
Toward an analytical model for Swedish election campaigns

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The image of Sweden as Europe's most stable democracy has suffered serious blemishes during the past three years. Not only was the 44 year tradition of Social Democratic predominance ended, but the coalition non-socialist government lasted only two years before it collapsed due to internal dissonance over the fate of Sweden's nuclear energy program.

During the spring of 1979, the three nonsocialist parties continued their political bickering. The results of the '79 election hardly clarified the situation. Despite the success of the 3 non-socialist parties in reconstituting their coalition government, the stability of the coalition is questionable. The instability of the parliamentary situation leaves open the possibility of new coalitions in the early eighties.

Scholars were quick to point out after the '76 election that the actual shifts in electoral support for the parties, and particularly between the two blocks, were quite small.¹ The precarious balance that had favored the Social Democrats tipped slightly and the result was the Fälldin government. However two major studies of the '76 election illustrated that important changes had occurred in Swedish politics. Olof Petersson summarized his findings in the following manner:

The significance of the long-term processes of change is that old stabilizing factors are being dissolved. The electorate becomes more floating. The image of the stable Swedish voter is today becoming a myth. More and more voters abandon their old parties. Class voting decreases. A growing number of voters make their decisions shortly before the election. The gap between electors and elected widens.²

Sören Holmberg demonstrated that the traditional left-right division of party and voter behavior no longer could be used as a one dimension model to explain Swedish political behavior.

Many of the new issues in Swedish politics in the seventies such as environmental questions, decentralization, energy, and nuclear debate, have tended to cut across the traditional left-right division.³

Both Petersson and Holmberg challenged the traditional scholarly description of the nature of Swedish election campaigns. In his most recent article, Holmberg summarized this traditional description and drew the following conclusion:

From an international perspective, Swedish elections seem a bit dull. The same parties compete with one another in similar terms as they have for 50 years. Economic and social problems usually dominate the campaign and the parties take their positions on a traditional left-right scale. The combatants usually have a 'down to earth' and calm discussing of different specific issues and try to avoid grabbing attention via attacks on personalities. Surprising new promises and massive public demonstrations are rare in Swedish elections. The catch phrases and campaign rhetoric naturally exist in the parties election propaganda, but such material usually does not have any great impact on the political discussion. Swedish elections usually have a factual character and are fought primarily on the left-right dimension. The 1976 election campaign broke with those traditions.⁴

From the perspective of his survey research Petersson suggested that the very nature of the campaign was changing:

This on-going development has important consequences not only for voters but also for the parties. The importance of party organization is declining. Instead we can see a growing significance of mass media and campaign planning. Contacts between voters and representatives have become indirect rather than direct.⁵

If Holmberg and Petersson recognized some of the inadequacies of traditional explanatory models, they have not yet had the opportunity to provide alternative paradigms. In the meanwhile, their colleagues reiterated the traditional models.

This article is an initial attempt to provide a new analytical model for Swedish election campaigns. The model is based upon research. I have on the campaigns of 1973, 1976, and 1979 and upon the studies of other social scientists of Swedish politics. The essay begins with a brief summary of the literature, a critique of the absence of studies on the campaigns themselves – with one major exception, and concludes with the presentation of my model. The applicability of this model to the past three election campaigns will be tested in a forthcoming book. In the interim it is my hope that this article will encourage a more careful discussion of the nature of election campaigns and their place in the general political development.

Survey research of voter attitudes conducted by political scientists at the University of Gothenberg, especially Bo Särilvik, dominate the literature of Swedish election campaigns. Conducted over 25 years, these studies represent a magnificent record of voter behavior. They permit scholars both to study changes in the electorate and to correlate various variables to voter attitudes and behavior.

The thrust of the survey research has been to map attitudes, not so much to provide explanations of behavior.⁶ They provide an image of the Swedish voter; his attitudes, his social position, when he decides which party to vote for, his general political knowledge, etc. Of course, Särilvik and others have tested various hypotheses for voter behavior. Särilvik concluded after his work on the '76 election:

The point we feel warranted to make is the variations in the Social Democratic voting support are bound up with short term political and economic developments rather than with changes in the structure or values of Society.⁷

Other political scientists have also rejected the so-called "Lindhagen thesis" of the close relationship between class structure and electoral behavior.⁸ All agree that the survey research data demonstrates a strong streak of rationality in the Swedish voter – a correlation between his preferences on various issues and his party selection. In such a case, one might have expected that scholars would pay, as sociologist Walter Korpi encouraged recently, 'more attention to the political messages of the parties and the record of the government.'

Yet the literature on political information, debate, and the campaigns themselves is nowhere

as impressive as the survey research. Särilvik himself gave little credence to the importance of campaigns. Only rarely did he see them as shifting opinion against general economic-political tendencies which he called "election winds."⁹ Other scholars have studied political communication and done content analysis of newspaper reporting.¹⁰ These studies offer an adequate analysis of party propaganda and newspaper content but they are insufficient or totally lacking in their analysis of radio/TV and the issue of receiver response. They tend to measure what is written, not what is read or how the electorate develops perceptions of his world and thereafter formulates political attitudes and choices. Even more striking is the dearth of literature on campaigns. Only one major work exists and it studies the campaigns of the early sixties.¹¹

We already have noted that Petersson as well as Holmberg concluded his work on the '76 election by underscoring the growing importance of the election campaigns themselves for the outcome of the election. Petersson rejects Särilvik's conclusion that in 1976 "inflation was the feature of the economic situation that remained the decisive electoral liability for the Social Democratic government."¹² There is additionally much evidence that large portions of the electorate do not decide how to vote until the last three weeks prior to election day – Petersson suggests 28 % in his study of the '76 campaign. Given the delicate balance in Swedish party strengths, the sensitivity to small shifts in electoral support, the importance of understanding the nature of the campaigns should be self-apparent. Yet the descriptive literature which touches on campaigns is neither very helpful nor consistent.

As examples of this literature, I refer to two recently published books: *The Swedish Party System*; and *The Electorate and Nuclear Energy*.¹³ The former is the latest revision of the standard textbook on Swedish politics, while the latter includes a characterization of Swedish election campaigns by Jörgen Westerståhl under whose tutelage the survey research work has been done. The current version of Back-Berglund attempts to describe the campaign from the perspective of party strategists differs strikingly from an earlier revision (1971) of the same work which emphasizes the importance of television which the more recent revision denies. Westerståhl's essay is intended only to describe the features of a campaign. Some

of the differences between the two works therefore depend upon the perspective that each takes, nonetheless a comparison is instructive.

Both conceive of the election campaign as relatively short. The nomination process 6-7 months prior to the actual election signals the beginning. Both emphasize the importance of the party organizations and the division of the parties on a left-right scale. Both relegate the roll of ideology to minor importance. Neither sees television as a dominant force. Westerståhl stresses the predominance of tempered discussion of "real issues," while the text underscores the importance of person to person contact. It also indicates the limitations of tactical maneuvers by party strategists and the role of continuity in Swedish politics.

While there is little doubt that there is considerable truth in what these two works suggest, they hardly seem adequate as descriptions, let alone as analysis. Campaign planning begins in earnest over a year in advance of an election - actual work about 12 months in advance. Ideology plays an important role in the campaign as the "fund question" demonstrates. Television as Petersson indicates is a critical force. Political debate may focus on "real issues" but frequently takes stylized forms that resemble political theater rather than open discussion. From an analytical viewpoint, neither work attempts systematically to explain why certain issues become important while others disappear. Neither recognizes how important the growth of marginal voters has become or the limits of the usefulness of party organization.

Petersson's work established the need to reexamine the traditional model. Holmberg and his colleagues in Gothenberg hope to devise one in the light of their studies of the '79 campaign. In the interim, the following model may be of interest. It must be admitted from the outset that the model presumes the kind of political experience that Sweden has had, ie. regular elections held triannually. Its applicability to a midterm election would need considerable adjustment. The model is intended as a framework for analysis of the election process as a whole. Undoubtedly some elements of the model need refinement. The model contains many ideas borrowed from other scholars, sometimes rearranged in a fashion which seemed more appropriate. The schema should improve understanding of the campaigns.

The model consists of four elements:

1. Recognition that *two distinct campaigns* comprise an election campaign - each of which

has its own special character, timing, and problems though they overlap and interact under certain conditions.

2. Each campaign's development occurs through the interaction of a number of *independent, yet related, variables*. These variables - the electorate, the parties, the means of opinion building, and external on-going developments, need to be studied individually as well as in relationship to the others.

3. The final phase of the campaign, the period four weeks prior to election day, has a character of its own and is dominated by a process called *agenda setting*.

4. The eventual outcome of the election is likely to depend on the ability of the various parties to "*peak*" properly

I. One campaign as two: a mobilization effort and the campaign for marginal voters:

The existence of large, well-organized, well-funded, relatively stable, and ideologically homogeneous political parties remains a primary feature of Sweden's political system. To mobilize fully the traditional support of any given party, particularly the Social Democrats (SAP), becomes a critical element in any election. This effort has a distinctive character and should be recognized as a campaign in its own right.

There are elements of process, issues and ideology, timing and strategy to the mobilization campaign. Process refers mainly to the relationship between the party leadership and the rank and file especially the local activists. Sweden's political parties tend to be directed from the top. The political leaders, particularly in terms of parliamentary and party tactics, have great freedom and responsibility. Rank and file input is limited to regular information networks, annual, or more infrequent, formal congresses, and the power to nominate candidates to various offices. Yet a successful mobilization effort depends heavily on the willingness of grass roots groups to work person to person and to maximize turn-out at the polls. There is therefore a sensitive relationship between rank and file attitudes, policies of the party leadership, and the success on the mobilization campaign. The leadership must plan an election campaign in such a way that the rank and file are encouraged to fulfill their particular role.

The patterns of this process vary from party to party. The two parties whose campaign is most

dependent on mobilization efforts are SAP and Center. In SAP's case, the mobilization campaign opens formally with the convening of the party congress, laid strategically a year in advance of the election. Although the leadership dominates the congresses, the process function of the meetings is apparent. The congress adopts the framework from within which the leadership shall act. It also has the opportunity to censure the leadership in case the latter has acted in a manner unacceptable to the elected delegates. Such an expression of displeasure is extremely unlikely at these meetings.

At the same time the party secretariat has already begun its planning for the entire campaign. Its first concern is the education of campaign workers. SAP has placed great emphasis on special courses and centrally initiated materials to inform party workers. "The movement" has always emphasized training programs. Educational activities demand considerable time and are concentrated in the period between the congress and May 1. In that period the basic work of SAP's mobilization campaign will be completed. Communication during this process occurs primarily through party controlled forms. Dependence on external media is small even for parties with minimal media resources. Election guides, simplified party election programs, etc. will be designed and ordered if not actually distributed. By May 1, the educational and planning phase of the mobilization campaign is completed. There will also have occurred a large number of district and local party meetings where the rank and file will have the opportunity to discuss pressing issues with party leaders. More importantly, party leaders have the opportunity to feel the pulse of their own grass roots organizations.

May 1 is a transition into the final phase of SAP's mobilization campaign. The annual demonstrations unite the leadership and the activists in a feeling of common struggle and purpose, provide a platform for the party's election program, and issue a call to arms for the movement as a whole. The Center uses its annual congress in June for much the same purpose. During the summer and last four weeks of the campaign the party activists will do their job more or less on their own initiative. The activists must therefore have been properly stimulated.

Swedish parties bear a strong relationship to class structure although this relationship has weakened during the past decade. Party identification ge-

nerally and a large number of issues fall on a traditional left-right political scale. Each party has an ideological character. That parties in the parliament do not necessarily follow those ideological paths is not so important here. Ideology plays a critical role in the relationship of the party leaders to party rank and file. Each are part of a larger movement and ideology. They work together toward the achievement of the goals of their common values and they sacrifice together. The rank and file expects, and is used to, communication from the party leadership in relatively clear ideological terms. Therefore the ideological tones of the mobilization campaign are distinct. Relatively crude, but traditional, slogans are often present: "collapse of the welfare state", "the danger of socialization," "the threat of reactionary forces (Högerspöket)" etc. In this sense, ideology plays an important role in the mobilization campaign. It serves as the common bond of the party and as the goal that must be protected through common effort. "Bush propaganda" within traditional groups has an even stronger ideological character.

Timing in the mobilization campaign has a distinctive pattern. The two critical periods are: 12-4 months prior to election day; and the last month of the campaign. The industrial holiday in Sweden eliminates July for practical political work. Actually nothing much of importance can be accomplished by any party between June 20 and August 15. During the first period, a massive and broad effort is made to mobilize the party activists. During the final month, they in turn will recruit their less active brethren through door to door campaign, local political meetings, and informal discussions at their work places.

The success of the mobilization campaign depends on the ability of the party leadership to activate a strong commitment from the rank and file. This process takes considerable time and is built up successively in stages. A relatively high level of activity and effort comes fully four months prior to election day. The final effort should lead the party to maximize its mobilizable traditional voting groups.

How large are the traditional voter groups? 70 % of the electorate has voted for the same party in the past four elections according to Särilvik et al. There is a large variation from party to party. SAP is most dependent on its mobilization efforts, the Liberals least. The 1976 election indicated a growing instability of voter behavior, 20 % switched parties. How great the potential for increasing erosion of traditional voting patterns is unc-

lear. Most scholars and politicians expect a continuing decrease in the percentage of traditional voters.

By international standards, Swedes are a well informed electorate. The survey research data suggests that voting behavior indicates a "rational" relationship between individual voter interests and party selection. Obviously the attitudes of the party faithful will depend to a considerable extent upon their evaluation of their leadership's behavior in the general political arena. If the leadership strays too far from agreed upon policies, there is the likelihood that the result will be less enthusiastic participation by the rank and file in the mobilization effort. SAP had problems of this sort after a leadership decision not to oppose the construction of the Liberal minority government. Important rank and file groups disapproved of this policy and the leadership had great difficulty in defending the decision within its own party.

The mobilization campaign is fundamentally an internal affair for the parties. Its rhythm is dependent upon the relationship between the grass roots and leadership elements of the parties. It is a long process which builds throughout the year prior to the election. It has an important ideological element. It represents the most important single element in the entire election process. Parallel to the mobilization campaign are the efforts to win marginal voters.

The historical stability of the Swedish electorate and its relationship to social structure has led many to conclude that groups outside the mobilization campaign were of relatively little interest. Petersson's study of the '76 campaign demonstrated the increase in the number of voters who changed their political allegiance between 1973 and 1976. These "marginal voters" can no longer be viewed as interesting only as small weights which tip the balance of a larger scale. They comprise at least 20 % of the electorate and potentially closer to 30 % in 1979. The party leadership has a pressing responsibility to gather as many of these votes as possible. The conditions under which this can occur is far different from the conditions of a mobilization campaign.

The paradoxes of a parliamentary party that claims to represent both its own party members and those elements of the electorate that voted for it are many. Slightly over 25 % of the electorate belong to a political party. Party leaders acknowledge that they feel a responsibility to their voters as well as their rank and file. Their dilemma is that the "marginal voters" are a heterogeneous group

up whose grounds for attraction (and repulsion) are varied and difficult to control.¹⁴ To design a campaign to attract these groups is more tenuous and awkward than the demands of the mobilization campaign. Therefore, any model of Swedish elections must recognize the special characteristics of the campaign for marginal voters and keep it distinct from the mobilization effort.

Instability and general voter uncertainty characterize the campaign for marginal voters. Many remain uncommitted until the final days of the campaign. Marginal voters generally decide later than others which party to support. The largest groups of floating voters are within the non-socialist block. Approximately 40 % of the marginal voters cross over the block borders.

Because of the heterogeneity of marginal voters, they can not be described commonly. However, a number of observations can be made that will be relevant for most of these voters. He/she is not likely to be attracted to a particular party for ideological reasons. Single issues, combination of issues, charisma of party leaders – all will effect marginal voter behavior. They are not for the most part reachable through party networks. They are much less likely to subscribe to party journals or periodicals. They are less likely to be members of other organizations that have a clear, party political color. Yet, they reflect a similar spectrum of better/less informed and active/passive interest in politics as the remainder of the electorate. They read newspapers daily and watch television nightly. The dilemma they present to the parties is how to reach them. The parties can not rely primarily on their own organizations but instead must seek to use institutions outside their immediate control, particularly mass media.

"Externality" becomes a chief feature of the marginal voter campaign. In contrast to the "internal" mobilization campaign, a single party alone or even all the parties combined do not totally control the process and opportunities of a marginal voter campaign. The parties interact with other institutions – the result of which forms the nature of the campaign.

Mass media, particularly television, play a critical role in the campaign for marginal voters. Swedish consumption of all media forms rates high by international standards. How voters consume information, as well as the control of the electronic media, lies beyond the direct control of individual parties. They play in a game in which they are not the only participants.

Because of the centrality of mass media to this campaign, party chairmen assume a dominant role. The media prefer to focus upon individuals and "instant news." Personalities, unexpected occurrences, dramatic struggles . . . such is the stuff that makes good news. Party chairmen are the easiest targets for the media which in the case of television is so powerful that it can on occasion dictate how a party will be represented on its programs. Nearly all party leaders view television as the most important single ingredient in the campaign for marginal voters. It is also the medium which they control least and criticize most.

The timing and nature of a marginal voter campaign therefore will pattern itself after these conditions. Party leaders will tone down ideological statements for the general public. A tendency of the parties to seek the middle will predominate, no doubt because the most important marginal voter groups probably reside there. Attempts to gain media attention and a concern over imagery are constant features of the campaign. The greatest emphasis in the sense of timing will be the last six weeks of the campaign. The intensity of the marginal voter campaign remains low prior to the second week in August, thereafter it builds rapidly reaching an initial plateau at the end of the month. It culminates with a final hectic week. The parties know that 20 % of the electorate selects a party in the final month of the campaign, half of these the final week. To maximize their strength, ie. to peak properly, becomes the critical goal of the parties on election day. To be successful the parties must meet the challenges of both campaigns.

Thus, two campaigns, not one, characterize a Swedish election. One is "internal" - an attempt by the parties to mobilize their voter cores. The other is "external" - a campaign to attract marginal voters. Both campaigns depend upon the on-going policies of the political parties and the general economic and social conditions of Swedish society. But each has its own space, structure, and time-schedule. They interact naturally, have many common links, and effect each other. Yet for the party leadership they must be taken individually. Each provides a challenge that is distinct and identifiable.

II. Independent, but relatable, variables

The second element in the model is the independent variables which effect both campaigns.

No attempt is made here either to suggest weights or to specify a complete list of variables. I choose four which are important as well as obvious. The description of one variable, the media especially television, is more elongated because of a serious absence of literature on the problem, not because it is more or less important than other variables. Each variable is in some sense "independent" but in reality they are interrelated. I prefer to emphasize their interdependence rather than attempt to contrast their relative weights. The four variables are: the electorate; the parties; the various means to effect voter behavior; and factors external to the immediate electoral process that effect directly the outcome of an election. The specific ways in which these variables interact produce the pattern of a given election.

Voter behavior must be the central variable of any election study. The electorate remains the focal point of study for Swedish social scientists. Their work suggests much about what Swedes think on specific issues and how they voted. Less clear from these studies are the factors which produce this measured behavior. Family traditions, occupation and social position, clearly play significant roles. Education and locality also effect attitudes. Beyond these factors however, our knowledge becomes shaky. How much the various media effects knowledge, attitudes and behavior is uncertain. No good measure exists of the various weights of information channels. Much like the politicians who plan the campaigns, scholars work on a set of presumed interrelationships rather than some definitively established hierarchy. Hopefully future research will provide a more exacting explanation of the forces that effect voter behavior.

If we are somewhat uncertain why the electorate votes, we do know that they must vote for a specific party. Parties are the actors in the Swedish political system. The election is a question of party selection. The parties therefore have the responsibility and the initiative to seek voter support. They provide the "strategy" of an election campaign. The term "party" in this context can be misleading. Swedish political parties are mass based organizations, often with a vibrant grass roots movement. Party "strategy" for the national campaigns however is very much the province of a small group of party leaders. "Strategy" represents the design and coordination of a party's activities during the campaigns. Strategy demands expertise as well as the authority within a party to carry through a particular tactic or strategy.

The party strategists include the chairman and his closest personal advisors, the party secretary, election specialists including media experts, and the heads of the important adjunct organizations – for example the chairman of LO. Many politicians normally considered leaders within a party, for example members of the various Governing Boards or even in some cases the Executive Committees, are not initiators of election strategy although they certainly are informed and may have opportunities either to change a given strategy or to effect it through their own actions.

The rôle, even influence, of the party "strategist" varies in the two campaigns. In the mobilization campaign the rôle of the "strategists" is quite limited. In the campaign for marginal voters, they play a major rôle, perhaps more important than any other institutional activity of the parties besides their actual voting record in the Riksdag. This rôle is due not so much to their own desires as to the general conditions under which the campaign for marginal voters will occur.

The central question for the party strategists is how the parties can most effectively influence the electorate and maximize their party's vote. Different methods and to a certain degree a differing ordering of a party's program will be necessary depending on the voter group one is concerned with. For the traditional voting groups the parties will be able to use "internal" methods of communication. These direct communications are most effective with active elements within traditional voting groups. The passive voters in the traditional voting groups probably must be reached through personal contact. Here the organizational strength of various parties is important. The mobilization campaign is so designed so that the activists within the parties will bear a primary responsibility for getting their passive brethren to the polls.

SAP has the best organized campaign structure. Although one need be somewhat skeptical of party claims of a core of 400 000 active election workers, it seems highly likely that among heavy concentrations of industrial workers there is one designated election worker for every 10–12 voters. The party locals which include the local trade union organizations have responsibility to direct party campaigning at the local level. Often it is the union officials who carry a major burden of the grass roots work for the party. Many of the full time, and part time, union representatives within private companies – paid by the companies thro-

ugh collective labor agreements – will use their working days in the summer prior to the election day for full time party work. Their ability to reach the passive voter because of their personal contact and familiarity with their fellow workers provides an invaluable resource for SAP. No other party has such a similar network of party activists.

In the campaign for marginal voters, SAP does not enjoy the same advantages. The means of influencing the marginal voters certainly are diverse even though probably not so diverse as the voters themselves. In this campaign too there will be "active and passive" voter groups. Each of which will have to be reached in different ways. The parties can not be certain exactly what will influence these groups and must devise a multi-level strategy to gather as many supporters as possible. Most marginal voters will be either outside traditional lines of communication or oblivious to it. Therefore the parties must rely on "external" communication – most importantly mass media. These institutions have their own methods and reasons for operation and party "strategists" must consider them when they design activities to attract the media. A full scale analysis of the media can not be made here but a number of features can be noted.

Although overlapping or interaction occurs between the major media forms – newspapers, radio and television – in terms of reporting and receptivity on the part of its audience, each has distinctive functions, patterns of behavior, and limitations. Newspapers have heretofore been the media most closely studied.¹⁵

Distinguishing features of the daily press include its direct linkages to political parties, the domination of a few dailies, and its large audience. Although a few newspapers claim to be independent of party loyalty, the political affiliations of all newspapers are well established and viewed as natural and proper. Party ownership or direct influence is widespread. The distribution of party affinity favors the Liberals and works primarily to the disadvantage of VPK and the Center. Although the Social Democrats own 2 major dailies, they are underrepresented and are attempting to start a new Stockholm morning paper.

In some cases, party affiliation is balanced by a tradition of news reporting outside the opinion page. In addition, a general party loyalty, or indeed even party ownership, does not stop criticism of a particular party policy or exclude the possibility that a paper will champion a position different

from that of the party leadership. The major pro-Liberal papers often take different positions with regard to domestic policy. Nonetheless in the heat of an election campaign, party loyalty becomes more apparent and the parties seek more deliberately to use the press to propagandize the readership. Parties unfavorably represented, particularly Center and SAP, frequently resort to full page advertisements which represent a major cost of their campaign.

Having studied and followed the press over three campaigns, I can not avoid the commentary that in general the daily domestic press coverage is weak. No doubt the linkages between party and paper limits the ability of individual journalists to report the news critically. However, the journalists themselves must carry some of the responsibility. There is no tradition of investigative journalism and such is rare.¹⁶ Few reporters begin their work with much knowledge of the political system or economics. Some never attain it. Too many articles are pathetically weak on analysis and dominated by the predispositions of the writer or his paper. The reports after a typical press conference read as though many of the reporters had attended different meetings.

There also appears to be a relatively closed community of journalists, particularly editorial writers whose political profiles are marked. Newspapers will often run summaries of other editorial opinion and not infrequently write own their editorials against them. Radio sends both digests as well as more lengthy accounts of editorial opinion. These programs have by all account a regular audience among editorial writers, politicians, and politically interested persons. Political debate can be stimulated or limited through this process. How independent the reader remains of his papers remains an open question.

Clearly, Swedes seek additional sources of news and information, ie. through radio and television. Both have increased their production of news. Public confidence in radio and TV news programs has risen the past decade. They are, as publicly controlled corporations, free of obvious political linkages. Both attract huge and daily audiences. A nightly televised newscast frequently can reach over 30 % of the Swedish population. Radio programming is diversified and has resisted the temptation to become simply music and news. Drama and in-depth reporting find prominent spots. Radio as a media lends itself better to extended political reporting than television. Radio journalists have more freedom than their counterparts in the

other media. Yet it seems undeniable that TV's influence is greater.

Of the 28-32 hours of week broadcasting (not including sports and educational programs), average consumption is 11-13 hours. The number of viewers each evening who see a given program especially the two nightly newscasts, is a large portion of the adult population. What rules govern television broadcasting? Non-artisanship, factuality, and "equal-time provisions" are the key concepts.¹⁷ "Equal time" provisions are practiced in very limited circumstances and pertain only to the parliamentary parties. Television itself retains the right to decide exactly how elections will be covered, when and under what circumstances the parties will participate, and how much time will be allocated.

The political parties feel frustrated by their relationship with TV. Party strategists are convinced of its importance and critical of its ability to play an independent role in the campaign. At the beginning of an election year, party secretaries meet with television officials to discuss forthcoming coverage. The secretaries forward their opinions but the television authorities decide exactly what will be done. The parties can protest (or threaten) but it will be of little avail. They must either follow the proposals of the channels or abstain from participating. The premises upon which TV officials make their decisions are different from those of the political parties.

Television has a responsibility to inform the electorate. Each channel also wants to present stimulating and viewer-interesting programs. Reporters feel the normal day-to-day political developments attract little public interest. They seek to find a little drama, conflict, and change to increase viewer-interest. Therefore television in its own internal discussions will examine not only its formal responsibilities, but also its own concerns about viewer acceptability. Some programming is automatic: individual party leader interviews and the all party leader debate the last Friday of the campaign. A number of "election specials" will be produced; some of which will be effected by "equal time" provisions and others which will be issue informative. Debates between two party leaders sometimes will be shown live but in such circumstances TV treats the debate as news and therefore does not have to give other party leaders equal time.

Newcasts are free of any special campaign restrictions. On the whole they probably are more

politically influential in sum than the special campaign coverage with the possible exception of the Friday party leader debate. Reporters for the news programs will select topics and interview subjects as they think the occasion warrants. During a campaign they often decide which party leaders are most likely to be prime minister and focus a disproportionate attention on them. Certain party leaders are easier or more difficult to use effectively in the 30 second to two minute segments which comprise most newscasts. In one recent survey, 15 % of those responding suggested that their impression of the party leaders was "most important" for their party selection. This impression comes primarily from TV.

A media oriented criteria plays an important role in the editing process. Issue selection too will be based on media criteria as well as a judgment of its political value. Nuclear energy was seen for example in 1976 by television as an excellent media issue quite independently from any of the positions of the various parties. Economic issues on the other hand are difficult media issues. They are complicated and intricate. No easy solutions are apparent and the different party policies are often hard to identify specifically. The reporters have the additional problem that they have little opportunity to form independent judgment of the "real" state of affairs. They depend to a great extent on their political contacts and "feeling" to judge which issues are really pressing. As reporters are not trained academics normally, they can make serious mistakes about the state of the country. For example during the '76 campaign, journalists by and large ignored warnings of a coming serious economic crisis for the country. These warnings had come both from labor as well as management, especially the latter. One reporter admitted that this very fact led him to doubt the creditability of the crisis! Television coverage of the campaign focused on other issues.

How do the parties try to influence television? Their means are quite limited. Formally they can make protests to the Radio Board if they feel that television has broken with the statute restrictions that effect the media's operation. A protest of this kind can only be made after the fact and has little real effect. Another tool could be reprisal in the parliament. It is difficult to judge if this weapon is used, although the television journalists at least are convinced that they are kept underfinanced intentionally by the parliament in order to keep them from becoming fully "independent." The

"dependence" implied relates both to news sources and information about the state of the country. It is perhaps the most important way the parties influence the media. There is an intimate relationship between the party leaders and the television journalists especially the members of the "politburo."¹⁸ They spend much time together. Each depends on the other. They must develop relationships that are acceptable to both and permit each to accomplish enough of what he/she is supposed to be doing.

The relationship between politicians and newsmen has a formal and informal side. As they spend so much time together, they establish a strict sense of when something is "on the record" and when something is not. "On the record" for television occurs during press conferences and taped interviews. These sessions are ritualized. The reporters have a clear idea of what exactly they want from the filming and are quite certain about the nature of response that they will get from a given politician on any specific issue. Rarely will reporters on these occasions force the interview. In press conferences follow-up questions are not normal. The whole procedure is rather tame. "Off the record" sessions are informal, often accidental, and provide much of the background which informs the journalists as to what may be most important. Here the politician can complain, warn, or provide "inside" information to the journalists. Although the journalists are free to use the "off the record" materials as they see fit, an open breach of the informal etiquette that regulates their relationship will bring reprisals and suspicions even from other politicians.

There is also the issue of the partisanship of the reporters themselves. The staffs of the electronic media do not reflect very well the party representation in the Riksdag. Bias exists to the left of SAP as well as against the Center. Sometimes party "strategists" will refer to "our people" in the media. Once in a while, the party bias of a given reporter will directly effect the materials he/she presents. More importantly, the journalist's own political views are more likely to effect his general attitudes toward issues and the parties and therefore his selection process rather than deliberately slanting the news. What seems striking about the "politburo" reporters and the remaining handful of television journalists who are truly knowledgeable about domestic politics is their reluctance to be critical of the politicians in their reporting.

Television reporting in Sweden, on the news-

casts in particular, must be "impartial." The law of impartiality provides a convenient screen behind which journalists report the days events but abstain from clarifying them. No place exists on the newscasts or elsewhere for "editorial commentary." Instead, a few of the TV reporters will write books or journal articles which incorporate the commentary that they dared not air in their normal reporting. Others will remain silent.

The selection process (including editing) becomes the major factor in political reporting. Parties design their strategy so that they can maximize their exposure on the tube through events which they know are likely to lead reporters to select their materials. Press conferences special announcements, dramatic policies – all are techniques which are well proven in the Swedish system. Perhaps the clearest example of a party's use of these techniques has been the Liberal minority government's behavior in the spring of 1979 wherein they simply announced to the press a given proposal rather than exposing it first in the parliament. This practice was a serious breach of parliamentary etiquette and led to much grumbling. The hard working but silent parliamentarian, or party worker, is not likely to find himself on television. The whole process leads to a kind of ritualized political theater which no one seems pleased with, particularly the voters. Nonetheless television remains a major factor in the political process.

Yet another important variable in the ability of parties to effect voter behavior is to hold the power of government. A sitting government potentially has distinct advantages during an election campaign. If it has a majority in the parliament, it can relatively easily announce new measures that will be viewed favorably by the electorate. Even weak governments can take executive decisions. SAP governments, for example, often announced a new tax benefit in the month prior to the election. Holding government power also increases a party's accessibility to the media – most importantly television. SAP has discovered that in the position of opposition their access to the media is much more limited than it was earlier.

If the public believes that times are good or getting better, such thoughts normally will benefit the government party. It has been traditional among Swedish observers to credit significant aspects of SAP's success at the polls to its holding of political power. Much of the rise of the Liberals in the spring of 1979 can also be explained in

similar terms, but their failures during the campaign also suggests limits to this advantage.

The holding of the power of government can be a liability. If there has been a negative development in the society at large or a perception on the part of the public that the government has not done what it should, the governing party may suffer directly at the polls. The governing party will receive more attention in any case than it deserves in strictly parliamentary terms. This attention can be an asset, and no doubt usually is, but it also can mean trouble. SAP in 1976 had to defend "bureaucracy" which was a major complaint of the electorate.

The parties' abilities to effect the electorate directly are always limited. It is greatest in the mobilization campaign. Politicians are anxious to say publicly that their party's policy is really all that counts. The electorate will rationally judge what the parties stand for and make their decisions on that judgment. Privately they recognize that such rationality does not always play as important a role. Images of reality often are as important. A fourth variable must be introduced for it too can effect dramatically the development and outcome of an election: external developments.

Election campaigns are never held in a vacuum. Just as party structure, voter behavior, media patterns, and the use of governmental power effect the nature of a campaign, so too the general economic and political climate will effect its outcome. The electorate's perception of the state of world affairs effect its ordering of issues and in turn will be reflected in the campaign. A pressing international crisis such as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia will lift foreign policy questions into a more critical role in the campaign than otherwise would be the case. A dramatic event such as the accident at the nuclear facilities at Harrisburg can affect an on-going campaign. Probably of more significance is the general economic climate, to which Sweden is so sensitive.¹⁹ What is critical about these developments for our model is that they are external to the political system. They occur outside of it and are at least initially independent of it, yet they force the system to respond to it. The direct effect of such developments is not easily predictable, nor is the response of all political parties or the ramifications on the outcome of an election.

III. Agenda Setting

Our model began with two rather general observations: the existence of a two level campaign structure; and the recognition that the campaigns development was related to the interaction of a number of independent variables. The remaining two features of the model are more specific and relate to special processes within the campaign. The first of these is the process called "agenda setting" as it relates to the final, intensive, four weeks prior to election day.

Swedish elections are set for the third Sunday of September every third year. The industrial holidays begin the first week in July and continue until the first week in August. By informal party agreement, the official "campaign" begins in the middle of August. From that day until the election, an intensive campaign is waged to win electoral support. The intensity, and importance, of this period is so different from the earlier periods of campaign work that it deserves a special place in a campaign analysis. The ability of a party to "win" the election will to a great extent depend upon its ability to have a favorable agenda for the final weeks of the campaign.

Despite all the efforts of the period before August, it is the success of the final campaign that will be identifiable on the third Sunday. Certainly there will be general tendencies in the campaign, and among the electorate, which already will have been established and which the final weeks will not measurably effect.²⁰ In this sense, the idea of "election winds" may be useful. But we know that a large portion of the electorate, within both the mobilizable and marginal voter groups, do not decide upon which party to vote until late August and the last week of the campaign. It is necessary, therefore, for the parties to culminate their efforts in a veritable orgy of campaign activity. The two different campaigns demand different tactics.

In the mobilization effort the success of the final weeks depends highly on the work of the party activists. The large passive groups of voters have been indifferent to the earlier mobilization efforts. They must now be turned out in large numbers. A combination of personal contact and ideological solidarity plus traditional behavior probably account for the most effective persuasion. The role of the party leaders is limited. They travel about with ever increasing speed but whom they impress is questionable. Meetings are organized for them and the turnout of party loyalists is often impressive. But the meetings are as useful to party

activists who reaffirm their common commitment with the leadership as they are to the passive voter groups. True, a spirited election meeting has an aura of its own which is highly attractive. It may serve to remind passive voters of the reasons why they have always voted for a given party. But the meetings are too brief, too well orchestrated, for any calm discussions of various issues. The party's positions are bound; the arguments well toned; and the strategy clear. If the passive voter wants an intelligent discussion, he will have to turn to a friend or colleague.

In the campaign for marginal voters party leaders will concentrate more and more on the media. Special tactics will be used to attract attention – to give the appearance of vitality, determination, and clarity. There will also be an intense struggle between the parties to have their issues as the dominant ones of the final weeks of the campaign. This struggle can be called "agenda setting."

Each political party has certain issues for which it has special commitments, special feelings and certain advantages politically in discussion with the other parties. In 1976 Center had nuclear energy. SAP believed economic issues, particularly full employment and social security, were their best issues. The Moderates emphasized taxes. The Liberals thought full equality between the sexes was their strength. The campaign taken as an entirety can include all these questions and additional ones – law and order, school issues, child care etc. But a careful study will demonstrate as Holmberg did for the 1976 campaign that certain issues are dominant. An ordering process occurs – agenda setting – whereby one or two questions seem to drown out the remaining issues particularly with regard to undecided voters. In 1976, nuclear energy topped the agenda of the final weeks of the campaign. Economic issues became secondary questions. The "government question" which would have benefitted SAP failed to appear. The agenda of the '76 campaign was highly unfavorable to SAP and contributed to its final defeat.²¹

The critical question is how does this agenda setting process work. Why is it that specific issues appear so pressing, while others seem to lose their significance?

No simple answer is possible. What seems apparent is that certain variables play a greater role in the agenda setting process than others. What might be called the general perceptions and receptibility of the electorate is probably most critical.²² If the public is convinced that a depression

is at hand, it is highly unlikely that a non-economic issue would be of great importance. We have already noted that how the public develops a certain perception and receptibility varies according to voter groups but that the media plays an important role in the process. The media will be a semi-independent actor in the agenda setting process. Radio and television in particular will seek to select issues for special attention partially because of criteria related to their media appeal as well as their political importance. Television pressed the "government question" in 1973 and nuclear energy in 1976. Both were decisive. It is a myth that the Center in some brilliant strategical fashion alone made nuclear energy the dominant issue of the last week of the '76 campaign. Party strategy certainly plays a part in the agenda setting process but it does not stand alone. External factors such as the Czech invasion, general economic climate, or the media are critical.

Whatever effects the agenda setting process, it is clear that the parties wage a desperate struggle to have their issues at the top of the agenda. If they succeed, their efforts to mobilize their loyalists and to capture marginal voters is much easier. When a party is not heard or seen as was the case with the Liberals in 1973, the results can be disastrous. In that case, the Liberals correctly understood even before the final phase of the campaign that they would be left out of the media and agenda setting process. Hején could get some attention by dropping hints of eventual cabinet lists but little else drew a crowd. Attention was focused elsewhere. The result was one contributing factor to a 40 % decrease in the size of the Liberal vote.

There is one final aspect of model that needs to be described: the phenomenon of peaking.

IV. Peaking

A central phenomenon of Swedish politics has been the relative balance between the socialist and non-socialist parties in the parliament. Slight shifts in the voting behavior of the electorate can produce significant changes in the composition of the government. Therefore it is critical for each of the parties to maximize their support on election day. Conceptually it is necessary to recognize that constant shifting occurs, no matter how small these shifts might be from one day to another. So a party's strategy must be so designed so that its supports "peaks" on or close to election day. In this way the parties maximize their voting strength.

Särilvik introduced the notion of "election winds." It is useful in the sense that there are general tendencies in any campaign which will effect all the political parties. Our model has placed these tendencies within the context of identifiable forces. What "election winds" fails to examine is both the process of agenda setting and peaking and their relationship to the outcome of the election. Without the two concepts, it becomes difficult to explain marginal shifts in voting behavior – which in turn may be the margin between "victory" and "defeat." A brief summary of the '76 campaign illustrates the point.

The '76 campaign had a relatively distinct chronology of voter preference. During the period, December 1975 to May 1976, SAP suffered a steady decline. Conversely the Moderates enjoyed an unbroken increase which by May had made them, nearly the equal of the Center. During the summer holidays, SAP began to reap the benefits of its mobilization campaign, while Center attracted voters from the Moderates. In general terms, the '76 campaign occurred in a mood of conservatism, a sense that the growth of the central state had begun to threaten Swedes and that a slowdown if not halt to the process should occur. The three main issues of the campaign – the "affairs" (bureaucracy), "socialization" (Meidner funds), and nuclear energy – relate directly to these feelings. In terms of left-right issues, the wind clearly blew toward the right. Nonetheless, SAP enjoyed a dramatic surge as the election drew to a close. Between May and early September, SAP increased its support by nearly 5 %. Such a presentation even if SAP usually increases its support during this period must be viewed as a "successful" campaign. However voter behavior research suggests that SAP peaked too early. In doing so, it lost the election.

In the final SIFO poll conducted the weekend prior to the last week of the campaign, SAP in combination with VPK led the non-socialist parties by a slight margin. This poll has traditionally been highly accurate and no one – politician or academic – has questioned its credibility. Petersson, noting the same phenomenon from his research, suggested SAP lost the election twice. During the final week, SAP lost something slightly over 1 % of its votes, the portion going directly to the Center. The reasons for this shift are related to "agenda setting" processes and the failure of SAP to peak at the proper moment. The 1 % shift accounted for the needed votes to fell the Social Democratic government and produce the first

non-socialist government since the thirties.

Do party strategists design campaigns to peak properly? They are aware of the phenomenon – even if they call it something else – but planning for an effective peak at a specific moment is difficult. Too many variables lie outside the control of the strategists. Certainly the final four weeks of the campaign are carefully designed with the agenda setting process clearly in mind but peaking may be more luck than design. This implies increasing activities the last weeks of the campaign, attempts to attract attention in the media, and efforts to establish high identification issues in the last debates. Media appeal plays a major part in this effort. Party leaders dominate the process and their media images will be essential aspects of the success of their efforts.

The peaking phenomenon always occurs within a larger context. Certainly by late August the campaign has progressed so far that each of the parties has a relatively narrow range of potential outcomes – the bands are probably 2–2.5 % shifts with the exception of VPK. In some cases the bands are less than 1 %. Between the blocks, it is doubtful if the bands are very large by late August, perhaps 2 %. Nonetheless these bands represent the difference between sitting in the government or not. They are critical and no party can ignore them. To approach a "peak" in terms of electorate support often will make the final difference in the election results.

The introduction to our analytical model is complete. The purpose of the model is to provide a framework for examination of Swedish election campaigns. It has been simplified, to a certain extent stylized, so that various components of the campaign can be identified, their role evaluated, and the interaction between different forces and actors understood. Most of the specific observations have been made by other scholars, yet none of these scholars have provided a wholistic view of a Swedish election campaign. Party strategists on the other hand would recognize the model. It is based to a large degree on their perceptions and the problems they face in fulfilling their responsibilities.

A Swedish election consists of two campaigns. The mobilization effort is an extended, internalized campaign. Its tempo builds slowly but distinctly well in advance of the final month of the campaign. Ideology, party organization, and traditional voting behavior play the largest roles in this activity. The campaign for marginal voters

focuses on the last month of the campaign. It is intense, effected by external factors, and issue oriented. Voter attitudes and behavior, party organization and strategy, the means to influence voter behavior, external developments which impact upon the campaigns – all are important variables that interact to effect the development of these campaigns. Finally we noted the importance of the agenda setting process and the peaking phenomenon. Within the small margins of the last weeks of the campaign these factors can be decisive to the election outcome.

This article was written in the summer of 1979 before the election was completed (Ed.).

Footnotes:

- 1 For example: Petersson, Olof and B. Särilvik, "När de borgerliga vann," *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift (StvT)*, 1977:2, p. 79.
- 2 Petersson, Olof, "New Trends in the Swedish Electorate: A Focus on the 1976 Election," Paper prepared for workshop on "Social Structure and Political Change," April 1978, p. 18.
- 3 Holmberg, Sören, "Kärnkraften och vänster-höger dimensionen. Konfliktlinjen i svensk politik," *StvT*, 1978:2, p. 67.
- 4 Holmberg, Sören, "Pressen och kärnkraften," *StvT*, 1978:4, p. 211.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 For example: Särilvik, Bengt, "Stabila väljare och partitytare," *StvT*, 1975:3, p. 122.
- 7 Karl H. Cerny, ed. *Scandinavia at the Polls*, 1977, p. 93.
- 8 See Petersson, Holmberg, Bengt Särilvik for other examples.
- 9 Petersson and Särilvik, *Ibid.*, p. 86. According to the article, the 1976 campaign was an exception.
- 10 The most ambitious work is Kai Kronvall, *Politisk Masskommunikation i ett Flerpartisystem*, 1975. Press studies abound both in political science and historical research.
- 11 Magnus Isberg, Anders Wettergren, Jan Wibbe, and Björn Wittrock, *Partierna Inför Väljarna*, 1974.
- 12 Cerny, p. 120.
- 13 Pär-Erik Back and Sten Berglund, *Der Svenska partiväsendet*, 1978; and Sören Holmberg, Jörgen Westerståhl, and Karl Branzen, *Väljarna och Kärnkraften*, 1977.
- 14 See Bengt Särilvik's article for description of marginal voters.
- 15 Among many works, Stig Hadenius and Karl Erik Gustafsson, *Swedish Press Policy*, 1976, is highly useful.
- 16 For an interesting description of the subtle changes occurring among journalists see Jan-Magnus Fahlström, "Några funderingar kring objektivitet i press,

radio och TV," *StvT*, 1977:3, p. 215. Also, Per Garton, *Dagens Nyheter*, July 16, 1979.

¹⁷ See *StvT*, 1977:3, for a discussion of the first two concepts.

¹⁸ "Politbureau" is a term used to refer to those reporters for *Aktuellt* and *Rapport* whose constant responsibility is to cover the domestic political scene.

¹⁹ See Lars Jonung and Eskil Wadensjö, "The Effects of Unemployment, Inflation, and real Income on Government Popularity in Sweden," *Scandinavian Journal of Economics*, 1979:2.

²⁰ See Bo Särilvik, "Voting Behavior in Shifting Election Winds," *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 5, 1970.

²¹ This conclusion does not contradict the fact that SAP had a generally effective campaign which saw the party both mobilize its loyalists and utilize its governmental position to full value.

²² See Hans Zetterberg, "The Swedish Election 1976," Paper presented to World Association of Public Opinion Research, April 1978.