

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

Niklas Bolin works at the Department of Humanities and Social Science, Mid Sweden University. Kajsa Falasca works at the Department of Media and Communication, Mid Sweden University.
E-mail: niklas.bolin@miun.se; kajsa.falasca@miun.se

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.

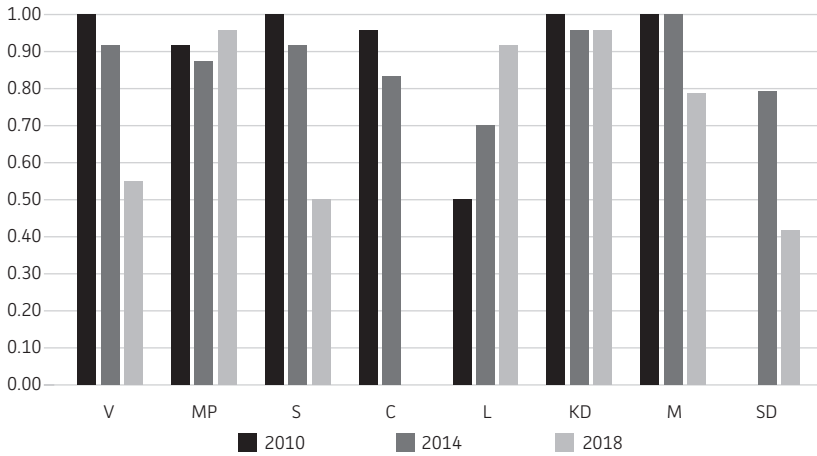
Another feature that stands out is that Facebook is clearly perceived as the most important social media channel. With the exception of the Greens, who on average score YouTube higher, Facebook is rated higher than other social media. In fact, no party has ever scored Twitter as more important than Facebook.

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.

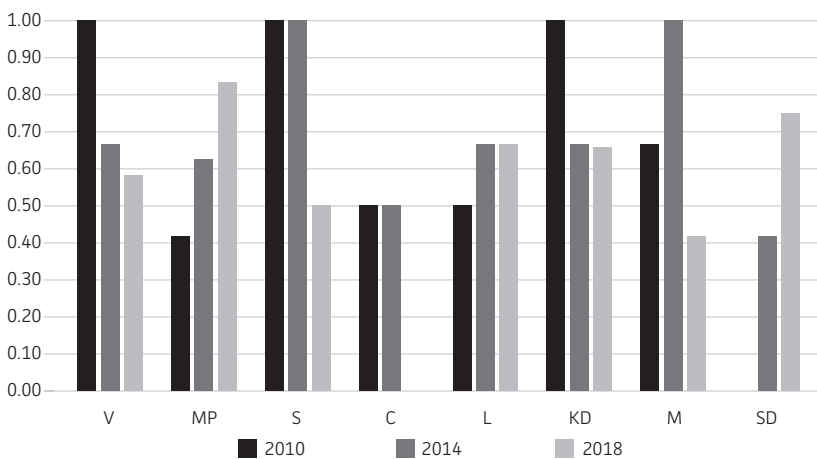
Figure 1. Importance of Media Communication Channels by Party, 2010–2018



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.

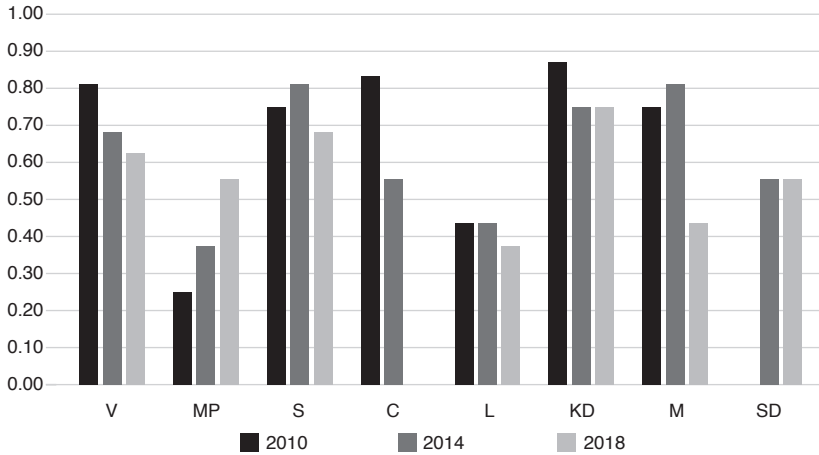
Figure 2. Importance of Social Media Communication Channels by Party, 2010–2018



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.