculturalism

The Young Swedes are concerned about our society's destructive development and have therefore initiated a campaign against multiculturalism. The main purpose is to wash away the positive connotation this word has in some circles. There is no doubt about the fact that our society has changed fundamentally and that the situation is worst in the multicultural suburbs, where many immigrants live. In these areas, which are becoming more and more, the vital foundations for the Swedish commonwealth have given way to criminal gangs and juvenile thugs [...]⁹.

Positive or liberal statements, such as press releases calling for fewer demands on migrants, more rights for migrants or solidarity with migrants, are coded 1. For example, the Green party (MP) released a press release on March 3 2016, reading:

Press invitation: Sweden grows – how do we create a welcoming labor market for newcomers?

The many new newcomers constitute a potential for the Swedish economy to grow. But how do we create a welcoming labor market? What opportunities and challenges do businesses see? [...]¹⁰.

A value of 0 designates a neutral position, which defends the status quo. Table A3 in the Appendix show each party's mean position and standard deviation on the migration issue. The high values for the standard deviation indicate the great volatility of most parties' positions on this issue during this period.

In order to validate the estimates of party rhetoric obtained on the basis of the press releases, we tested the coding reliability, as well as the external validity of the coding.

Since the coding was conducted by one single coder, an intra-coder reliability test is applied using a randomly selected sample of 192 press releases of the full corpus, which were coded a second time. The coding of the subsample was carried out at a 2-months time interval of the coding of the full corpus. Table A4 in the Appendix reports percentage agreement and Cohen's Kappa for both

9 "Ungsvenskarna SDU lanserar kampanj mot maangkultur. Ungsvenskarna tar den destruktiva samhallsutvecklingen paa allvar och har daerfoer inlett en kampanj mot maangkultur. Syftet aer att foersoeka tvaetta bort den positiva klang begreppet har i vissa kretsar. Att vaart samhaelle har foeraendrads i grunden raader det inga tvivel om och vaerst aer situationen i de invandrartaeta maangkulturella foerorterna. I dessa omraaden, som blir allt fler, har vitala fundament foer det svenska samhaellet gett vika till foerman foer kriminella gaeng och ungdomsligister."

10 "De maanga nyanlaenda utgoer en potential foer den svenska ekonomin att vaexa. Men hur skapar vi en vaelkomnande arbetsmarknad? Vilka moejligheter och utmaningar ser foeretagen?"

the issue of the press release (migration or not) and the position of the press release if it pertains to migration. Both measures indicate a satisfactory level of agreement between codings.

In addition, the external validity was tested by comparing the positions obtained for each party to the codings of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) (Volkens et al. 2017). Tables A5 and A6 in the Appendix report the correlations between (1) the party emphases of the migration issue (table A5), as well as (2) the party positions (table A6) based on parties' press releases from 2014 and the CMP codings of the Swedish manifestos published before the 2014 national election¹¹. The tables display the correlations with parties' coded emphases and positions on Immigration, as well as Multiculturalism and National Way of Life¹². These correlations are all above 0.7¹³, which means that the codings of parties' emphases and positions on the migration issue based on their press releases corresponds to the emphases and positions expressed in their manifestos. As a consequence, we are confident that our estimates of party emphasis and position based on the press releases are accurate.

The final dataset contains 3723 press releases, 556 of which pertaining to the migration issue, published by the eight main Swedish parties between September 2014 and September 2018.

MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

The data on public opinion comes from a subsample of the 2014–2018 panel of the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES)¹⁴. The subsample contains 1124 citizens with valid demographic information (age and gender), which were interviewed both in the 2014 and the 2018 Swedish post-electoral studies. The dependent variable measures citizens' positions on asylum and is based on a question on citizens' attitudes toward refugees¹⁵ on a 5-point-scale rang-

11 The data based on the 2014 election manifestos is the latest available CMP data.

12 The CMP Immigration categories are per602_2 (positive) and per601_2 (negative), the Multiculturalism categories are per607 (positive) and per608 (negative), and the National Way of Life categories are per601 (positive) and per602 (negative). Party emphasis measures based on the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) codings were calculated by adding the negative item(s) and the positive item(s). Party position measures were calculated by subtracting the negative item(s) from the positive item(s) (except for the National Way of Life categories, where the negative category was subtracted from the positive category, and dividing the result by the total of both categories. For the same procedure see Abou-Chadi (2014).

13 The only exception is the correlation between the measure of parties' emphases of the migration issue based on their press releases and the measure of parties' emphases of Immigration in their manifesto. This is not very surprising, since immigration only represents a subcategory or the migration issue as defined in this paper.

14 At the time of the publication of this Special Issue, only a subsample of the panel was available, limiting the choice of indicators and control variables. For more detail see <https://valforskning.pol.gu.se>.

15 The exact question reads: Here are a number of suggestions that apply to Sweden's relationship with other countries. What is your opinion of each of them? receive fewer refugees in Sweden ("Här är ett antal förslag som gäller Sveriges förhållande till andra länder. Vilken är Din åsikt för vart och ett av dem? . . . B. ta emot färre flyktingar i Sverige").

ing from “very good suggestion” to “very bad suggestion”¹⁶. 543 respondents have valid answers to this question both in 2014 and 2018, 36.1% of which kept the same position between 2014 and 2018. 51.6% of respondents shifted toward a more restrictive attitude toward refugees between the two national elections, while 12.3% defend a more positive position in 2018 than what they did in 2014.

Respondents’ party preference is measured via their party choice in the 2014 national election. Adding respondents’ answers regarding their interest in politics in 2014 as a control variable, this leaves 488 citizens who responded to all relevant questions.

ASSESSING THE INFLUENCE OF PARTIES’ COMMUNICATION ON PUBLIC OPINION

Datasets are matched using the respondents’ party preference in 2014. Each respondent’s preferred party’s mean position is calculated based on the party’s press releases published between the 2014 and the 2018 national elections. Additionally, two variables measure rival parties’ mean positions. Each respondent is assigned a variable, which indicates the mean position of parties in the same bloc (center-left or center-right) as the respondent’s preferred party, as well as another one calculating the mean position of parties in the opposite bloc. For voters of the Left party, the variable indicating the mean position of parties on the same bloc measures center-left parties’ mean position, while the variable specifying the mean position of parties on the opposite bloc measures the mean position of parties in the center-right “alliance”. For voters of the right-leaning Sweden Democrats, these variables are reversed. As will be shown in a robustness check presented below, excluding these voters from the analysis does not alter the results.

The resulting data structure and the nature of the dependent variable call for a linear mixed effects model, where respondents are nested in their preferred parties. The full model evaluates the effects of a respondent’s lagged position (in 2014), his or her preferred party’s position between 2014 and 2018, the mean position of parties in the same party bloc than his or her preferred party, the mean position of parties in the opposite party bloc than his or her preferred party, as well as his or her interest for politics, age, and gender on his or her current position toward refugees (in 2018).

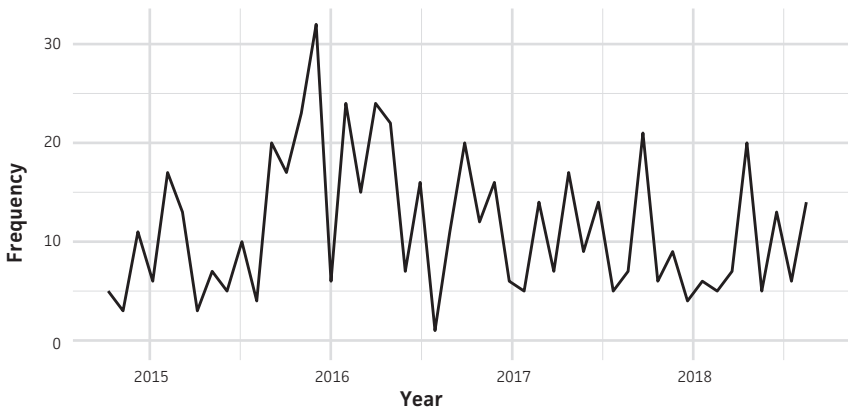
The next section shows the results of these calculations after offering some dynamic descriptions of the evolution of Swedish parties’ emphases of the migration issue and positions on the migration issue between 2014 and 2018.

16 (“mycket bra förslag” – “mycket dåligt förslag”)

Results

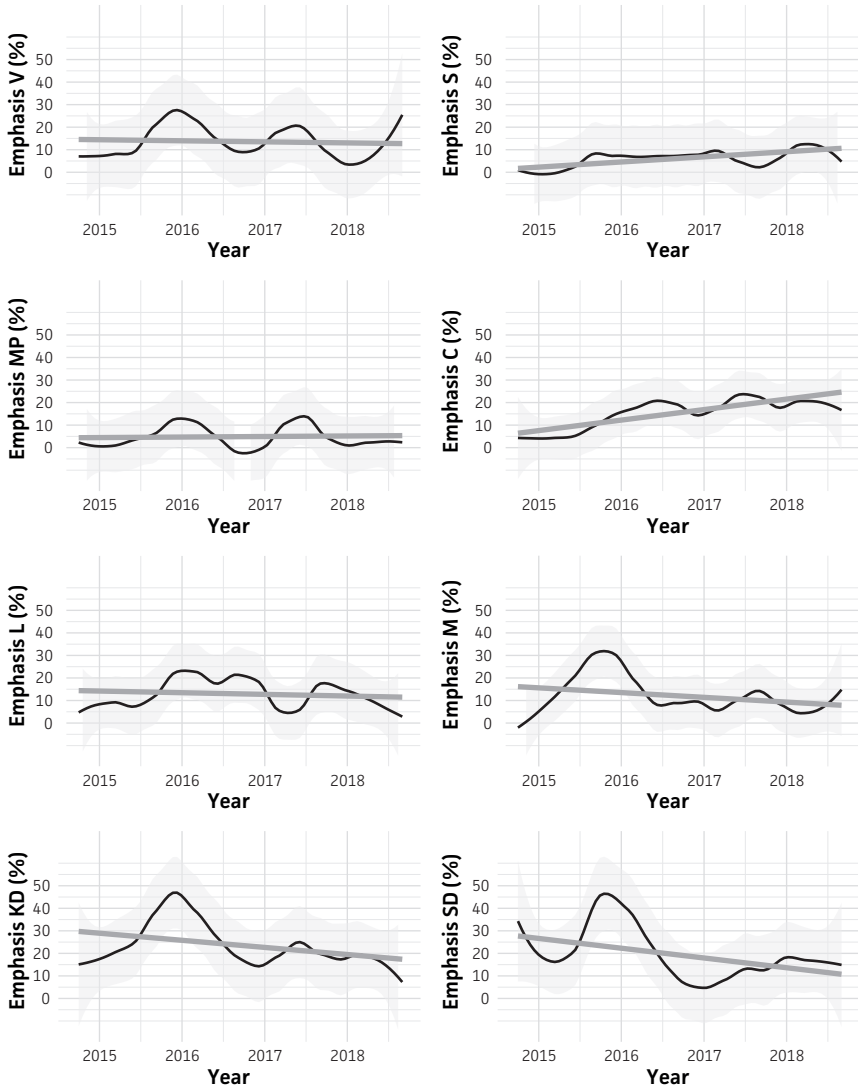
The result section is divided into two main parts. First, the results regarding parties' communication on the migration issue are presented. The findings are in line with previous studies, showing an increase in the overall attention parties devote to the migration issue, as well as a position change for several parties over the studied period of time. The second section looks at the effects of party messages on voters' position shifts toward refugees.

Figure 2. Press Releases About the Migration Issue by Major Swedish parties 2014–2018, *N*



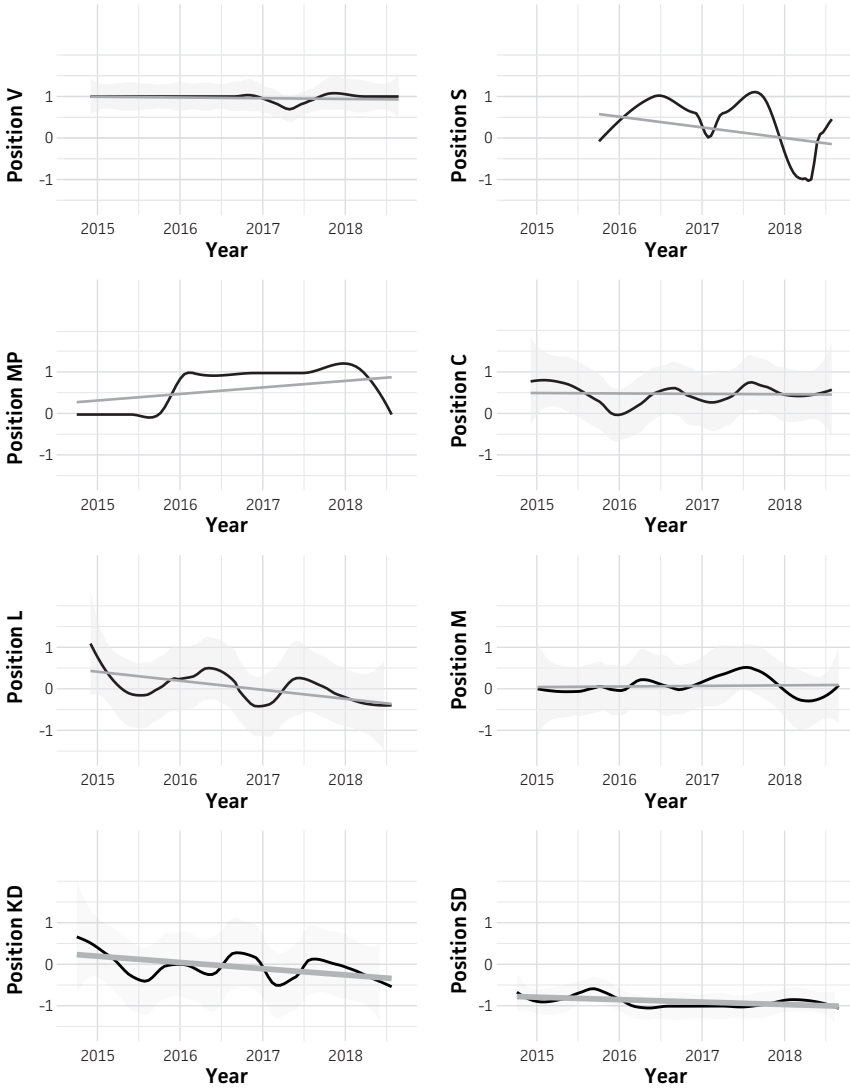
Swedish parties' attention to the migration issue since 2014 has been punctuated by different events. Figure 2 shows the evolution of the number of press releases Swedish parties publish monthly about the migration issue. The event, which mostly sticks out, is the aftermath of the 2014 national election campaign, during which migration was salient (mostly for right-of-center parties). The second most important event was the center-left government's historic decision to heavily reduce the number of refugees admitted into the country during the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. During an emotional press conference on November 24, 2015, the Social democratic and Green parties announced their radical policy shift.

Figure 3. Swedish Parties' Emphasis of the Migration Issue 2014–2018, % (share of total press releases per month)



In order to understand how much importance parties attribute to the migration issue, we need to know how much parties emphasize the migration issue *in relation* to their overall communication. Turning to the results in figure 3, which displays a party's emphasis of the migration issue as the share of the total amount of press releases a party publishes monthly, we first notice that far from all parties have increased their emphasis of the migration issue between 2014 and 2018 (The solid grey lines show the general average trends). This result is not completely in line with the studies cited above, which find that the migration issue has moved up on the agendas of several parties. However, most of these studies look at the evolution of parties' emphasis of the migration issue starting before the time period analyzed here, which could explain differing results. Indeed, most parties' emphases of the migration issue peak in late 2015, and diminishes toward the end of the period, which means that parties might indeed talk about more about migration between 2014 and 2018 than before 2014, but might experience a "downwards" trend during this period (i.e. after late 2015). Although punctuated by several political events, the governing Social Democrats (S) increasingly talk about migration. However, this issue still represents a rather small proportion of their communication via press releases. On the center-right, the Center party (C) increasingly emphasizes the migration issue. The Moderates (M) and the Christian Democrats (KD) register notable increases at the beginning of the studied period. The Christian Democrats even match up to the emphasis of the anti-migration Sweden Democrats (SD) during this period, before decreasing their emphasis of the issue toward the end. Interestingly, the Sweden Democrats do not contribute to this trend. On the contrary, their relative emphasis of the migration issue has slightly decreased since 2016.

Figure 4. Swedish Parties Position on Migration Issue 2014–2018 (mean of press releases per month)



Turning to the Swedish parties' positions on the migration issue (Figure 4), it can be noticed that the two pole parties, the Sweden Democrats and the Left party, hold quite constant and opposite positions from 2014 to 2018. Mainstream parties' positions, on the other hand, fluctuate during the entire period under study. Most impressively, the governing Social Democrats (S) take an important turn toward a more restrictive position, the first time at the end of 2015, when they announce their asylum policy shift, and a second time in 2018, for a second policy shift. While all center-right parties defend liberal migration policies at the beginning of the period under study, a trend toward more restrictive positions can be detected on this side of the left-right divide as well. The Liberal party (L) and the Christian Democrats (KD) defend increasingly negative positions. For the Christian Democrats, this trend was probably set in motion after the leadership change from Göran Hägglund to Ebba Busch Thor on April 25, 2015, with the subsequent decision to leave the "Decemberöverenskommelse", an agreement of all center-right parties not to collaborate with the Sweden Democrats. For all parties on the center-right, the tone becomes increasingly negative until the government's policy shift on November 24, 2015. After this date, the Center party (C) slowly goes back toward a more positive attitude. The Moderates' (M) position fluctuates around a rather neutral position. The observed trends partly confirm the results from previous studies, which report that several Swedish parties shifted their position on the migration issue during recent years (e.g., Strömbäck & Theorin 2018). These shifts might not leave voters unaffected.

PARTISAN CUEING AND POLARIZATION EFFECTS

Table 1 shows the results of the mixed effects models assessing voters' position shifts toward refugees. As could be expected, a voters' lagged position influences his or her current position positively and significantly (Model 1). This effect does not disappear when adding the preferred party's stated position (M2). The coefficient shows that there is a significant positive effect of parties' positions stated in their press releases on their partisans' position shifts toward refugees. This effect stays positive and significant when adding rival parties' stated positions to the model (M3).

Table 1. Explaining Swedish Voters' Positions Towards Refugees 2014–2018 (mixed effects model)

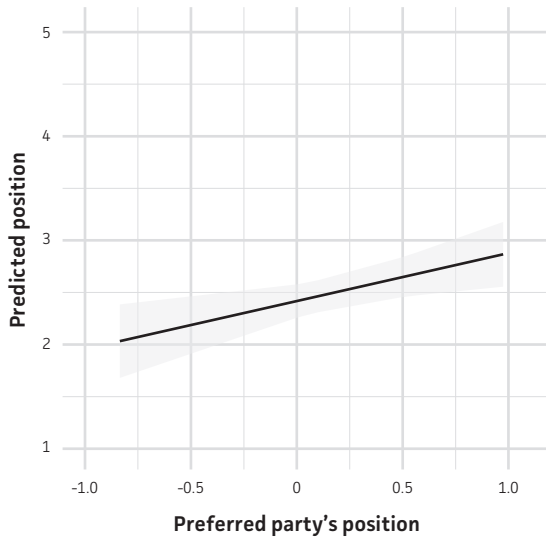
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Position (t-1)	0.58*** (0.04)	0.56*** (0.04)	0.56*** (0.04)
Preferred party's position		0.50*** (0.14)	0.46** (0.17)
Mean position of parties in the same bloc			0.36 (0.41)
Mean position of parties in the opposite bloc			-1.09 (1.24)
Gender	0.23** (0.08)	0.22** (0.08)	0.22** (0.08)
Age	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Level of interest for politics	0.03 (0.06)	0.04 (0.06)	0.03 (0.06)
Intercept	0.55 (0.29)	0.49 (0.28)	0.64 (0.39)
AIC	1345.98	1341.57	1341.44
Log Likelihood	-665.99	-662.79	-660.72
N individuals	488	488	488
N parties	8	8	8
Variance individuals	1.00	1.00	1.00
Variance parties	0.07	0.02	0.02

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

Figure 5 displays the predicted effect of the preferred party's stated position on Swedish voters' positions toward refugees in 2018¹⁷. Although this effect is significant, it has a rather limited magnitude. If a party moves its average position on migration from -0.27 (one standard deviation below the mean) to 0.58 (one standard deviation above the mean), a partisan's predicted position toward refugees increases by only a half a point on the response scale (from 2.2 to 2.7). Nevertheless, it seems as though voters take cues from their preferred party when forming their opinions on the migration issue, thus confirming the first hypothesis.

17 Predicted probabilities are calculated based on the full model holding all variables at their means, and gender at its mode (male).

Figure 5. Effect of Preferred Party's Position on Swedish Voters' Position Towards Refugees 2014–2018 (95% CI)



Regarding the expectations on the influence of rival parties' mean position on voters' positions on the migration issue, the results in table 1 point in the right direction, even though they are not significant at the 0.05-level. Voters seem prompted to update their positions to be contrary to those positions stated by rival parties of the opposite party bloc, while shifting in the same direction as parties, who belong to the same party bloc as their preferred party. These results, which are found looking at this subsample of 488 Swedish citizens, however, cannot be extrapolated to the entire Swedish population due to insufficient significance levels. The second hypothesis on the partisan backlash effect thus cannot be accepted.

ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

In order to assess the robustness of these results, two robustness checks are conducted. Firstly, model 3 is calculated excluding voters of the anti-immigration party Sweden Democrats (SD), since this party as well as its voters might follow a different pattern of behavior in this particular question than other parties and partisans. The results, which are displayed in table A7 in the Appendix, do not alter the conclusions stated above.

Secondly, a model is estimated using an alternative specification of the three variables measuring parties' stated positions. Indeed, there are many different valid ways of matching data measuring communication content with survey data (De Vreese et al. 2017). The second robustness check presents the results calculated with an alternative specification of the three variables measuring parties' stated positions including a recency measure. In other words, this is a

test of whether the strength of the cueing effects depends on *when* the parties issued their press releases. The expectation is that more recent information is better remembered and more accessible when a respondent forms his or her attitude on asylum. For these alternative weighted party positions, all press releases published during the 2018 election campaign (three months prior to the election date on September 9, 2019) are weighted double. Practically, this means that press releases published between June 9, 2018 and September 8, 2018, are counted twice when calculating parties' mean positions on the migration issue. Table A8 in the Appendix show the results of Model 3 with weighted measures of party communication. The results do not alter the validity of the conclusions stated above.

Summary and Outlook

This paper sets out to explore how party communication affects Swedish citizens' views on asylum. In the context of the recent upheaval in the Swedish migration debate, it is more important than ever to assess whether and how these changes influence the attitudes of Swedish citizens. Previous studies have shown an increase in Swedish parties' attention toward the migration issue, as well as changing and increasingly polarizing positions on this issue. However, the effect on Swedish citizens' attitudes remains unclear.

Based on the existing literature on mass–elite linkages, two expectations are formulated. On the one hand, political science scholars have shown that parties can persuade their own supporters on specific salient issues (Carsey & Layman 2006; Feddersen & Adams 2018; Steenbergen et al. 2007). In other words, voters update their policy positions on specific issues to align with their preferred party, thus leading us to expect a partisan cueing effect. On the other hand, citizens have been shown to move away from the stated positions of parties they dislike (Bischof & Wagner 2018; Feddersen & Adams 2018; Goren et al. 2009; Nicholson 2012; Zakharova & Warwick 2014), thus creating a partisan backlash effect.

The study combines data on public opinion from the Swedish National Election Studies (SNES) 2014–2018 panel with data on parties' stated emphases and positions based on an exhaustive collection of their press releases between 2014 and 2018 in order to assess cueing effects. The rhetoric-based measures of party communication assessed via their press releases allow for continuous and unmediated measures of party emphasis and party position. Validity and reliability tests are conducted to ensure the quality of the hand coding.

Looking at Swedish parties' communication on the migration issue between the 2014 and the 2018 elections, it can be noted that almost all parties' emphases of the migration issue increase at the beginning of the analyzed period, when the center-left government announced its historic decision to heavily

reduce the number of refugees admitted into the country during the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015. During an emotional press conference on November 24 2015, the Social democratic and Green parties announced their radical policy shift. However, after this first increase in overall emphasis, parties take different trajectories regarding the importance they allocate to the migration issue. In line with previous research, the dynamic descriptions of party positions show a polarization between the two blocs, lead especially by the positional developments by the Social Democratic, the Liberal and the Christian Democratic parties.

Regarding the effects of party messages on the Swedish public opinion, the results show that there is a partisan cueing effect. Even though this effect is not very strong in absolute terms, citizens nevertheless seem to take cues from their preferred party when updating their opinion on asylum. These results confirm that cueing effects exist and can be detected when looking at salient issues and using the appropriate data sources to measure party communication. The partisan backlash effect, whereby citizens move away from the stated position of parties they dislike (namely parties of the opposite bloc) is present as well, although non-significant.

The results presented in this study confirm the importance of exploring mass-elite linkages during these “turbulent” times in Sweden. For parties, the results can be rather reassuring, since it seems that their partisans take cues from their stated positions, even though these positions might have fluctuated heavily in between elections. However, the results also show that it might be difficult for parties to convince voters, who prefer a party belonging to the other bloc.

Still, parties might also be prompted to revise their positions on the migration issue based on public opinion. Indeed, public opinion influences parties’ communication, and parties have been shown to update their positions in response to public opinion (e.g., Adams et al. 2004; Ezrow et al. 2011). Additional studies are needed to evaluate this reversed effect, as well as the presence of reciprocal effects, and to further study the relationship between party communication and public opinion.

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Appendix

Table A1. Availability and Sources of Swedish Parties' Press Releases

Party	PR from	until	URL	last visited
V	2012-03-29	2018-09-27	https://www.vansterpartiet.se/kategori/pressmeddelanden/	2018-11-07
S	2016-12-05	2018-10-04	https://via.tt.se/pressrum/socialdemokraternas-ps-kansli?publisherId=142377	2018-11-07
	2006-03-23	2016-11-25	http://news.cision.com/se/socialdemokraterna	2018-11-08
MP	2008-09-05	2018-10-30	http://news.cision.com/se/miljopartiet-de-grona	2018-11-07
C	2016-11-01	2018-10-31	https://www.centerpartiet.se/press/pressmeddelande	2018-12-11
	2003-05-15	2016-11-01	http://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/centerpartiet/pressreleases	2018-11-08
L (FP)	2012-10-09	2018-11-02	http://news.cision.com/se/liberalerna	2018-11-07
M	2013-04-10	2018-10-24	http://news.cision.com/se/moderaterna	2018-11-07
	2013-01-10	2013-04-04	http://www.moderat.se/pressmeddelande	2018-11-08
KD	2016-11-25	2018-11-02	https://kristdemokraterna.se/kategori/nyheter/	2018-11-08
	2010-11-12	2016-11-18	https://www.kristdemokraterna.se/Media/Nyhetsarkiv	2018-11-08
SD	2006-01-14	2018-10-25	http://www.mynewsdesk.com/sesverigedemokraterna/pressreleases	2018-11-08

Table A2. Swedish Parties' Press Releases 2014–2018, N (%)

Party	PR about migration	PR about other issues	Total
MP	14 (8)	172 (92)	186 (100)
V	39 (13)	250 (87)	289 (100)
S	20 (6)	296 (94)	316 (100)
C	133 (15)	744 (85)	877 (100)
L	108 (14)	663 (86)	775 (100)
KD	124 (22)	428 (78)	552 (100)
M	39 (12)	290 (88)	329 (100)
SD	79 (20)	324 (80)	403 (100)
Total	556 (15)	3167 (85)	3723 (100)

Data: Own data (press releases).

Table A3. Swedish Parties' Positions on the Migration Issue 2014–2018

Party	Mean position	Standard deviation
MP	0.57	0.51
V	0.97	0.16
S	0.00	0.79
C	0.49	0.81
L	0.03	0.79
KD	0.01	0.96
M	0.10	0.45
SD	-0.84	0.44
Total	0.10	0.88

Note: Scale runs from -1 (negative) to 1 (positive).

Data: Own data (press releases).

Table A4. Coding Reliability of Press Release Codings

Variable	% Agreement	Cohen's Kappa
Migration issue	95.3	0.79***
Position on migration issue	85.7	0.66**

Note: Reliability test based on a randomly selected sample of 192 press releases of the full corpus.

Data: Own data (press releases).

Table A5. Swedish Parties' Emphases of the Migration Issue: Comparing the Press Release Codings to the Comparative Manifesto Codings (2014)

Party	Press releases	CMP: MC & NWL	CMP: IM	CMP: MC, NWL & IM
MP	8.26	6.04	2.62	8.25
V	6.31	2.50	2.50	5.00
S	0.00	0.92	0.74	1.66
C	1.49	3.68	2.37	6.05
L	9.81	6.65	3.90	10.55
KD	12.45	4.37	2.83	7.20
M	0.00	5.62	2.81	8.44
SD	16.66	14.56	3.48	18.04
Correlation		0.73	0.66	0.76

Note: Party emphasis measures based on the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) codings were calculated by adding the negative item(s) and the positive item(s). MC = Multiculturalism (per607 and per608); NWL = National Way of Life (per601 and per602); I = Immigration (per602_2 and per601_2).

Data: Own data and Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2017).

Table A6. Swedish Parties' Positions on the Migration Issue: Comparing the Press Release Codings to the Comparative Manifesto Codings

Party	Press releases	CMP: MC & NWL	CMP: IM	CMP: MC, NWL & IM
MP	0.76	0.80	1.00	0.86
V	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
S	-	0.60	1.00	0.78
C	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
L	0.57	0.72	1.00	0.83
KD	0.41	0.53	1.00	0.71
M	-	0.91	1.00	0.94
SD	-0.81	-0.91	-1.00	-0.93
Correlation		<i>0.99</i>	<i>0.94</i>	<i>0.98</i>

Note: Party position measures based on the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) codings were calculated by subtracting the negative item(s) from the positive item(s) (except for the National Way of Life category, where the positive item is subtracted from the negative item) and dividing the result by the total of both categories (for the same procedure see Abou-Chadi 2014). MC = Multiculturalism (per607 and per608); NWL = National Way of Life (per601 and per602); I = Immigration (per602_2 and per601_2).

Data: Own data and Comparative Manifesto Project (Volkens et al. 2017).

Table A7. Explaining Swedish Voters' Positions Towards Refugees Excluding SD-Voters 2014- 2018 (mixed effects model)

Robustness check I	Model 3
Position (t-1)	0.57*** (0.04)
Preferred party's position	0.71** (0.22)
Mean position of parties in the same bloc	0.70 (0.39)
Mean position of parties in the opposite bloc	-0.86 (1.12)
Gender	0.23** (0.09)
Age	0.00 (0.00)
Level of interest for politics	0.01 (0.07)
Intercept	0.42 (0.42)
AIC	1266.87
BIC	1307.99
Log Likelihood	-623.44
N individuals	451
N parties	7
Variance individuals	1.00
Variance parties	0.01

Note: The dependent variable is an individual's position towards refugees. Respondents indicating that they voted for the Swedish Democrats were excluded from the analysis.

Table A8. Explaining Swedish Voters' Positions Towards Refugees Using Weighted Party Positions 2014–2018 (mixed effects model)

Robustness check 1	Model 3
Position (t-1)	0.56*** (0.04)
Preferred party's position	0.47** (0.16)
Mean position of parties in the same bloc	0.36 (0.45)
Mean position of parties in the opposite bloc	-1.01 (1.14)
Gender	0.22** (0.08)
Age	0.00 (0.00)
Level of interest for politics	0.02 (0.06)
Intercept	-0.31 (0.56)
AIC	1341.14
BIC	1383.04
Log Likelihood	-660.57
N individuals	488
N parties	8
Variance individuals	1.00
Variance parties	0.02

Note: The dependent variable is an individual's position towards refugees. Party positions are weighted by recency.

Start Sharing the News

Exploring the Link Between Right-wing Alternative Media and Social Media During the Swedish 2018 Election

Linn A.C. Sandberg & Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk

Abstract

This study examines the influence of right-wing alternative media on social media during the Swedish 2018 general election, by analyzing links shared on Facebook and the engagement around these links. The results indicate that content originating from such sites had notable visibility on social media in comparison to traditional news-media content. Of the news stories shared in our sample, 28 % originated from right-wing alternative media outlets and the amount of engagement around links shared was comparable to that of mainstream news media. Immigration and integration-related issues dominated the covered content shared from right-wing alternative media. Content in links that evoked highest engagement on Facebook similarly revolved around immigration, crime, and the Sweden Democrats. In this regard, Facebook might contribute to giving voice to contested views of these controversial news sites and the platform, to broaden their reach.

An important question in all democracies concerns who manages to set the agenda during election time. While traditional editorial-driven media still plays a crucial role when it comes to informing people about political and societal issues, the role of social media has enabled new actors to compete for visibility and impact. In this article, we will focus particularly on the extent to which right-wing alternative news media managed to gain visibility and create engagement on Facebook during the election campaign in Sweden, in comparison to established news media. The type of media actors in question includes a variety of amateur or semiprofessional news outlets that aim to represent an alternative to the mainstream-media coverage (Figenschou & Ihlebæk 2018; Holt 2016a). Even though studies have shown that the Swedish mainstream press predominantly frames immigration negatively (Strömbäck Andersson & Nedlund 2017), right-wing alternative media actors often claim that what is perceived as left-wing journalism does not cover immigration fairly

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(Figenschou & Ihlebæk 2018). Furthermore, anti-system and anti-elitist attitudes often characterize such sites, mirroring the rhetoric of far-right populism (Holt 2018).

Arguably, the Internet and social-media platforms have lowered the threshold for populist or non-elite actors to enter the arenas of communication (Atton 2004; Engesser, Fawzi & Larsson 2017). The rise of right-wing alternative media can therefore be seen in relation to the growth of far-right populist political actors in Sweden, as well as in Europe and the U.S. (Engesser et al. 2017; Ernst et al. 2017; Haller & Holt 2018; Krämer 2017; Schierup & Ålund 2011). The concern is that by promoting values like anti-elitism and anti-immigration on social-media platforms, the influence from such actors will lead to polarization, mistrust, and racism (Krämer 2017). The partisan and often hostile reporting found on the right-wing alternative media sites in Sweden have been highly controversial (Holt 2016a; 2016b), and they have been framed as “hate sites,” “racist sites,” or “Sweden Democrat sites” in the Swedish press (Andersson and Hammarlund 2016). As the latter name implies, some right-wing alternative news sites have had close links to representatives of the Sweden Democrats; *Avpixlat* (the predecessor of *Samhällsnytt*), for instance, was economically founded by Kent Ekeröth from the Sweden Democrats, while *Nya Tider* was the party paper of the now dissolved *Nationaldemokraterna*.

Recent numbers show that right-wing alternative news outlets in Sweden appear relatively modest in comparison to national established news media when it comes to readership. However, many sites have nevertheless managed to attract a solid audience base. Reuters Digital News Report (Newman et al. 2018) shows that between 6% and 11% say they have used alternative media in the last week (*Nya Tider*, *Fria Tider*, *Samhällsnytt*, *Nyheter Idag*, *Ledarsidorna*). In comparison, 46% say they have used *Aftonbladet* online, 32% have used *Expressen* online, and 17% have used regional or local newspapers. Furthermore, studies from Norway and the U.S. have indicated that right-wing alternative media often successfully manage to elicit user engagement on social media, which in turn might influence the wider public agenda (Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018; Larsson 2019). Therefore, it is important to examine the sharing potential of a right-wing agenda in news articles on Facebook and engagement around this content, especially in Sweden, since many of these sites have attracted a relatively large audience.

By analyzing a unique dataset of links posted on Facebook, we examine to what extent they originated from right-wing alternative or established news sites, as well as what type of political topics evoked most engagement. Furthermore, we apply an explorative approach to examining the news reports originating from right-wing alternative media and receiving the highest level of engagement, focusing on topics covered and their framing.

The study contributes to knowledge about right-wing alternative media and their visibility on social media in a Swedish context. The aim is to inform the discussion concerning the role of new agenda-setters in a high-choice media environment, and how platforms like Facebook reinforce the position of marginal actors. In the following discussion, we will first outline theoretical perspectives on “alternative media” before we present the hypotheses tested in the article.

Perspectives on Alternative Media

A central precondition of our study concerns the distinction between established and alternative forms of journalism. Scholars within the field of media and communication have long grappled with questions concerning what constitute the key differences between the two. Several authors have argued that the boundaries between professional and amateur journalism must be understood as blurry and fluid, rather than something static and fixed (Kenix 2013; Carlson 2015; Hujanen 2016; Singer 2015). That being said, some key characteristics that have been identified as significant markers in the literature include: (1) alternative media are often run by a small number of activist or semiprofessional actors motivated by political, ideological, or economic interest; (2) alternative media are funded on scarce economic means since they operate outside the structures of the established commercial media industry; (3) alternative media are structured as nonhierarchical and participatory organizations; (4) people working for alternative media reject or have an unclear relationship to press ethics or editorial responsibilities; (5) the journalistic content is characterized by a more personal and biased style (Atton 2002; Atton and Hamilton 2008; Atton 2015; Figenschou & Ihlebæk 2018; Nygaard 2019; Wickenden & Atton 2005).

Another somewhat more disputed component is the normative dimension of the term “alternative media.” Historically, alternative media have been studied in relation to left-wing media connected to social-protest movements and grassroots activism. From this perspective, alternative media is defined as democratic projects, mobilizing citizens to actively participate in news production or political activism and consequently empowering them (Fuchs 2010; Haas 2004). Haas’s definition of alternative media builds on this approach, identifying them as “media devoted to providing representations of issues and events which oppose those offered in the mainstream media and to advocating social and political reform” (Haas 2004: 115). While studies of left-wing alternative media dominated the field for some time, the role of right-wing and far-right alternative media gained less attention. Atkinson and Berg (2012a) argue that this “flaw” has “left scholars half-blind to the political realities of the twenty-first century” (p. 117), pointing to how far-right populist parties and movements

have managed to engage an active follower-base. However, a number of studies have recently explored how right-leaning online news sites have managed to set the agenda, often promoting critical stories against immigration and Islam, as well as fronting explicit and extensive media criticism and skepticism toward the cultural elites (Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018; Figenschou & Ihlebæk 2018; Atkinson & Berg 2012a; Atkinson & Berg 2012b; Nygaard 2019; Rauch, forthcoming; Haller & Holt 2018; Holt & Haller 2017).

Based on the traditional normative benchmarks of “alternative media”, questions have arisen as to whether this kind of alternative media should be termed “alternative” at all (Atton 2006). Some scholars have instead labeled far-right groups as “communities with closure” (Atton 2006), “anti-publics” (Cammaerts 2009), “anti-democratic publics” (Alvares & Dahlgren 2016), “repressive radical media” (Downing 2001), “populist counter-media” (Noppari, Hiltunen & Ahva 2019), “hyperpartisan news” (Bastos & Mercea 2019; Larsson 2019) or simply “partisan media” (Newman et al. 2018). Whether “alternative media” can include right-wing news media is consequently contested. Studies have acknowledged that right-wing alternative media cater to participatory involvement and mobilize for political activism. At the same time, they also fuel cultural divisions and promote exclusionary viewpoints (Padovani 2016; Atkinson & Berg 2012a). Furthermore, it is imperative to take into account that what has been referred to as right-wing or far-right (alternative) news media might differ greatly in terms of their ideological position (ranging from controversial to extreme positions), production practices, diversity of content, and participatory possibilities. While some sites produce and distribute misinformation or disinformation that could be harmful and polarizing, others are more moderate in their stance and style, aiming to present alternative viewpoints to their audiences. Conceptualizing this phenomenon by considering the similarities, but also acknowledging the differences among the variety of sites in question, is a complex and difficult exercise. In this context, Holt points to the importance of also looking at the role of alternative media as “self-perceived correctives” for traditional media. Holt proposes the following definition: “A self-assumed term that signals an opposition to traditional media (‘old media’), which many of the writers in this field regard as failing to report properly on important societal issues, for example, by avoiding reporting on social problems related to immigration” (2018: 52). In other words, the self-defined outsider role as alternative or independent is emphasized. While Holt’s definition is useful to escape the strong normativity that has dominated the scholarship on “alternative media”, it surely also has some weaknesses. The self-ascribed role cannot be the only parameter; it should be seen in combination with other dimensions identified in the literature, as outlined above.

Acknowledging that the term “alternative media” is disputed and that “right-wing alternative media” might be controversial, we nevertheless believe

the term is useful for analytical purposes. By “right-wing alternative media”, we mean online news sites that more or less explicitly position themselves as an alternative or corrective to the established media; are run by amateur or semiprofessional actors motivated (more or less explicitly) by conservative-to-far-right values; and resist or have an unclear relationship with press ethics.

Setting the Agenda on Social Media

The competition for attention and visibility is fierce in high-choice media environments. Old and new content producers experiment with how they can utilize social media to spread their content. National news outlets still have the highest readership and strongest agenda-setting power; consequently, they arguably also have the strongest presence on Facebook in terms of user engagement. However, recent research indicates that alternative news sites have an active audience base that eagerly shares content, and many right-wing groups seem to be highly knowledgeable about the dynamics of social media and attaining visibility online (Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018; Marwick & Lewis 2016; Krämer 2017; Haanshuus & Jupskås 2017). A study by Larsson (2019) compared news use and audience engagement on Facebook with a cross-section of national, regional, and what he terms “hyperpartisan news” in Norway. He found that national news outlets have a much higher number of followers on Facebook; however, hyperpartisan actors “emerge as more successful in terms of the degree to which their followers engage as news users” (p. 19). This follower-base both shares and comments to a higher degree, “resulting in the amplification of the perspectives purveyed by these pages” (p. 19). Similarly, it has been argued that these sites have “a political or ideological agenda and their user base tends to passionately share these views” (Newman et al. 2018, p. 15). Therefore, it seems plausible that the recent emergence of right-wing alternative-media sites and their rapid growth in some countries has been, if not made possible, at least facilitated by social-media distribution.

Fewer total users consume content directly from right-wing media outlets; however, those outlets’ reach on Facebook might be greater, since their audience is more active in sharing and engaging around this content. In addition, the content itself might evoke more engagement, as it deals with controversial topics and uses contested frames or a “mobilizing tone” (Larsson 2019). Many of these sites position themselves in opposition to the journalism found in the established press, which they perceive as failing in the responsibility to report on issues of immigration and integration. The self-ascribed role of producing content omitted from mainstream media might, by definition, lead to news coverage more likely to be engaging on Facebook. In established theories from communication research, the elements that enhance the popularity of a political message include persuasive elements or news factors (Porten-Cheé

et al. 2018). Empirical research on social media seems to support this claim; journalistic content that could be characterized as newsworthy (i.e., connected to geographical and cultural closeness, conflict, and human-interest stories) correlates positively with content that becomes “shareworthy” on Facebook. Moreover, traditional news-agency articles receive less engagement, indicating the importance of exclusivity (Trilling, Tolonchko & Burscher 2017). We therefore expect the following relationship between right-wing alternative media and national news outlets to characterize engagement around news content:

H1: The mean engagement score per link originating from traditional news outlets versus right-wing alternative media will be equivalent.

We have previously outlined that questions related to immigration and Islam have been some of the topics that have motivated the rise of right-wing alternative media (Benkler, Faris & Roberts 2018; Holt 2016a; Holt 2016b; Figenschou & Ihlebæk 2018), and that news items on issues pertaining to immigration and Islam resonate well with the follower base of partisan outlets on Facebook (Larsson 2019). At the same time, there is widespread mistrust of traditional-media reporting on immigration-related issues (Sandberg & Demker 2014). Therefore, we expect immigration to score high, particularly for the alternative-media sites.

H2: Compared with other topics, immigration will dominate the coverage in shared links originating from right-wing alternative media.

H3: News stories on immigration-related issues from right-wing alternative-media outlets will similarly evoke the most engagement, compared with other topics.

In the following section, we will discuss the data and methods used in this study before we move on to present results on how content from alternative media was shared, and how Facebook groups engaged with it during the Swedish election, compared to the traditional-news-media content, and the level of engagement related to political issues covered.

Data and Methods

DATA SELECTION

The Swedish public broadcaster (SVT) collected the data used for analyzing engagement around news links (URLs) on Facebook during the three weeks prior to the Swedish national election and one week after the election on September 9, 2018. SVT selected groups on Facebook that in some way discussed election-related issues based on searches in the social-media tracking tool, Crowdtangle. After a manual classification by relevance and size, a list of

850 open Facebook groups was compiled. This selection is not comprehensive; nonetheless, it comprises a substantial number of the links shared on Facebook. Crowdtangle does not access links shared from private accounts or closed Facebook groups, and the information gathered from Facebook is completely anonymous.¹ The dataset used in this study consists of shared links that originated from either national news media or what we have classified as right-wing alternative-media outlets. Therefore, using secondary-data analysis, we can only assess the relationship between national news media and right-wing alternative media, not the total number of links shared in this time span and the sources behind them.

News articles shared on Facebook that were liked, shared, and commented on were aggregated into a “total engagement” score. SVT measured engagement by using a point system in which “shares” and comments were each given two points, and “likes” and other reactions (i.e., love, anger, sad, wow, and haha emojis) were each given one point. Both sharing and commenting signals a greater interest in a post than merely liking or another emoji that expresses feelings toward a post. Users make a greater effort in sharing or commenting on a post, reflected in a higher engagement point value, as not all interactions with a post indicate equal commitment. “Likes” and “shares” function as popularity cues, i.e., indicators of the perceived relevance and positive evaluation of news items and political messages (Porten-Cheé et al. 2018). Based on the aggregation of engagement, we cannot conclude that all engagement is positive. Comments in particular might express both negative and positive attitudes toward the content.

Engagement on Facebook does not necessarily reflect public opinion or citizens’ issue engagement. Rather, it reflects exposure and visibility of issues and news content on this specific platform. On Facebook, the activities leading up to increased visibility of a post are largely driven by Facebook’s algorithms, and the engagement around posts can be driven by automatic or semi-automatic accounts (so-called “bots”) or by single individuals. In this way, actual engagement and visibility can be manipulated, and it is difficult to examine the extent to which this affects the result. Greater numbers of interactions with a post are nonetheless rewarded by algorithms and increase visibility and exposure (DeVito 2017). Thus, aggregated engagement with links shared on Facebook reflect what users see and what content those users perceive as prominent.

ISSUE ENGAGEMENT

Journalists at SVT manually coded the content of links shared on Facebook. The choices of issues coded were based on the most important topics for the

1 SVT describes their data collection and methods here: <https://www.svt.se/opinion/metod-facebook-kartan>.

electorate, as reported in a survey conducted by Novus from July to August 2018.² In addition to the survey, SVT added a category of election/government by which to classify articles about government formation, election campaigning, and party strategy. A category of “other” was also used for content not suitable to any of the predefined categories. It was not possible to see from what group or page the link was shared in the coding procedure. An inter-coder reliability test of a 10% randomly selected sample revealed 94% and 89% inter-rater agreement in coding of link topics, between the coding done by SVT and the sample coded by the authors, which is rather high.³

CLASSIFICATION OF RIGHT-WING ALTERNATIVE AND MAINSTREAM MEDIA

The focus in this paper is to compare shared links and engagement around content originating from right-wing alternative media and traditional media. Traditional mainstream media in our sample consist of well-established national news-media sites in Sweden; local newspapers are excluded, to limit the sample size of traditional media. More specifically, the national news sites are *Dagens Nyheter*, *Sveriges Television*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen*, *TV4*, *Metro* and *OMNI*.

Table 1 outlines some key characteristics of the sites classified as right-wing alternative. We have based our classification on previous research (Holt 2016a; Nygaard 2019; Newman et al. 2018) as well as a qualitative interpretation emphasizing their self-ascribed role and stated motivation. We have also considered if they report following the ethical codes for the Swedish press; however, we do not know if this is implemented in practice and in the content presented on their website.

2 The topics were Environment/climate, Economy, Labor market, Pensions, Healthcare, Elderly care, Education, Immigration/Integration, and Crime. Additional categories added were Election/Government formation and a category for other content.

3 Out of all 1,214 shared links from traditional media, 121 links were randomly selected in order to test the inter-coder reliability score. Correspondingly, 47 links shared from alternative-media sites were coded by a second coder based on content. Cohen's kappa was used for measuring interrater reliability and resulted in $K = 0.92$ for national news media and $K = 0.86$ for content from partisan media outlets.

Table 1. Overview of Right-Wing Alternative Media

	Ascribed editor	Stated commitment to press ethics	Self-description on their website
Nyheter Idag	Yes	Yes	Independent news site in tabloid format focusing on politics, gossip, social media and foreign policy by creating own news through interviews, be on site to film/photograph and follow developments on social media. Rests on a libertarian outlook.
Rapport 24	No	No	Swedish political discussions and satire daily. Do not support racism or hate speech. Critical towards the Swedish government and its handling of the country.
Ledarsidorna	Yes	Yes	Independent web based newsmagazine. Critics of the system, "consequence-neutral" and constantly in opposition.
Nyhetsbyrån	Yes	No	Nyhetsbyrån is needed in a media buzz and news flow that increasingly comes to consist of values and emotions. We created NB to select news in areas important to the development of society and its survival.
Samhällsnytt	Yes	No	Samhällsnytt takes on a broad publicist approach. We specifically cover the areas in which "establishment media" prove to neglect or to lapse, but also focus broadly on common news journalism. We aim to be the publicist product that tomorrows' media consumers interested in society, wants and have the right to demand.
Fria Tider	No	No	Media in Sweden needs to have the screws put to it. [Mediesverige behöver en rak höger]
Samtiden	Yes	Yes	Independent news site with social conservative editorial tendencies. We seek to offer our readers news, relevant analyzes and a debate around conservative values.
Nyatider	No	No	The only printed-paper to refute the "press-system's" lies in their own format: on paper. Since its founding in 2012, Nyatider scrutinize the political correctness and report how reality looks like beyond "system-media's" distorted view.
Svegot	No	No	Daily digital newspaper that aims to broaden the Swedish media landscape and at the same time raise issues important to our non-profit organization and try to push the opinion in a direction more in line with our organization's ideas. Our editorials political profile is libertarian-nationalist.
Nyadagbladet	Yes	No	Independent, humanist and ethno-pluralistic daily newspaper with an anti-globalist stance and an international perspective. Founded in 2012 as a new media platform publishing news, analyses, stories etc. in all media formats. It specifically covers issues on ethical and cultural rights, integrity and surveillance, environment and health.

Note: Self-presentation in the table is a summarized version of how these sites present themselves on their webpage in December 2018 and translated to English. Accountable editor or publisher, and commitment to press ethical norms is noted if it has been stated on the site.

We argue that even though the included sites differ in many ways, the uniting features are that they are run by amateur or semiprofessional actors, that they employ a more or less explicit anti-establishment rhetoric and critical approach toward traditional media outlets. The ideological position also varies within the selection of sites, and some are more conservative than far right. Our classification further demonstrates the limitations of characterizing these sites only by taking into account their self-ascribed role. For instance, *Nyheter Idag* does not explicitly state an oppositional role, rather claiming to be “independent,” and furthermore claiming to follow the ethical standards of the press. Consequently, its self-ascribed role in opposition to the mainstream media or as anti-establishment is less explicit. However, previous research has classified this site as alternative, based on its partisan and anti-immigration reporting (Holt 2016a; Newman et al. 2018). At first look, the content on some sites might also appear noncontroversial; a closer reading can reveal, however, a potentially extreme underlying political agenda. The site *Nyadagbladet*, for example, provides a broad range of news articles and presents itself as Sweden’s broadest and most independent daily newspaper, with the aim of becoming “Tomorrow’s Newspaper!” However, it also defines itself as ethno-pluralistic, and journalists have described it as extreme right.⁴ Its publisher and news director were previously active in the extreme-right party, *Nationaldemokraterna*, until the party dissolved. Similarly, the organization behind *Svegot* has a stated purpose to act as an association for ethnic Swedes, “by standing up for the Swedes and working against the growing hostility by ethnic minorities towards everything Swedish.” “The organization will also work long-term by building networks, purchasing real estate, creating Swedish zones and laying the foundation for an alternative to the failing multicultural state.”⁵ Like the two examples above, the majority of these sites can be described as far right, based on their coverage and stated purposes of covering news.⁶

Results

From all content shared on Facebook in our material, 1,214 links originated from national news media and 466 from right-wing alternative media. Engagement with links shared from national news media scored mean per link of 1,742, compared to 1,352 per link originating from right-wing media (the total engagement score for national news media was 2,114,849, and 628,666 for right-wing media). Engagement per link compared between the two media

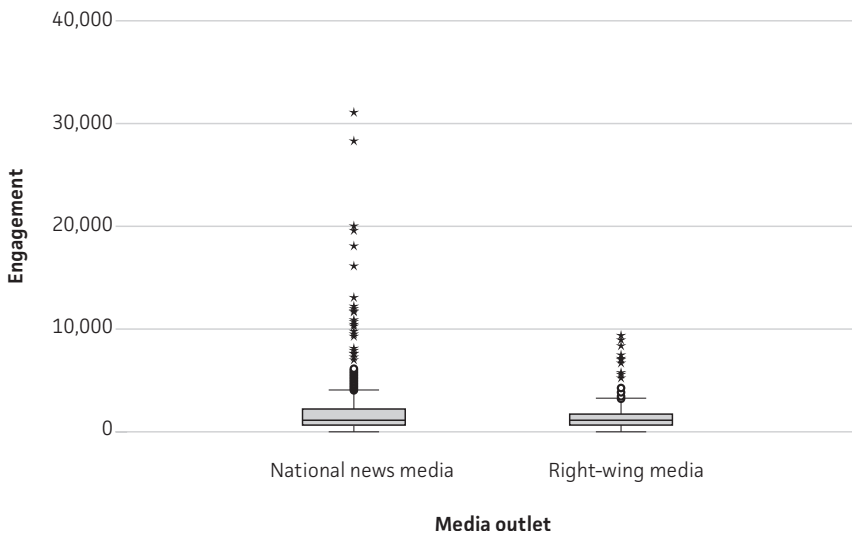
4 <https://www.dn.se/webb-tv/klipp/nyheter/det-har-extremsajterna-gemensamt/>.

5 <https://www.defriasverige.se/english/> Accessed 23.04.2019.

6 *Far right* is used here as a unifying concept ranging from right-wing populists to neo-Nazi terrorists, following Mudde’s (2017) classification.

types was thus similar, even though more links from national news media were shared in our sample of Facebook groups, supporting Hypotheses One (H1). Distribution of engagement with links shared however, varied considerably between the two media types. Links shared from national news media had higher variation in total engagement points. The top link from traditional news media with highest engagement had 31,024 points, and the equivalent link shared from a right-wing outlet had 9,391 points (see Figure 1), suggesting that the total reach is greater for national news media. Nonetheless, the link from right-wing media evoking the highest engagement came in at thirteenth place for total engagement, compared with links shared from national news media.

Figure 1. Engagement on Facebook Around Links Originating from National News Media and Right-Wing Alternative Media Outlets



Comment: Boxplot showing the spread of engagement around news links, originating from either national news media or right-wing media outlets. Engagement is measured as the total sum of shares (2 p), comments (2 p), likes (1 p) and other reactions (1 p).

Notably, as much as 28% of the content originated from right-wing alternative media sites in our sample of links shared. Given the profile of these sites summarized previously (Table 1), the results not only point to considerable visibility of partisan alternative media on Facebook, but influence from sites specifically hostile to traditional media and the government. Many of these are far-right sites with connections to extreme-right movements. The amount of engagement evoked and the number of links shared is therefore noteworthy in the Swedish context. The results tell us something about the media landscape in Sweden today and the importance of Facebook for spreading and potentially broadening the audience reach of right-wing alternative media.

We will return to a more in-depth discussion of the content shared in prominent posts to examine further the appeal of right-wing news sites. First, we discuss what political topics evoked most engagement, in the form of shares and total engagement (including number of shares, likes, other reactions and comments) on Facebook, comparing traditional news media and right-wing alternative media.

Table 2. Political Topics Covered in Relation to Shares and Engagement (percentage and mean)

	Topics covered in shared links, % (n)		Total engagement per topic, Mean (Std.D)	
	Traditional news media	Right-wing alternative media	Traditional news media	Right-wing alternative media
Immigration	20 (247)	41 (190)	1721 (1958)	1479 (1344)
Election and government	27 (327)	28 (131)	1754 (2273)	1340 (1191)
Law and order	13 (154)	11 (52)	1652 (1638)	1467 (1359)
Environment	6 (75)	2 (8)	1894 (3713)	1039 (425)
Elderly care	0 (3)	2 (8)	1421 (343)	1681 (1217)
Healthcare	6 (69)	2 (9)	1263 (1112)	1420 (855)
Education	3 (34)	2 (8)	1718 (1674)	898 (645)
Pension	2 (20)	1 (3)	2031 (1402)	1108 (518)
Economy	7 (85)	0 (11)	2182 (2810)	799
Labor market	1 (8)	0 (1)	995 (522)	524 (-)
Defense	1 (9)	0 (0)	988 (614)	-
Other	15 (183)	10 (45)	1788 (2225)	943 (581)
Total	100 (1214)	100 (466)		

Comment: There was a positive correlation between topics in links shared from traditional news media and right-wing media (Pearson). The value of R^2 , the coefficient of determination, was 0.7472; yet, no correlation between mean engagement scores for which the value of R^2 was 0.0017.

Of the unique links shared on Facebook, most covered topics of immigration/integration, election and government formation, and law and order, originating from either traditional or alternative right-wing media. The other political topics were covered in less than 10% of shared links. In links originating from right-wing alternative media, 41% covered topics concerning immigration/integration, whereas the corresponding percentage for traditional media was 20%; thus, these topics dominated the coverage in links shared from alternative media, in particular. Topics of election, government formation, and party strategy were covered in most of the links shared from traditional media (27%) and were also the second-most-covered topic in links originating from alternative media (28%). “Law and order” was the third-most-prominent topic in links shared both from traditional news media and from right-wing

alternative-media sites. Other topics were covered considerably less, and regarding content from right-wing alternative media, the other topics were only covered in 0–11 links, compared with 3–85 links from established media. Content classified as covering topics other than those mentioned in Table 2 appeared to a similar degree in content shared from alternative or traditional media (10% and 15%, respectively).

The results indicate that similar political topics in the unique links activate sharing practices on Facebook. These topics thus appear to be salient and “shareworthy,” regardless of source. Topics that the different outlets themselves cover is, of course, also likely to influence type of content shared, especially since partisan alternative news sites tend to have a narrower focus (Newman et al. 2018). Although there was a correlation between the topics featured in most links originating from national news media and right-wing alternative media, the result gives some support to Hypothesis Two (H2), since issues relating to immigration dominated the coverage in links shared from right-wing alternative media. Apart from content concerning “election and government,” topics other than immigration only appeared in 0–11% of the news stories shared.

On the other hand, comparing the topics’ different degrees of engagement reveals less similarity, and there was no correlation in topic engagement between traditional and right-wing alternative media. Among the news from right-wing alternative media, topics concerning elderly care and immigration, followed by law and order, received highest engagement value (measured as mean engagement score). However, differences in mean were small for most topics, with respect to content shared from right-wing alternative media. On the other hand, the mean engagement score varied considerably between the topics evoking highest engagement value (elderly care) versus lowest (labor market), ranging between 524 and 1,681. Topics evoking the highest engagement in shares from traditional news media were the economy, followed by pension and the environment. Election and government topics had the fourth highest mean score, followed by immigration, education, law and order, elderly care, health care, labor market, and, lastly, issues regarding Swedish defense. Defense-related issues were not covered in any of the links shared from right-wing alternative media.

Compared with other political topics, immigration coverage evoked the second-highest mean engagement score in links from right-wing alternative media. Although immigration was not among the topics that evoked most engagement in links from national news media, it did evoke a higher mean engagement score (1,721) than it did in links from right-wing alternative media (1,479). Therefore, the coverage of immigration did not evoke the highest engagement value on average, compared to other topics, nor did it evoke higher mean engagement value compared with immigration coverage in national news

media. Our results, therefore, do not give full support to our third hypothesis that immigration-related issues would generate highest engagement around content originating from right-wing alternative media.

Next, we will take a closer look at the content in links shared that received highest engagement value, to further explore the link between right-wing alternative media and its engagement appeal on Facebook.

IMMIGRATION, CRIME, AND THE SWEDEN DEMOCRATS

Among the links originating from right-wing alternative media sites with highest engagement value, scores for the top eight news articles shared varied between 9,391 and 5,481 (see Appendix). Content in these most engaging links was published on three different alternative news sites (*Samhällsnytt*, *Fria Tider*, and *Nyheter Idag*). *Samhällsnytt* published the news article evoking the highest engagement. The article describes a candidate for the Social Democratic party and his criminal record, focusing on his background as an immigrant and statements he had made about reducing crime rates. Another article from *Fria Tider* with the third-highest engagement value also focuses on a Social Democratic politician with an immigrant background who fled the scene of a car accident with “a minivan full of immigrant-politicians.” The article explains this accident in the author’s own words: “Was in a rush to get to the airport as they were flying home to the countries they fled from on vacation.” The article with second-highest engagement points also concerns immigration and integration themes. In the article, a Social Democratic Danish politician is quoted as encouraging the Swedish population to vote for the Sweden Democrats: “He believes that Sweden’s prime minister lacks the correct ‘reality view’ and that immigration is so severe that it can bring down the Nordic welfare state.” The three links with the highest engagement of all concerns immigration and integration, as well as Social Democrats, either committing criminal acts as in the two first examples, or as in the last example, using a quote from a Social Democrat encouraging voting for the Sweden Democrats. Moreover, the links with the fourth- and fifth-highest engagement rates deal with immigration-related issues and Islam—more specifically: “Residential area in Västerås is taken over by Salafists—the police deeply concerned” and “Poland rather leave the EU than being forced to admit Muslims.”

Another theme in the links with highest engagement (6th through 8th place) concerns the Sweden Democrats and fraud or crime allegedly committed against them. In one, a journalist is perceived as boasting about sabotaging ballot papers belonging to the Sweden Democrats while she expresses support for the Center party on Instagram. In a comment, the party leader thanks her for her support, which is interpreted as the party leader supporting the act of sabotage. Another link reports on a false call against the Sweden Democrats in

which several celebrities supposedly signed this list, but in fact had not. Lastly, a link with the title “Sweden Democratic youth heavily assaulted by Somali gang” evoked high engagement.

Immigration, the Sweden Democrats, and crime dominated the content in the links evoking the highest engagement value on Facebook. In some articles, the themes overlap. For example, regarding the Social Democratic politician’s alleged misconduct, both angles of immigration and crime are used while the main message is aimed at the faulty behavior of Social-Democratic politicians. When articles concern the Sweden Democrats, they express either support for or wrongdoings against the party. Also, worth noting is that while some of the articles evoking high engagement are neutral in tone and reporting, others are depreciatory and ridiculing toward political opponents. While there is no indication of fabricated news content, some of the articles give the impression of exaggerating and, to some extent, tailoring the facts to fit a cause. News reporting in these articles features both, in the form of self-produced content and news from established media, recontextualized to make a political statement.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, we explored the role of right-wing alternative media on Facebook during the Swedish general election, in particular, the degree to which they managed to create visibility and engagement in relation to the established media. A common line of argument in the self-presentation of these sites is anti-establishment rhetoric, such as “system critical,” “constantly in opposition,” “establishment media,” refuting “system-media’s” distorted view and the “press-system’s” lies. *Fria Tider*, one of the most well-known and read sites included in our analysis, has the slogan, “Media in Sweden needs to have the screws put to it [Mediesverige behöver en rak höger].” Another example takes this rhetoric a step further by arguing for the need of alternative news in order to cover areas “important to the development of society and its survival.” Uniting features of these sites are criticism or hostility toward legacy media that are believed to censor important information, anti-establishment, and a strong focus on immigration-related issues and what are perceived as negative immigration policies or effects of immigration.

Our study finds that right-wing media sites seem to have had a substantial influence on social media during the Swedish 2018 election, compared with national news media. Of the news stories shared in our sample, 28% originated from these sites, compared to national news media on Facebook. As many of these sites are far-right with stated motives going beyond merely covering what traditional news media are perceived to neglect, the reach and potential influence are made more striking.

In line with our expectations, the engagement with links shared was similarly high, despite the fact that traditional news media generally reaches a larger segment of the population. This tells us something about the audiences of alternative right-wing media and supports previous findings of this reader base being particularly active in sharing and engaging with this content (Larsson 2019).

Concerning our second and third assumption, we believed that immigration would dominate the coverage in links shared on Facebook and that immigration-related issues would generate the highest engagement scores, which our study partly supported. Immigration-related issues were covered in the majority of links shared from right-wing alternative media and evoked high engagement; however, this topic did not evoke the highest engagement score on average. Compared to traditional news media, the mean engagement score was also lower. This suggests that immigration-related issues evoke relative high engagement, regardless of the news media actor. Immigration-related issues were covered in a substantial portion of links shared from national news media (20%). Negative reporting of immigration-related issues in traditional media might therefore generate engagement similar to the coverage of right-wing alternative media, although this content is more controversial and uses contested frames.

Taking a closer look at the content in the most engaging links revealed quite a homogeneity in the right-wing agenda, both in type of content and partisan or one-sided angles. Content concerned immigration in particular, but also crime, and indicated support for the Sweden Democrats. In several, a sarcastic undertone can also be detected, possibly aimed at undermining political opponents or expressed as contempt for politicians with an immigrant background. The links receiving highest engagement value originated from three different sites (*Samhällsnytt*, *Fria Tider*, and *Nyheter Idag*). This also indicates a widespread supply of alternative news, as not only one or two outlets seem to have dominated the “alternative agenda”.

In this study, we have only examined the relationship between national news media and right-wing alternative-media outlets. We can therefore not assess how right-wing content was shared and engaged with, compared to all content shared on Facebook. Other outlets, particularly political blogs, would be of value to include in future studies. Moreover, due to data restriction, we only examined open Facebook groups and can therefore not know how this distribution differs from that in private profiles or closed Facebook groups.

Sweden received significant international attention around its 2018 election, in particular, misinformation and the influence of bots on social media. These bots expressed support for the Sweden Democrats, criticism of immigration

and refugees, and critique of the elites and of the media.⁷ Compared with the result presented in this study, a similar agenda can be found in content originating from right-wing alternative media. Since many of the sites in question have a fundamentally radical or extreme agenda, the influence of content from these sites on the political news flow on Facebook might contribute to increasingly polarized debates and reinforcing political beliefs about a lying press and harmful immigration. In future research, it will be of importance to examine these outlets more closely and the extent to which social-media dynamics reinforce these types of messages.

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Appendix

Table 1. Links Originating from Alternative Media Sites With Highest Engagement Scores

Engagement-score	Outlet and date	URL link
9391	Samhällsnytt (27/08/2018)	https://samnytt.se/forsokte-strypa-kassor-kandiderar-for-socialdemokraterna-i-valet/
8864	Fria Tider (25/08/2018)	http://www.friatider.se/dansk-socialdemokrat-till-svenska-folket-r-sta-p-sd
8278	Fria Tider (04/09/2018)	http://www.friatider.se/smet-fr-n-trafikolycka-och-lj-g-sig-till-l-gre-b-ter-sen-blev-haxhimustafa-32-l-fvens-nya
7603	Samhällsnytt (29/08/2018)	https://samnytt.se/bostadsomrade-i-vasteras-tas-over-av-salafister-polisen-djupt-oroad/
7071	Nyheter Idag (08/08/2018)	https://nyheteridag.se/polen-lamnar-hellre-eu-an-tvingas-ta- emot-muslimer/
7054	Nyheter Idag (06/09/2018)	https://nyheteridag.se/det-stammer-inte-kandisartar-avstand-fran-kandislista-mot-sd/
6486	Nyheter Idag (25/08/2018)	https://nyheteridag.se/journalist-skryster-om-valsabotage-mot-sd-annie-loof-tackar-for-stodet/
5481	Nyheter Idag (03/09/2018)	https://nyheteridag.se/sverigedemokratiska-ungdomar-grovt-misshandlade-av-somaliskt-gang-de-fortsatte-sparka-pa-honom-nar-han-lag-ner/

“Is Sweden Finally Waking Up?”

Debating the 2018 Swedish National Election on 4chan

Emma Ricknell

Abstract

Today’s ever evolving media landscape offers a multitude of ways to consume and spread political information and opinions, especially in election times. Yet in this diverse media ecosystem, not all communication occurs in the public sphere. This study explores how the 2018 Swedish national election was discussed in a less accessible international online space associated with alt-right ideology and profoundly offensive content, with focus on how political positions were debated and expressed. The analytical approach applied sees participants in the discussions as members of an electronic tribe, which in turn is situated along an influential, yet often overlooked, hybridized flow of communication that defies previous models of analysis. Results suggest that while support for right-wing political parties and politics is prevalent on the site and is expressed using a common protocol, positions are also debated internally, sometimes adopted only to later be abandoned, highlighting the non-fixed, fleeting aspects of online existence.

Introduction

As the Internet started gaining ground in the early 2000s, the possibilities from a democratic perspective seemed endless. Via the Internet, the individual’s rights and freedom could be strengthened, participation and access to information broadened, and previously unthinkable opportunities for people to engage with each other across the globe would develop; in essence providing grounds for a democratic utopia (Papacharissi 2004). Considering the Internet’s ubiquitous presence in our contemporary lives, with its seemingly unlimited provision of information and ways to engage, it can be argued that a revival of the public sphere has indeed occurred (Blumler 2015, 2016).

Contrasting viewpoints have however also been voiced. Increased access to information and media and ways to connect with other people has not necessarily resulted in more freedom. Instead, the need to bring order to the chaos

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has appeared, and is done by carving out one's own, personalized sliver of the web. When it comes to politically oriented media, the need for simplification can lead to individuals ending up in political realities parallel to each another where the same information and arguments bounce back and forth in "filter bubbles" or "echo chambers" (Bennett & Pfetsch 2018) or in a division between news-seekers and news-avoiders (Strömbäck et al. 2013). This development can in turn drive polarization of political views, even weaken social cohesion in society that could have far-reaching consequences for citizen's views on the legitimacy of democratic institutions (Sunstein 2007; Bennett & Pfetsch 2018; Van Aelst et al. 2017). Whether revived or not, the public sphere is from this perspective fragmented, and increasingly so.

Of particular concern are anonymous arenas for online communication; arenas which may provide breeding ground for uncivil, sometimes extreme forms of online political expression, lacking personal consequences (Blumler 2015; Suler 2005). This paper dives into one of the central online spaces where such activity takes place today in an attempt to explore political engagement relating to a central event in citizens' democratic life, namely an election. Over many months in the run-up to the 2018 Swedish national election, intense debate and negotiations on political positions were held in a primarily English-speaking online space: the anonymous, discussion-based image board 4chan. 4chan, specifically its sub-forum "Politically Incorrect" ("/pol/"), is indeed widely associated with alt-right ideology, trolling culture and overall offensive content (e.g. Hawley 2017; Hine et al. 2017; Nagle 2017).

Previous research has demonstrated how /pol/ has been able to exert wide-spread influence on the rest of the Web by a mixture of cross-platform sharing of both mainstream and alternative media as well as significant amounts of original content in the form of memes, often those exhibiting hate to various degrees, and also "raiding" comment sections on the major social media platforms such as YouTube (Hine et al. 2017; Zannettou et al. 2017, 2018). The immediate issue when it comes to analyzing the site is thus that it defies simple divisions between mainstream, alternative and different forms of social media, coherent information flows and media logic. An analysis of the election-related discussions on /pol/ using a conventional approach based upon how interaction between political actors, media and the public has typically occurred would be hopelessly outdated.

This paper aims to bring a grain of order to our understanding of the activity emanating from /pol/ in the Swedish context by approaching the discussions centered upon the 2018 election using a framework adapted to the current digital era. From a wider perspective, the ambition is furthermore to bring to the surface an arguably very influential yet less accessible part of a greater, very complex flow of information and communication that characterizes our current Web. I am guided by two basic questions in my research. First, given

the overall alt-right context of /pol/ as shown by previous research, what political parties do the discussions regarding the Swedish election center upon? Secondly, given the level of influence online previous research has been able to document regarding /pol/, are the users on the forum organized? In other words, are the discussions on /pol/ indicative of users being part of a cohesive, politically oriented group that is able to influence the Web? To answer these questions, I use a unique dataset of discussion threads relating to Sweden on /pol/, covering a time period of about 12 months. I conduct a content analysis of a number of aspects relating to the discussions held surrounding the Swedish election, specifically mentions of political parties and attitudes toward such, as well as a categorization of the types of threads posted.

I view /pol/ as an online forum that exemplifies one corner of what Andrew Chadwick has labeled the “hybrid media system” (2013): a complex and diverse, constantly developing system that has appeared in the contemporary era of digital communication, that does not necessarily replace all aspects of the old system, but instead exhibits hybridization in the interaction between new and old. In the midst of this seemingly chaotic, fragmented media environment, I furthermore argue that /pol/ is an online space where electronic tribes (Adams & Smith 2008) can form, meaning aspects pertaining to participants’ sense of common purpose, anonymity and ephemerality and the entire architecture of the site can help provide insight into people’s engagements and convictions also in the most aggressive of online contexts, where political opinions expressed may be as pronounced as they are offensive, yet not necessarily fixed.

Related Work and Theoretical Framework

As humans, we tend so seek out social contexts, based upon a need for a sense of belonging. Such belonging now takes place online to varying degrees (Adams & Smith 2008), including on 4chan. The context in which this occurs is one where a cacophony of voices and choices confront the average Internet user on a daily basis, emanating from what Chadwick (2013) has described as a hybridized media system. In such a system, old and new media in various formats intermix, the voices of both public and private actors with a wide range of media platforms at their disposal are heard, and a multitude of ways to interact exist for the individual. A hybridized system moves analysis away from any kind of dichotomous idea of the role and impact of more established media sources as opposed to newer, primarily digital ones, highlighting interdependence and diversity rather than one replacing the other. Chadwick’s analytical approach has been argued to fit well with the current need for a reconceptualization of the mechanisms of today’s political communication, able as it is to integrate the above aspects (e.g. Blumler 2015; Bennett & Pfetsch 2018).

With this more comprehensive framework in mind, looking back at individual users, it is not surprising that individuals seek some sort of simplification and cohesion. In an attempt to conceptualize this on-going development, the concept *electronic tribes* has been introduced. Drawing upon the theories of neotribalism presented by French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1996), Adams and Smith define an electronic tribe as “an exclusive, narrowly focused, network-supported aggregate of human beings in cyberspace who are bound together by a common purpose and employ a common protocol and procedure for the consensual exchange of information and opinions” (2008: 17). With basis in the idea that people join social groups oftentimes primarily to share information and exchange views and opinions in a mutually beneficial way, Adams and Smith see members of electronic tribes as bound by a common purpose and that over time begin to develop their own protocols, rituals and roles shaped by different technological solutions that facilitate interaction and information sharing (2008).

Adams and Smith highlight the technological aspects of electronic tribes by explaining that there are no advanced technological solutions required in order for such to form, but that the technology does have to be advanced enough to support a continuous flow of information as that is what defines the very essence of electronic tribes. Engaging in this flow is described as “storytelling”, meaning the practice of members of the electronic tribe addressing each other in the form of questions, engaging in discussions and together offering solutions. As part of the ingrained want for humans to communicate with each other and to be part of a greater whole, engaging in such storytelling in an electronic tribe becomes particularly important when there is a sense of on-going threat, such as a natural disaster, or when people find themselves in a marginalized position in society (Adams & Smith 2008: 18).

One might however question whether there is merit in introducing a concept such as electronic tribe, as it seems to be simply a synonym of “community”. Adams and Smith (2008) however argue that although there may be similar characteristics shared between the two, communities tend to be larger and also connected to geography in some way. Furthermore, electronic tribes are not particularly stable, compared to a more traditional community in civil society. They are instead characterized by fluidity and ephemerality; electronic tribes can form only to disperse again, similar to how identities existing primarily online contain some aspect of being transitory or provisional (Adams & Smith 2008: 17-18).

4CHAN AS AN ELECTRONIC TRIBE

Applying the concept of electronic tribes to the study of /pol/ is suitable for a number of reasons. First, there is the above characteristic of ephemerality, identified in previous research conducted on 4chan as one of its most

prominent features (Bernstein et al. 2011; Knuttila 2011; Hine et al. 2017; Zannettou et al. 2018). The ephemeral, fleeting nature of interactions on 4chan forms as interaction is based upon a fast-paced, constant flow of new threads, meaning very few users end up even viewing the same web page at the same time (Knuttila 2011). Threads are also removed once the catalog limit of each board is reached, much like a bulletin-board which gets full; sometimes a thread lasts only a few minutes, other times for hours, and are comprised of a combination of comments and images. Once a thread on /pol/ is pushed out it is moved to a short-term official archive where threads in their final state are stored up to a week (Zannettou et al. 2018). In other words, 4chan stands in stark contrast to traditional social media such as Facebook and Twitter, where actions made by users persist over time, making user behavior more transparent (Knuttila 2011).

Another prominent characteristic of 4chan that stands in great contrast to traditional social media is anonymity. This characteristic adds to the applicability of electronic tribes to 4chan, as more fixed, continuous identities of the users are absent in a forum marked by fluidity. The flag feature on /pol/, a small icon that appears with each post based upon IP location, does serve as a form of identifying feature and is meaningful in terms of connecting with the topics discussed, yet comes with the important caveat that such flags can easily be altered using VPNs/proxies (Hine et al. 2017). While the anonymous feature arguably reduces the sense of personal responsibility and accountability, research shows conflicting results regarding its effect on online behavior, such as in regards to aspects of aggression, credibility and participation (Bernstein et al. 2011; Hine et al. 2017). However, the first large-scale study conducted on /pol/ by Hine et al. (2017) is clear in its assessment that /pol/ is home to a significant part of the hate available online; hate which as mentioned above spreads over to traditional social media such as YouTube and Twitter via extensive link sharing and “raiding” of comment sections. Journalist Angela Nagle succinctly describes the kind of environment the 4chan culture of anonymity since the site’s inception in 2003 has fostered as one users go to “air their darkest thoughts” (Nagle 2017:17). Moderation on 4chan can furthermore be considered as very lax (Hine et al. 2017), further allowing for more or less any kind of content.

Finally, viewing 4chan through the lens of electronic tribes highlights the way users on 4chan communicate not only by using the written word, but via images, videos, or a combination of image and text, also known under the term *memes*. Originally coined by Richard Dawkins in his book *The Selfish Gene* (1976), a meme can be seen as analogous to a gene in that it replicates, can mutate through user recreation and spread through the dissemination of large numbers of online users, sometimes resulting in viral reach and entering popular culture (Zannettou et al. 2018). Memes are frequently humorous and ironic

and can often contain multiple layers of information and symbolism that can be specific to the online social group, or electronic tribe, providing a medium through which users can communicate and relate to one another as a group (Adams & Smith 2008).

The concept of electronic tribes has to the author's knowledge not previously been applied to 4chan and /pol/, but instead when analyzing online sport fan groups (e.g. Norman 2014) and gamer culture (e.g. Servais 2015). Such topics are however also discussed on the many sub-forums available on 4chan beyond /pol/, and such engagement can be considered as being part of the same pattern of contemporary online behavior of creating one's own media- and information diet. A final aspect connected to /pol/ has however been heavily publicized in recent years, namely the presence of alt-right ideology.

THE ALT-RIGHT CONTEXT

The term "alt-right" can be described as "an ideological island that hosts (all at once) a joke shop, a meme factory, media influencers, a Neverland for lost boys who feel disempowered or a dangerous sociopolitical movement – depending on who you ask" (Collins 2017). While there are studies that suggest that the alt-right movement, which gained significant momentum around 2013 (Hawley 2017) is indeed non-cohesive, even complex (Phillips & Yi 2018) and thus defies a simplistic definition (Heikkilä 2017), analysis of the content on /pol/ indicates that the board exhibits the racist, hateful, xenophobic and socially conservative sentiments generally associated with the alt-right (Hawley 2017; Hine et al. 2017). The inclusion of "meme factory" in the quote furthermore refers to the prolific use of memes on forums like 4chan, where the factory produces many witty and humorous memes, yet at the same time also those carrying very negative, hateful or racist messages (Zannettou et al. 2018).

The alt-right profile of /pol/ forms an overarching context for viewing its users as members of an electronic tribe, but also illustrates /pol/'s position within the hybrid media system as identified by Chadwick (2013). Based upon a large-scale analysis of 4chan posts, Zannettou et al. (2017) show that 4chan is responsible for a large number of both mainstream and alternative news links posted to Twitter, where the latter category contains a number of sources commonly associated with the alt-right, such as *breitbart.com*, *rt.com* and *infowars.com*. In combination with the prolific production and spread of memes that eventually become part of contemporary internet culture (Zannettou et al. 2018), activity and engagement on /pol/ as an electronic tribe can from an analytical standpoint benefit from keeping in mind the greater context of our contemporary hybrid media system, thereby ensuring that an online space like /pol/'s role and function is neither disregarded, nor overlooked.

Data and Research Design

Lacking a long-term formal digital archive searchable by means typically available for online forums, news sites, blogs, social media etc., threads on /pol/ board were collected via the site’s short-term archive on a daily basis starting in mid-November of 2017. The search word “swed” was used to capture the threads which contained any reference to Sweden in the top post which initiates each new thread. Thus not able to collect every single comment on /pol/ where Sweden is referred to, this inclusion criterion is nevertheless able to capture all relevant threads, thereby enabling documentation of a near complete picture of the discussions. A similar method was applied by Colliver et al. (2018).

The collection method rendered 5,555 threads from November 17, 2017 to November 30, 2018 of which 831 were related to the September 2018 election. The sub-collection of election-related threads ended on September 25, 2018, when the last such thread was posted. The total collection of threads on /pol/ represents 277,071 comments containing 69,910 images; the election-related threads 67,806 comments containing 18,550 images. On average, Swedish-related threads on /pol/ generated 49.8 comments; for election-related threads the average was 81.6. The starting date for the data during the third week of November, 2017, was chosen due to an impactful election-related political event generating significant activity, namely the publication of the Swedish Democrats’ election campaign video on YouTube.

In contrast to previous research specifically using data from 4chan (e.g. Hine et al. 2017), and indeed to much of contemporary research involving human-generated online data that can be analyzed via big data methodology, this paper analyzes a relatively small sample over a longer time period. It also approaches the data more closely in contrast to automated methods. The main reason for this approach is that automated analysis of this type of material comes with significant difficulties. Not only is the material very varied, consisting of written comments, hyperlinks and videos, images in multiple forms such as memes, photos, screenshots and more. Added difficulty comes with the fact that memes themselves often contain text, oftentimes multilayered in terms of meaning (Zannettou et al. 2018). The material furthermore contains extensive jargon, abbreviated or modified words, Internet slang, humor and sarcasm, further complicating an automated approach. While a wholly automated analysis is not impossible, a different approach considering the limited size of the material was chosen.

As the aim in this paper deals with grasping general patterns of the content of the election-related threads, this study uses a content analysis with a mixed methods approach. Content analysis has been defined as a “research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff 2004: 18), allowing for analysis

of frequencies of different types of categories in a larger empirical material containing not only text but also visual media. Of central concern using this approach are aspects of validity and replicability referenced in the quote, raising the importance of quantification of appropriate units, operationalization of theoretical concepts and ensuring quality in the coding process (Krippendorff 2004).

When analyzing the election-related threads, three elements were considered. First, the entire thread itself was identified as one main unit separated from a greater collection of threads on /pol/. Secondly, the very first post in a thread was seen as one type of sub-unit as such posts initiate for example a discussion and thus over time, can be categorized based upon its content. Third, subsequent posts, which can contain text, images, or a combination of both, comprised a second type of sub-unit. With basis in these units, the following coding process was conducted.

As an initial step, threads were coded as being election-related based upon the content of the thread-initiating post, which also comprises the title of the entire thread. Considering the constant flow of threads that characterizes the board, gaining attention to one's own thread requires some clarity wherefore titles often make explicit reference to the election, such as "swedish election", "This year is election in Sweden" or "Nationalists lead the polls in Sweden". For the less obvious threads with titles such as "A Hope for Sweden?", "Sweden NO" or "Will they actually do it?", the election had to emerge in the subsequent text of the thread-initiating post in order to be included as election related.

Lacking a variety of previous research on this type of material, especially research that applies a very close, non-automated analysis, the process of operationalizing measurable indicators from the identified election-related threads was in large part based upon testing and evaluating different possible alternatives in samples of the material. Using a combination of analysis of the content of the two thread sub-units, addressing the first research question regarding attention to the different political parties in Sweden thus entailed 1) a count of party mentions in all posts and 2) a categorization of attitude (favorable or non-favorable) towards a party or combination of parties, meaning multiple favorable or unfavorable attitudes can be present in the same post. Together, this part of the analysis aims to operationalize an analysis of a common purpose among the participants. An electronic tribe formed on a forum with a documented alt-right presence is expected to center discussions primarily on the political options corresponding to such a profile, meaning the Swedish Democrats (SD), but also the party which formed in the election year, Alternative for Sweden (AfS), along with the Nordic Resistance Movement (Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen; NMR). However, activity is not expected to be generated by the *same* group of anonymous individuals who hold the same, fixed opinions over time. The ephemeral nature of existing on /pol/ means that

users may fluctuate in activity over time, which may have an overall impact on the results.

The second research question pertained to investigating the cohesiveness of the discussions and in an extension, the group of participants as a whole, specifically analyzing engagement in storytelling via a common protocol. This means that participants are expected to frequently ask each other questions about the election, initiate election-related discussions and try to come up with answers and solutions together, and that the threads are not characterized entirely by randomness, despite the seemingly chaotic flow of threads on the site. Coding was in this case based upon the categories presented in a content typology analysis in a previous study by Bernstein et al. (2011) of the board /b/ on 4chan, but adapted to better fit the material. The full coding scheme is available in the Appendix.

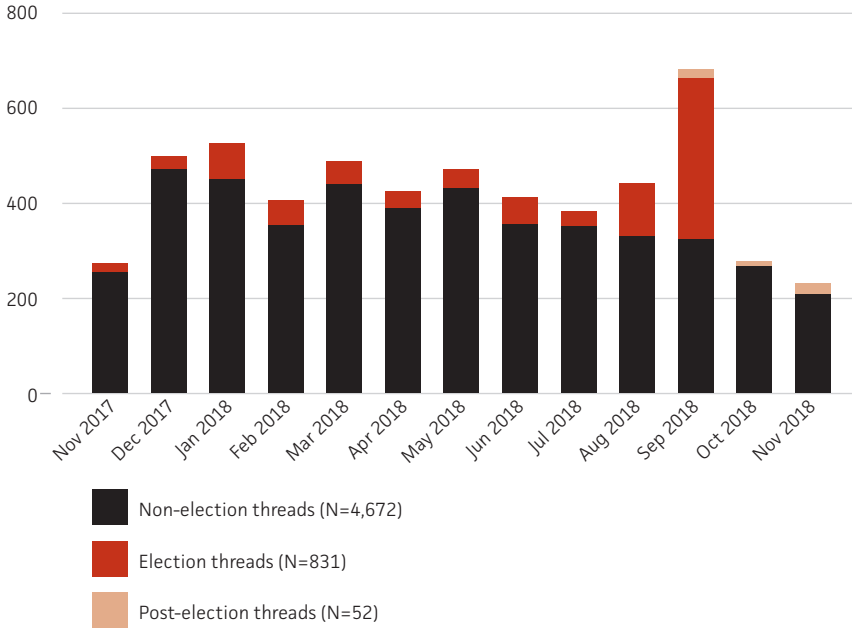
Ethical Considerations

Using data from online forums comes with ethical considerations. While access to 4chan requires neither login nor registration, and, most importantly, posts are anonymous barring the flag feature as mentioned above, participants may still not consider their discussions to be public. However, due to participation being anonymous, obtaining consent is by default practically impossible. On the other hand, the anonymity feature, the openness of the forum, and the fact that /pol/ alone can generate 216,000 discussion threads (corresponding to 8 million posts) in a span of two-and-a-half months (Hine et al. 2017), nevertheless point to the board being of a public nature, and the users being fully aware of such being the case. Furthermore, there are no attempts made in this paper to de-anonymize or map opinions of specific individuals, nor does the coding involve any type of tracking that would pose a risk to personal integrity.

Results

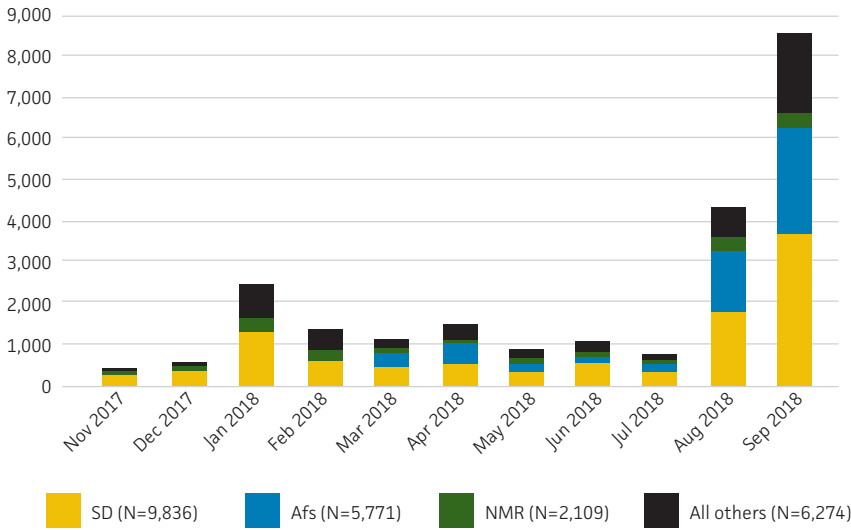
Figure 1 illustrates the overall activity on /pol/ during the selected time period, starting on November 17, 2017. Threads mentioning Sweden total around 300-500 per month up until the election when there is a great increase in activity, and at which time the number of election-related threads make up about half of all the Sweden-related threads in that month. As threads relating directly to the election stop by the end of September, overall activity also slows down.

Figure 1. Swedish Election- and Post-Election-Related Threads in Proportion to the Total Number of Threads on /pol/ Referencing Sweden by Month



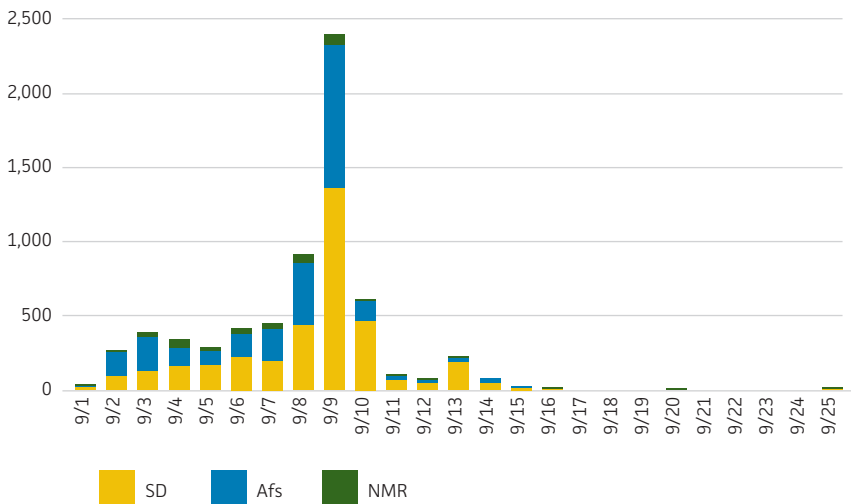
The question is, whether there is a pattern in how the discussions in the election-related threads engaged in political discussions referencing political parties, as well as expressing either favorable or unfavorable sentiments towards them. Figure 2 provides an indication of the first aspect, namely which political parties generated the most engagement among the participants. The count of party mentions shows that the three parties SD, AfS and NMR consistently appear in thread posts, albeit at differing levels over time, with NMR garnering limited interest compared to the other two. This result confirms the expectation that these three parties engage participants on /pol/ the most. Considering however that SD is a party that has been represented in the Swedish parliament (the Riksdag) since 2010 and both AfS and NMR sought to enter the Riksdag for the very first time in 2018, AfS having been launched only seven months before the election, the number of mentions of AfS is very disproportionate.

Figure 2. Mentions of Political Parties in Swedish Election-Related Threads on /pol/ by Month



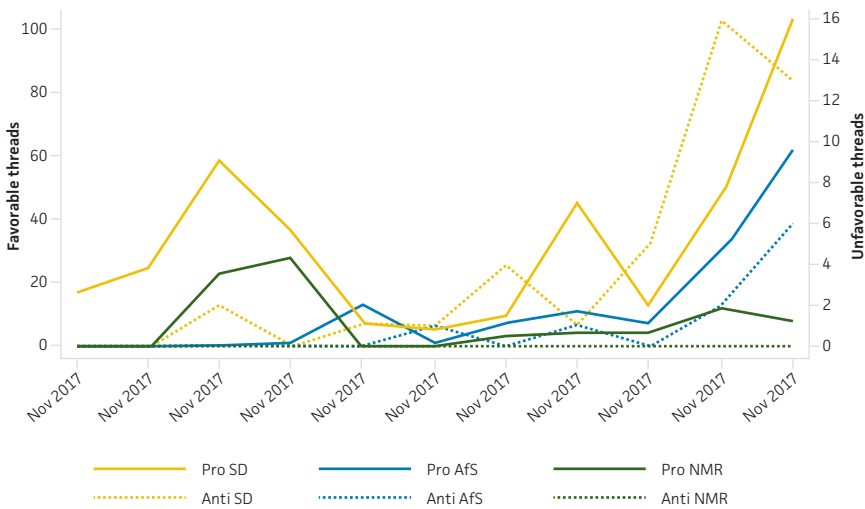
During the two most intense months, August and September, the three parties SD, Afs and NMR combined make up 83% and 77% of all the mentions of political parties. A closer look at engagement during the month of the election (September 1st-25th) provided in Figure 3 shows the intensity of mentions of the parties during September 8th, 9th (day of the election) and 10th, only for that intensity to decrease rather dramatically a few days later.

Figure 3. Mentions of SD, Afs and NMR in Swedish Election-Related Threads on /pol/ During September 1st-25th



Further mapping of the political engagement on /pol/ is provided in Figure 4, where counts of favorable (left hand side Y-axis) and unfavorable (right hand side Y-axis) threads are displayed over time. Starting with SD, the results indicate that favorable opinions expressed in thread-initiating posts fluctuate greatly over time. Prior to September and the election, there are two peaks in the data, one in January and one in June; a result which will be discussed below in the content typology analysis results. Between those two peaks, in the month of March, AfS was launched, potentially resulting in more threads favoring that party compared to SD, yet by the month of the election, threads expressing positive sentiments towards SD skyrocket. Threads expressing positivity toward AfS also increase significantly in September, after having remained at a more stable level compared to SD in the months leading up to the election. NMR is in this context peripheral and around the time AfS is launched loses almost all attention. When it comes to threads expressing criticism against either one of the three parties, such criticism is mainly concentrated to the months of August and September and primarily pertain to SD. A total of 29 thread-initiating posts contain unfavorable views on SD during those two months, compared to 150 favorable.

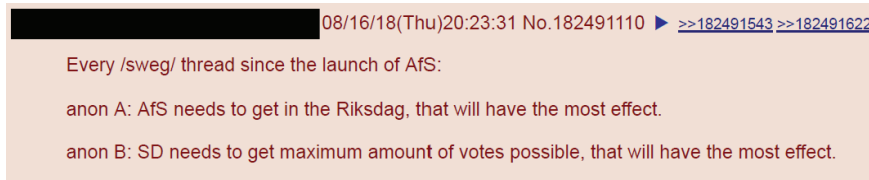
Figure 4. Attitudes Toward SD, AfS and NMR in Thread-Initiating Posts on /pol/ by Month



Typical critical opinions regarding SD consist of claiming that the party is “controlled opposition”, or that the party’s policies are not going “far enough”, making one poster state that “They’re literally just lefties at this point.” Critical views towards AfS consist of opinions that AfS is splitting the nationalist vote, stating that AfS is “troll bait to lower SD votes”, or that “AfS destroying the chances for a Swedish right wing coalition government.” What the favorable

and unfavorable views shown in Figure 4 of the political parties expected to receive the most attention provide is an illustration of the negotiations that occurred on /pol/ regarding which party should be promoted, potentially ultimately be voted on. As noted by Colliver et al. (2018), this time period is marked by intense strategic voting discussions. As the election draw closer, the suggestion is often to place the vote with SD in the 2018 election, and AfS in the next election, while others highlight that change is desperately needed, meaning AfS should be premiered. In mid-August, one user summarizes the discussions on strategic voting since the launch of AfS accordingly, clearly illustrating how the common, overall aim is to achieve an "effect":

Figure 5. Excerpt from Comment Posted on /pol/ August 16, 2018



While joined in a sense of purpose in promoting the election of political parties that can have the biggest effect – in this case, to change the course of Sweden’s trajectory towards falling apart primarily due to current immigration policies – many of the posters on /pol/ express alienation, often contrasting themselves to “normies”, i.e. “normal”, “conventional” people. Under such circumstances, seeing /pol/ as an electronic tribe where people who feel marginalized may end up, the expectation was thus that individuals on /pol/ engage in the constant flow on the board in a storytelling fashion, trying to help each other out, debating differences of opinion and coming up with solutions to problems. The results from the analysis of the content typology of the election-related threads as summarized in Table 1 indeed show that the three most common types of threads, together representing three out of four threads in total, are those that initiate discussions, share content with others and are composed according to a repeating theme. This is similar to the content types found on another subforum on 4chan with the exception that discussions are more common on /pol/ (Bernstein et al. 2011).

Table 1. Content Typology of Swedish Election-Related Threads on /pol/ Nov 2017–Sept 2018. Examples and Frequency.

Type	Examples	%
1) Themed	THIS IS WHERE THE FIGHT FOR EUROPE BEGINS. On the 9th September, Sweden is going to have a general election. This may be the last chance Sweden has to stop itself from falling over the edge before it's too late. After years of the establishment turning their country from a paradise on earth into the rape capital of Europe, the immigration issue is at the forefront of every Sven's mind. We need to keep it there.	24%
2) Sharing content	Swedish nationalist party tells the liberals and social democrats who really carries responsibility for the situation in Sweden in a new awesome video. ----- This is our new populist party in Sweden, they are truly / our guys/. We truly aren't cucks anymore. ----- Swedish electoral debate in 2 minutes /.../ Come one come all and watch the world's most underqualified politicians shout useless platitudes at each other in a language you don't understand. Surely there cannot be a better use of your time!	23%
3) Question, advice or recommendation	decide my vote in the swedish election ----- Did Sweden Democrats win. And how much votes did AfS get. I don't trust the sites i am looking at so I'm asking here for election results.	11%
4) Discussion	Sweden is falling into pieces. We need to get these fucking radicals out of this country! What do you guys think?? #SD2018 ----- Swedish Democrat Nazi Party are going to win the elections in Sweden i hope you are happy with yourselves /pol/ ----- Is Sweden finally waking up?	27%
5) Self-reference	Sweden is officially dead, another 4 years of turkniggers, another 4 years of wasted tax dollars, another 4 years of cuckery. Just fucking kill me /pol/.	1%
6) Request for content	NEED SWEDISH MEMES I wanna help get AfS to 4% in the Swedish election. I have an Instagram of about 100k followers, so when I post it will reach pretty far.	>1%
7) Request for action	A new political party "Alternative for Sweden" wants to do Sweden great again and now need your help! ----- if you are active on social media then begin shilling for AfS (Alternative For Sweden) remember, /pol/ is a NRM board BUT AfS ultimately have to be pushed to punish the faggots in SD LOVE NRM, VOTE AFS !	11%
8) Other	Russia you better not fuck this up. Sweden deserves a break from all of this	2%

Note: Table adapted from Bernstein et al. (2011).

The themed threads are of particular importance as the content analysis resulted in only one specific type of themed thread, namely those generally titled “/SWEG/ Swedish Election General” by the poster. These threads mirror the appearance of those that appeared on 4chan in the run-up to the 2017 elections in Germany and France (Colliver et al. 2018) and together with the threads requesting content and action illustrate an attempt to organize efforts for change around the common purpose of the group, or, provide strategies for solving a perceived problem. For example, when asked a direct question regarding which political party the SWEG threads favor, the original poster responds per below, illustrating the common goal of promoting a specific overarching ideology, albeit not a specific political party:

Figure 6. Excerpt from a SWEG Thread Posted on /pol/ April 26, 2018



While Colliver et al. (2018) were not able to document any significant impact online of these themed threads, they make up a significant proportion of the total number of election-related threads (202 out of 831). Throughout the period of time under study in this paper, the SWEG threads provide updated overviews of the current situation in terms of news, resources such as links, memes etc. meant for sharing, and encourage others to supply the same. A form of common procedure and protocol, serving the same purpose, is thus over time developed. These types of threads also serve as a way of countering the ephemeral aspects of the image board, a way to continue the discussion in a coordinated way (Bach et al. 2019).

Regarding the peaks found in Figure 4 above when it comes to threads posted that are favorable towards SD, the peak in January is largely due to the significant number of SWEG threads posted during that month (47 out of the 202 total SWEG threads); each thread promoting SD. This type of thread furthermore explains the higher count in threads favorable to NMR during this month, as NMR is mentioned as an alternative to support. As these types of threads are not posted as often by the month of March, and perhaps in combination with the launch of AfS this month, positive sentiments towards NMR decline significantly. The content typology analysis can also aid in the analysis of the second peak in thread-initiating posts promoting SD. Out of the 45

threads which favor SD posted in June, eight are SWEG threads and 16 consist of threads of the second category, meaning those that share election-related content primarily for purposes of providing information. A common theme among the content-sharing threads is poll results; such having been particularly positive for SD in June (SVT Nyheter 2018).

Figure 7. Example of the Beginning of a /SWEG/ Thread (accompanying image omitted)

🗨 /SWEG/ Sweden election general - we made the news edition [REDACTED]
 08/26/18(Sun)18:13:55 No.183571086  [▶ >>183574699 >>183579101 >>183561011 >>183561648 >>183561938 >>183584326 >>183592942 >>183598911 >>183599196 >>183600889](#)

Ok /pol/ the official election campaign has now begun in sweden. We have little over a mnth left of meme making and online campaigns left. Let's make it fucking count, and not sit around on our asses! Let's fucking save Sweden!

Danish fake news media just wrote and article about us! They are getting scared! The article includes hillarius statemnts such a"What is a meme" "What is a hatefact" and "The movement is foreign and lead by a Englishman". It also features several juicy skurt memes

We have grown to the point that the mainstream is writing about us. Keep it going lads!

NEWS
 >Danish fake news media write a hit piece about how "right wing radicals" use Jonatan Spang as propaganda. He responds by saying he dosen't pick sides and eouraged people to "Vote for me as comedian of the year if you like radical nazi humor"
 /ourguy/ confirmed
<https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/udland/hoejreradikale-bruger-jonatan-spang-i-svensk-valgkamp>

Yet as much space that the SWEG threads occupy in the data, along with the other major categories of election-related threads that encouraged engagement and the exchange of ideas among the participants during the studied time period, especially as the election grew closer as illustrated in Figure 1, the same figure also shows how overall activity starts to drop after the election. While the discussions regarding the election and its result dissipate toward the end of September, discussions regarding the then on-going government formation negotiations take over. A closer look at this activity is shown in Figure 8, where counts of party mentions in the post-election threads are displayed.

Figure 8. Mentions of Political Parties in Post-Election Threads on /pol/ by Month

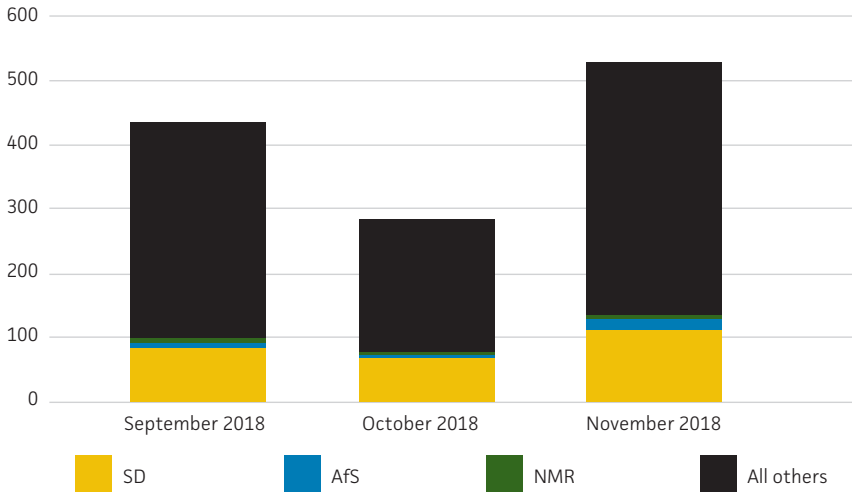


Figure 8 clearly shows that not only is the drop in activity significant in terms of discussions that pertain to parties once the election is over, but in the mentions that pertain to the post-election situation, as parties other than the trio of SD, AfS and NMR receive the majority of the attention in terms of mentions. Heightened activity around an election on a forum that discusses politics is to be expected, as are discussions regarding political parties involved in an on-going government formation process. However, the results in party mentions suggest that there may also be transitory aspects at play if an electronic tribe focused in large part on AfS was formed leading up to the election, only to dissolve or disperse again, in line with the ephemeral feature present on /pol/. Indeed, once the idea of Sweden being forced to hold a new election after a seeming deadlock in government formation negotiations arises by the month of November, opinions regarding AfS such as those shown below begin to appear, completely dismissing promoters of AfS having occupied significant space on the forum only a few months prior.

Figure 9. Excerpt from Post-Election Thread on /pol/ Posted November 22, 2018

11/22/18(Thu)17:11:16 No.194282265 ▶ [>>194282468](#) >>[194282603](#)

oh boy i can't wait for the braindead AfS shills again

11/22/18(Thu)17:13:40 No.194282468 ▶

>>[194282265](#)
AfS posters are memers

Conclusion and Discussion

In this study, an attempt has been made to offer insight into an online space located far from the public sphere where discussions on the 2018 Swedish national election were held among anonymous participants on a primarily English-speaking image board. The results provide an overview of attention to and attitudes towards the main parties of interest to the participants in the discussions, both before and after the election, and also how the participants interact within the confines of the architecture and technological features of the location of the discussions. While the results unequivocally show that the political interests of the participants on /pol/ seen as a group are located to the far right, attention and support for the main political parties in question, the Sweden Democrats (SD), Alternative for Sweden (AfS) and Nordic Resistance Movement (NMR), can fluctuate over time both in relation to each other and the other Swedish political parties. These political alternatives are furthermore intensively debated internally in the context of a national election.

Viewed through the lens of electronic tribes, highlighting in particular the ephemerality of existing in a space like /pol/, the idea put forth in this study is that political positions expressed there are not to be seen as fixed. Instead, affected by living in a time of overwhelming access to new media and information in a hybridized media system, members may join the tribe in search for belonging, identifying with the common purpose expressed among the members and adopting common ways of interacting via the means possible on the platform, only to leave, or disinvest in the act of promoting certain ideas and opinions. This also means that it is difficult to see a place like /pol/ as an expression of a cohesive political conviction, organized and stable, despite the fact that there are some discernable patterns visible in the activity generated by many of the participants following a common procedure and protocol. Considering the fleeting, non-fixed aspects of the activity among the participants, the findings also bring attention to the possibilities of being able to negotiate political positions. So called “filter bubbles” may form, but may also be porous enough to allow for the inclusion of different viewpoints over time.

The perspective presented in this paper can be applied to other online environments, particularly those which feature anonymity and ephemerality. Yet because such features are present, navigation and ultimately understanding of such environments requires a level of literacy into the ways communication occurs, including via memes and through certain typologies of discussion threads as those documented in the above analysis, and also the general structure and flow of a site, which can vary greatly but will impact interactions. Not expanding analysis beyond traditional channels however risks missing a growing number of citizens located in part elsewhere, sometimes in very dark, far less accessible corners of the Internet. This is in turn symptomatic of a significant gap in our understanding of the role these kinds of sites play in

the greater, incredibly complex flow of information and communication online today, although as demonstrated in this paper, can be rectified by applying an updated, integrated approach such as that proposed by Chadwick (2013).

Lastly, the current study is limited in the sense that it does not offer an in-depth analysis of the discussions regarding the 2018 Swedish national election. Election-related threads are also only part of the discussions held regarding Sweden during the selected time period. More extensive analysis involving automated techniques able to manage both text and images can provide a fuller picture of the different nuances of the discussions and different political positions negotiated and debated. While 4chan, despite its considerable influence on online culture, is still considered “fringe” (see e.g. Zannettou et al. 2018), it nevertheless plays a part in the contemporary media- and information landscape characterized by the ever-growing complexity as discussed in this paper, thus warranting research attention.

Appendix

CODING SCHEME

Main unit: *Election-related threads (including post-election threads)*

Qualifier for inclusion: Thread-initiating post contains mentions of at least one of the following:

Indicator	Examples
Swedish political parties*	New election video from Sweden democrats ---- This is our new populist party in Sweden
Party leaders of Swedish political parties	Can Jimmie save us? ---- Sweden’s Prime Minister is a joke
References to the election, such as polls or results	Men Vote to Save Sweden, Women Vote to Destroy It ---- Swedish government Deadlocked
References to the election aftermath, government formation negotiations starting in late September 2018	Sweden one step closer to re-election ---- Communist party leader threatens to save Sweden

*Mentions of Swedish political parties refers to mentions of the party’s full name or abbreviation, slang or jargon, e.g. “moderaterna”, “M” “the moderates”, “the conservative party”, “the cuckservative party”, as well as by images (e.g. by party symbol, picture of party leader).

Sub-unit 1: Thread-initiating posts

Indicator	Coding	Examples
1) Thread ID	Format: 2oYYMMDD-001	
2) Attitudes towards parties	1) Pro SD	Nationalist Sweden Democrats Are Set to WIN Next Month's Elections!!!
	2) Anti SD	----
	3) Pro AfS	SD is not based and will not save Sweden
	4) Anti AfS	----
	5) Pro NMR	This is the man that will save Sweden.
	6) Anti NMR	
	7) Anti either one of SD, AfS, NMR, or all, pro another party	Facism's loss in Sweden's elections ---- The Socialdemocratic party is Swedens only hope
	8) None of SD, AfS, NMR mentioned, pro another party/parties	---- Swedish PM reveals power levels ----
	9) None of SD, AfS, NMR mentioned, anti another party/parties	Why are Moderaterna and KD retarded?
	10) Pro one of SD, AfS, NMR, anti another party/parties	
	11) No parties mentioned	
3) Content type	Type	Description
	1) Themed	A themed series of posts formatted in a reoccurring way, using similar text and images etc.
	2) Sharing content	Post offering election-related content for comment or simply to click on, usually accompanied by a brief introduction. Commonly contains link(s) to election-related news stories/videos or information.
	3) Question, advice or recommendation	Asking for advice relating to the election (such as what to vote for, how to vote from overseas or if ballots are missing), or a more general question regarding who is winning the election, what a poll result or the election result could mean.
	4) Discussion	Usually in addition to sharing content, such as a meme, posting an opinion, sentiment or argument, encouraging or inciting discussion about an election-related topic.
	5) Self-reference	Thread started by referencing oneself, including some personal information or anecdote relating to the election.
	6) Request for item	Starting a thread to request content, such as memes, previous threads or for a thread to be started.
	7) Request for action	Posting a call to action of some sort, for example to share and repost news, memes or videos relating to the election but also other types of actions such as to print posters. Oftentimes addressing the community itself, by using "we", "boys", or simply "/pol/".
8) Other	Unable to categorize.	

Sub-unit 2: Individual posts in thread

Indicator	Coding
Party mentions* (monthly basis)	0-3,427

*See note on page 459.

PARTIES INCLUDED IN THE ANALYSIS

Represented in parliament

- Centerpartiet (Centre Party), (C)
- Kristdemokraterna (Christian Democrats) (KD)
- Liberalerna (Liberals) (L)
- Miljöpartiet de gröna (Green Party) (MP)
- Moderata samlingspartiet (Moderate Party) (M)
- Socialdemokraterna (Swedish Social Democratic Party) (S)
- Sverigedemokraterna (Sweden Democrats) (SD)
- Vänsterpartiet (Left Party) (V)

Others

- Alternativ för Sverige (Alternative for Sweden) (AfS)
- Feministiskt initiativ (Feminist Initiative) (FI/Fi/FI)
- Medborgerlig Samling (Citizens' Coalition) (MED)
- Nordiska Motståndsrörelsen (Nordic Resistance Movement), (NMR/NRM)

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Exploring Media Use and Perceptions of Swedish News Media Among Immigrants During the Election Campaign 2018

Nora Theorin

Abstract

In democratic societies, news media play a key role – not least during election campaigns – as a central source of political information and forum for public debate. This makes it crucial to understand how and why people use and perceive news media. This includes immigrants. Despite the fact that immigrants constitute a relatively large group, and indications that immigrants and the Swedish majority population differ in ways that might have societal implications, there is however limited research on media use and media perceptions among immigrants in Sweden. To help remedy this, the aim of the current study is to explore how immigrants used and perceived Swedish news media during the election campaign 2018. Findings from focus group data display a great deal of variation regarding characteristics and motivations for media use. Further, four different trust dimensions that participants evaluated, and based their perceptions of news media on, are identified.

In democratic societies, news media play a key role – not least during election campaigns – as a central source of political information and forum for public debate (Schröder 2016). For example, evidence suggests that use of news media is associated with political knowledge, interest, participation and trust (Curran et al. 2014; Norris 2000; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2018; Strömbäck & Shehata 2010).

In the context of migration, media use is also often viewed as a tool for integration and a way of learning about the host society (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Horsti 2008). On the other hand, news media might also discourage identification with public life since the views of elites tend to be overrepresented while other groups tend to be marginalized (Curran et al. 2014). Arguably, immigrants

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might be especially likely to experience a lack of identification since they are underrepresented in news media as well as within political parties; in addition, research shows that immigrants and immigration are often negatively framed in the news (Dancygier et al. 2015; Eberl et al. 2018; Strömbäck et al. 2017).

Against this background, a relevant research question is how immigrants in Sweden used and perceived media during the election campaign 2018. This is relevant for at least three reasons. First, we have limited knowledge about the *motivations* for media use (or non-use) and the *roots* for different perceptions of Swedish news media among immigrants. This holds true even though one-sixth of the Swedish population consists of immigrants (SCB 2018). Over one million of them are Swedish citizens (SCB 2017a), and in addition over half a million foreign citizens were entitled to vote in the local elections 2018 (SCB 2017b). Second, research indicates that immigrants and the Swedish majority population differ in ways that might have societal implications. For instance, findings suggest that immigrants use somewhat less Swedish media (Andersson 2005; Weibull & Wadbring 1998) and that they find it more difficult to understand (Annerstedt, Bergström & Ohlsson 2017). Yet, previous research about how immigrants relate to media is mainly descriptive in character, while there are hardly no Swedish studies that explore immigrants' motivations for media use or perceptions of news media. Third, as noted above, immigrants tend to be underrepresented and negatively framed in the news (Brune 2004; Eberl et al. 2018), and international research indicates that immigrants perceive themselves as excluded and negatively presented in media (Christiansen 2004). That might reinforce feelings of exclusion from the host society, which in turn might trigger tensions between immigrants and the majority population.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this study is to explore media use and perceptions of Swedish news media among immigrants during the election campaign 2018. Empirically, the study builds on data from focus groups conducted in the midst of the election campaign.

News Media Use Among Immigrants

Research suggests that immigrants tend to use media from their countries of origin as well as international media and media content in their native language (Andersson 2005; Christiansen 2004; Kissau 2012). This has been claimed to result in lack of interest in the host society and decreased integration (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). Yet, this claim has also been questioned, and evidence from the Nordic countries suggests that use of media outlets from other countries and in other languages seems to complement rather than replace use of media from the host country (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008; Weibull & Wadbring 1998). Specifically, research suggests that immigrants tend to seek news media – from the host country *and* from international outlets – very

broadly, and their news diet often include a mix of radio, television, newspapers and the Internet. In fact, evidence indicates that immigrants in total seek news through more different outlets and spend more time on obtaining news than the majority population (Christiansen 2004). This finding has been explained by difficulties in finding a single news outlet that can fulfil immigrants' various needs related to their transnational situation (Christiansen 2004).

At the same time, survey-based studies from Sweden indicate that immigrants use Swedish media slightly less than people born in Sweden, especially when it comes to use of broadsheets and radio news (Andersson 2005; Weibull & Wadbring 1998). Findings from Sweden also shows that immigrants, compared to Swedes, find it more difficult to read Swedish news texts and to understand Swedish TV and radio news (Annerstedt, Bergström & Ohlsson 2017).

In terms of motivations for media use, previous research has identified several key motivations. These include to stay updated on local and national events (in the home countries as well as in the host country), that media use is a part of an ongoing identity work, and that media use constitutes an efficient way of learning a new language (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Sjöberg & Rydin 2011). At the same time, research shows that news use and interest in political issues in the host country are likely to vary among immigrants, depending on factors such as language skills, self-esteem and social capital (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008).

Despite the fact that there is some research about media use among immigrants, our knowledge about how immigrants in Sweden use news media is very limited. Further, to the best of my knowledge, no studies have been conducted in the context of an ongoing election campaign, when the role of news media can be considered especially important from a democratic perspective. To help remedy this, the following research question is posed, where "participants" refer to those immigrants participating in this study:

RQ1: How did participants use Swedish news media during the election campaign?

Perceptions of News Media Among Immigrants

In terms of immigrants' perceptions of news media, research indicates that immigrants tend to be rather critical (Christiansen 2004), and it has been claimed that less positive perceptions might be explained by the fact that many immigrants previously have experienced media systems characterized by political propaganda (Weibull & Wadbring 1998). Research also suggests that immigrants are particularly critical of the way in which they are presented (Christiansen 2004). Specifically, immigrants have expressed that they experience that they are often linked to negativity and problems (Eide & Nikunen

2011; Christiansen 2011). Moreover, evidence from Denmark shows that immigrants perceive themselves as excluded in media (Christiansen 2004). Part of the explanation might be limited language skills and segregation (Christiansen 2004). Further, it is reasonable to expect that the feeling of exclusion, and the critical stance towards the news, relate to the fact that immigrants generally are underrepresented in news media (Eberl et al. 2018). Moreover, *when* they are figuring in the news, they tend to be linked to problems such as crime and cultural challenges (Andreassen 2011; Keskinen 2011; Schemer 2012; Strömbäck et al. 2017), although it might differ depending on immigrant group (Eberl et al. 2018; Lawlor & Tolley 2017) and between different media outlets (Eberl et al. 2018; Jacobs, Meeusen & d’Haenens 2016).

The problem-oriented media coverage might in turn lead to immigrants turning away from news in the host society (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). It is also reasonable to expect that underrepresentation and negative media frames might trigger mistrust, or even hostility, toward news media. Against this background, it could be hypothesized that immigrants in Sweden have rather negative perceptions of news media. Given the lack of previous research, I have however opted for two research questions about perceptions of Swedish news media during the election campaign rather than pose hypotheses:

RQ2: How did participants perceive Swedish news media during the election campaign in general?

RQ3: How did participants perceive the news coverage on immigration and immigrants during the election campaign?

Method

To investigate the research questions above, I have chosen focus groups interviews as methodology. Focus groups rely on the dynamic of group interaction to stimulate thinking and verbal contribution of participants to seek opinions and beliefs (Barron et al. 2010). It is a suitable method when the aim is to investigate peoples’ perceptions about their behavior (Ekström 2010) and their experience of media (Lindlof 2009). Focus groups are also increasingly used to access immigrants with limited language skills, that may exclude them from other research methods (Barron et al. 2010). Thus, it is a suitable method for exploring motivations behind media use as well as perceptions of news media among immigrants.

Six focus groups comprising between three and eight participants were conducted in the midst of the election campaign 2018.¹ Requirement of

1 The focus groups were conducted between August 28 and September 4. The election took place September 9.

participants, and the interviews, took place at locations that were familiar to participants. Specifically, four interviews were conducted at SFI (Swedish For Immigrants), and two interviews were conducted at a cultural center (Blå Stället), located in a suburb in Gothenburg. While the vast majority of the participants at SFI had immigrated to Sweden quite recently, most participants at Blå Stället had lived in Sweden a substantially longer time. This recruitment strategy was considered as beneficial, as it is reasonable to expect that residence time might influence how immigrants relate to Swedish media and the campaign.

Participants were asked if they wanted to take part in the focus groups. It should be noted that this self-selection has its shortcomings. For instance, individuals with good language skills and social capital might be more willing to participate: factors that are also associated with news use and political interest (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). Further, the self-selection led to some of the groups being quite heterogenous on factors such as age, education, ethnicity and gender, which might have implications on the group interaction. In some of the groups a few participants appeared to be more comfortable expressing their views than others, which might be related to the heterogeneity as well as the various group sizes. I handled this challenge by taking a rather active role as a moderator, ensuring that everyone had the chance to express their views.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish. To reduce the risk of selection bias due to language barriers, and to facilitate the communication process, participants were informed that they could answer in English, or mix Swedish and English, which some of them did.

A semi-structured interview guide designed to tap into the research questions about media use (RQ1) and perceptions of news media (RQ2 and RQ3) during the election campaign was used. A pilot test of the guide was firstly conducted together with a colleague. After debriefing and evaluating the test, no major changes were made. Thus, data from the pilot-group is also included in the study.

PARTICIPANTS

31 individuals participated in one of the six focus groups. Before the interviews, they filled in a short questionnaire about socio-demographics and media use, aiming to provide information about key characteristics of the sample. Data from the questionnaire (see Table 1) shows a great deal of variations among participants.

Table 1. Participants in Focus Groups: Demographics (individuals and percent)

	Participants (N, %)		Participants (N, %)
Gender		Years in Sweden	
Female	16 (52)	Less than 1 year– 2 years	13 (42)
Male	15 (48)	3–10 years	12 (39)
Age		More than 10 years	6 (19)
18–25 years	4 (13)	Media use for information about the election	
26–35 years	16 (53)	Newspapers	17 (55)
36–45 years	6 (19)	TV	16 (52)
46–55 years	5 (16)	Radio	11 (35)
Education		Social media	10 (32)
Primary	6 (19)	SVT	6 (19)
High school	8 (26)	Facebook	5 (16)
University/ collage	17 (17)	Göteborgs-Posten	4 (13)
Country of origin			
Australia	1 (3)		
Belarus	1 (3)		
Benin	1 (3)		
Croatia	2 (6)		
Egypt	1 (3)		
Greece	1 (3)		
Iran	5 (16)		
Iraq	8 (26)		
Morocco	1 (3)		
Palestine	1 (3)		
Romania	1 (3)		
Serbia	1 (3)		
Sierra Leone	1 (3)		
Somalia	3 (9)		
Syria	3 (9)		
The US	1 (3)		

Note: Percentages are rounded to whole numbers. The following open-ended question was asked for media use: “Which media do you use to get information about the Swedish election that will be held this autumn?” Since participants could mention several media types and outlets the percentages add up to more than 100. Some participants also mentioned more than one country of origin, which is why the percentages add up to more than 100. One participant was born in Sweden with parents who had immigrated. When recruiting participants at Blå Stället it was not clear that this participant was born in Sweden, which is why the person was included in one of the interviews. While the focus of the study is media use and perceptions among *immigrants*, the data that this participant contributed with was included since it enriches the findings.

This heterogenous sample is beneficial since many of the factors that participants differ on relate to media use and perceptions of media, and since the group *immigrants living in Sweden* is a highly diverse group. To increase the chances of mapping out various key explanations for media use and perceptions of news media, it is crucial to collect data from people with different characteristics. Worth noting however, while many different characteristics are represented, some are clearly overrepresented. For instance, 55 percent had a university or collage education and 53 percent were between 26–35 years. Yet, this is no major problem since the current study does not claim to *generalize* the results to the population *immigrants in Sweden*, but to *explore* media use and perceptions of news media among this group.

PROCEDURE

First, participants were welcomed and the intended focus group process was described.² It was stressed that the information participants would provide would be handled anonymously and only used for research purposes. Then, participants filled in the questionnaire, and thereafter they were asked to introduce themselves to the group. Then, the focus group interview started. The sessions were recorded and lasted approximately 40–70 minutes.

The interviews were then transcribed as detailed as possible to provide a transcript that was true to its original nature (Braun & Clarke 2006). The quotes presented in the result section below are thus close to direct translations of the transcript. Yet, minor changes (principally grammatical corrections) were made in cases where it was considered as necessary to facilitate reading and avoid potential misunderstandings.

METHOD OF ANALYSIS

The focus group data was analyzed with thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying and analyzing themes within data (Braun & Clarke 2006). A step-by-step-guide for thematic analysis was followed (Braun and Clarke 2006), and resulted in a thematic map with three themes relating to the research question about media use and four themes belonging to the research questions about media perceptions.³

To check the reliability of the coding, an intercoder-reliability test was conducted with an external coder (see e.g. Wibeck 2010). More specifically,

2 To enhance a friendly atmosphere, and to compensate participants for their contribution, participants were offered coffee, tea and snacks during the interviews.

3 Themes belonging to RQ1: 1) Media use and personal contacts as information sources, 2) Reasons for following the election campaign, 3) Reasons for not following the election campaign. Themes belonging to RQ2: 1) News media as provider of correct and truthful information, 2) News media as a watchdog, 3) News media and social responsibility. Themes belonging to RQ3: 1) News media coverage on immigrants and immigration.

10 percent of the material was randomly selected and then categorized under the themes based on the definitions of each theme. The test reached an agreement-rate of 85.7 percent, which is considered an acceptable rate (Wibeck 2010). After the test, the definition of one theme was further clarified, as the test revealed that two themes overlapped each other. Finally, and simultaneously as writing up the result section, the research questions were addressed by linking them to the analysis of the themes.

Findings

The result of the analysis is presented below. Each quote hyphen at the start of the sentence. To clarify when quotes belong to each other (i.e. participants engage in a group discussion), versus when the quotes represents an individual speaking, the focus group number is specified at the end of each speaking.

Use of News Media During the Election Campaign

MEDIA USE AND PERSONAL CONTACTS AS INFORMATION SOURCES

The first theme relating to RQ1 taps into participants' type of media use as well as the frequency of their media use. The other characteristic of this theme relates to participants' use of mediated information versus information from other sources.

In line with previous research suggesting that immigrants tend to seek news broadly (Christiansen 2004), participants described that they followed the campaign by using several different media types, including traditional media outlets, media content translated to their native language, social media, and alternative media sites. Interestingly, one participant expressed that low media trust served as a motivation for using several different media outlets:

- I do not trust media so I read several different newspapers so that I can cross... (Silence).
- So, you think that you can get a better picture if you use several different media? (Moderator).
- Yes, because no one knows if they say the truth. (FG6)

This can be related to research suggesting that immigrants tend to use news media broadly to fulfill their various needs (Christiansen 2004).

At the same time, many participants expressed that they relied on personal contacts – such as friends, family and colleagues – rather than media as sources of information about the election:

– I don't use media that much. But me and my husband have many Swedish friends. And we spend much time together, and I think I get the right information from them and not from media.

(FG2)

One participant elaborated on why personal contacts was preferred as an information source. The person expressed that the parents gave more information and provided pedagogical explanations, while news content was perceived as too short and difficult to follow:

– Yes, and they (refers to parents) can also explain in a good way and they say exactly what is happening. Sometimes in the news, they shorten everything. My parents give me more information.

(FG4)

Yet, mediated information and information through personal contacts sometimes overlapped:

– I don't check media or read the newspaper. But I listen to news on the radio when my stepdad drives me to school in the morning. So, I and he might discuss who we will vote for and why and stuff like that.

(FG4)

Further, friends and families living in other countries also linked participants to mediated information, by sharing or talking about news content on Swedish politics. A reoccurring pattern was that the news coverage from other countries was about immigration, integration and/or the Sweden Democrats:

– Yes, but I received an e-mail from a friend several weeks ago about Sweden's political situation. So, it's, yes, I think people hear about it in different parts of the world actually. It's a little strange that my friends know about it...I think it's a little negative for people living in Sweden. (Silence)

– Okay, so it's not positive information? (Moderator)

– No, people just want to hear about the Sweden Democrats. And what's going to happen with us who are immigrants. So, it becomes a little uncomfortable.

(FG1)

While some participants stated that they followed media coverage about the election and other expressed that personal contacts were a more central information source, other participants said that they neither used media nor talked politics during the election campaign:

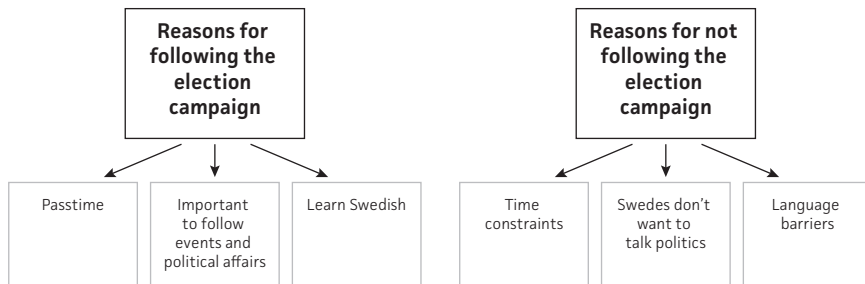
– I'm in the same kind of situation as you (refers to another participant). Everything I see comes from my home country and I don't talk politics often with people...So, I haven't heard or read much about the election actually.

(FG1)

REASONS FOR FOLLOWING AND NOT FOLLOWING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Participants elaborated on why they followed, or not followed, the campaign. Thus, the other two themes that were identified in relation to RQ₁ are 1) Reasons for following the election campaign and 2) Reasons for not following the election campaign. The identified motivations for following and not following the election campaign are illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1. Reasons for Following Versus not Following the Election Campaign



Starting with reasons for following the election campaign, participants expressed that they felt that it was important to stay updated on current events and political affairs:

- For example, I read Aftonbladet (Swedish tabloid) almost every day. Not every day, every second day. I want to know what happens.
(FG₃)

This is consistent with uses and gratification research, showing that media use can be motivated by a need to be informed and learn about one's community, events and political affairs (Rubin 2009; Ruggiero 2000), as well as research that have identified this as one of the motivations for media use among immigrants (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Sjöberg & Rydin 2011). Beyond that, different dimensions of the need to stay updated on events and politics can be distinguished: for instance, to be able to be a part of a social context or to manage everyday life (Bergström 2016). When analyzing the focus group data, another dimension could also be identified: one participant felt that it was highly important to follow the radical right movement in Sweden to increase the chances of being able to predict potential implications of a strong radical right, and in particular how it would impact the person as a refugee. That can be related to research suggesting that individuals under stressful situations might be more attached to media (Ruggiero 2000), as well as the suggestion that media use is related to social identity (Rubin 2009):

– I always read newspapers and interviews about the election and uh...And I want to know how the Swedes will vote and what will be the next government, to know what to do...as refugees. What to do in the future. Yes, because there are two different ways. If negative people will form a government...or those who think that all refugees should leave Sweden and have a bad program for refugees, so...I try to figure out what to do as a second step. So therefore, I listen to everyone and read everything about the election. And I always ask all Swedes “Who are you going to vote for?”
(FG6)

This motivation appeared crucial to the participant who developed the thoughts and feelings later during the interview:

– For, example I “liked” Alternativ För Sverige⁴ on Facebook two days ago, and I follow them and what they are talking about. They want Sweden to only be for those who have blue eyes, yellow hair and white skin. They don’t want any others.

– Why do you follow them? (Moderator)

– Because I want to try to know how they think. And how many people agree with them. It’s very important to me. To know how many Swedish people’ agree with those who are Nazi or racist in this country. It’s really important to me.

– But isn’t it very difficult to read such things for you as an immigrant?
(Moderator)

– Yes, it’s very difficult. You feel really bad and you get very sad when you read how they talk about the others.
(FG6)

This illustrates how the different situation that immigrants and native-born are situated in, and how immigrants’ transnational situation can influence their news media use (Christiansen 2004). Nevertheless, there are also some motivations that are quite similar regardless of whether people are native born or immigrations. This includes using media and following the election campaign as a way of just passing time:

– I usually check... At the bus stops, there is information about each party. What they think about, and what suggestions they have and so on. I usually read to get information. Yes, and it shortens time. (Laugh)
(FG4)

This finding is consistent with research showing that accessing news often function as a habitual way of consuming time rather than seeking media content for

4 Alternativ för Sverige (ENG: Alternative for Sweden) is a Swedish radical right and anti-immigration party.

goal-directed and instrumental reasons (Rubin 2009; Ruggiero 2000). Further, in line with previous research (Sjöberg & Rydin 2011), it was expressed that the election campaign was followed for the sake of learning Swedish:

- But my reason is not politics. I listen to learn more Swedish.
(FG1)

Turning to the reasons for *not* following the campaign, some participants expressed that there are language barriers:

- There are many immigrants in Sweden now. So maybe there could be a little more news in different languages.
- Yeah, I agree.
- It's a little controversial but I think they could be a little more inclusive. Especially, in the large cities like Gothenburg and Malmö. Because not everyone can speak Swedish. It's not easy.
- Yes. Because I know very little about certain parties. But I think it's a good idea. Because as we can see, we can't have a discussion in Swedish about this stuff because it's waaay higher than our... We want to get our point across so it would be good if it was in different languages.
(FG1)

This is in line with research showing that immigrants, compared to people born in Sweden, find it more difficult to read news stories and understand news programs on the radio as well as on TV (Annerstedt, Bergström & Ohlsson 2017), as well as research showing that language skills is important for media use (Christiansen 2004).

Research on news avoidance suggests that a common motivation for non-use is that people experience that they do not have the time to consume news (Schróder 2016). Time constraint also occurred as an explanation for not following the campaign and politics during the focus groups:

- I don't know if I will vote. It's the first time but I'm not so focused on politics so I don't know. Because I'm more focused on my job, but maybe I will vote.
(FG1)

Finally, one participant felt that Swedes don't want to talk about politics:

- It's like a rule in Sweden, that people can't talk politics at the lunch-table or... Yes, if you check the statistics, the Sweden Democrats have 24 percent. This means that one of four will vote for them. So, when people sit around a table, there are several who will vote for them. But they don't want to talk about it so it's a bit fake. Because I work at a Swedish company and there are many Swedes who find it uncomfortable to talk about it during the lunch break.
(FG1)

Perceptions of News Media During the Election Campaign: Different Dimensions of Media Trust

With respect to RQ2 and RQ3 about participants' perceptions of news media, different dimensions of media trust became central during the interviews. It comes as no surprise as media trust has been shown to be crucial for understanding people's perceptions of media (e.g. Jensen & Rosengren 1990; Sullivan 2013; McLeod et al. 2017). The concept of media trust represents faith in media actors to fulfil journalistic expectations that people have (Vanacker & Belmas 2009). Put differently, media trust to a high degree depends on peoples' perceptions about media actors' performance, and peoples' evaluations and perceptions of media are based on their normative expectations (Fawzi 2018). Consistent with this, participants evaluated media based on their perceptions about how media and journalists fulfilled the normative expectations that participants had. Specifically, four themes that represented different trust dimensions, could be distinguished: 1) News media as provider of correct and truthful information, 2) News media and social responsibility 3) News media as a watchdog, and 4) News media coverage on immigrants and immigration. In other words, participants evaluated media based on these themes. The themes, as well as positive and negative perceptions expressed by participants, are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Different Dimensions of Media Trust

Theme/ trust dimension	Positive perceptions	Negative perceptions
News media as provider of correct and truthful information	<p>"Swedish media represent citizens rather than the government."</p> <p>"Swedish media is free and independent."</p>	<p>"Media content is influenced by political parties, economic factors, journalists and owners of the companies."</p> <p>"Media spread false information."</p>
News media and social responsibility	<p>"There is information that is easy to understand."</p> <p>"There are several outlets to choose from."</p> <p>"Swedish media outlets are serious and classy."</p>	<p>"There is a lack of information that is easy to understand."</p> <p>"News media are shallow and repetitive."</p>
News media as a watchdog	<p>"Certain media outlets scrutinize and have the courage to ask uncomfortable questions."</p>	<p>"In general, media do not scrutinize and ask uncomfortable questions."</p>
News media coverage on immigrants and immigration	<p>"It is understandable that news media report about immigration since it's a central societal problem."</p>	<p>"News coverage about immigration and immigrants is one-sided and negative."</p>

NEWS MEDIA AS PROVIDER OF CORRECT AND TRUTHFUL INFORMATION

To provide information that is as truthful as possible is a key task for journalism (Strömbäck 2004). While participants in the focus groups appeared to agree on the ideal, there were different opinions about whether this ideal is adhered to or not. One positive claim that was being made is that Swedish media is free and independent. Participants referred to, and compared with, media in their home countries, and felt that news media in Sweden is more reliable:

- Yes, here, TV outlets in Sweden, they work independently. For example, no police appear. There, (refers to home country) comes the police to the TV-company and says: "Stand there, say this!" and so on.
(FG2)

Moreover, and in contrast to research suggesting that news media focus on views of elites (Curran et al. 2014), participants felt that news media represent citizens to a greater deal than in many other countries:

- I think that here in Sweden they say more what people think. Not only what the government is thinking.
- Yes, it's better.
- It's a little more freedom than in our countries.
- Yes, it's a big, big, big difference. It's not comparable.
(FG2)

On the other hand, many participants felt that they did not trust Swedish media content. One argument was that, rather than fulfilling the journalistic ideal about being free and autonomous in relation to interests of other powerful actors and institutions, news media was perceived to be influenced by political parties:

- And also, for example, one wants to promote certain parties. So, some parties might pay certain companies to spread specific things about the party.
- Mm.
- Then you can't trust it. If money is involved you can't trust it.
- Do you mean ads from political parties in media? (Moderator)
- I think that they also pay newspapers to promote their party.
- In articles and so on? (Moderator)
- Yes.
(FG3)

Worth noting however is that the perceptions that some participants appeared to be based on previous experiences with media from their home country, rather than on their experiences of Swedish news media:

– You have to be careful when reading all newspapers because there are many media outlets that promote those who pay more. For example, there is a party called Alternativ för Sverige. That party can go to some newspapers and pay them to write: “We are good for Sweden. We do that. It’s a good thing.” And they’re talking about them and try to get many votes from those who don’t know anything about the party.

– Yes, maybe they get paid from parties. It happens in many countries, so why not in Sweden as well? Because of money...

(FG6)

This can be related to claims about that immigrants might have less positive perceptions about news media since many of them have experienced media systems characterized by political propaganda (Weibull & Wadbring 1998). Further, news media outlets were not only presumed to be influenced by political parties, but economic factors in general, which seemed to decrease trust:

– I want to add one thing: For example, Aftonbladet and Expressen and all this – they want to make money. It’s their purpose. So, it’s not for the sake of the people, but for the sake of the company.

– Exactly.

– So, they can put a really interesting title like: “This has happened.” But it’s just to attract readers.

(FG3)

Another reason for not trusting the media, that some participants raised, is that the news coverage might be influenced by the predispositions of journalists or the owners of the media companies:

– If an enterprise is privately owned it can be manipulated. And a certain viewpoint can be expressed on the television and in the newspapers. And it’s difficult for me to say. Because I don’t know how Sweden is run. I’m not sure if it’s a public TV so therefore technically no one owns the right to it, or whether it’s private and the current government showing this story or they showing that story and try to influence whether it be consciously or unconsciously. So, I think we are misinformed.

(FG1)

– You cannot know for sure who provides you the information. For example, if you are a journalist, you might only write what you want. Because you have the same thinking. It’s a part of the job as a journalist. I don’t know, but it happens very often in my country.

(FG1)

Once again, it can be noted that perceptions often seemed to be influenced by experiences from the countries that participants had emigrated from. Further, some participants explicitly expressed that media spread misinformation, although participants often stated that they were not always sure about the Swedish case:

– They can do whatever they want. It's kind of fake news. You can't believe what you read or what you see on TV. But I'm not sure how it works in Sweden...
(FG1)

– I think there's a lot of media propaganda. They are stating certain things: "This party said that." But if you think and check the source, you can see that it's not truth. In the past, it was more true information that was being spread, not false rumors. And therefore, I don't think that the media has helped at all when it comes to the election.
(FG3)

NEWS MEDIA AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Consistent with the ideal that news media should act as a "public educator", contributing to the common good (Bondebjerg 2002; Ekström & Djerf-Pierre 2013; Norris 2000; Strömbäck 2004), participants expressed an ideal that the news media should take social responsibility, for instance by providing content that is easy to understand:

– Language and summary. The journalists, the media: they have to write at a level that everyone can understand. I don't need a journalist to write advanced. I have to look for synonyms and check "what does this mean". I mean, maybe it can be easier for those who have college education. They can understand the content and summarize. But another...Media must speak to different language levels...People, everyone will not have...We are all different, we have different jobs, we are different when we read articles.
(FG3)

While some participants expressed that media actors could do better to fulfill this expectation, other mentioned media outlets that they thought are easy to understand and related to this also felt that there are a lot of outlets to choose from:

– In class we read 8 sidor: information that is really easy to understand.
(FG5)

– I think that here in Sweden it's very interesting when you are interested in politics. You can find any kind of information, for example by checking apps, listening to radio or watching TV. And you decide for yourself. If you don't want to hear anything about politics, that's okay. So, it's really interesting.
(FG5)

Another aspect related to the theme of social responsibility can be related to research showing that news media often frame politics as a strategic game rather than as issues, and that this type of framing tend to increase distrust in politics as well as in news media themselves (Curran et al. 2014; Hopmann et al. 2015). Related to this, participants felt that the content in certain media outlets are shallow and repetitive rather than that they provide in-depth information:

– It goes fast. And they don't raise important issues. For example, they made a contest with the party leaders. And yes, I think it's good but there are a lot of important questions that people are waiting to be answered.

(FG3)

– And there is one problem I think they should work on: They always talk about the same thing. They are not trying to find anything else...on the news, on SVT, every morning it's the same story. It's boring. I think people get bored and tired of the same old story all the time. Maybe another program is better, but I watch SVT every morning. But they are not talking so well... Or they have to change subjects.

– What subjects do you think they talk too much about for example?
(Moderator)

– They talk every morning about that you have to...they don't say it's mandatory, but you have to vote. And Stefan Löfven... He is always on top of the news stories. And they always talk about him and that he avoids the answer...Why do they want to talk about that all the time? It's enough to say it once. Why do they have to repeat?

(FG5)

Yet, participants in the same focus groups also expressed positive opinions about Swedish media content:

– As you said, it's boring that they talk about the same thing all the time. But for me that's better than that they have scandals all the time.

– Yes, I think they are a little more classy here, and a little more serious.

(FG5)

NEWS MEDIA AS A WATCHDOG

One of the most cherished journalistic ideals is the ideal of scrutinizing and act as a watchdog (Norris 2000; Strömbäck 2004). In principally one of the focus groups, this was elaborated upon and participants thought that media could do better to fulfill this ideal:

– Media must look for the truth and present it to the people...For example, ask why people vote for the Swedish Democrats...Even though the best colleague might have immigrant background for example. The media has a task

here, to reveal this, tell the truth, and ask this person: “Why do you vote for this party? Don’t hide, but say why.”

(FG3)

However, participants also gave examples of specific media outlets that they thought performed well:

– For example, on SVT...This program where they go and film...

– Uppdrag Granskning! (Two other participants)

– Mm, actually I like that. I like that. Because I feel: “Okay, this is facts.” They dare to take this step and even if there are people saying: “You should not say that” and they get these threats. But still. It becomes interesting and you sit and watch it.”

(FG3)

NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE ON IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION

Turning to the theme related to perceptions of the news media coverage of immigrants and immigration, participants in the focus groups expressed that they felt that the news coverage about immigration and immigrants tend to be one-sided and focusing on negative aspects (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Christiansen 2011; Horsti 2008). The fact that participants expressed negative opinions about news content about immigration is consistent with research showing that trust in news coverage is lower regarding this topic compared to many other topics (Andersson et al., 2017). Yet, research has also shown that many people think that media avoid reporting about negative consequences of immigration (Andersson et al. 2017), while participants in the focus groups rather expressed the opposite view:

– Media must tell people the truth. Why are immigrants here? But instead many report about car fires in Biskopsgården. Or crime in Angered. Or terrorism in Stockholm. But think about the reason people move to Sweden. There are many people who still don’t understand it. Media must inform people before they choose racist parties.

(FG2)

Yet, some participants thought that immigration is a central problem, and said that they thus understood why media pay much attention to it:

– There are always problems with taxes, health care, education and other things. But now, one of the most important problems is immigration.

– Yes.

– And that’s why they talk a lot about it. Other things are also important but they are always important. But today they have to think about immigration.

– I also think they talk about it so much because everybody has an opinion about that. For example, this Green Party...there are people who are not interested in the environment. Or if I don't have my grandparents here, I don't care so much about elderly care and stuff like that. But when it comes to immigration everybody has an opinion.

– Yes, because it's a big big change for Swedish society. And I understand why it's a big question. Because now we have to let those people in to society. Because we have so many different cultures.

(FG5)

Overall, however, most participants seemed to think that the coverage on immigration and immigrants was biased:

– They just focus on the negative implications. But if you think about the economy, immigration will be a good thing for Sweden...I know that there are problems. But there are also positive things, such as the economy.

(FG2)

– Maybe media should write more about positive things about immigrants, their homelands and habits. And maybe portray them as normal persons that you don't have to be afraid of.

(FG2)

Discussion

To summarize the findings of this study, the focus group data firstly displayed a high degree of variation regarding which media was used, the frequency of participants' media use, as well as their reasons for following – or not following – the election campaign. While the need to stay updated on political events was central for some participants, other viewed it as a way of learning Swedish. This coincide with previous research that also have identified these motivations (Eide & Nikunen 2011; Sjöberg & Rydin 2011). Further, some expressed that following the mediated election campaign was rather a pastime.

In line with previous research, participants mentioned language barriers as one reasons for *not* following the election campaign (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). Moreover, time constraint and the impression that Swedes do not want to talk politics were also mentioned as explanations.

In terms of their perceptions of news media, participants differed. While some appeared to have overall positive views, others were substantially more critical. In other words, negative as well as positive evaluations about how well media actors fulfilled participants' normative expectations were represented. However, it should be noted that the negative evaluations were more central and often characterized by a longer, more developed reasoning, illustrated with concrete examples and experiences. This is consistent with research suggesting

that immigrants tend to be rather critical toward media (Christiansen 2004). One key part of the explanation is probably the generally problem-oriented news coverage on immigration related issues (Eberl et al. 2018; Strömbäck et al. 2017). Further, the fact that participants often linked negative perceptions to experiences of media in their home countries indicates that experiences of media systems characterized by political propaganda might have generated suspiciousness toward Swedish news media as well (Weibull & Wadbring 1998).

Worth noting, many participants who expressed negative perceptions and mistrust toward Swedish news media still used it. That might seem contradictory – why would people use media that they do not consider to be trustworthy? While research suggests that the most skeptical people use slightly less traditional media, they still get much of their information from the media sources they mistrust (Tsfati & Cappella 2003). This might be explained by the fact that news can be used to fulfil different needs, such as entertainment, pastime or means of connecting to society (Tsfati & Cappella 2003).

Although I believe that this study makes an important contribution by providing insights into media use and perceptions of news media among immigrants during the election campaign, one shortcoming is that the findings cannot be generalized to the population *immigrants living in Sweden*. Thus, while the negative evaluations of news media were more central and often characterized by longer and more developed explanations, this is not necessarily the case for immigrants living the Sweden in general. Consequently, an important task for future research would be to investigate how common negative and positive perceptions of news media are among immigrants on the aggregate level. This could be done by measuring the four different trust dimensions that participants in this study based their perceptions on. It would also be interesting to test if news media stimulate political engagement (in line with virtuous circle theories) or rather turn immigrants of politics and the election campaign (in line with media malaise theories).

The qualitative approach of this study also limits the possibilities to map out key factors leading to the identified variations between participants. Thus, future and quantitative studies should test if individual-level factors that are important for political interest, news use and trust – such as education – might explain individual-level variations in media use and perceptions. Further, language skills, social capital and self-esteem might also explain the variation in media use and perceptions, as these factors in other countries have been associated with among immigrants (after media use) (Christiansen 2004; Horsti 2008). Additionally, it should be investigated if the fact that media tend to portray different immigrant groups in different ways (Eberl et al. 2018), is likely to lead to different perceptions about news media among different immigrant groups.

Finally, another relevant task for future research might be to investigate how media use and perceptions of news media among immigrants develop over

time. For example, research shows that the level of social trust among immigrants tend to increase over time (Holmberg & Rothstein 2014; Nannestad et al. 2014), and it is plausible that a similar type of process might be at work with respect to media use and media perceptions – including media trust.

Thus, further research on how immigrants use and perceive news media is clearly needed. Since media use and perceptions of news media appear to be crucial for a healthy democracy and thus have societal implications, and as Sweden is populated by many people from other countries, this is a research-topic with high societal relevance. Thus, it is my hope that the current study will serve as a springboard for more research about media use and perceptions of news media among immigrants.

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Statsvetenskapliga förbundet

Förbundsredaktör: Katarina Roos

Ett inifrånperspektiv på beredning av forskningsansökningar

av Katarina Roos

Denna gång får vi ta del av professor Ulf Bjerelds reflektioner kring sina erfarenheter från uppdraget som ordförande för ämnesrådet för humaniora och samhällsvetenskap vid Vetenskapsrådet.

Det är ofattbart många arbetstimmar som forskarsamhället lägger ned på att utarbeta ansökningar till olika finansiärer. Antalet ansökningar är många, konkurrensen stenhård och beviljandegraden låg. Ändå fortsätter vi att idogt utarbeta, omarbeta och vidareutveckla ansökningar i hopp om att de ska kunna realiseras till finansierade forskningsprojekt. Varför? Visst finns ett värde i själva processen såsom varande en lärande- och bildningsprocess men det ärliga svaret är nog att vi inte har något val. Tanken är att konkurrensen genererar forskning av högsta kvalitet, och kanske lever systemet också upp till det syftet. Frågan är dock om det nuvarande systemet är rimligt, om det är väl använda resurser?

Det är i vart fall tydligt att forskarsamhället behöver hjälp med att skriva forskningsansökningar, vilket också kräver resurser av olika slag. Jag gjorde en googlesökning på frasen "att skriva forskningsansökan" och möttes av rubriker såsom "Hur du lyckas med din forskningsansökan" och uppmanades att anmäla mig till olika lärosätens seminarier, workshops och ansökningsverkstäder på temat "konsten att skriva en framgångsrik forskningsansökan".

Den statliga utredningen Styr- och resursutredningen (Strut) lämnade under våren sitt slutbetänkande med namnet "En långsiktig samordnad och dialogbaserad styrning av högskolan" (SOU 2019:6). Ett av förslagen är att regering och riksdag ska utarbeta en plan för hur andelen direkta statsanslag ska kunna utgöra minst hälften av de totala forskningsintäkterna vid högskolor och universitet under den närmaste åttaårsperioden. Utredaren menar att det skulle kunna ske antingen genom utökade medel eller genom en omfördelning av medel från de statliga forskningsfinansiärerna direkt till lärosätena. Utredaren vill också återinföra formuleringen i högskolelagen om att en lärares arbetsuppgifter i normalfallet bör innehålla både forskning och undervisning. Utökade basanslag till forskning är ett mycket välkommet förslag och det blir intressant att se vad som händer med Struten.

Nu till Ulf Bjerelds text om sina erfarenheter av att befinna sig på insidan av systemet i egenskap av ordförande i en av Vetenskapsrådets beredningsgrupper. Det är en förmån att få ta del av Bjerelds reflektioner kring beredningen av ansökningar och finansieringssystemets funktionssätt. Det finns också ett värde i att erfarenheterna dokumenterats i text så att många kan ta del av dem, både nu och i framtiden. Tack Ulf för att du delar med dig av dina erfarenheter!

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Att söka medel från Vetenskapsrådet. Erfarenheter från ämnesrådet för humaniora och samhällsvetenskap

av Ulf Bjereld

År 2018 inlämnades 121 ansökningar om projektbidrag till Vetenskapsrådets beredningsgrupp för statsvetenskap, freds- och konfliktforskning samt medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap. Av dessa ansökningar tilldelades 13 stycken medel, vilket ger en beviljandegrad på 10,7 procent.

Beviljandegraden är något högre inom ämnesområden som medicin och hälsa, teknik och naturvetenskap. Men sammantaget ägnar svenska forskare hundratusentals timmar varje år till att skriva ansökningar som inte beviljas medel. Är detta verkligen en rimlig tidsanvändning? Och är det möjligt att urskilja de absolut bästa ansökningarna i en sådan flodvåg av ansökningar? Vore det inte bättre att använda befintliga forskningsmedel till att ge varje forskare mer utrymme för forskning inom ramen för sin anställning?

Under tre år - 2016-2018 - hade jag förmånen att få vara ordförande för ämnesrådet för humaniora och samhällsvetenskap vid Vetenskapsrådet. Ämnesrådet ansvarar för fördelning av forskningsmedel och följer upp och utvärderar forskning inom sitt ämnesområde. I det följande vill jag givet mina erfarenheter från ämnesrådet reflektera kring a.) fördelar och nackdelar med existerande system där så stor del av forskningen finansieras via ett konkurrensbaserat externt granskningssystem, b.) hur väl Vetenskapsrådets granskningssystem fungerar, samt c.) vad som kännetecknar framgångsrika forskningsansökningar.

Fördelar och nackdelar med existerande system. Forskningsfinansieringen av humaniora och samhällsvetenskap skiljer sig från

finansieringen av medicin och hälsa, naturvetenskap och teknik i åtminstone två avseenden. För det första går en förhållandevis liten andel av de samlade forskningsintäkterna i Sverige - ungefär 20 procent - till forskning inom humaniora och samhällsvetenskap. I Norge och Finland uppgår motsvarande andel till över 30 procent, och i Storbritannien till ungefär 45 procent.¹ Humaniora och samhällsvetenskap har således en mindre andel forskningsmedel till sitt förfogande jämfört med en del jämförbara länder, vilket bidrar till att förstärka osäkerheten och konkurrenssituationen.

För det andra använder humanistiska och samhällsvetenskapliga forskare som tilldelats anslag i större utsträckning sina medel till att finansiera egen forskningstid. Inom ämnesområdena medicin och hälsa, naturvetenskap och teknik används en betydligt större andel av de externa forskningsmedlen i stället till att finansiera juniora forskare och doktorander. En av de viktigaste förklaringarna till denna skillnad är att professorer och universitetslektorer inom humaniora och samhällsvetenskap har avsevärt mindre tid för egen forskning inom ramen för sina egna anställningar.²

Fördelarna med innevarande system är att konkurrensen tvingar enskilda forskare att anstränga sig extra för att skriva bra forskningsansökningar. Konkurrensen motverkar slentrian och slapphet i forskningen. En ansökan som får avslag kastas oftast heller inte i papperskorgen, utan vidareutvecklas med förhoppning om att komma bättre ut i ett annat sammanhang eller i en senare ansökningsomgång. Att skriva ansökningar utvecklar forskarens vetenskapliga tänkande, oavsett om ansökan beviljas medel eller ej.

Nackdelarna med innevarande system är att väldigt många väldigt bra forskningsidéer inte kan förverkligas. Oerhört mycket resurser avsätts till att skriva ansökningar som inte tilldelas medel. Osäkerheten skapar stress bland

1 Forskningsöversikt 2019. Humaniora och samhällsvetenskap. Vetenskapsrådet 2019. Bilaga 4, s 36.

2 Forskningsöversikt 2019. Humaniora och samhällsvetenskap. Vetenskapsrådet 2019. Bilaga 4, s 36.

medarbetarna. Forskningsbegåvade personer som ogillar de osäkra arbetsförhållandena kan välja att söka sig andra karriärvägar. Det blir svårare för institutionsledningen att planera verksamheten. Här kan också finnas en inbyggd genusproblematik som bidrar till att förklara varför kvinnor fortfarande är så underrepresenterade i kategorin professorer.

Ett alternativ är att låta en större del av forskningsfinansieringen ske genom lärosätena och genom att en anställd professor eller lektor får bättre möjlighet att forska inom ramen för sin ordinarie anställning. Det finns inget självklart positivt samband mellan extern forskningsfinansiering och kvalitet på forskningen. En del studier pekar i motsatt riktning.³ *Styr- och resursutredningen (Strut)* argumenterar i sitt betänkande (SOU 2019:6) för att lärosätenas basresurser för forskning måste förstärkas. Jag tror det är rätt väg att gå. Men då är det viktigt att det utarbetas mekanismer för att lärosätena verkligen använder utökade resurser till att öka utrymmet för egen forskning inom medarbetarnas anställningar som professor eller lektor. Jag ser en risk i att lärosätena annars använder utökade resurser till att bara låta volymen i verksamheten växa, till exempel genom att anställa fler och fler personer, i stället för att ge den enskilde medarbetaren mer tid och utrymme för egen forskning.

Granskningens kvalitet. Är det då verkligen de absolut bästa projekten som tilldelas anslag? Den frågan är förstås omöjlig att ge ett definitivt svar på. Här diskuterar jag hur vi skapar goda förutsättningar för att det verkligen är de bästa projektansökningarna – baserat i första hand på originalitet och vetenskaplig skicklighet – som prioriteras.

I beredningsgruppen för statsvetenskap, freds- och konfliktforskning samt medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap är det den

enskilda projektansökan som står i centrum – den enskilde forskarens meriter och tidigare forskning spelar en mer underordnad roll. Den principen har gynnat juniora forskare som ännu inte hunnit meritera sig på samma sätt som seniora forskare har gjort.

Beredningsgruppens sammansättning ska präglas av hög vetenskaplig kompetens. Det är viktigt för att ansökningarna ska bedömas av så vetenskapligt skickliga forskare som möjligt och för att systemet ska ha trovärdighet och legitimitet i forskarsamhället. Beredningsgruppens ledamöter ska representera en bredd med avseende på vetenskapssyn och metodologi. Ledamöterna sitter inte i gruppen som vakthundar för det egna ämnet, utan för att tillsammans med kollegor värna det inomvetenskapliga allmänintresset.

Självklart ska det heller inte tas några ovidkommande hänsyn. Jävsreglerna är mycket stränga, vilket ibland leder till problem då flera ledamöter i gruppen är jäviga på samma ansökan. Här gäller det att vara särskilt uppmärksam på de mindre ämnena, så att inte ”deras” representanter ständigt är jäviga på ansökningar från deras egna områden. Ett sätt att hantera problemet är att beredningsgruppen har en tillräckligt stor andel ledamöter som inte har sin vetenskapliga bas förlagd till Sverige, och därmed heller inte lika täta kontaktnät med det svenska forskarsamhället.

Enligt min uppfattning genomförs arbetet i beredningsgrupperna utifrån mycket högt ställda krav på vetenskaplig skicklighet och integritet. Det är också – enligt min uppfattning – det bästa sättet att förbättra förutsättningarna för en jämn könsfördelning av beviljade forskningsmedel. Under de senaste åren har kvinnor varit mer framgångsrika än män med avseende på beviljandegrad av medel från beredningsgruppen för statsvetenskap, freds- och konfliktforskning samt medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap.

3 Se till exempel Hwang, Stephen (2018) *Forskningskvalitet, effektivitet och extern finansiering* SUHF samt van den Besselaar, Peter & Sandström, Ulf (kommande), “Funding evaluation, and the performance of national research system”, *Journal of Informatics*.

För åren 2015-2018 var beviljandegraden för kvinnliga huvudsökande 13,1 procent, medan beviljandegraden för manliga huvudsökande var 8,5 procent. Fortfarande är det emellertid betydligt fler män än kvinnor som ansöker om forskningsmedel. Under åren 2015-2019 inkom 258 ansökningar med en manlig huvudsökande, mot 198 ansökningar med en kvinnlig huvudsökande.⁴

Visst kan det finnas ett element av slump med i bilden när en beredningsgrupp skiljer mellan två ansökningar som ska rankas på till exempel nionde och tionde plats. Men det finns en trygghet i systemet i att det i princip utesluter att en svag ansökan tilldelas forskningsmedel.

En nackdel i granskningsarbetet är att den hårda konkurrenssituationen innebär att beredningsgruppen sällan eller aldrig vågar chansa. En spännande och ovanlig ansökan som kanske inte är riktigt färdigtänkt i alla delar har svårt att hävda sig mot ansökningar där den inomvetenskapliga kvaliteten skiner igenom redan från början.

Ämnesrådet borde också utveckla en ordning där huvudsökande på de ansökningar som gallras ut redan vid beredningsgruppens möte i maj/juni får information om utfallet tidigare. Ungefär 75 procent av ansökningarna läggs åt sidan redan i maj/juni. Dessa sökande vänta ända tills oktober/november på sitt avslagsbesked.

Inte så sällan vill politiker peka ut relevanta forskningsområden och initiera forskningssatsningar med riktade anslag till något särskilt ändamål – till exempel migration, rasism, demokrati, civilsamhället eller miljö/hållbar utveckling. Det är positivt att staten skjuter till extra medel till humanistisk och samhällsvetenskaplig forskning. Men satsningen är ibland ett uttryck för oro från politikens håll om att forskarsamhället skulle negligera samhällsrelevant forskning. Och så är det ju inte. Ämnesrådet har de senare åren

initierat ett arbete med att kartlägga innehållet i de ansökningar som lämnas in och som beviljas. Kartläggningen – som fortfarande befinner sig på pilotstadiet – visar att just de områden som statsmakten vill skjuta extra pengar till är de områden som forskarna själva redan identifierat som intressanta och relevanta. Pilotstudien visar hur forskning inom ämnesområden som klimat/miljö, migration, demokrati, psykisk hälsa, digitalisering och genus/kön prioriteras högt i den fria forskningen, oavsett riktade satsningar från staten eller inte. Så staten behöver inte peka ut vilka samhällsproblem forskningen ska prioritera. Den fria, nyfikenhetsdrivna forskningen identifierar själv relevanta samhällsproblem värda att beforska.⁵

Vad kännetecknar framgångsrika forskningsansökningar? Vilka råd vill jag då ge potentiella sökande av forskningsmedel? Nu erbjuder ju lärosätena till och med kurser för lärare och forskare om hur man skriver en bra forskningsansökan. Men här är mina tre favoritråd. För det första måste det finnas en spännande forskningsfråga som sticker ut. Beredningsledamoten måste övertalas om varför just detta projekt – i en mängd av kvalificerade projektansökningar – som hen har att bedöma ska beviljas medel. Forskningsfrågan ligger också till grund för varje kvalificerad vetenskaplig studie. Utan en bra och skarp forskningsfråga är det svårt att få ihop en bra ansökan överhuvudtaget. För det andra måste den planerade studiens upplägg vara genomtänkt. Det räcker inte att presentera en spännande idé. Den sökande måste ha gjort jobbet hela vägen. Vaga formuleringar kring till exempel metod och material eller kriterier för slutsatsdragning avslöjas direkt. Det dunkelt sagda är det dunkelt tänkta – så tänk och skriv igenom hela forskningsprocessen så långt det är möjligt. För det tredje – sök! Det bästa sättet att inte få forskningsmedel är

4 Rapport till ämnesrådet från beredningsgrupp HS-E. Erfarenhet från 2018 års beredning. Vetenskapsrådet 2018.

5 Forskningsöversikt 2019. *Humaniora och samhällsvetenskap*, s 25 f. Vetenskapsrådet 2019.

att inte ansöka. Skriv- och tankeprocessen är i sig utvecklande, och det finns alltid möjlighet att komma tillbaka med en bättre och mer genomarbetad ansökan i ett annat sammanhang eller vid ett senare ansökningstillfälle. Dessutom visar ett högt ansökningstryck på behovet av ytterligare medel till humanistisk och samhällsvetenskaplig forskning...

*

Jag vill avslutningsvis passa på att tacka Vetenskapsrådets skickliga och hårt arbetande personal för ett gott jobb. Det är inte alltid enkelt att hantera snåriga beslut, komplicerade regelverk och känsliga forskarsjälar.

Ulf Bjereld är professor i statsvetenskap vid Göteborgs universitet. Han var 2014-2016 ordförande för Vetenskapsrådets beredningsgrupp för statsvetenskap, freds- och konfliktforskning samt medie- och kommunikationsvetenskap samt 2016-2018 ordförande för ämnesrådet för humaniora och samhällsvetenskap vid Vetenskapsrådet.

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Litteraturgranskningar

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Hindman, Matthew, 2018. *The Internet Trap. How the Digital Economy Builds Monopolies and Undermines Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Anmälan av Nils Gustafsson

Det är ett mysterium att det tog ända till 2017 för att en bred, global allmän debatt om det problematiska med de digitala informationssoligarkerna äntligen skulle bryta ut. I efterhand är det som en decennielång bilkrasch. Ett antal unga entreprenörer sitter i källare och studentkorridorer någonstans i USA och uppfinnar fantastiska tjänster som Google, Twitter, Facebook, Amazon, eBay, osv. Dessa tjänster är så bra och populära att de snabbt får miljontals och sedan miljardtals användare över hela världen. Och plötsligt en vacker dag visar det sig att det kan finnas problem med att låta ett fåtal företag kontrollera mer eller mindre all digital kommunikation och information i världen, miljarder datapunkter med känsliga personuppgifter och dessutom monopolisera pengaströmmarna vilket i sin tur ger dem ekonomiska muskler att slå ut eller köpa upp alla uppstickare och konkurrenter. Att detta är ett problem för demokratiska system torde stå klart för alla. Bland Robert Dahls (1982) fem demokratikriterier återfinns som bekant ”upplyst förståelse” och ”kontroll över dagordningen” för medborgarna, och dessa kriterier behöver kvalificeras om medborgarna får sin upplysta förståelse genom en leverantör, och kontrollerar sin dagordning genom samma leverantör.

Jag vet inte om detta har varit ett nederlag för den akademiska forskningen om sociala

mediers betydelse för demokratiska samhällen. Det har funnits en konstant ström av Kassandror som påpekat riskerna med monopoliseringen (jfr Hindman 2008; Askanius & Gustafsson 2010). Men ofta har det varit forskare med en uttalat systemkritisk inställning som varit först ut (Dahlberg 2010; Fleischer 2014; Fuchs 2014) och kanske har det fördröjt genomslaget.

Den mesta forskning som gjorts på och om sociala medier har koncentrerat sig på individers användning av tjänsterna och de effekter detta får snarare än effekterna av det företagen som äger plattformarna och tjänsterna gör. Detta har delvis att göra med en föreställning som var mycket spridd på 00-talet: den att en digital jätte när som helst kan konkurreras ut av en uppstickare och försvinna.

När jag själv började forska om sociala medier 2007 var en av mina farhågor att de plattformar som var populärast då (Facebook och Twitter) kanske inte alls skulle finnas kvar fyra år senare. Det var i en tid när fenomenet Second Life (en sorts virtuell värld som påminde lite om Minecraft, men med bättre grafik) hade genomgått en enorm hype – den dåvarande utrikesministern Carl Bildt invigde en svensk ambassad i Second Life – med efterföljande kollaps.

På samma sätt hade MySpace, med flera hundra miljoner användare och uppköpt av Rupert Murdoch för 580 miljoner dollar år 2005, förlorat konkurrensen om att vara världens största sociala nätverkssajt till just Facebook. Tron på att de nya jättarnas position inte var permanent gjorde möjligen att såväl akademiker som allmänhet brydde sig mindre om det hotande informationsmonopolet. I den mån enskilda plattformar fick uppmärksamhet i samband med politiska händelser

var den snarast positiv.

Men företag som Facebook och Google skaffade sig snabbt ointagliga försprång. Facebook försökte hävda att man var en neutral plattform och inte en publicist med ett redaktionellt ansvar. Men det var uppenbart att Facebook hade förvandlats till en aktör som förändrade förutsättningarna för opinionsbildning, politisk kommunikation, och politiskt deltagande. Bond et al:s (2012) berömda experiment om social påverkan via Facebook och valdeltagande med 61 miljoner deltagare beräknades ha höjt valdeltagandet i det amerikanska mellanårsvalet 2010 med 340 000 individer (ibid).

Efter 2016 års stora politiska händelser, som den amerikanska presidentvalskampanjen som ledde till valet av Donald Trump, och Brexitomröstningen som kanske slutligen kommer att leda till Storbritanniens utträde ur EU, kom företagen i fokus. I fallet Trump, liksom i fallet Brexit, kom Facebook att utstå mycket kritik för det sätt som analysföretaget Cambridge Analytica hade kunnat använda sig av stora mängder "psykometrisk" data från användare och på så sätt skapa en mer effektiv målgruppsinriktad kampanj. Mindre uppmärksamhet fick det faktum att anställda från företag som Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft och Apple arbetade direkt för Trumps och andras presidentvalskampanjer (Kreis & McGregor 2018). Mark Zuckerberg frågades under våren 2018 ut i såväl den amerikanska kongressen som i EU-parlamentet. En lång rad andra skandaler som rör dataläckor och problematisk dataanvändning har sammantaget gjort att informationsoligarkernas rykte har blivit skamfilat.

2019 är Facebook ett företag som försöker framstå som en god samhällsmedlem genom sina initiativ för att motverka desinformation, propaganda, fake news och så vidare, samtidigt som de diskret försöker skydda sig från trustlagstiftning genom att "integrera" sina tjänster och undvika sitt nyvunna publicistansvar genom att tala om att framtidens sociala medier kommer att vara mer privata (och

därmed mindre åtkomliga för rättsvårdande myndigheter) (Tufecki 2019). Från att ha förnekat att desinformation och falska nyheter hade en roll i valet av Trump kan man nu exempelvis meddela att man tagit bort 2,8 miljarder falska Facebookkonton och arbetar aktivt med valmyndigheter inför nationella och europeiska val (Graham-Harrison 2019).

Den amerikanske statsvetaren Matthew Hindman gjorde sig ett namn som en uttalad internetskeptiker redan med sin förra bok *The Myth of Digital Democracy* (2008), där han visade på hur underliggande strukturer i sättet som digitala medier fungerar gör att makt och status tenderar att koncentreras till eliter snarare än att spridas ut jämnt i en utopistisk många-till-många-kultur. Ett viktigt resultat var att traditionella nyhetsmedier inte var utmanade av bloggar, utan de försteg som etablerade nyhetsförmedlare hade slog igenom och förstärktes på Internet.

The Internet Trap är på många sätt en fortsättning av de temata som Hindman tog upp i föregångaren. Bokens centrala begrepp är uppmärksamhetsekonomi (*attention economy*), som uttrycker förhållandet mellan pengar och uppmärksamhet: de är varandras förutsättningar i en tid där det finns ett överflöd av information medan uppmärksamheten är begränsad. Att pengar köper uppmärksamhet kan måhända te sig som självklart, men en återkommande tes i debatten om informationsåldern har varit att så inte skulle vara fallet (se t ex Goldhaber 1997). I en internetutopistisk tankefigur skulle digitala medier göra stora organisationer kraftlösa och skapa förutsättningar för en egalitär meritokrati, en sorts libertariansk fantasi med fullständig information och perfekt konkurrens (se t ex Levy 1997; Castells 2000; Rheingold 2002; Surowiecki 2004; Shirky 2008; Jenkins 2009).

Den genomgående metoden är att förklara informationsoligarkernas dominerande position med hjälp av nationalekonomisk teori. Hindman gör tre centrala antaganden: 1) stora sajter har skalfördelar; 2) konsumenter

föredrar mångfald; 3) det finns byteskostnader. Skalfördelar innebär att stora aktörer har möjlighet att exempelvis investera i infrastruktur. En uppgift som återges i boken är att Google mellan 2003 och 2013 spenderade 60 miljarder dollar på forskning, byggnader och utrustning, vilket justerat för inflation är tre gånger så mycket som Manhattanprojektet kostade. Infrastruktur handlar även om att producera mer och mer mångsidigt innehåll, att bli bättre på att målgruppsanpassa innehåll och också att kunna effektivisera intäktsgenereringen.

Att konsumenter föredrar mångfald innebär bara att de vill ha mer att välja på istället för mindre, och byteskostnader handlar om att när man väl har vant sig vid att använda en viss tjänst (t ex Facebook) finns det kostnader förbundna med att byta ut tjänsten mot något annat (eftersom man har vant sig vid den fungerar, man har alla sina kontakter samlade där, man vet inte vad alternativen är, etc).

Netflix är ett exempel på en aktör som tack vare att man redan är en stor aktör på marknaden har resurser för att gradvis utöka sitt innehåll men också för att investera i att erbjuda en tjänst som blir bättre på att förutse vad den enskilde konsumenten är sugen på att se baserat på tidigare beteende och andra faktorer.

Hindman visar hur Netflix tidiga förstag på marknaden för strömmande film ledde till att företaget med sin större publik och högre inkomster kunde utveckla bättre algoritmer vilket i sin tur gjorde att tjänsten upplevdes som ännu bättre och blev "stickier", dvs höll konsumenterna kvar på sajten (s. 43ff; jfr Hallinan & Spriphas 2016).¹ Det sägs ofta att distributionskostnaden har blivit lägre i den digitala eran, men Hindman menar att distributionskostnaden är att bygga upp en publik från början. Skalfördelarna betyder att de som lyckades bra i början i en kombination av tur och talang slår ut sina konkurrenter och växer till giganter som det sedan är mycket, mycket

svårt att flytta på.

Marknaden för webbtrafik påminner mycket om börsmarknaden (s. 85ff). Marknadsandelarna följer en potenslagfördelning (*power law distribution*) där det finns ett fåtal stora jättar i toppen och en lång svans av aktörer med mycket små andelar. Marknadsandelarna följer vidare av rangordningen: varje plats på listan kan kopplas till en fast marknadsandel, där nummer ett har en viss andel, nummer tio en annan, och så vidare, medan enskilda sajter och företag kan byta plats på listan. Volatiliteten är mycket lägre i toppen av listan, så att nummer ett förblir nummer ett under lång tid, medan aktörer längre ner på lista i mycket högre grad byter plats med varandra.

Hindman lägger stor kraft på att formulera en teoretisk modell som förutser den uppkomna situationen med en marknad som består av ett fåtal giganter som ingen flyttar på samt ett stort antal relativt betydelselösa aktörer. Eftersom den utgör kärnan i bokens argumentation kommer jag här att försöka återge den (i Hindmans bok återfinns resonemangen på s. 62–82 samt 181–184). Modellen ser ut som följer:

$$(1) c_j^i = \gamma_j^i (1 - |p^i - p_j|) \lambda_j \omega_j$$

c_j^i är en individs i konsumtion av sajten j . p^i är individens preferens för variation och p_j är sajtens variation. λ_j är sajtens uppdateringshastighet och ω_j är sajtens kvalitet. γ_j^i , slutligen, är en proportionalitetskonstant. Konsumtionen av en enskild sajt är alltså en funktion av variation, uppdateringshastighet och kvalitet, vilket följer av grundantagandet om individers preferens för mångfald ovan. Eftersom antalet sajter potentiellt är oändligt medan individens tid inte är det begränsas individens konsumtion av tidsbegränsningen C , som kan ses som en funktion av hur många sajter som potentiellt sett finns att välja på för konsumenten, hur mycket tid det tar att leta

1 I samma veva erbjuder Hindman en sorts primer i maskininläring, vilket jag personligen uppskattade.

upp en ny sajt, och individens konsumtion av en enskild sajt som en funktion av variation, mångfald och förnyelse enligt ovan. Detta bygger delvis på grundantagandet ovan om att det finns byteskostnader. Individens kommer att beta av olika sajter i preferensordning (den bästa först) tills hela hans konsumtionsbudget är förbrukad, men om en sajt levererar en högre volym av innehåll med en hyfsad grad av preferensöverensstämmelse kommer individen att välja den istället för den "bästa" (s. 73).

Hindman går sedan vidare till att beskriva hur intäkterna för en enskild sajt kan beräknas med utgångspunkt i ovanstående resonemang. I nedanstående modell är profiten för en enskild sajt π_j en funktion av intäkter R minus kostnader. Intäkterna är då en funktion av den totala konsumtionen av sajten (alltså summan av individuell konsumtion av sajten c_j^i). Här är själva mekanismen för att konvertera konsumtion till pengar genom t ex annonsförsäljning helt exogen. Kostnaderna utgörs dels av en fast kostnad α och dels av kostnader för antalet arbetare (som tänks vara proportionellt mot mängden innehåll som produceras, alltså uppdateringshastigheten) gånger lönen (som tänks vara proportionell mot kvaliteten på innehållet); β och δ är proportionalitetskonstanter.

$$(2) \pi_j = R \left(\sum_{i=1}^N c_j^i \right) - \alpha - (\beta \lambda_j) (\delta \omega_j)$$

Om investeringar i ökad kvalitet och kvantitet av innehåll leder till en ökningsgrad av intäkterna som är högre än motsvarande produktionskostnader, kommer vinsten att öka mer än investeringarna. På så sätt kommer även små skalfördelar (Hindmans första grundantagande ovan) att på sikt leda till monopolliknande situationer. Det optimala för den enskilde konsumenten vore att spendera hela sin tid för konsumtion på en enda sajt som i sin tur har ett maximalt utbud av kvalitet och kvantitet och alltså kan tillfredsställa samtligas preferenser utan att konsumenterna behöver ödsla tid på att byta sajt och/eller

söka fram nytt innehåll. Detta leder också självklart till en monopolisering av intäkter.

Genom att tillämpa prediktionerna som följer av modellen på befintliga data över webbtrafik i USA under perioden 2005–2008, och genom att göra simuleringar av webbtrafik som bygger på modellen, visar Hindman relativt övertygande att den teoretiska modellen ganska väl förutser uppkomsten av en marknad för webbtrafik som hyfsat väl liknar den faktiskt existerande situationen. Google och Facebook har exempelvis 60 % av den digitala annonsmarknaden i USA. De tre mest besökta sajterna globalt är Google, YouTube (ägt av Google) och Facebook (Alexa.com 2019). 80 % av trafiken till andra sajter kommer från Google och Facebook (Dunn 2017).

Nå, ekvationer inom samhällsvetenskapen har som bekant flera fördelar. Förutom att uttrycka logiska relationer ger de även intryck av att vara odiskutabelt vetenskapliga, får avsändaren att vara en person som har koll på saker och ting och verkar avskräckande på personer som känner ett fysiskt obehag när de ser en ekvation. Bakom Hindmans ekvationer (det finns fler) ligger dock ett antal relativt enkla antaganden, varav en del framstår som obestridliga och andra som mer tveksamma. Att mediekonsumenter föredrar innehåll de gillar framför innehåll de inte gillar ter sig rimligt, men modellen behandlar preferensformeringen som helt exogen, vilket gör att det enda medieaktörerna behöver göra är att anpassa sig till rådande preferenser (medan det i verkligheten finns ett mått av oförutsägbarhet och inkonsistens i sådana preferenser).

På samma sätt är det troligt att fler innehållsproducenter kan producera mer innehåll, även om det inte helt nödvändigt är som Hindman skriver att tjugo skribenter producerar dubbelt så mycket innehåll på samma tid som tio skribenter (Hindmans publikationslista består i låg grad av samförfattade artiklar, så det är möjligt att han har orealistiska förväntningar). Det är i vilket fall som helst inte helt självklart för mig att högre lön står i direkt relation till högre

innehållskvalitet (s. 72). Jag skulle i alla fall vilja veta vilket empiriskt stöd som kan anföras för det antagandet. Det är för övrigt frapperande att det inte finns någon som helst plats i modellen för den armé av mer eller mindre gratisarbetande medieproducenter som är så kännetecknande för sociala medieeran (jfr Klinger & Svensson 2015).

I Hindmans modell finns ett antagande inbyggt om att kvantitet (uppdateringshastighet) slår ut kvalitet eftersom konsumenter tänks vara villiga att acceptera en större mängd mediokert innehåll hyfsat nära deras preferenser på en sajt istället för en mindre mängd makalöst innehåll i perfekt överensstämmelse med deras preferenser, eftersom byteskostnaderna åter upp den värdefulla konsumtionsbudgeten (s. 72). Även om detta på en intuitiv nivå tycks stämma överens med ens subjektiva upplevelse av det generella digitala medieutbudet är kvalitet liksom individers preferenser helt exogen i modellen och framstår paradoxalt nog som statisk, fast det också ter sig som uppenbart att utvecklingen av exempelvis sociala medier har skapat efterfrågan på innehåll som få kunde föreställa sig för några decennier sedan. Aktörerna är inte enbart mekaniska aktörer på en marknad utan skapar också aktivt nya behov, nya preferenser, och också nya mått för kvalitet, (som antalet WOW-smiley-reaktioner på en statusuppdatering i Facebook t ex).

Man kan dessutom fråga sig om de data som används i boken för att testa modellen inte i vissa fall har lite för många år på nacken: de data om webbtrafik som används är från mitten av 00-talet, data om Netflix utveckling av algoritmer är från 2006, data om amerikanska lokalmediers död (ännu en effekt förutspådd av Hindmans modell) är från 2010. Det är inget underkännande av resultaten, bara en påminnelse om att saker och ting förändras. Man kan också – i den andra riktningen, så att säga – fråga sig exakt hur nya och unika den digitala ekonomins funktionssätt skiljer sig från tidigare varianter (se t ex McGuigan 2019 för en intressant

spårning av automatiserad digital annonserings rötter i 1900-talets mediehistoria).

Den absolut starkaste delen av Hindmans resonemang är trots allt de delar som berör de möjligheter som en tidig marknadsframgång innebär i termer av att bygga upp en publik och använda deras data för att bygga bättre algoritmer och genom A/B-tester hålla kvar publiken genom att erbjuda mer målgruppsanpassat innehåll och fler mikrobetalningar. Genom att visa på den enorma marknadsdominansen som ett fåtal aktörer har fått och det i det närmaste ointagliga försprång genom sina investeringar infrastruktur och kraftfulla algoritmer de skaffat sig ger han en sorts slutlig korrektion till debatten om internets demokratiska potential.

När makten över kommunikationen och informationen samlas i en monopol- eller oligopolliknande struktur leder det självklart till återverkningar för fördelningen av den ekonomiska och politiska makten. Att hantera den uppkomna situationen med dominans för ett fåtal aktörer kommer att vara en central uppgift för dem som fortfarande tror på den representativa demokratis överlägsenhet som politiskt system. Att studera och förstå den kommer att vara en central uppgift för den vetenskap som intresserar sig för den auktoritativa fördelningen av värden i samhället.

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Anmälan av Elsa Hedling

Det har gått några år sedan den danska succéserien *Borgen* sände sin tredje och sista säsong (visades av SVT 2011-2013). TV-serien om maktspelet på Christiansborg som blev en tittarsuccé både i och utanför Danmark, skildrar relationen mellan en nytillträd statsminister, dennes medierådgivare (eller som man säger i serien, "spinndoktor") och en nyhetsredaktion frontad av en ung, ambitiös journalist. Serien varvar den politiska dramaturgin av ständiga attacker mot makten, interna läckor och försiktiga avvägningar i relation till de senaste opinionsmätningarna med de informella relationernas vardagliga avtryck.

Ett äktenskap i kris, en svår barndom, hälsoproblem och krävande chefer är faktorer som påverkar huvudpersonernas förmåga att navigera i det politiska spelet. Ett ledmotiv i serien är statsministerns, den charmerande Brigitte Nyborg, kamp med den pragmatism som krävs (särskilt av en minoritetsregering), utan att förlora sin idealism. Och nog är det just pragmatism som gäller i vår tids 24-timmars nyhetscykel, där allt och alla kan rapportera till den ständigt pågående men i viss mån utarmade, politiska debatten. Det räcker inte längre att som partiledare profilera sig med kompetens i ett litet antal frågor och därför krävs välplanerade kommunikationsstrategier. Men det är inte självklart att denna anpassning drivits bara av kommunikatörer eller journalister, i *Borgen* är maktens höga pris framträdande allteftersom Nyborg lär sig kontrollera det politiska spelet.

I bruset av vår tids sociala medier och "fake news" tenderar emellertid dynamiken mellan aktörer i maktens centrum, illustrerat av Christiansborg, att negligeras. Förvisso kan numera alla producera nyheter men det ömsesidiga beroendet mellan journalister och politiker som karaktäriserar demokratiska system består. I antologin *Close and Distant. Political Executive-Media Relations in Four Countries*, studeras några aspekter av denna relation genom jämförelser mellan Finland, Litauen, Polen och Sverige.

Politiker behöver journalister som kommunicerar, analyserar, legitimerar och kontrollerar politiken. Journalister behöver politiker som skapar, utför, utmanar och misslyckas i politiken för att ge nyhetsvärde till den politiska rapporteringen. Trots att politiker själva kan nå ut till en bred publik genom nya kanaler på Internet, används sociala medier ofta främst av politiker för att nyhetsvärdet ska "plockas" upp av nyhetsmedia. Sociala medier har alltså inte ersatt den politiska journalistiken utan istället blivit en av de kanaler som politiker, och journalister, använder i relationen med varandra. Internet och sociala mediers format har emellertid

förändrat och utmanat traditionell nyhetsmedia bland annat genom de betydligt lägre produktionskostnaderna, vilket lett till drastiskt minskade resurser för nyhetsredaktioner världen över. En stor förändring är naturligtvis också uppluckringen av partipressen som tidigare dominerade politisk nyhetsmedia i Västeuropa. Det har dessutom skett en professionalisering, framförallt i kommunikationen av offentlig sektor. Trenden med allt större regeringsorganisationer innebär större medvetenhet om och kontroll över den politiska kommunikation som paketeras och riktas till nyhetsmedia, och i förlängningen till folket. Inom forskning om politikens medialisering talar man om att politiken i ökande utsträckning har antagit medielogik, alltså anpassat politiken till nyhetsmediernas förväntningar om nyhetsvärde (Strömbäck 2008). Politiska roller som pressekreterare, kommunikationsrådgivare, mediatränare eller som i Danmark, spinndoktorer, är relativt nya i europeiska sammanhang. I Sverige var det t.ex. först på 1960-talet som regeringskansliet bemannades med en pressekreterare. Numera har samtliga ministrar och departement egna pressekreterare i kombination med andra kommunikationsroller som både proaktivt och reaktivt sköter relationen till massmedia. Gränserna mellan yrkesgrupperna är alltså numera mindre tvära vilket kan leda till en konsensuskultur, men också försvåra tidigare goda informella relationer mellan politiker och journalister. Förändringar har även skett i den publik som konsumerar politiska nyheter. Internet har både vidgat och fragmenterat den traditionella folkmassa som politisk journalistik riktat sig mot. En sensationell nyhet kan färdas mycket snabbt men vi vet också att politisk analys numera ofta sker i så kallade bubblor åtskilda av selektiv åsiktsrepresentation. Somliga menar att vi lever i en tid av hybridmedia där relationerna mellan aktörer engagerade i politisk kommunikation blivit mer rörliga (Chadwick 2017).

Mot denna bakgrund ställer bokens redaktörer Karl Magnus Johansson och

Gunnar Nygren ett antal frågor angående relationer av närhet och distans som antas karakterisera den politiska eliten. Å ena sidan föreligger starka konflikter mellan politiker och journalister. Konfliktlinjen grundas i journalistikens granskande roll och kommersialiseringen av nyhetsmedia. På senare år har den tilltagande populismen inneburit ökade risker för journalister i deras granskande roll om inte nödvändigtvis i relation till den personliga säkerheten som avseende tillgången till viktiga platser och nätverk. USAs president Donald Trump är t.ex. numera känd för att kunna dra in journalisters ackreditering i Vita huset efter konfrontationer. Här har också sociala medier i viss mån lett till större befogenheter för politiker som givet att de har en väletablerad kanal på Internet är mindre beroende av att hålla sig väl med journalister. I rollen som Sveriges utrikesminister valde t.ex. Carl Bildt ofta att referera journalister till sin egen blogg, där han menade att hans uttalanden löpte mindre risk att bli felciterade eller fel-tolkade. Men det är också nyhetsmediernas jakt efter sensationsnarrativ och förändring som driver konfliktlinjen.

Å andra sidan innebär symbiosen mellan politiker och journalister att båda grupper är införstådda med värdet av goda relationer sinsemellan. Informella relationer eller gemensamma värderingar kan därför också utgöra hinder för mediernas granskande roll. Denna relation har uppmärksammats i form av kritik mot det politiska etablissemangets maktkoncentration i Sverige. När Sveriges Television (SVT) efter en partiledardebatt 2018 valde att ta avstånd från ett inlägg i debatten av Sverigedemokraternas partiledare Jimmie Åkesson, togs fallet upp i Granskningsnämnden (som är en del av Myndigheten för press, radio och tv). Granskningsnämnden fällde sedermera SVT för agerandet såsom varande i strid mot uppdraget om opartiskhet. Liknande fall och efterföljande diskussioner har på senare tid uppstått i en rad europeiska länder, varav några uppmärksammas i boken.

Boken driver tesen att dessa utvecklingar av både tilltagande närhet mellan politik och nyhetsmedier och ökad fragmentisering inom de två sektorerna lett till en centralisering av maktintressen. Här representerar de fyra länderna både variation och likhet. I Sverige och Finland påvisas en gradvis centralisering av regeringens kommunikation som inneburit ökad kontroll för statsmakten i relation till nyhetsmedierna. I Polen och Litauen är mönstret inte lika starkt främst på grund av mindre koordinerad kommunikation mellan regeringsdepartementen. Alla fyra länder vittnar dock om professionalisering och anpassning till en mer strategisk kommunikationskultur, bland annat genom sociala medier som många av bokens informanter framhåller som ett nödvändigt ont. Sociala mediernas roll är också intressant givet bokens slutsats om de informella relationernas betydelse i alla fyra länder, Twitter, liksom kommunikation via e-mail och SMS tycks upprätthålla informella nätverk.

I bokens tre delar (och elva kapitel) beskriver och analyserar kapitelförfattarna relationerna mellan politiker och journalister i de respektive länderna (del 1) och mellan länderna (del 2). Boken avslutas med en diskussion som belyser kapitlens bidrag både från ett statsvetenskapligt och journalistiskt perspektiv. Bokens stora bidrag är det breda anslaget och de många olika dimensioner den analytiskt förhåller sig till: från vardagliga rutiner – de slentrianmässiga aspekterna av relationen mellan sektorer och dess olika aktörer – till de mer institutionaliserade (och reglerade) förhållandena och hur dessa förändrats över tid. Denna vidd från micro till meso till macro, bringar en fördjupad förståelse av den politiska kultur som ofta präglar relationer i makteliten, men som är en svår-fångad variabel. Genom dessa dimensioner, som presenteras i inledningskapitlet, förhåller sig bokens elva kapitel hela tiden nära varandra vilket ger läsaren goda möjligheter till en systematisk jämförelse både inom och mellan de empiriska nedslagen. Här är boken också ett viktigt bidrag till förståelsen av hur

hybrida mediesystem fungerar i praktiken, där de institutionaliserade relationerna inte alltid visar komplexiteten i att t.ex. mänskliga relationer numera sker både online och offline. Det är också i denna dikotomi som boken visar ett behov av mer förståelse av förändringar i politisk journalistik bortom de sociala mediernas förklaringskraft. Kapitlen erbjuder också diskussioner om förändring över tid, dels genom kortfattade nedslag av viktiga förändringar i det institutionaliserade förhållandet mellan politik och medier, men också genom många citat från de personer som intervjuats och själva upplevt förändring.

Bokens första del ger en beskrivande bild av situationen i de fyra länderna som delvis förklaras av ländernas tämligen olika politiska kontexter. I Polen har dessutom stora förändringar skett under studiens tid, sedan det ödesdigra valet 2015 har den konservativa majoritetsregeringen begränsat den fria pressens utrymme. Både Polen och Litauen utmärks av en postkommunistisk kontext där relationerna mellan aktörerna i fokus inte har samma historiska bäring. Litauen är dessutom ett betydligt mindre land än de övriga (ca. 2,8 miljoner invånare), vilket innebär en mindre maktelit med närmare relationer. Sverige och Finland förefaller relativt lika, men Finland ger uttryck för mer balanserad samverkan mellan politiker och journalister.

I bokens andra del används jämförelsen dem emellan i intressanta analyser av regeringskommunikation, sociala medier, formella och informella samspel, medielogik och politisk kommunikationskultur. I dessa kapitel ställs det empiriska materialet, över 80 djupintervjuer, i relation till forskningsfronten i politisk kommunikation. Särskilt intressanta är kapitel 9 (författat av Gunnar Nygren och Risto Niemikari) som diskuterar medielogikens plats i den politiska verktygslådan och kapitel 10 (författat av Auksė Balčytienė och Tom Moring) om politisk kommunikationskultur. Diskussionerna i de båda kapitlen belyser även andra resultat och det är främst här som de tre analytiska nivåerna

tillsammans med det jämförande perspektivet, visar bokens unika bidrag. Medielogik i politiken handlar om att utöva kontroll genom ökad förståelse och kompetens i politisk kommunikation. I ett mer konkurrenspräglad informationssamhälle innebär detta ökat inflytande i politiken. Professionalisering i kombination med politisk kommunikationskultur, som antingen utvecklats mot mer pluralism (Sverige och Finland), eller begränsats av politiska skäl (Polen) eller av andra faktorer givna för kontexten (Litauen), tycks förklara många av bokens resultat.

Den jämförande studien bekräftar författarnas tes om det ökade värdet av relationer och nätverk som innebär en pågående maktcentralisering; detta påvisas i alla de fyra länderna. Allra längst har denna utveckling gått i Sverige där den politiska sektorn väger tyngst i balansen av kontroll mellan de båda grupperna. Medan regeringskansliet utvidgats och inneburit fler specialiserade kommunikationstjänster, har nyhetsredaktioner minskat och inneburit krav om mer generell kompetens. I bruset av sociala medier och falska nyheter, är boken därför ett viktigt bidrag för en mer nyanserad analys av vår tids problem och dess orsaker.

Bokens populärkulturella referens till Netflix-serien *House of Cards* signalerar uppgivenhet inför politisk cynism men studiens resultat ligger som väl är närmare *Borgens* dramaturgi. Samtliga avsnitt av *Borgen* inleds med ett citat som fångar det politiska dramats kärna, oftast från Machiavelli, men ibland figurerar någon av Winston Churchills, Abraham Lincolns, Mao Zedong eller Lenins ofta citerade utsagor om politik. Den sistnämnde lär ha myntat uttrycket "förtroende är bra men kontroll är bättre" som ofta nämns just i diskussioner om maktcentralisering. Det må vara lätt att skylla på de sociala mediernas förenkling och polarisering av politiken, men kontroll över hur politik kommuniceras och blir tillrättalagd av makteliten har också bidragit till sjunkande förtroende. Detta är ett minst lika angeläget samhällsproblem idag.

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Anmälan av Karin Skill

När internet introducerades på 1990-talet uttrycktes förhoppningar att det skulle bidra till deliberativt deltagande (Yates 2016). Liknande förväntningar uttrycktes för sociala medier under deras första år, och det är något som är i fokus för denna politiska etnografi av turkiska forskaren Zeynep Tufekci. Hon kallar sig själv teknosociolog och ger sig i kast med relationerna mellan teknik, politik och sociala medier i proteströrelser i såväl auktoritära stater som demokratier. Tufekcis bok tar utgångspunkt i de höga förväntningarna på internet som ett demokratiskt verktyg för yttrandefrihet under den s.k. arabiska våren. Men förväntningarna på teknikens inneboende kraft har kommit att nyanseras. Till exempel talar Mineur och Sannerholm om ett normativt skifte i bistånd till IKT (2018: iii) där betoning på digitalisering istället gått mot insatser som motverkar antidemokratiska krafter och propaganda. Man kan säga att Tufekci skriver det normativa skiftets historia då hon fokuserar på perioden 2010 till 2016. Hennes exempel av twittrande mitt i tårgasen kommer utöver Tunisien och Egypten, från sociala rörelser i Turkiet och USA, med historiska utblickar mot Zapatisterna och den

amerikanska medborgarrättsrörelsen som möjliggör jämförelser med tidigare analyser av proteströrelser.

På sin websida technosociology.org beskriver Tufekci sin ambition att skriva för en bredare publik och att publicera via Creative Commons License för att göra den tillgänglig. Denna ambition innebär att texten är läsvärd även utanför akademiska kretsar, men samtidigt till att teoretiska bidrag tonas ned. *Twitter and teargas* har tre delar: "Making a movement", "A protester's tools" samt "After the protests". I den senare visar hon hur auktoritära stater gått från att använda censur till att skapa oreda och osäkerhet genom olika sätt att översvämma digitala kanaler. Här nämner hon allt från digitala troll till makedonska ungdomar som får betalt för att producera falska nyheter. Metodologiskt ger Tufekci etnografiskt rika beskrivningar av vad hon observerat genom att vara på plats, via intervjuer och under digitala samtal, samt observationer av online-beteende bland aktivister.

Utöver förord och introduktion har boken nio kapitel. I kapitel 1 granskas digitalt nätverkande rum och hur sociala rörelser använder digitala verktyg för att mobilisera. I kapitel 2 undersöker Tufekci betydelsen av uppmärksamhet, traditionell massmedia, censur och framväxten av digital medborgarjournalistik. Kapitel 3 handlar om hur de ideologiskt vänsterorienterade och nätverkande sociala rörelserna organiserar sig. Även om hon främst deltagit i vänsterkretsar menar hon att hennes analys gäller för hela det politiska spektret och hon nämner till exempel the Tea Party med snabbare beslutsordning. I kapitel 4 beskrivs hur protestkultur i nätverkande anti-auktoritära rörelser samspelar med *affordances* som digital teknik medger. *Affordances* är "the actions a given technology facilitates or makes possible" (xi). I det femte kapitlet får vi se hur Tufekci positionerar sig filosofiskt och metodologiskt när hon studerar teknik och samhälle. Hon poängterar att hon inte har för avsikt att studera sociala rörelsers framgång eller misslyckande utan just "affordances".

I kapitel 6 uppmärksammas hur Facebook, Twitter, Google och YouTube har kommit att dominera nätverkande offentliga rum, samt hur plattformarnas policys, affärsmodeller och algoritmer spelar roll för sociala rörelser. Det handlar bl a om Facebooks förbud mot att agera under pseudonym. I kapitel 7 fortsätter analysen av hur "real name policies" påverkar aktivister och andra medborgare. Till exempel nämner hon Reddit där män under pseudonym kunde utbyta pornografiknande bilder, men också YouBeMom där deltagarna diskuterar tabubelagda ämnen som oönskade graviditeter. I kapitel 8 presenteras de centrala begrepp som utöver affordances bär upp hennes analys av nätverken, nämligen *capacities* och *signals*. Capacities bygger på idéer från Amartya Sen och Martha Nussbaum. Tufekci berör sedan tre typer av affordances: narrative, electoral/institutional och disruptive och de handlar om de nätverkande sociala rörelsernas möjlighet att påverka och förändra. Inte alla proteströrelser lyckas mobilisera de tre kapaciteterna. För att förstå hur en rörelse inte kommer vidare för att den inte har utsett en representant som kan förhandla, eller helt enkelt är oförmögna att utforma nästa steg, används begreppet *tactical freeze*. Detta hänger i mångt och mycket samman med hennes fokus på rörelser med en ambition att vara horisontella. Det avslutande kapitlet granskar makt och regeringars motåtgärder som genomgått omfattande utveckling under senare år från det Tufekci kallar Mubaraks "clumsiness" (xxii) till regeringar som förmår att själva använda sociala medier till sin fördel och för att försöka bevara *status quo*. Ur ett statsvetenskapligt perspektiv är det sista kapitlet intressant och är starkt kopplat till idén om ett skifte från sociala mediers demokratiska möjligheter till dess utmaningarna med propaganda och näthat mm.

Analytiskt uppmärksammar Tufekci att precis som städer, broar och byggnader har online-plattformar arkitektur som möjliggör vissa saker och hindrar andra, det som kallas affordances. Gilla-knappen är en affordance

medan Twitter via @funktionen medger att snabbt nå tusentals och miljontals människor genom twitteranvändare med högt antal följare. En affordance som Twitter består med är öppenhet för användares experimenterande och reappropriering. Men även Twitter håller på att gå över till algoritm-kontroll enligt kriterier som företaget beslutar, och leder till något Tufekci kallar "algorithmic governance" (162). Här kommer vi att behöva fler studier och inte minst teoretiska ansatser för att förstå hur data blir den nya råvaran i plattformsekonomier.

Proteströrelser har förändrats av sociala medier, argumenterar Tufekci, genom användning av digitala verktyg för att mobilisera, organisera och förstärka sina berättelser. Men, samtidigt som sociala medier möjliggör organiseringen av massiva protester så gör det också rörelserna utsatta och känsliga, ett argument som framgår av titeln på boken och som vi kan säga utgör kärnan i det normativa skiftet. Ett skämt i aktivistkretsar under den så kallade arabiska våren var att för första gången i historien kunde någon ansluta sig till en revolution bara genom att klicka på "I'm Attending"-knappen på Facebook (xxii). Detta är inte bara ett skämt. Det hänger samman med Tufekcis ståndpunkt att den virtuella världen inte är mindre *verklig* än offline. Som en kontrast till de massiva protesterna med mängder med människor som samlas fysiskt, visar Tufekci upp hur ett fåtal personer, med hjälp av digitala verktyg, tillsammans i ett effektivt nätverk organiserade mediciner och sjukvård till behövande under tumulten i Egypten. Den som startade insatsen satt på distans utanför landets gränser och kom igång på ett par dagar. Detta kontrasteras mot de förberedelser i tid och rum som krävdes för att organisera en medborgrättsmarsch i USA på 1950-talet, som traditionellt uppmärksammats i teorier kring kollektiva protester. I statsvetenskap och sociologi har studiet av sociala rörelser bl a uppmärksammat hur de bidragit till agendasättande. Tufekci bidrar till en nyanserad bild av den ofta polariserade diskussion

som förs om sociala medier och att de inte är *antingen goda* eller dåliga utan kan vara både och. Liksom andra IT-intresserade samhällsanalytiker citerar hon Melvin Kranzberg som hävdar att: "Technology is neither good, nor bad, nor is it neutral" (124).

I sammanhanget där vi är intresserade av sociala mediers roll för politisk mobilisering är det viktigt att Tufekci för en diskussion med Evgeny Morozov som argumenterat för att demokrati på internet är en illusion. Hon hänvisar till Morozovs begrepp *slacktivism*, som hon är kritisk till. Idén om *slacktivism* eller *clicktivism*, syftar till att visa att det krävs liten insats för att "delta" via sociala medier (xxvi). Tufekci är kritisk eftersom hon uppmärksammar att många demonstranter anger interaktioner online som startpunkten för deras politisering (xxvi). Morozov å sin sida argumenterar att *slacktivism* är en typ av "online identity supermarket" som innebär "digital efforts (that) make us feel very useful and important but have zero social impact". Därutöver menar han att *slacktivism* är "likely to erode other more effective (and more political) forms of protest" (2009). Morozov har dock blivit motbevisad även i andra sammanhang (Mazak och Stetka 2016). Det är även av betydelse att de tidiga analyserna av internets roll för människors identitet förutspådde att det skulle bli slutet för kategoriseringar av människor i ras, genus och klass och att den mänskliga kroppen skulle få minskad betydelse. Nu blev det inte så konstaterar Tufekci, och med all rätt. Ras och misogyni fortsätter att spela roll och kan till och med stärkas av strävan att skaffa uppmärksamhet. Algoritmer är i samklang med annonser, och tummen upp är en positiv och annonsvänlig signal. Det är svårt att ge tummen upp till att någon blivit dödad. Inte för-rän 2016 blev det möjligt att uttrycka någon annan känsla än gilla på Facebook, men gilla-symbolen är fortfarande default. Ett exempel på detta är ishinksutmaningen för ALS på Facebook som exponerades samtidigt som en svart pojke i Ferguson sköts ihjäl av polis. På

grund av logiken med att "gilla" videos med människor som hällde iskallt vatten över sig, fanns det många som inte blev exponerade för nyheten om dödsskjutningen. På ett liknande sätt kom pingviner att symbolisera censurerade medier i Turkiet när en nationell tv-kanal sände ett naturprogram med pingviner, istället för att visa protesterna som pågick i Istanbuls Gezipark.

Ett viktigt ämne i boken är hur bluff, felaktig information och att sprida tvivel om uppgifters riktighet översvämmer de digitala kanalerna med information som gör att annan information dränks. Att skapa tillräckligt mycket förvirring kan paralysera människor och avleda protester. Detta är den nya auktoritära strategin som till viss del ersätter tidigare censur eftersom det gör tillgången på information oanvändbar. Trots att hon framhåller att teknik och samhälle utvecklas tillsammans och vi inte tjänar på att förhålla oss vare sig utopiskt, dystopiskt eller teknikedeterministiskt till den så är det avslutande kapitlet ganska dystert. En viktig slutsats som hon drar, och som har bredare relevans utöver proteströrelser, är att människor börjar tvivla och inte kan bedöma trovärdigheten i alla inlägg som cirkulerar på sociala medier. I epilogen visar Tufekci hur Facebook har blivit en viktig spelare i det offentliga rummet, och sträcker sig till och med till att säga att Facebook "acts as de facto public sphere" (139). För aktivister i auktoritära regimer är *community policing* ett problem som ligger invävt som en utmaning i de sociala medierna. Ju fler som ser dig, vilket är ett mål, ju fler kan samtidigt rapportera dig för exempelvis spam. De som granskar är få, och arbetet är ofta outsourcd till låginkomstländer som där anställda kanske inte talar språket de är satta att granska, eller inte har kulturell kunskap. Tufekci ställer sig den relevanta retoriska frågan om var gränsen mellan pressfrihet och propaganda går, och inte minst "who is qualified to make those decisions?" (152). Liknande diskussioner att förts kring möjligheterna, och svårigheterna, att lagstifta om nåthet.

Boken manar till reflektion över en av vår tids omvälvande teknologiska utvecklingar och är relevant även för dem utanför skaran som intresserar sig för dreadlocksprydda protesterörelser. Den kan med fördel användas i såväl undervisningen om internationella relationer som i studier av agendasättande och deltagande i den digitala eran.

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