

## Development trends and challenges in Nordic political journalism

Allern, Sigurd; Blach-Ørsten, Mark; Kantola, Anu; Pollack, Ester

*Published in:*  
Power, Communication, and Politics in the Nordic Countries

*Publication date:*  
2020

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Allern, S., Blach-Ørsten, M., Kantola, A., & Pollack, E. (2020). Development trends and challenges in Nordic political journalism. In E. Skogerbø, Ø. Ihlen, N. Nørgaard Kristensen, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Power, Communication, and Politics in the Nordic Countries* (pp. 135-154). Nordicom. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299>

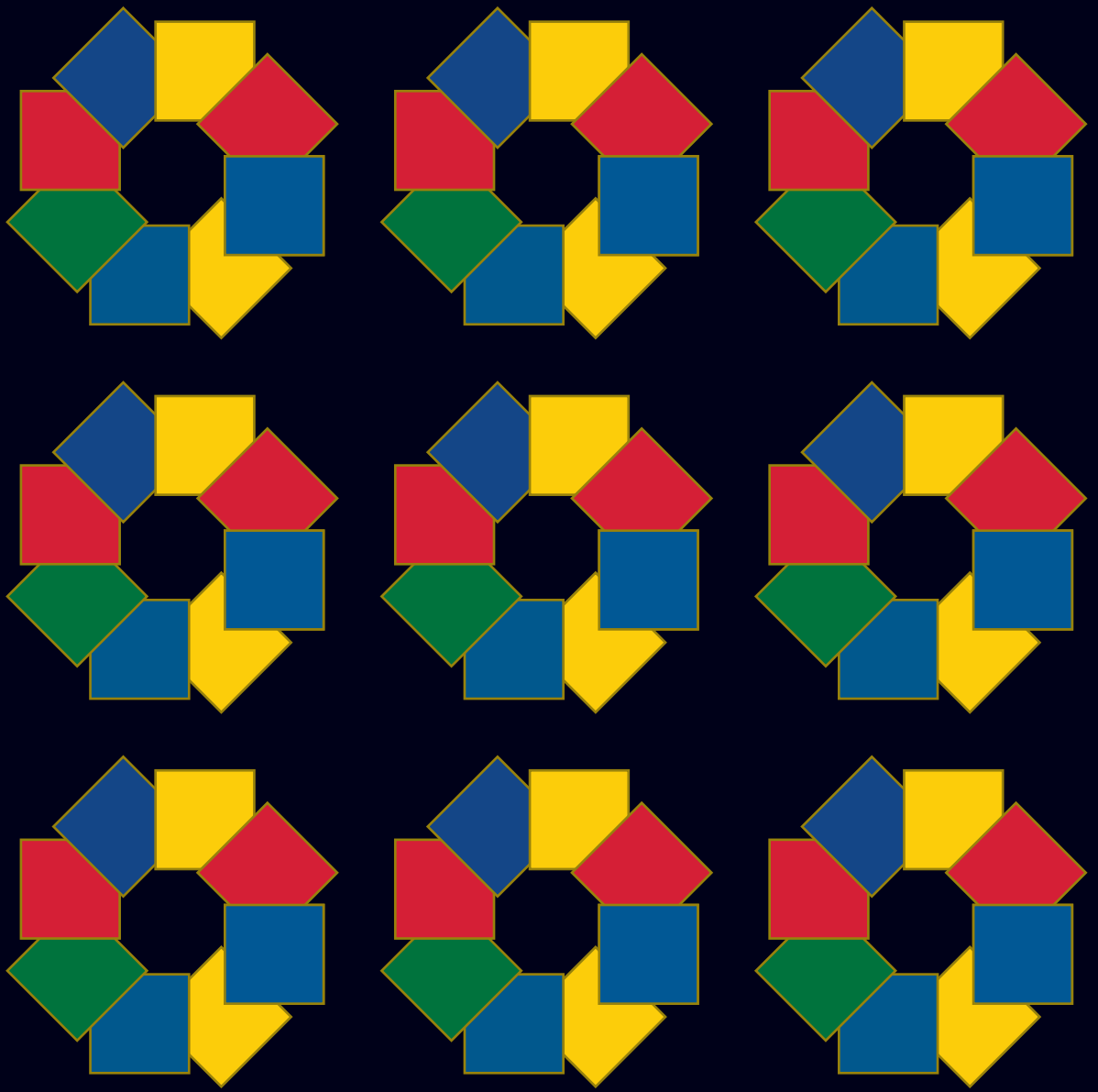
### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain.
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [rucforsk@kb.dk](mailto:rucforsk@kb.dk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



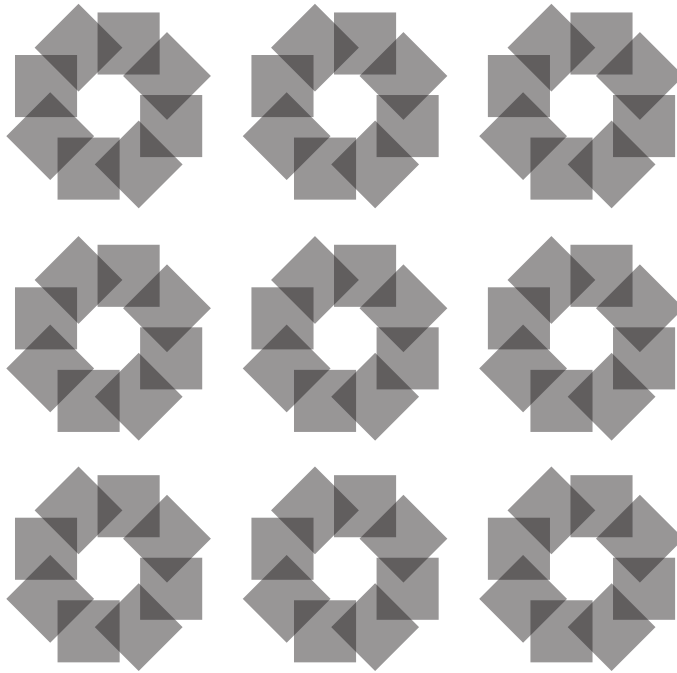
# Power, Communication, and Politics in the Nordic Countries

Edited by:

Eli Skogerbø, Øyvind Ihlen,  
Nete Nørgaard Kristensen, & Lars Nord

**POWER, COMMUNICATION, AND POLITICS  
IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES**





# Power, Communication, and Politics in the Nordic Countries

Edited by: Eli Skogerbø, Øyvind Ihlen,  
Nete Nørgaard Kristensen, & Lars Nord

**NORDICOM**

# Power, Communication, and Politics in the Nordic Countries

Eli Skogerbø, Øyvind Ihlen, Nete Nørgaard Kristensen, & Lars Nord (Eds.)

© 2020 Nordicom and respective authors. This is an Open Access work licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No-Derivatives 4.0 International Public licence (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of the licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

ISBN 978-91-88855-28-2 (print)

ISBN 978-91-88855-29-9 (pdf)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299>

The publication is also available as Open Access at [www.nordicom.gu.se](http://www.nordicom.gu.se)

Published by:

Nordicom

University of Gothenburg

Box 713

SE 405 30 GÖTEBORG

Sweden

Cover by: Per Nilsson

# Contents

Preface	7
PART ONE	
<i>Eli Skogerbø, Nete Nørgaard Kristensen, Lars Nord, &amp; Øyvind Ihlen</i> 1. Introduction: A Nordic model for political communication?	13
<i>Nete Nørgaard Kristensen &amp; Mark Blach-Ørsten</i> 2. Media and politics in Denmark	29
<i>Jón Gunnar Ólafsson &amp; Valgerður Jóhannsdóttir</i> 3. Media and politics in Iceland	51
<i>Kim Strandberg &amp; Tom Carlson</i> 4. Media and politics in Finland	69
<i>Eli Skogerbø &amp; Rune Karlsen</i> 5. Media and politics in Norway	91
<i>Lars Nord &amp; Marie Grusell</i> 6. Media and politics in Sweden	113
PART TWO	
<i>Sigurd Allern, Mark Blach-Ørsten, Anu Kantola, &amp; Ester Pollack</i> 7. Development trends and challenges in Nordic political journalism	135
<i>Carl-Gustav Lindén, Lisbeth Morlandstø, &amp; Gunnar Nygren</i> 8. Local political communication in a hybrid media system	155
<i>Nete Nørgaard Kristensen &amp; Anna Roosvall</i> 9. Cultural communication as political communication	177
<i>Eva Josefsen &amp; Eli Skogerbø</i> 10. Indigenous political communication in the Nordic countries	197
<i>David Nicolas Hopmann &amp; Rune Karlsen</i> 11. Elections and political communication in the Nordic countries	219

<i>Juha Herkman &amp; Ann-Cathrine Jungar</i>	
12. Populism and media and communication studies in the Nordic countries	241
<i>Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk &amp; Silje Nygaard</i>	
13. Right-wing alternative media in the Scandinavian political communication landscape	263
<i>Bente Kalsnes, Kajsa Falasca, &amp; Aske Kammer</i>	
14. Scandinavian political journalism in a time of fake news and disinformation	283
<i>Øyvind Ihlen, Anne Skorkjær Binderkrantz, &amp; PerOla Öberg</i>	
15. Lobbying in Scandinavia	305
<i>Tine Ustad Figenschou, Magnus Fredriksson, Kristoffer Kolltveit, &amp; Josef Pallas</i>	
16. Public bureaucracies	325
<i>Audun Beyer, Erik Knudsen, Kim Andersen, &amp; Adam Shehata</i>	
17. Political media effects in a Nordic perspective	347
<i>Jens E. Kjeldsen, Christian Kock, &amp; Orla Vigsø</i>	
18. Political rhetoric in Scandinavia	365
<i>Lars Nord, Eli Skogerbo, &amp; Nete Nørgaard Kristensen</i>	
19. Conclusion: Nordic political communication between change and continuity	385



## Preface

Is there a Nordic model for political communication? This is the question we pose in this anthology. It seems simple enough, but there are many answers. When we first invited our Nordic colleagues to this book project, we asked them to reflect on the changes that challenged the Nordic welfare states and their infrastructures for political dialogue and negotiations. We pointed to the technological shifts, the hybridisation of the media structures, and the fact that the Nordic countries had different experiences and handled crises differently in the recent past. While this book was in its final stages, a new crisis hit. During the global Covid-19 pandemic, both striking differences – such as differences in crisis management and crisis communication of the Nordic governments – and deep-seated similarities – such as the high trust level between governments and citizens – came to the fore. As the chapters of this book explore, if anything, the key to understanding Nordic political communication is to keep in mind both aspects: the systems are similar, but there are considerable differences between the countries in terms of history, cultures, languages, demography, and contemporary politics.

The aims of the book are threefold. First, we want to present an updated and broad picture of Nordic political communication. In this respect, this book updates and expands *Communicating Politics: Political Communication in the Nordic Countries*, edited by Jesper Strömbäck, Mark Blach-Ørsten, and Toril Aalberg in 2008, which brought a much-needed systematic comparative perspective to Nordic political communication. Second, we aim to go beyond the comparative media models perspective. The media models remain important, but at the same time, we seek to explore and disclose the dynamics that underlie the theoretical framework. In order to do so, this book expands the field by including new actors, themes, theories, and research questions in Nordic political communication.

The third objective is to show that both more comparative studies and more in-depth analyses are essential to understand the similarities and differences

between the Nordic countries. It is precisely the similarities and differences that create the conditions for Nordic politics and political communication. To the degree that there is a Nordic political communication model, it is flexible and pragmatic and takes both the similarities and the differences within the Nordic region into account. To unpack the fundamental elements of Nordic political communication, we challenged leading Nordic researchers to compare their research and insights. The ambition was to bring scholars from several Nordic countries together in each chapter – an effort that resulted in brand new collaborations we hope will inspire and facilitate Nordic cooperation in the future.

It has been a true pleasure and privilege to edit this anthology. Owing to many factors, it has been in process for a while, and there are many people to thank for the fact that the book is now available to you in different formats. First, the authors should be thanked for their contributions to the anthology. Without you, it would not be here. Many of the authors, including the editors, have never worked together before. They were asked to form authorships across borders and fields and have responded to the challenge with much enthusiasm and dedication. They have generously explored and shared knowledge in their special fields *and* met the challenge of comparing insights from the different Nordic countries that make up Nordic political communication research.

Further, we thank the POLKOM group and network and our home institutions for taking part in this effort. The group has its base at the Department of Media and Communication (IMK) at the University of Oslo and has been supported financially and administratively by this department. The POLKOM network includes scholars, many of whom authored chapters in this book, working with political communication in institutions all over Norway and the other Nordic countries. Thanks also to everyone who has commented and discussed drafts, conference papers, and ideas for chapters.

And finally, some key people and organisations have been crucial to the process of making this book. Some of them, the reviewers of the chapters, must be thanked anonymously – you know who you are. Thank you for devoting the time and effort to improve the book. Research and editorial assistant Anja Vranic at IMK has been invaluable in the process of finishing the book. She has assisted in the completion of all chapters – diligently, efficiently, and always helpful with any possible and impossible issue tied to the completion of every chapter. Our publisher, Nordicom, has taken all challenges and delays with an everlasting patience. Special thanks to Ingela Wadbring and Jonas Ohlsson who believed in the project; academic editor Johannes Bjerling who has read and commented on every chapter; technical editor Kristin Clay who has carefully edited them; and Mia Jonsson Lindell who is responsible for the marketing efforts.

## PREFACE

Last, and very important, the research network UiO Norden funded a seminar where the ideas for the book were discussed, and the Norwegian Research Council has – through funding the POLKOM research group – contributed significantly to the funding of the book.

Oslo, Copenhagen, & Sundsvall, 9 December 2020

Eli Skogerbø, Øyvind Ihlen, Nete Nørgaard Kristensen, & Lars Nord

---

© 2020 Nordicom and respective authors. This is an Open Access work licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public licence (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of the licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>



# Part One



## Chapter 1

### *Introduction*

# A Nordic model for political communication?

Eli Skogerbø, Nete Nørgaard Kristensen,  
Lars Nord, & Øyvind Ihlen

#### **Abstract**

The Nordic countries have been termed a supermodel for political and economic governance. This anthology explores how and why the political communication systems contribute to explaining and understanding why the Nordic countries stand out as stable, democratic welfare states. The state and nation-building processes of these small European countries were not at all identical, but the ensuing political systems show many similarities. Yet, there are also considerable differences. Part One of the anthology explores developments in the media structure and relationship between media and politics in the five Nordic countries. The chapters are co-authored by scholars from political communication, media, and journalism from each country and emphasise particular national traits. Part Two studies and compares political communication across the Nordic countries within particular domains, such as political journalism, local journalism, lobbyism, elections, and the spread of fake news, with a specific eye for similarities and differences between the Nordic countries. We conclude with the argument that Nordic political communication is and should be international and comparative. Still we want to highlight the need to also continue with in-depth national or Nordic comparative studies.

**Keywords:** Nordic political communication, Nordic media model, hybrid media system, welfare state, political communication

### Introduction

This anthology is about political communication in the Nordic countries – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden – taking as its starting point that the political systems and media and communication systems in this region stand out as quite similar. The notion of the “Nordic model(s)” (Knutson, 2017) has been heavily discussed in political science and economy. In media studies, the five Nordic countries have, by some authors (Syvertsen et al., 2014), been subsumed under the label of a media welfare state model and by others noted to share characteristics with other Northern European countries and termed

---

Skogerbø, E., Kristensen, N. N., Nord, L., & Ihlen, Ø. (2021). Introduction: A Nordic model for political communication? In E. Skogerbø, Ø. Ihlen, N. N. Kristensen, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Power, communication, and politics in the Nordic countries* (pp. 13–27). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299-1>

democratic corporatist media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, 2016), or even North American media systems (Ohlsson, 2015). This anthology adds to these ongoing debates by focusing specifically on the characteristics, if there are any, of Nordic political communication. The anthology applies two overall perspectives: first, it urges the importance of, on the one hand, international comparison between and beyond the Nordic realm, and, on the other, in-depth national studies; second, it points to the need for taking both changes and continuities into consideration when analysing political communication, rather than focusing on *either* change *or* continuity. Part One explores developments in the media structure and relationship between media and politics in each of the five Nordic countries. The chapters are co-authored by political communication scholars, media scholars, and journalism scholars from each country, emphasising particular national traits. Part Two studies and compares political communication across the Nordic countries within particular domains, such as political journalism, local journalism, lobbyism, elections, and the spread of fake news, with a specific eye for similarities and differences between the Nordic countries. These themed chapters emphasise the interplay of new and old types of political actors such as governments, lobbyists, bureaucracies, political parties, and journalists, and various arenas for political communication, including institutionalised news media, alternative media, social media platforms, election campaigns, local media, cultural political communication, and political rhetoric. In the concluding chapter, we sum up and draw conclusions on the status of political communication in the Nordic countries, whether we can actually speak of a Nordic political communication model today, and if so: What is it? And how does it impact the political, economic, social, and cultural development and resilience of the Nordic countries? The last question became particularly relevant when this anthology was about to be finished, as the final production phase collided with the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020.

## The Nordic region

The Nordic region consists of five small states – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden – and four territories with different types of home rule: Greenland and the Faroe Islands (Denmark), Åland (Finland), and Svalbard (Norway) (Hilson, 2008). The Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish states have also allocated some degree (not identical) of self-determination to the indigenous Sámi populations through the Sámi Parliaments (read more in Part One; Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10). The Nordic countries have a reputation of being generous welfare states with widespread gender equality and high social equality. Indeed, they have been labelled a “supermodel” for political and economic governance (The Economist, 2013). The countries



generally have high scores on measures of citizen happiness and democratic governance – in the 2019 *World Happiness Report* (Helliwell et al., 2019), Finland ranked first, Denmark second, Norway third, Iceland fourth, and Sweden seventh. These accounts tell stories of a region in which state- and nation-building processes were not at all identical, but where the ensuing political systems show many similarities (Brandal et al., 2013; Heidar, 2004), though also considerable differences (Bengtsson et al., 2013; Piketty, 2014). Yet, there are many reasons for questioning this somewhat idyllic image, as, for instance, Teigen and Skjeie (2017) do in their analysis of the Nordic gender equality model. In a set of analyses, they show that although Nordic women have succeeded in entering the highest levels of politics and organised society, they have been much less successful in the business sector. Jónsson (2014) questions the applicability of a Nordic consensual model to Iceland, arguing that Icelandic politics are more adversarial than the other Nordic countries, whereas Ólafsson (2020) points to the importance of size to explain why Iceland is often left out of comparative analyses, even in the Nordic context (see also Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, Chapter 3). The observant reader will find that this is also a relevant point for this anthology: only a few of the chapters include Iceland in the comparisons, and few include all five Nordic countries, thereby underlining both the differences between the countries and the need for increased Nordic comparative research.

Further, crises and changes take place even in the peaceful corners of the world and make up, as Davis (2019) has discussed extensively, particular challenges for political communication – the key focus of this anthology. The global tendencies of increasing economic and social differences (Piketty, 2014) have also reached the Nordic region (Nordic Co-operation, 2018). Over the past decades, they have been through the same global upheavals as other regions, including the financial crisis from 2008 onwards and following lasting high numbers of unemployment in some social groups, reductions in public income and taxes, increasing climate challenges, and, most recently, the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. These challenges, however, have not had the same effects in each of the countries. Iceland (see Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, Chapter 3) suffered substantially more from the financial crisis and the collapse of the banking system than did Norway, whose huge tax income from the oil industry worked as a buffer. In Sweden, the reductions in public incomes have had more severe effects on the funding of the extensive welfare state than in Denmark and Norway.

The similarities in terms of culture, politics, and communications between the countries are nevertheless notable, as the following chapters show. Suffice to say that Denmark, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden have majority languages that are closely related and, to some degree, mutually understandable. The majority language in Finland is fundamentally different, but Finnish is spoken by national minorities in Norway and Sweden, and Swedish is the largest

minority language in Finland. Other historical minority languages are spoken across some of the countries, such as Sámi, Romani, and Yiddish. Over the past decades, all the Nordic countries have changed demographically both in terms of an aging population and immigration. Since the mid-1990s, all five countries have been part of the free movement of European Union citizens, opening up for (relatively) free labour migration in Europe. These policies, combined with increased immigration from other parts of the world, have made the countries markedly more multicultural than two generations ago. Having noted this as a change in all five countries, there are also major differences between Sweden – which over the past decades had liberal immigration policies – and its Nordic neighbours, that in the same period had strict restrictions on immigration regions outside of the European Union.

These economic and demographic changes have also given rise to new conflicts, shifted political power among the parties in parliament, and made for the creation of new political parties and new media outlets (see Part One; Herkman & Jungar, Chapter 12; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, Chapter 13). They have also given rise to new media genres that – to some extent – have addressed social and cultural challenges and gained Nordic perspectives international attention beyond the political context. Popular culture offerings such as bestseller novels, films, and quality television series have become global phenomena, including Nordic Noir, political fiction, and teen drama (e.g., Hansen & Waade, 2017; Sundet, 2020), with titles such as *Wallander*, *The Bridge*, and *Trapped* (crime fiction and film adaptations), *Borgen*, *Invisible Heroes* (television series), and *Skam* [*Shame*] (multiplatform and web-series). Successful Nordic television series, for example, have pointed to the role of public service media in fostering quality drama for a broad audience, but also in showcasing the ideals of the welfare state ideology. The political drama series *Borgen*, produced by the Danish public service broadcasting company (DR) and running for three seasons (2010–2013) with a fourth season scheduled for 2022, is an interesting case in point. The series' portrayal of how a fictional female prime minister, Birgitte Nyborg, navigates political powerplays and everyday life in Denmark and paints a quite different – progressive and positive – picture of the political scene than does American television series such as *The West Wing* (1999–2006) and *House of Cards* (2013–2018). Andersen and colleagues (forthcoming) argue that such popular culture expressions may keep alive “the myth of the utopian Nordic welfare model”. Bondebjerg and colleagues (2017: 230) find that the international appeal of cultural expressions, such as Nordic Noir, relates to them coming “from modern welfare states with a lifestyle, social system and importantly gender equality that critics and audiences abroad found to be intriguing to explore through fiction”. At the same time, these fictional universes also criticise some of the social and political realities of the very same welfare systems (Bondebjerg et al., 2017). Such international successes within popular culture have added to

the international attention devoted to the Nordic context during the past decade, also within political communication.

The Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 highlighted the critical importance of studying and reflecting on political communication in times of crisis. Indeed, Davis (2019) argues that crisis is defining the “fourth age of communication”, echoing the revised version of the periodisation of political communication set out by Blumler and Kavanagh (Blumler, 2016: 28; Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Blumler (2016: 28) argued that “the bifurcated political communication system of the fourth age is quite different from its predecessors. Where a relative uniformity, coherence and simplicity once prevailed, now everything seems to be laced with complexity, multiplicity, variety and cross-currents”. At the bottom of these changes lies digitalisation as the transformative technological driving force, which is also the starting point for Davis’s rather grim analysis of the state of politics and political communication in 2019. Along with Davis, Bennett and Pfetsch (2018) point to factors such as increasing complexity of politics, fragmentation of audiences, information overload, and weakening of state institutions as indications of crisis. Another and particularly relevant factor, highlighted by the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, is the problems caused by the spread of unreliable news and the problems of verifying sources, a concern that is also pointed out in this anthology (Kalsnes et al., Chapter 14). Nevertheless, as much as we admit that global crises are highly relevant, this anthology also shows that the Nordic countries – individually and regionally – differ from Davis’s account of crisis on important indicators. The level of trust in the news media and political institutions are, for instance, high in all the Nordic countries (Newman et al., 2019), and despite major transformations of news production and a massive increase in the number of digital channels, public media institutions have retained solid positions. Whereas voter volatility has increased and party systems started fragmenting decades ago – two of Davis’s crisis indicators – the Nordic democratic systems have remained stable (see Part One; Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11). Although right-wing parties have gained considerable attention in all Nordic countries except Iceland, the nationalist challenges are less pronounced than elsewhere (see Herkman & Jungar, Chapter 12).

### Power, communication, and politics in the digital age

What exactly do we refer to when we say we study political communication? The literature is abundant with definitions, as Jamieson and Kenski (2014) show when they differentiate between old and new ones and discuss which elements need to be present. Their approach is to include work that discusses exchange and interpretation of symbols tied to “shared exercise of power”. Davis (2019: 9) takes McNair’s (2017: 4) definition of political communication as “purposeful

communication about politics” as a “starting point as good as any”, but draws attention to the limitations concerning which actors count as political – typically political parties, politicians, governments, and media and their coverage of elections – and what types of communication or messages count as political. Ihlen and colleagues (2015: 12–13) also discuss the variety of definitions found in previous works and the limitations as a starting point for their own definition, which we also follow here: “politics is about the governance of society and the handling of cooperation and conflict, values and interests. Any use of symbols and any attempts at influencing the outcome of political processes, we will call political communication”. The benefits of using a wide definition are that it allows, first, for political communication to have many forms. The main focus in this anthology is on mediated political communication in news media, social media, and other platforms, yet we recognise that politics has many expressions and symbols, among them cultural expressions such as music, clothing, and drama (see Kristensen & Roosvall, Chapter 9; Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10). Second, and in line with most other recent definitions (McNair, 2017; Jamieson & Kenski, 2014; Strömbäck et al., 2008), we emphasise that political communication has at its roots that it is shared and communicated. Third, this anthology also draws attention to the fact that political communication is not only about communicating true and rational information about politics and political governance. On the one hand, there is also a need for knowledge about how “fake news” and mis- and disinformation thrive on social media (see Kalsnes et al., Chapter 14). On the other hand, we recognise that political communication is structured by both constitutional and regulatory measures, as well as social and cultural characteristics, which provide social groups with different and unequal opportunities for voicing their interests (see, e.g., Ihlen et al., Chapter 15; Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10). Fourth, similar to, among others, Norris (2000) and Norris and colleagues (2008), we apply a broad and inclusive definition of political actors, seeing them as anyone – individual, group, or organisation – that seeks to influence political decision-making. Although much attention, also in this anthology, is centred on the communication between the “usual suspects” – in other words, political parties, politicians, and voters (Hopmann & Karlsen Chapter 11; Herkman & Jungar Chapter 12; Beyer et al., Chapter 17) and news media and journalists (Allern et al., Chapter 7; Lindén et al., Chapter 8), we also include other actors who seek to influence outcomes or are concerned by the outcome of political processes. Such actors include alternative media (Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, Chapter 3), indigenous people (Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10), cultural actors (Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11), bureaucracies (Figenschou et al., Chapter 16), and lobbyists (Ihlen et al., Chapter 15). More importantly, we do not argue that this is an exhaustive list.

Following from our definition is the fact that power and influence, or the lack thereof, are always at the centre of political communication, whether we

research elections and election campaigns, perhaps the most classical theme of political communication studies (see Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11), or whether we seek to understand the dynamics of political rhetoric (see Kjeldsen et al., Chapter 18). Whatever the specific issue at focus, political communication research in the Nordic countries analyses how different groups, movements, organisations, and sometimes individuals, benefit – or not – from having access to channels of influence; manage to influence public opinion or voters; or use particular techniques, forms, or strategies to obtain influence.

## Nordic political communication research – looking back in brief

Nordic communication research as a regional field can be dated back to the first Nordic conference in Oslo in 1973, at that time gathering about 80 scholars, many of whom were involved in what we today would term political communication studies (Nordenstreng et al., 2014). Many leading Nordic scholars among these could be highlighted, but one of the most marked participants was Karen Siune. She was not only one of the very few women in the field at the time but also a leading scholar of Danish (Siune, 1991) and European comparative political communication and media policy for several decades (Bakke & Siune, 1972; McQuail & Siune, 1998; Siune et al., 1984). As has been the case with many scholars working in Nordic political communication, Siune's work always slid between studies of political communication and studies of the changing media structures and media policies making up shifting structural conditions for the communication of politics (Truetzschler & Siune, 1992). This approach has been exemplary but, as shown by Kristensen and Blach-Ørsten in Chapter 2, not necessarily a path followed by later political communication scholars in Denmark.

We find the same preoccupation with media systems as a framework for political communication research in later publications. One anthology has been particularly important as a forerunner for the current one. In 2008, Jesper Strömbäck, Mark Ørsten, and Toril Aalberg published *Communicating Politics: Political Communication in the Nordic Countries*, a collection of chapters on Nordic media systems and political communication that has been highly influential for well over a decade. As with the current anthology, the 2008 anthology held both country overviews and a collection of themed articles. It placed Nordic perspectives within international political communication research, replying to the increasing demands for comparative research, for highlighting some specific themes such as “mediatisation” of politics, and for more cooperation among Nordic researchers (Strömbäck et al., 2008). Although the anthology did not really come through as a collection of comparative studies – as only the

introduction and conclusion compared the Nordic countries – the collection brought strong ambitions to the field and, moreover, the editors have, over the following decade, contributed markedly to European comparative research projects (Aalberg et al., 2012; Benson et al., 2012; Pollack et al., 2018; Reinemann et al., 2017).

*Communicating Politics* took as its main starting point Hallin and Mancini's now seminal book *Comparing Media Systems* (2004), which suggested that the media systems of the Nordic countries could be categorised as belonging to one particular type of system, the “democratic corporatist” media systems model. Hallin and Mancini set out to compare media systems to uncover patterns and clusters and explain differences and similarities. They did so by launching an analysis of Western countries based on a holistic theoretical approach and a historical perspective, reviewing existing literature, drawing on a plethora of methods and analyses, and proposing four key analytical dimensions: the degree of political parallelism, the degree of journalistic professionalism, the role of the state, and the structure of the media market. In the opening chapter of their book, Hallin and Mancini argued for the need for comparative studies in media research, as they found that few studies of media systems at the time took on a comparative approach. Rather, the field was dominated by empirical studies originating from one country only, or by volumes mainly presenting country studies, such as the studies of the Euromedia Group. Strömbäck and colleagues' (2008) book was a first take on testing whether Hallin and Mancini's classification of media systems worked in the Nordic context. *Communicating Politics* systematically applied the framework for the democratic corporatist model to each of the five Nordic states – in different chapters – and found that there was no “perfect match” (e.g., Esmark & Ørsten, 2008; Moring, 2008). As could be expected, when tested closely, none of the countries actually fitted the ideal type. Furthermore, as Ørsten and colleagues (2008) noted in the concluding chapter, not only were there notable differences between the Nordic countries, the systems were rapidly changing as the Internet, new media, and other technological changes made inroads into advertising and audience markets, user habits, and journalistic production and distribution. In other words, the systems that Hallin and Mancini described and classified had already changed fundamentally in relation to the dimensions they used for classification – an observation that many authors, including those of this anthology, have made.

Despite these shortcomings, which have been noted time and again by many different authors both within and beyond the Nordic context (e.g., Flensburg, 2020; Ohlsson, 2015), Hallin and Mancini's typology has, as noted, thoroughly influenced Nordic research on media systems and political communication. This is evident also in this anthology. Hardly any of the chapters avoid a reference to the book – and particularly to the democratic corporatist model – although there is scant consensus on the validity of the typology. Still, the models seem

to retain their face-value relevance as they point to some systematic similarities, albeit that some are historic more than contemporary. It may, to some extent, be a matter of convenience that Hallin and Mancini retain some of their popularity, but it may also be that the model is flexible and adaptable enough to cater to both changes and continuities, at least to some degree. The argument that Nordic media policy-formation relies on a cooperative and corporatist political system is still, to quite a large extent, true, even if new and international market actors, such as the global tech companies, do not take part in these processes. However, the relevance of Hallin and Mancini's models is highly contested, and so is the discussion on whether the Nordic media systems have specific characteristics or not.

In the mid-2010s, two significant Nordic publications drew quite opposing conclusions about the state of the Nordic model, emphasising its resilience and instability, or even decline, respectively. In their book *The Media Welfare State*, Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) argued that the Nordic media systems are strongly anchored in the welfare state systems in the region, and that this explains the continued survival of the key pillars of the Nordic media model, both at the level of media policy and in empirical reality. In line with this, they criticised Hallin and Mancini's democratic corporatist model for being too broadly defined, thereby disregarding the distinct Nordic characteristics. Instead, Syvertsen and colleagues argued that policy values such as universalism, equality, strong editorial freedom, close links between media and cultural policy, and cooperation or consensus in media policy-making continued to distinguish the Nordic countries. This was supported empirically, as diversity continued to characterise the content of print and digital newspapers and public service media in the Nordic region. Further, news and information provided by such media institutions continued to be part of many peoples' media repertoire, even at a time of increasingly fragmented media use. These empirical trends suggested that public service media and national newspapers upheld a strong position among Nordic populations. Several historical and empirically based publications have supported this argument (e.g., Brüggemann et al., 2014; Enli et al., 2018).

At approximately the same time as Syvertsen and colleagues' work was published, Ohlsson (2015) published a distinctly different analysis which concluded that the Nordic media systems were not converging towards each other but towards a global system. In his report, *The Nordic Media Market*, he pointed to increasing differences between the Nordic countries, and thus to a destabilisation of the Nordic media market. One evidence was the steady decline of newspaper circulation and advertising revenues, another the weakening of political parallelism between newspapers and political parties with the fall of the party press during the twentieth century. Changes in Nordic public service funding during the past decade, such as conversion from licence fees to taxation, was a third example of the weakening not only of the Nordic model

but also of the relevance of Hallin and Mancini's models. These two publications testify to the continued importance of comparing the many dimensions of political communication within in the Nordic region with an eye to both similarities and differences, and changes and continuities.

*Communicating Politics* was published just as social media disrupted the (Nordic) media systems and made their way into political communication, turning them into “hybrid media systems” (Chadwick, 2017). Although digitisation was addressed, in 2008 no one could quite foresee the impact that Facebook, Twitter, and eventually a range of other channels would have on campaigning, journalism, and political communication at large over the next decade. Further, since 2008, the Nordic countries – along with the rest of the world – have, as indicated, been through major crises and changes that have had, and continue to have, long-lasting impact on political and economic systems. To mention only some of the major events: the financial crisis in 2008 onwards; the rise of populist and anti-democratic politicians, parties, and movements in many countries, among them Sweden, the US, Brazil, and Hungary; Brexit 2016–2020; the 2015–2016 migration crises; reinforced climate protests, spectacularly led by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg since 2018 and coupled with an increasing number of natural catastrophes on a global level; and, concerning digitalisation, the Cambridge Analytica scandal and the ensuing raised attention on surveillance and market control by a few global actors. Latest, the Covid-19 pandemic has ravaged the globe since the winter of 2019 and spring of 2020. These events have had immense impact on politics, on the practices of political communication, and on the power relations that are always present in political communication.

What we can conclude so far from the different analyses – as many of the chapters in the current anthology will also show – is that there are observable path dependencies in the way Nordic media systems continue to develop: public service broadcasters remain important – particularly so in crisis situations. Further, cooperative and corporatist systems are still instrumental in media regulation and policy-making. Despite the many arguments that media systems are disrupted and totally changing because of digitalisation, market upheavals, and entrance of the giants in the global media industries, the current systems are hybrid (Chadwick, 2017). They carry traits of the news media system of previous decades that Hallin and Mancini built their analysis on, and of a new and transformed digital communication system (Flensburg, 2020). The digital system offers new and old media actors, political players, and industries, an array of platforms for political communication. Former gatekeepers, such as journalists and editors, have lost some of their power, while new ones, such as Facebook, have become very powerful. New producers of content – of all qualities and kinds – have entered the digital media market, but at the cost of a fragmented public space, where it is increasingly difficult to attract attention. At



the same time, in 2020, reinforced by the Covid-19 crisis, the already shattered business models of many media houses continue to be undermined. Political actors – such as parties, politicians, voters, and journalists, to mention only some – operate on many platforms, traditional as well as newer ones. Hybridity is a descriptive more than an analytical model, and it is more of a political communication model than a media systems model. For the Nordic countries, it fits quite well. In this anthology, however, the important question is not so much whether we can pin down exactly what makes up the Nordic model or models as it is to understand whether – and if so, how and why – political communication patterns contribute to maintaining sustainable Nordic democracies.

### The Covid-19 crisis

Before concluding this chapter, let us briefly return to the Covid-19 pandemic, as this crisis highlighted some of the tensions in the Nordic media model. The production of this anthology was in its final phase in the spring of 2020 as the Covid-19 crisis swept the globe. The pandemic, caused by the rapid and seemingly uncontrollable spread of the virus SARS-CoV-2, disrupted society as we know it, causing not only a global health crisis but also political, financial, and social turmoil. Governments and populations responded differently to the crisis and at varying speeds. This was the case in the Nordic region, too. At a relative early stage, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Norway introduced strict measures to curb the spread of the virus. The measures varied somewhat between the countries, but included closing of borders and public institutions, social and physical distancing, and rigorous restrictions on populations' free mobility and basic rights for the sake of public health. Sweden applied a more moderate and pending strategy from the start: instead of lockdown, the Swedish government issued recommendations and trusted citizens, businesses, and civil society to act responsibly. The crisis thus revealed the same pattern in the Nordic region as elsewhere: the measures taken were largely national – not regional or global – and the recommendations from the World Health Organisation were, somewhat unexpectedly, not implemented identically in the Nordic countries (Strang, 2020).

From a Nordic political communication perspective, the crisis points to at least two important debates: the role of publicist media and the role of information technology and digital communication infrastructures in times of crises. The Covid-19 crisis was, not surprisingly, very high on the agenda of all national news media in the Nordic region. They served as key components in the crisis communication by reporting from the governments' nearly daily press conferences and broadcasting healthcare guidelines from authorities in a top-down, almost paternalistic manner, known from the time of public service monopolies. Simultaneously, the news media sought to exercise critical journal-

ism and hold politicians, decision-makers, and experts accountable by questioning their strategies and motives; and they aimed to provide trustworthy facts, at a time when mis- and disinformation spread almost as quickly as the virus (Brennen et al., 2020); they provided space for the public to raise their concerns and ask questions from the bottom up; and they tried to gather the nation by organising singalongs, concerts, and live television shows. At the same time, many media institutions and journalists experienced the financial consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic up-front, as advertising revenues vanished instantly due to the crisis, forcing media to reduce staff.

Advanced information technology and solid digital media infrastructures also played key roles during the crisis, as physical and social distancing became the new normal. Though pressure was put on these technologies and infrastructures, they quickly helped the restructuring and rethinking of many professional and mundane activities that had to be moved online. Furthermore, digital media platforms served as fora for sharing everyday experiences in the lockdown, for testimonials and appeals from healthcare workers, and heated debates about political decisions, the heroes and villains of the pandemic, and human, social, and economic co-responsibility, or the lack thereof.

The 2020 Covid-19 crisis amplified and put to the test many of the characteristics typically associated with the Nordic welfare societies, and for our purpose specifically, the Nordic media model, where a versatile news media landscape, anchored in a public service ethos and a professional, critical watchdog approach, and strong (digital) communication infrastructures are considered public goods. In that sense, the Covid-19 crisis put a spotlight on the resilience of the Nordic model – a point that we will return to in the concluding chapter.

## Conclusion

This anthology does two main things. First, it updates and showcases Nordic political communication as a vivid and internationally recognised field of scholarship. Within that framework, the chapters of the anthology show that Nordic researchers apply a diversity of approaches and topics. Second, the anthology urges us to not forget the continued importance of in-depth national or Nordic comparative studies. In 2008, Strömbäck and colleagues called for more comparative political communication research within and beyond the Nordic context in order to flesh out the specificities of the Nordic political communication model in a broader international perspective, which resonated well with the comparative political communication research agenda emerging internationally at the time (de Vreese, 2017). Since then, this agenda has fostered numerous descriptive and explanatory comparisons of political

communication beyond the nation-state, focusing not only on comparing media systems at macro- and meso-levels, but also on comparing news coverage of national elections, European Union elections, political journalists, political actors, and political communication cultures (for overviews see, e.g., Pfetsch & Esser, 2014; de Vreese, 2017). As part of this comparative turn, Nordic political communication scholars have focused less on national and Nordic specificities and differences and more on the Nordic in a Western or global context. The internationalisation of Nordic media research has clearly been beneficial to the development of the field, yet, if we want to avoid reproducing potential myths about the homogeneity of the Nordic region, we need to flesh out the conditions and characteristics that describe and explain the continued resilience and possible increasing differences of the Nordic political communication model or models, which is exactly what this anthology is about.

## References

- Aalberg, T., Strömbäck, J., & de Vreese, C. H. (2012). The framing of politics as strategy and game: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 162–178. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911427799>
- Andersen, L. P., Kjeldgaard, D., & Nielsen, S. B. (Forthcoming). Utopian Noir: Borgen viewed in Denmark and the UK. In R. McCulloch, & B. Proctor (Eds.), *The Scandinavian invasion: The Nordic Noir phenomenon and beyond*. Peter Lang International Academic Publishers.
- Bakke, M., & Siune, K. (1972). *Nyheder i radio og TV: Sammenligning mellem Norge og Danmark [News on radio and TV: Comparisons between Norway and Denmark]* (Vol. 1). Aarhus, Denmark: Department of Political Science, Aarhus University.
- Bengtsson, Å., Hansen, K. M., Hardarson, O., Narud, H. M., & Oscarsson, H. (2013). *The Nordic voter: Myths of exceptionalism*. Colchester, England: ECPR Press.
- Bennett, L., & Pfetsch, B. (2018). Rethinking political communication in a time of disrupted public spheres. *Journal of Communication*, 68 (2), 243–253. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqx017>
- Benson, R., Blach-Ørsten, M., Powers, M., Willig, I., & Zambrano, S. V. (2012). Media systems online and off: Comparing the form of news in the United States, Denmark, and France. *Journal of Communication*, 62(1), 21–38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01625.x>
- Blumler, J. G. (2016). The fourth age of political communication. *Politiques de communication*, 6(1), 19–30. [https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E\\_PDC\\_006\\_0019--the-fourth-age-of-political.htm](https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_PDC_006_0019--the-fourth-age-of-political.htm)
- Blumler, J. G., & Kavanagh, D. (1999). The third age of political communication: Influences and features. *Political Communication*, 16(3), 209–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/105846099198596>
- Bondebjerg, I., Redvall, E. V., Helles, R., Lai, S. S., Søndergaard, H., & Astrupgaard, C. (2017). *Transnational European television drama: Production, genres and audiences*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62806-6>
- Brennen, J. S., Simon, F., Howard, P. N., & Nielsen, R. K. (2020). *Types, sources, and claims of COVID-19 misinformation*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/types-sources-and-claims-covid-19-misinformation>
- Brandal, N., Bratberg, Ø., & Thorsen, D. (2013). *The Nordic model of social democracy*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137013279>
- Brüggemann, M., Engesser, S., Büchel, F., Humprecht, E., & Castro, L. (2014). Hallin and Mancini revisited: Four empirical types of Western media systems. *Journal of Communication*, 64(6), 1037–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12127>
- Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>
- Davis, A. (2019). *Political communication: A new introduction for crisis times*. Cambridge: Polity.

- de Vreese, C. H. (2017). Comparative political communication research. In K. Kenski, & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 287–300). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.82>
- Enli, G., Syvertsen, T., & Mjøs, O. J. (2018). The welfare state and the media system: The role of media and communications in the evolution and transformation of Scandinavian welfare states. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 43(5), 601–623. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2018.1474023>
- Esmark, A., & Ørsten, M. (2008). Media and politics in Denmark. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communication politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 25–44). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Flensburg, S. (2020). *Det digitale systemskifte: En historisk analyse af digitaliseringen af det danske kommunikationssystem [The digital system change: A historical analysis of the digitalisation of the Danish communication system]* [Doctoral dissertation, Copenhagen University, Denmark]. [https://curis.ku.dk/ws/files/233784455/Ph.d.\\_afhandling\\_2020\\_Flensburg.pdf](https://curis.ku.dk/ws/files/233784455/Ph.d._afhandling_2020_Flensburg.pdf)
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2016). Ten years after comparing media systems: What have we learned? *Political Communication*, 34(2), 155–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1233158>
- Hansen, K. T., & Waade A. M. (2017). *Locating Nordic Noir: From Beck to the Bridge*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-59815-4>
- Heidar, K. (Ed.). (2004). *Nordic politics: Comparative perspectives*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Helliwell, J. F., Layard, R., & Sachs, J. D. (2019, March 20). *World happiness report 2019*. <https://worldhappiness.report/ed/2019/>
- Hilson, M. (2008). *The Nordic model: Scandinavia since 1945*. London: Reaktion Books.
- Ihlen, Ø., Skogerbø, E., & Allern, S. (2015). *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon [Power, media, and politics: Norwegian political communication]*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Jamieson, K. H., & Kenski, K. (2014). Political communication: Then, now, and beyond. In K. Kenski, & K. H. Jamieson (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political communication* (pp. 3–12). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793471.013.77>
- Jónsson, G. (2014). Iceland and the Nordic model of consensus democracy. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 39(4), 510–528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2014.935473>
- Knutsen, O. (Ed.). (2017). *The Nordic models in political science: Challenged, but still viable?* Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Moring, T. (2008). Media and politics in Finland. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communication politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 45–62). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- McNair, B. (2017). *An introduction to political communication*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315750293>
- McQuail, D., & Siune, K. (1998). *Media policy: Convergence, concentration and commerce*. London: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446250358>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2019). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2019*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/>
- Nordenstreng, K., Frandsen, K., & Ottosen, R. (2014). The significance of Nordicom and the NordMedia Conference to Nordic media and communication research: Festive tributes. *Nordicom Review*, 35(Special Issue), 18–28. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2014-0102>
- Nordic Co-operation. (2018, May 2). Increasing income inequality in the Nordics. <https://www.norden.org/en/news/increasing-income-inequality-nordics>
- Norris, P. (2000). *A virtuous circle: Political communications in postindustrial societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511609343>

## 1. INTRODUCTION: A NORDIC MODEL FOR POLITICAL COMMUNICATION?

- Norris, P., McQuail, D., & Graber, D. A. (2008). *The Politics of news: The news of politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Ohlsson, J. (2015). *The Nordic media market*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Ólafsson, J. G. (2020). Factoring size into the equation: Media studies, politics, and small states. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, 2, 145–156. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njms-2020-0013>
- Ørsten, M., Aalberg, T., & Strömbäck, J. (2008). Conclusions: Similarities and differences between the Nordic countries. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 267–272). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Pfetsch, B., & Esser, F. (2014). Political communication in comparative perspective: Key concepts and new insights. In C. Reinemann (Ed.), *Political communication* (pp. 87–106). Berlin: De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110238174.87>
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the twenty-first century*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press.
- Pollack, E., Allern, S., Kantola, A., & Ørsten, M. (2018). The new normal: Scandals as a standard feature of political life in Nordic countries. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 3087–3108. <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-72289>
- Reinemann, C., Aalberg, T., Esser, F., Strömbäck, J., & de Vreese, C. H. (2017). Populist political communication: Towards a model of its causes, forms and effects. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Teinemann, J. Strömbäck, C. H. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 12–25). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623016>
- Siune, K. (1991). *EF på dagsordenen [EF on the agenda]*. Aarhus: Politica.
- Siune, K., McQuail, D., & Blumler, J. G. (1984). Broadcasting European elections. *Electoral studies*, 3(3), 256–263. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-3794\(84\)90006-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/0261-3794(84)90006-4)
- Strang, J. (2020, April 6). *Why do the Nordic countries react differently to the Covid-19 crisis?* nordics.info, Aarhus University. <https://nordics.info/show/artikel/the-nordic-countries-react-differently-to-the-covid-19-crisis/>
- Strömbäck, J., Ørsten, M., & Aalberg, T. (2008). *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Sundet, V. S. (2020). From ‘secret’ online teen drama to international cult phenomenon: The global expansion of Skam and its public service mission. *Critical Studies in Television*, 15(1) 69–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1749602019879856>
- Syvertsen, T., Enli, G., Mjøs, O. J., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- Teigen, M., & Skjeie, H. (2017). The Nordic gender equality model. In O. Knutsen (Ed.), *The Nordic models in political science: Challenged, but still viable?* Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- The Economist. (2013, February 2). The next supermodel: Politicians from both right and left could learn from the Nordic countries. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2013/02/02/the-next-supermodel>
- Truetschler, W., & Siune, K. (Eds.). (1992). *Dynamics of media politics: Broadcast and electronic media in Western Europe*. London: Sage.



## Chapter 2

# Media and politics in Denmark

Nete Nørgaard Kristensen & Mark Blach-Ørsten

### Abstract

In this chapter, we point to some of the changes and continuities that have characterised the interplay between news media and politics in Denmark during the last two decades. The chapter has three main focus areas: first, we present key institutions and players within the Danish political and media systems; second, we point to some of the theoretical approaches that have dominated political communication research in Denmark since the early 2000s, among them institutional and sociological perspectives; and third, we conclude by suggesting some of the differences between political communication in Denmark, as both practice and research field, compared to the other Nordic countries. We aim to balance the chapter between a media studies approach and a political science approach to political communication, but, contrary to much other Danish political communication research, the chapter especially takes its point of departure in the former.

**Keywords:** Denmark, corporatism, media subsidies, mediatisation, welfare state

## Introduction

This chapter introduces political communication in Denmark, focusing especially on changes and continuities in the interplay between news media and politics from the early 2000s until today. First, we outline the main institutions and players within the Danish political system and media system. In regards to the political system, the chapter points to the weakened link between political parties and interest organisations, challenging the Danish corporatist structure, and to the increased splitting of the Danish political system into centre-left and centre-right blocs, challenging the tradition for broad consensus in Danish politics. In regards to the media system, a main focus is the mix of publicly and privately funded news media, including the most recent changes in Danish media policy and public news use, which suggest weakened political support for key public service institutions but increased attention to private news media.

Second, we introduce some of the theoretical perspectives that have informed Danish research about political communication since the early 2000s, especially institutional and sociological perspectives to news and politics. One key approach is mediatisation theory, which has especially influenced the intersection of media studies and political communication. Part of this research concerns the interconnected professionalisation of political communication (including public relations, spin, and lobbyism) and of political journalism (including journalism as an increasingly professionalised type of media labour). Audience studies is another approach that has played an increasingly significant role in Danish political communication research since the early 2000s. A common denominator across these perspectives is that Danish political communication research has long been, and still is, informed by two relatively separate approaches – a media studies approach and a political science approach with little collaboration and interplay. Though we aim to balance the two, this chapter especially takes its point of departure in the first approach.

Third, we conclude by pointing to some of the aspects that set political communication in Denmark, as both practice and a research field, apart from Sweden, Norway, and Finland. In terms of practice, a key difference is that politicians and political journalists in Denmark are in a state of “permanent campaign” due to the organisation of the national election terms. In terms of research, the continuous silos between media and journalism and political science perspectives make political communication a much more fragmented endeavour in Denmark compared to the other Nordic countries.

## The political system

Denmark is a parliamentary democracy, and since 1953, Folketinget [the Danish Parliament] has consisted of only one chamber. Elections to the Danish Parliament are based on proportional representation and held at least every four years, but it is within the power of the prime minister to call elections sooner, if they wish to do so (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). The parliament has 179 members, including 4 elected from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, which belong to the commonwealth. Denmark is divided into three electoral regions (Metropolitan Copenhagen, Sealand-Southern Denmark, and Northern and Central Jutland) and ten multi-member constituencies subdivided into 92 nomination districts. The distribution of seats takes place at two levels, a multi-member constituency level and a national level. The first 135 seats of the parliament are allocated among the ten multi-member constituencies, while the 40 remaining seats are distributed in a compensatory fashion at the higher tier of the national level (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017a).



### *Key characteristics of the Danish political system*

Denmark practices what is known as negative parliamentarism, in which the government does not need to have a majority in the parliament, but it must not have a majority against it either. If there is a majority against the government, it must resign. The system of negative parliamentarism allows Denmark to be run by a minority government. In fact, many Danish governments have been minority governments holding less than 90 of the 179 seats in the parliament.

Another central characteristic of the Danish political system is its corporatist structure and tradition for consensus politics (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014; Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999; Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). Denmark has, just as Finland, Sweden, and Norway, a long tradition of corporatism, understood as the organised negotiations and deliberations between the state, employer associations, and unions (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014; Vesa et al., 2018). Traditionally, the Nordic countries have been regarded as some of the most corporatist liberal democracies in the world. At the heart of the corporatist structure is the so-called committee system. From the 1950s to about the mid-1980s, the system consisted of several hundred permanent tripartite committees – committees with members from the state, unions, and employee organisations – and focused on both policy development and policy implementation (Blom-Hansen, 2000; Campbell & Pedersen, 2014).

Turning to the party system, Denmark also fits the image of a multi-party system of consensus politics, as opposed to the dominance of two-party systems in majoritarian politics. The oldest Danish parties are the Conservatives (historically called Højre [right]) and the Liberals (now called Venstre [left]), which were formed among members of parliament in the decades following the ratification of the Danish constitution. The Danish Social Democratic Party was founded in 1871 and obtained its first seats in parliament in 1884. In 1905, the Social-Liberals broke away from the Liberals, completing the list of four parties usually considered the “grand old parties” in Denmark (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). Since then, several political parties have come and gone, for instance, the Danish Communist Party that was founded in 1919 and gained representation in parliament from 1945–1960 and again from 1973–1979, but not since (Campbell & Pedersen, 2014). Traditionally, parties were linked closely to the labour market associations, with the Social Democrats closely linked to unions, and the Liberal Party and Conservatives closely linked to business and agricultural interest organisations.

### *Recent developments in Danish politics*

Today there are ten parties in the Danish Parliament making up two political blocs; the red and blue blocs. On the left, the red bloc includes the Social Demo-

crats, the Social Liberals, the Socialist People's Party, the Red–Green Alliance, and the Alternative Party. On the right, the blue bloc includes the Liberals, the Conservatives, the Danish People's Party, the Liberal Alliance, and the New Liberal Party. In a Nordic context, an important aspect of Danish politics is that the Social Democrats have not been as dominant as in Sweden and to some extent in Norway. Thus, power has shifted back and forth between the red bloc and the blue bloc in post-war Denmark (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008).

Even though the Danish political system is basically very stable, there have been several changes in recent years. Esmark and Ørsten (2008) point to Europeanisation as one of the important changes to the Danish political and administrative system from 1973 (when Denmark entered the Common Market) and onwards. Another trend points towards a slow process of de-corporatisation starting from the mid-1980s and leading to fewer committees and a lesser focus on tripartite negotiations (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b; Blom-Hansen, 2000; Rommetvedt et al., 2013). According to studies by Blom-Hansen (2000) and Öberg and colleagues (2011), corporatism in Scandinavia peaked in the 1970s and 1980s and has declined, or weakened, in most sectors ever since. A study on corporatism in Finland by Vesa and colleagues (2018) suggests that corporatism has persisted there into the 2010s, while a study by Christiansen (2017) argues that though corporatism has weakened in Scandinavia, the corporatist structures still play a part in policy implementation.

In Denmark, corporatism is still considered to have peaked around 1980 and then declined (Blom-Hansen, 2000). The reasons for the decline are thought to be multiple, but both decentralisation of politics to the level of local government and the earlier-mentioned Europeanisation of politics have played a role. Other important factors that contribute to the decline of corporatism include more power to the Danish Parliament due to a more assertive opposition, financial cutbacks, and more fragmented unions experiencing declining membership (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b; Öberg et al., 2011). As corporatism declines, at least in most of the Nordic countries, lobbyism is considered to be on the rise (Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999). But whereas corporatism describes a highly institutionalised way that organised interest and political actors may interact – boards, councils, committees, hearings, and so on – lobbyism is characterised by a much more informal, and mostly ad hoc, form of interaction (Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999; see also Ihlen et al., Chapter 15). Despite these differences, lobbyism and corporatism should not be viewed as opposites, but more as two opposite ends of a continuum of the different ways in which the interaction of organised interest and political actors may take place (Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999). Resourceful organisations, of course, may utilise both forms of interaction, should they wish to maximise their influence.

It is possible to distinguish between several types of lobbyism: parliamentary, governmental, bureaucratic, and media (Blach-Ørsten & Kristensen, 2016;

Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b). Scandinavian studies of lobbying are still few, however. In the case of Norway, Ihlen and Gullberg (2015) conclude that lobbying has increased from the 1970s and onwards and that lobbying has likely become more professionalised. In Sweden, Möller (2009) concludes that there is regular contact between politicians and lobbyists but that politicians are split in their views on lobbying. In Denmark, a report by the communication agency Advice (2012) concludes that contacts between politicians and lobbyists are frequent for politicians in the Danish Parliament, and 60 per cent of the politicians surveyed answered that they had contacts with lobbyists several times a week.

For Danish political parties, the switch from traditional party voting to issue voting is one of the most significant changes in recent years. This switch has led to increased competition on a few central political issues, primarily immigration, which has been the focus of many recent Danish elections (Borre, 2005; Green-Pedersen, 2006). The trend towards more issue-based voting rather than more traditional party voting dates back to the 1970s, especially the 1973 election, where the Danish Progress Party won a landslide victory and paved the way for a more issue-based and populist approach to politics. Since then, the switch has led to increased competition between the political parties on a relatively small number of issues, such as the economy and immigration, which has helped boost populist politics (understood as loud rhetoric and simplified solutions to complex problems) across both the red and blue blocs. Indeed, as Blomqvist and Green-Pedersen (2004) argue, the growing importance of issue- rather than class-based voting is one of the biggest changes for political parties in Scandinavia to navigate when competing for voter support. They also argue that this shift has especially affected the Social Democrats in Denmark and Norway, whereas the Social Democrats in Sweden have been less affected.

Outside of electoral studies, research has found the same transformation of political orientations and participation from the field of ideology and programmatic politics to specific policy issues and ad hoc political projects. Such projects are typically based in the practical and “everyday” experience of the individual citizen, but can also take the form of identity politics, in which the fight for recognition of highly particular rights to specific political groups take focus, as opposed to a focus on the “classes” of conventional politics (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). This is also evident in the rise of political populism in Denmark most often associated with the success of the Danish People’s Party and its rise to power (Bächler & Hopmann, 2017). The recent focus on so-called identity politics have not been as prominent in Denmark as in the US and Sweden, where issues such as sexuality and recognition have become a still larger part of politics. A recent study of political scandals in the wake of the #metoo movement, however, shows that both Sweden and Norway have had scandals focusing on politicians accused of sexual harassment, improper sexual behaviour towards young women, and the sharing of pornographic images,

whereas neither Denmark nor Finland have seen such scandals (Pollack et al., 2018; see also Kristensen & Roosvall, Chapter 9).

## The Danish media system

The Danish media system is part of what has, in recent years, been labelled “the media welfare state” (Syvertsen et al., 2014) and “the Nordic media market” (Ohlsson, 2015). Such terms have emerged in response to Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) grouping of the Nordic countries under “the democratic corporatist model” with a range of other Northern European countries. Though the Nordic media model shares many traits with media in these countries (e.g., Strömbäck et al., 2008), scholars have also emphasised its distinctiveness, as media in the Nordic region are seen as key pillars of “the Nordic welfare model” (Ahva et al., 2017; Ohlsson, 2015; Syvertsen et al., 2014). This is epitomised by the central role of public service broadcasters and the considerable indirect and direct subsidies also for privately-owned media in the Nordic region, such as printed and digital newspapers. In the following, we outline how continuities and changes within the Nordic media model take shape in the Danish context, especially from the turn of the twenty-first century and onwards, focusing on media regulation and news consumption.

### *Freedom of the press and media liability*

Section 91 in the Danish Constitutional Act of 1849 (Rigsarkiv, n.d.) represents an important landmark in regards to freedom of expression, as it instituted Danish citizens’ freedom to publish their thoughts in print and marked the end of censorship, even though individuals could be held responsible for their printing in a court of law. Already at this early stage, indirect subsidies were granted to newspapers in the form of reduced postal rates with the aim of supporting the emerging party press and, more broadly, freedom of expression (Flensburg, 2015: 88). The 1953 adjustment of the constitutional act (Ministry of the State, 1953: §77) rearticulated the issue of freedom to print to citizens’ liberty “to publish his ideas in print, in writing, and in speech” – the formulation applying today. These freedom rights must still be exercised in accordance with criminal law, prohibiting libel actions or utterances threatening national security, among others.

For quite some time, no exact reference was made to the liabilities of the press or institutionalised news media, but in 1992, the Media Liability Act (Engell, 1991) was introduced with the aim of specifying who is to be made responsible for media content in case of libel actions (criminal liability and liability for damages). The act also marks the establishment of the Danish Press Council, an independent council responsible for ruling in cases of published

content conflicting with sound press ethics. Overall, Denmark is considered among the most advanced in terms of media accountability, as many media organisations have formulated specific ethical guides in accordance with the overall Danish principles of sound press ethics, legitimised by the Media Liability Act (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2015).

Nonetheless, the media's "freedom of expression with responsibilities" regularly stirs public debate about which rights are more important – freedom of expression, and by extension the press, or considerations of, for instance, individuals or other matters. A recent case is the conviction by the high court of the national newspaper *Politiken* and its editor-in-chief, Christian Jensen, in February 2020 to pay a considerable fine for publishing most parts of a book about the Danish Security and Intelligence Service in the newspaper in 2016. The 2020 conviction was a tightening of the ruling by the district court in 2019. The publishing of the book, partly based on interviews with a former head of the service, had been hindered by the court due to its sensitive and confidential content. *Politiken* printed the book in view of its public importance and because the injunction of the court was seen as limiting freedom of expression and the press (C. Jensen, 2016).

### *Main media policy characteristics*

A key characteristic of the Danish media system and its news provision is hybridity (Kammer, 2017), as public service broadcasters and private printed or digital news media co-exist. This hybridity is an outcome of both social democratic and liberal democracy lines of thinking informing Danish (media) policy (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). Regulation of public service broadcasters as well as a subsidy system to support the commercial press have been an important political issue since the mid-twentieth century, in accordance with the emergence of the welfare-state ideology (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). A main goal of Danish media policy has been to ensure a diverse portfolio of media outlets and the production of quality media content and journalism and, by extension, to ensure the corner stone of Danish democracy, an informed citizenry (Kammer, 2016). Accordingly, public service has been a key principle in Denmark since the 1920s, with the introduction of radio (1926) and later television broadcasting (1951), epitomised by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (originally Statsradiofonien, later renamed Danmarks Radio [DR]) and long financed by license fees. Today, DR is a large media organisation, spanning numerous television and radio channels as well as a website. In 1988, TV 2 was introduced, a state-owned television broadcaster, also serving public service goals, but since 2004 financed by advertising and, later on, subscriptions as well. TV 2 includes a line of segmented channels and seven regional channels, the latter of which are funded by licence fees.

Newspapers in Denmark are private enterprises, but the public service line of thinking also permeates their ethos and increasingly also the political actions put in place to subsidise these news media (Flensburg, 2015). While indirect media subsidies – such as zero-taxation on revenues and reduced postal charges for the distribution of newspapers – have a long tradition in Denmark, direct media subsidies for private news media are a newer phenomenon and include support of operational costs, subsidies for media with financial problems, distribution subsidies, and so on. Such initiatives have emerged during the 1990s and 2000s and signal increased political attention to a broader portfolio of media types, as the boundaries between public service, publicist, and commercial media have become increasingly blurred since the late twentieth century (Flensburg, 2015; Hjarvard & Kammer, 2015).

With these changes also followed increased political attention to the content, quality, and societal role of public service as well as private media. Public service contracts were, for example, introduced in the early 2000s, outlining various requirements that especially DR must fulfil, such as giving priority to Danish culture, children, and young adults. Similarly, in the second half of the 2000s, current affairs, politics, economics, and culture were stipulated as key areas for print and digital newspapers to cover to qualify for subsidies. Though an arm’s-length principle has long characterised Danish media policy (e.g., Kammer, 2017) – both in regards to publicly funded public service broadcasters and privately-owned newspapers – this increased political attention to the contours of the media content can be viewed as a shortening of the distance between politicians and media content providers. Nonetheless, Søndergaard and Helles (2014: 41) argue that the key values of Danish media policy have remained quite constant, in other words, the aim of “securing the freedom of expression and pluralism of voices by actively supporting both private and public media”.

### *Recent media policy changes*

Danish media policy is still under the purview of the Danish Ministry of Culture, which signals a cultural policy approach to Danish media policy, as also exemplified by the named key values still being intact and by the increasing support to private newspapers as well (Flensburg, 2015). Nonetheless, the heated public and political debates about the most recent, major media policy regulations – the media subsidy reform in 2013–2014 (Ministry of Culture, 2013) and the Media Agreement for 2019–2023 (Ministry of Culture, 2018) – signal change: While media regulation and media support continue to be key pillars of Danish cultural policy, competition between various types of media has increased. As a consequence, audience and business interests are gaining grounds in the political thinking about the media. More broadly, this showcases that media policy is a highly politicised area in Denmark today.

Overall, the Law of Media Subsidy, phased in from 2014, marks a change from distribution subsidies, based on circulation numbers, to production subsidies, based on the journalistic content production measured by “the number of ‘journalistic full-time equivalents’ employed” at the given news media (Hjarvard & Kammer, 2015: 121). Or put differently, a change from indirect to direct subsidies. In this way, the law also marks a change from subsidising particular media platforms, the printed press in particular, to a “platform neutral” approach (Hjarvard & Kammer, 2015), taking the digital media environment and its new media types and platforms into consideration, for example, online-only news media. In addition, the Law of Media Subsidy reserves money for media innovation, allocated to new media start-ups or the development of existing media turning digital. A main focus is on written Internet-based outlets, and such new initiatives have to comply with the broad content requirements in terms of covering political, societal, and cultural issues. While international research has pointed to a turn towards a more liberal media model in many Western countries (e.g., Hallin & Mancini, 2004), Flensburg (2015) argues that the Law of Media Subsidy points in the opposite direction by showcasing a change from economical compensation to publicist motivation, precisely because private media, either digital or in print, can also receive direct subsidies today if their content production qualifies for it. Furthermore, the introduction of funding for media innovation signals a modernisation of Danish media policy, even though the more specific requirements may present some limits to actual innovation, according to Kammer (2017). Private news media have, however, also become increasingly dependent on these subsidies, as only very few Danish newspapers would have a surplus without them today (Schrøder & Ørsten, 2018).

Denmark has a variety of newspaper titles – approximately 10 national newspapers published daily and around 20 local or regional newspapers (Gallup, 2018). Notwithstanding the smaller population and geographical area, these numbers are considerably lower compared to the other Nordic countries (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008). Especially the national newspapers play an agenda-setting role in the production and circulation of news in Denmark, whereas local newspapers have experienced challenges in recent years in terms of circulation, advertising, and public attention. Svith and colleagues (2017), for example, show that much local journalism is not about the local environment and involves little investigative journalism, which challenges the broader democratic role of these newspapers in Danish society. In addition, many of the newspapers with high circulation are owned by the same few, larger corporations – some being foundations targeted at making money to produce media content (e.g., JP/Politikens Hus and Jysk-Fynske Medier), others commercial and publicly traded businesses producing media content to make money for their investors (e.g., Berlingske Medier, owned by De Persgroep) (see also Kammer, 2017). In

terms of newspaper titles, there is thus relative diversity and external pluralism, since most titles have a distinct and segmented profile (e.g., Schultz, 2007), but in terms ownership, the Danish newspaper market is characterised by some concentration.

Another example of the increased political support to private news media in Denmark is the Media Agreement for 2019–2023 (Ministry of Culture, 2018), adopted by the rightwing coalition government and the Danish People’s Party in the spring of 2018. A key element of the agreement is a 20 per cent reduction of the funding for DR over five years, including the closing of several DR television and radio channels. More specifically, the broad range of cultural topics and events, including sports and entertainment, that have formerly been part of DR’s repertoire will be reduced. Key examples are that two television channels, DR2 and DRK, devoted to societal and cultural issues will be merged to one; DR3, a television channel targeted at young adults, and DR Ultra, a television channel targeted at tweens, will only be available online; a number of cultural and lifestyle television programmes will no longer be produced; and three radio channels devoted to different music genres – P6 Beat, P7 Mix, and P8 Jazz – will no longer exist.<sup>1</sup> In broader terms, this reflects a political ambition of changing DR from a media institution with a broad repertoire of offerings across a range of platforms – television, radio, and the Internet – to a distinct cultural institution with a narrower repertoire focusing on news, information, culture, and education, and with special attention to children and young people. This could be regarded as a media historical return to the cultural and societal role formerly occupied by DR.

Another significant change prompted by the Media Agreement for 2019–2023 is the replacement of the licence fee by a direct taxation, potentially making public service media more susceptible to political trends and fluctuations. While these changes may be seen as a weakening of Danish public media, and DR in particular, they are also a means of strengthening the private media players, which have for several years complained that DR has distorted especially the digital news market by providing free online news. In addition to the DR cutbacks, private digital news media will, for example, enjoy tax exemption on revenues in similar ways as printed news media, thus furthering the equaling of the conditions for print and digital news media initiated by the 2013–2014 Law of Media Subsidy. More funding is also allocated to the public service pool, distributing subsidies to, typically, private production companies producing Danish television drama and documentaries.

### *Danes’ media use*

These policy changes link to changes in the Danish public’s media use during the past decades, but also to the continued importance of Danish media



in the public's daily media diet. Especially public service institutions, such as DR and TV 2, have been relatively successful in maintaining a large audience despite increased competition from international media players and newer platforms. Danes, for example, mainly watch public service television (rather than non-public service television) (Agency for Culture and Palaces, 2018), two in three Danes access news via public service media platforms every week, and national quality media brands, such as public service providers and national newspapers, enjoy the trust of the population (Schrøder et al., 2018). Internet penetration in Denmark is among the highest worldwide (97%), and the use of digital media, including digital news consumption, is high, even though still relatively few Danes are willing to pay for digital news (15%) (Schrøder et al., 2018). As in most other countries, audiences and circulation numbers for printed newspapers have declined considerably during the 2010s, even if the decrease has stagnated in recent years (Agency for Culture and Palaces, 2018). The newspapers' digital platforms are news sources for many Danes, not least the tabloid newspapers. At the same time, social media, especially Facebook, have become an increasingly important source of news and other information for younger news consumers (Schrøder et al., 2019).

In summary, the regulatory changes during the 2010s suggest actions to sustain a varied portfolio of national media that can meet the changed patterns of media consumption among the Danish population in the digitalised and increasingly competitive media market, including actions to further media innovation and start-ups. While the policy actions point to weakened political consensus about the importance of public service broadcast media, they also suggest increased political support to private media. Overall, much public funding is still vested in regulating the Danish media market, indicating continuity in Danish media policy in terms of continued public support to the media. In 2019, DKK 4.9 billion were allocated to Danish media, including 410 million to printed and written Internet-based media and 3.6 billion to DR (Ministry of Culture, 2018). At the same time, the arm's-length principle is challenged.

### Main theoretical perspectives in Danish political communication research

In the democratic-corporatist model, the link between news media and democracy is stated much clearer than in the liberal model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). As mentioned, news media are seen – and regulated – as an important institution in society in Denmark. Thus, Danish research has long focused on how the news media fulfil their larger role in society.

### *Mediatisation of politics, culture, and society*

In the 1970s, Danish media research was inspired by Habermas' theory of the public sphere, which often led to criticism of the news media for being part of the capitalistic system and not focusing enough on the plight of the working class (M. B. Andersen & Poulsen, 1974; Bondebjerg, 1976). More recently, a focus on the institutional role of the news media has been expressed in the development of an institutional and media central approach to mediatisation theory (Hjarvard, 2008). A key focus in this approach is to view mediatisation as a long-term structural transformation where media – understood as television, news media, social media, and so on – have become omnipresent, or part of almost all aspects of society – from political cross-media campaigning to children's play on tablets. Such studies of mediatisation have focused on the mediatisation of politics, but also of religion, parenthood, sports, culture, and so on. A main take-away from most of these studies, whether focusing on politics or culture, is that the media have become a central way of experiencing everyday life for most Danes. News media, such as public service radio and television, and social media, such as Facebook, are, as mentioned, a great part of most Danes' media diet.

A key aspect of the mediatisation of politics concerns the increasing professionalisation and mediatisation of election campaigns and politicians' interplay with journalists. Siune and Borre (1975) and Siune (1982, 1993) are among the first scholars to study the modern mediatised political campaign, both regarding national elections and European elections. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, these studies concluded, among other things, that politicians and political parties set the agenda and that journalists followed up, and questioned, the political agenda setting (Siune, 1982). Election studies of European, national, regional, and local elections have since been a main fixture in Danish political science (e.g., Albæk et al., 2010; J. G. Andersen et al., 2005; Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2010; Hansen & Kosiara-Pedersen, 2015; Lund & Ørsten, 2004; Thomsen, 2001; see also Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11). In recent years, studies of the mediatisation of politics have especially focused on the interplay of (news) media logics and political logics but increasingly also on social media logics in political communication. The Internet and social media have come to play an increasingly important role during national elections in Denmark, for example, both in politicians' communication strategies and in the public's accessing of political information and news (e.g., J. L. Jensen et al., 2016).

### *The professionalisation of political communication and political journalism*

In 2000, Danish scholars from several disciplines launched a new focus on political communication and political journalism. They concluded that there were

only loose couplings between the political administration and professionalised media management at the time (Pedersen et al., 2000). This soon changed, however, as Danish politicians hired an increasing number of press and media advisors during the 2000s, inspired by the spin-doctor wave in British and American politics in the 1990s. This instigated several public committees in Denmark, put in place to scrutinise the changed interplay between the Danish political system and the news media (e.g., Ministry of Finance, 2004, 2013). The most recent committee (Ministry of Finance, 2013) concluded that today such special advisors not only offer counselling on media management but also political-tactical advice (Kristensen & Blach-Ørsten, 2015), exemplifying the increasing intertwinement or mutual adaption of media and politics, a key argument in the literature about the mediatisation of politics. The question of the professionalisation of political communication has recently been extended to include other political actors such as think tanks (Blach-Ørsten & Kristensen, 2016; Kelstrup, 2016) and lobbyists working in public relations firms and interest organisations (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b). The underlying argument is that both mediatisation and de-corporatism has opened up more space for lobbyism, including so-called media lobbyism, where political actors try to use favourable media exposure to create attention and sympathy for the clients and their causes (Aagaard & Blach-Ørsten, 2018; Binderkrantz, 2012).

The research debates about the professionalisation of political communication in Denmark has also focused on the professionalisation of journalism (e.g., Albæk et al., 2015; Kristensen, 2000, 2003). Though journalism is not a profession in the traditional sense, applying sociological theory about professions has illuminated the increasingly professional traits of Danish journalists. A key characteristic of the democratic-corporatist model, including the Nordic media model, is a high degree of professionalism among journalists. In Denmark, such professional traits emerged during the twentieth century, especially in the second half, as journalists increasingly detached themselves from political ideologies and developed strong professional norms, gradually became more organised and educated, and adopted self-regulatory ethical standards. With the decline of the party press and the emergence of the omnibus press as well as public service media, Danish journalists adopted norms such as objectivity, autonomy, a public service ethos, and the role conception of the watchdog. Objectivity continues to be a key norm of Danish journalists, even if it is also contested and primarily an ideal. For Danish journalists, objectivity especially concerns striking a balance between various viewpoints and basing stories on facts (Albæk et al., 2015). Danish journalists also identify strongly with the watchdog role (Ahva et al., 2017) and, overall, feel freedom when choosing and reporting stories, as they experience little pressure from political authorities or business interests (Skovsgaard et al., 2012), or in other words, they experience autonomy in their professional practice.

These professional norms and values have been cultivated through education. Like in the other Nordic countries, journalism education in Denmark is based on an integrated model, combining theory and practice (Ahva et al., 2017), but the field has also experienced an academisation during the past decades. The first, longer formalised journalism programme emerged in the early 1970s and was of a vocational nature, but it was accompanied by academic journalism programmes in the late 1990s. Today, seven in ten Danish journalists have a journalism education – the number is even higher for political journalists (nine in ten) (Albæk et al., 2015). This academisation goes hand in hand with the increasing institutionalisation of journalism studies as a discipline of its own in Denmark from the early 2000s. Approximately 26,000 people are employed in the Danish media sector today, or 18,000 full-time equivalents (Agency for Culture and Palaces, 2016).<sup>2</sup> The large majority is organised in the Danish Union of Journalists, established in 1961 as a merger between a number of smaller organisations. Today, the union organises more than 18,000 people (Danish Union of Journalists, 2019) and is a strong player in the Danish media and communication industry. Contrary to its Norwegian and Swedish counterparts, the union organises not only journalists and professionals providing content to the media industry but also professionals working in the public relations and communication sector. This signals that the professional boundaries between journalism and strategic communication are somewhat blurred in Denmark (Kristensen, 2003), which occasionally stirs professional debates, especially among journalists. At the same time, the union has played an important part in harmonising the professional standards of Danish journalists and, in recent years, in supporting a sound ethical conduct (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2015). Thus, even though the professional title of “journalist” is not protected, Danish journalists have become increasingly professionalised.

### *Audience perspectives*

A last perspective to be highlighted in Danish political communication research is audience studies, including the public’s use of media, and news media in particular, to be informed political citizens. From early on, audiences’ response to the offerings of especially DR has been a focus point among scholars, politicians, and the Danish media industry (e.g., K. B. Jensen, 2001). Of particular interest from a political communication perspective has been the news cast of DR, TV-Avisen, for years viewed as the “big brother” of news in Denmark (e.g., K. B. Jensen, 1995: 16). While some studies have focused on how people make sense of news and the social and political role that news play in audiences’ everyday life (e.g., K. B. Jensen, 1988), others have pointed to how the public’s perception of the political is very much based on media discourses or framings (e.g., Phillips & Schrøder, 2004). Studies, however, also showcase public commitment to the

news media, as being an informed citizen is considered important, normatively and in everyday interaction with colleagues, friends, and family (e.g., Nielsen & Schröder, 2014).

Since the early 2010s, two important, empirically driven contributions to the field have emerged, indicating a turn from qualitative to quantitative approaches: Since 2014, annual reports from the Agency for Culture and Palaces have provided important data about Danes' media use across legacy media and social media, as well as more specialised reports about particular media trends, such as the influence from global media players on the Danish media market or the role and economy of influencers on social media. In addition, the annual *Reuters Institute Digital News Report*, which compares the use of various digital media to access news in an increasingly large number of countries, includes a country report about Denmark, produced by Danish media scholars (e.g., Schröder et al., 2018). While these studies continue the empirical tradition in Danish audience research, which is of both a qualitative and quantitative nature, especially the reports by the Agency for Culture and Palaces testify to the continued political attention to the public's media use, as these reports are funded as part of the media agreement. Furthermore, the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* testifies to the increasingly comparative nature of much political communication research in Denmark. Overall, the findings of these empirical studies document Danes' continued high attention and commitment to national quality media brands of both a public service and private nature, even if social media, especially Facebook, has also become an important component.

### Conclusion: Differences from the other Nordic countries and future research paths

This chapter has pointed to some of the historical traits and more recent developments in the interplay between media and politics in Denmark, highlighting recent media political changes in view of a reconfigured media landscape and changed patterns of media use as well as recent changes within the political system.

If looking beyond the Danish context to the neighbouring Nordic countries, a common trend across the Nordic region in terms of media policy seems to be the switch from financing public service radio and television via a licence fee to taxation. In Finland, the licence fee was replaced by a tax in early 2013, which was the case in Sweden in 2019 and in Norway in 2020. In Denmark, there will be a gradual change from a licence fee to taxation from 2019–2021, to be fully implemented in 2022. The recent political decision in Denmark to reduce the budget of the key public service provider DR by 20 per cent seems,

however, to be less in sync with the other Nordic countries. Despite switching from licence fees to a media tax in Sweden, the ambition is that the budget for public service should remain relatively stable (Harrie, 2019). In Finland, the most recent media policy agreement (2018–2023), for example, involves few changes and states that the budget for the media will remain stable for the period. For now, it seems that in Denmark the political involvement in how media institutions should perform has increased with implications for especially the offerings of DR, thus challenging the arm’s-length principle between the media and the political system, perhaps more so than in the other Nordic countries. This points to media policy, including the implications of changed policy actions at both the national and the Nordic level, as a pertinent topic for future research, as Denmark seems to be taking different paths than the other Nordic countries in some regards.

Turning to the political system, the shift towards issue voting, especially with a focus on immigration as a dominant issue, seems to have affected Denmark more than the other Nordic countries, although immigration has also become a central issue in Norway and in the most recent Swedish election. With four years between elections, but no fixed election date, the Danish political system also seems to be highly suited for permanent campaigning with the questions of when the next election will happen often being floated by politicians as well as political commentators. Notwithstanding, the two most recent elections have been called at the end of the formal four-year election period. National and Nordic research about the implications of such – on the face of it, different – conditions for political communication and political campaigning might be worth pursuing.

Regarding research, Danish political communication research has mainly been addressed from either a humanities and partly sociological perspective or the perspective of political sciences, but more rarely from a combination of these. Research informed by the humanities and sociology has focused on, among other things, public sphere theory, epitomised by the Habermasian approach, and the sociology of professions, including spin and public relations, whereas research stemming from political science has traditionally had a special focus on elections, both national and European. The more recent study of the professionalisation of political communication and the mediatisation of politics and other institutions of society are perhaps the only examples of “schools” or research approaches that have been able to attract scholars from both the humanities and political sciences. Despite this, Danish research into news media, political communication, and media policy remains more fragmented than (we think) is the case in the other Nordic countries. A challenge for Danish research is thus that political communication is a growing research field, for example, in terms of the number of academic institutions and scholars engaging in such research. At the same time, this research lacks coordination and collaboration

across disciplines and universities, which potentially leads to research gaps as well as overlaps.

## Notes

1. See DR's overview of the implications of the reductions here: <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/indland/overblik-disse-dr-programmer-og-kanaler-lukker> (last accessed March 23, 2019). The closing of P6 Beat and P8 Jazz has been postponed to the end of 2020.
2. Approximately 8,900 people (5,600 full-time equivalents) work in the Danish newspaper industry, and 6,500 people (5,600 full-time equivalents) work in the television industry (Agency for Culture and Palaces, 2016).

## References

- Aagaard, P., & Blach-Ørsten, M. (2018). *Politisk Kommunikation – Nye tider, nye aktører* [Political communication – New times, new actors]. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels.
- Advice. (2012, June 25). *Analyse af lobbyismen i Danmark: Erfaringer og holdninger til lobbyisme blandt politikere i Folketinget, regioner og kommuner* [Analysis of lobbyism in Denmark: Experiences and attitudes to lobbying among politicians in the Danish Parliament, regions, and municipalities]. <https://www.kk.dk/sites/default/files/edoc/Attachments/14199820-16433495-1.pdf>
- Agency for Culture and Palaces. (2016). *Brancheøkonomi og beskæftigelse 2016* [Business economics and employment 2016]. Mediernes udvikling i Danmark 2016 [Media development in Denmark 2016]. <https://mediernesudvikling.slks.dk/2016/branche/brancheoekonomi-og-beskaeftigelse/>
- Agency for Culture and Palaces. (2018). *Overblik og perspektivering 2018* [Overview and perspectives 2018]. Mediernes udvikling i Danmark 2018 [Media development in Denmark 2018]. <https://mediernesudvikling.slks.dk/2018/overblik-og-perspektivering/>
- Ahva, L., van Dalen, A., Hovden, J. F., Kolbeins, G. H., Nilsson, M. L., Skovsgaard, M., & Väli-veronen, J. (2017). A welfare state of mind? Nordic journalists' conception of their role and autonomy in international context. *Journalism Studies*, 18(5), 595–613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1249005>
- Albæk, E., Hopmann, D. N., & de Vreese, C. D. (2010). *Kunsten at holde balancen: Dækningen af folketingsvalgkampe i tv-nyhederne på DR1 og TV2 1994–2007* [The art of keeping the balance: Coverage of parliamentary elections in the news on DR1 and TV2 1994–2007]. Odense, Denmark: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Albæk, E., van Dalen, A., Pihl-Thingvad, S., Skovsgaard, M., & de Vreese, C. (2015). *Den danske journalist* [The Danish journalist]. Odense, Denmark: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Andersen, J. G., Andersen, J., Borre, O., Hansen, K. M., & Nielsen, H. J. (2005). *Det nye politiske landskab* [The new political landscape]. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels.
- Andersen, M. B., & Poulsen, J. (1974). *Mediesociologi* [Media sociology]. Copenhagen: Rhodos.
- Binderkrantz, A. S. (2012). Interest groups in the media: Bias and diversity over time. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51(1), 117–139. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.01997.x>
- Blach-Ørsten, M., Eberholst, M. K., & Burkal, R. (2017a). From hybrid media system to hybrid-media politicians: Danish politicians and their cross-media presence in the 2015 national election campaign. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 14(4), 334–347. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2017.1369917>
- Blach-Ørsten, M., Hartley, J. M., & Flensburg, S. (2015). Denmark: Voluntary accountability driven by political pressure. In T. Eberwein, S. Fengler, & M. Karmasin (Eds.), *The European handbook of media accountability* (pp. 54–62). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315616353>
- Blach-Ørsten, M., & Kristensen, N. N. (2016). Think tanks in Denmark: Media visibility and network relations. *Politik*, 19(1), 22–42. <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v19i1.27399>

- Blach-Ørsten, M., Willig, I., & Pedersen, L. H. (2017b). PR, lobbyism and democracy: Mapping the revolving door in Denmark from 1981 to 2015. *Nordicom Review*, 38(2), 19–31. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0405>
- Blom-Hansen, J. (2000). Still corporatism in Scandinavia? A survey of recent empirical findings. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 23(2), 157–181. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.00035>
- Blomqvist, P., & Green-Pedersen, C. (2004). Defeat at home? Issue-ownership and social democratic support in Scandinavia. *Government and Opposition*, 39(4), 587–613. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00137.x>
- Bondebjerg, I. (1976). *Proletarisk offentlighed* [Proletarian public]. Copenhagen: Medusa.
- Borre, O. (2005). Issue voting i Danmark 2001–2005 [Issue voting in Denmark 2001–2005]. In J. G. Andersen, J. Andersen, O. Borre, K. M. Hansen, & H. J. Nielsen (Eds.), *Det nye politiske landskab – Folketingsvalget 2005 i perspektiv* [The new political landscape – The 2005 parliamentary elections in perspective] (pp. 177–194). Aarhus, Denmark: Academica.
- Bächler, C. M., & Hopmann, D. N. (2017). Denmark: The rise of the Danish People's Party. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 39–51). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623016>
- Campbell, J. L., & Pedersen, O. K. (2014). *The national origins of policy ideas: Knowledge regimes in the United States, France, Germany, and Denmark*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Christiansen, P. M., & Rommetvedt, H. (1999). From corporatism to lobbyism? – Parliaments, executives, and organized interests in Denmark and Norway. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 22(3), 195–220. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.00013>
- Christiansen, P. M. (2017). Still the corporatist darlings? *The Routledge handbook of Scandinavian politics* (pp. 36–48). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315695716>
- Danish Union of Journalists. (2019). *DJ in English*. <https://journalistforbundet.dk/dj-english>
- Elmelund-Præstekær, C., Müller, L., & Rasmussen, L. N. (2010). Soft news i 2007-valgkampen: Balanceret, men ukritisk snak om mennesker i politik [Soft news in the 2007 Danish national election campaign: Balanced, but uncritical talk about people in politics]. *Journalistica*, 4(1), 88–139. <https://doi.org/10.7146/journalistica.v4i1.2138>
- Engell, H. [Minister of Justice]. (1991). *L 132 Forslag til medieansvarslov* [Law 132 media liability act]. Folketinget. <https://www.folketingstidende.dk/samling/19902/lovforslag/L132/index.htm>
- Esmark, A., & Ørsten, M. (2008). Media and politics in Denmark. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 25–44). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Flensburg, S. (2015). Danske mediestøtte 1960–2014: Fra økonomisk kompensation til publicistisk motivation [Danish media subsidies 1960–2014: From economic compensation to publicist motivation]. *MedieKultur*, 31(58), 85–103. <https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v31i58.18286>
- Gallup. (2018). *Læsertal fra Index Danmark/Gallup 2. Kvarter + 3. kvartal 2018* [Readership from Index Denmark/Gallup 2nd Quarter + 3rd Quarter 2018]. Copenhagen: Kantar Gallup.
- Green-Pedersen, C. (2006). Long-term changes in Danish party politics: The rise and importance of issue competition. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 29(3), 219–235. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2006.00150.x>
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hansen, K. M., & Kosiara-Pedersen, K. (2015). *Kortlægning af den kommunale valgkamp: Kandidatundersøgelse ved kommunalvalget 2013* [Mapping the municipal election campaign: Candidate survey at the 2013 municipal elections]. University of Copenhagen: Centre for Voting and Parties.
- Harrie, E. (2019, September 18). *The Nordics replace licence fee with public service tax*. Nordicom. <https://www.nordicom.gu.se/en/latest/news/nordics-replace-licence-fee-public-service-tax>
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of society: A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change. *Nordicom Review*, 29(2), 102–131. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0181>
- Hjarvard, S., & Kammer, A. (2015). Online news: Between private enterprise and public subsidy. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(1), 115–123. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443714553562>
- Ihlen, Ø., & Gullberg, A. T. (2015). Lobbyisme: Påvirkning av politikere og byråkrater [Lobbyism: The influence of politicians and bureaucrats]. In Ø. Ihlen, E. Skogerbø, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt*,



- medier og politik: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon [Power, media, and politics: Norwegian political communication]* (pp. 232–243). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Jensen, C. (2016, October 9). Derfor bringer vi PET-bogen [That's why we bring the PET book]. *Politiken*. <https://politiken.dk/indland/art5639353/Derfor-bringer-vi-PET-bogen>
- Jensen, J. L., Hoff, J., & Klastrup, L. (2016). *Internettet og folketingsvalget 2015 [The Internet and the 2015 parliamentary elections]*. Copenhagen: Danske Medier Research. <https://blog.itu.dk/decidis/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2016/08/Internettet-i-FTvalget-2015-Hoff-Jensen-Klastrup.pdf>
- Jensen, K. B. (1988). News as a social resource: A qualitative empirical study of the reception of Danish television news. *European Journal of Communication*, 3(3), 275–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323188003003003>
- Jensen, K. B. (1995). *Borgerlige ord: Modtagernes perspektiv på nyhedsmediernes i den demokratiske proces [Civil words: The recipients' perspective on the news media in the democratic process]*. Copenhagen: Statsministeriets Medieudvalg.
- Jensen, K. B. (2001). *Dansk Mediehistorie bind 2: 1880–1920 og 1920–1960 [Danish media history volume 2: 1880–1920 and 1920–1960]*. Frederiksberg, Denmark: Samfundslitteratur.
- Kammer, A. (2016). A welfare perspective on Nordic media subsidies. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 13(3), 140–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2016.1238272>
- Kammer, A. (2017). Market structure and innovation policies in Denmark. In H. van Kranenburg (Ed.), *Innovation policies in the European news market* (pp. 37–47). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-45204-3>
- Kelstrup, J. (2016). Tænketankes brug af dagbladene som et marked for politiske ideer i Danmark [Think tanks' use the newspapers as a market for political ideas in Denmark]. *Politik*, 19(1), 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v19i1.27392>
- Kristensen, N. N. (2000). Journalistik som profession: Om journalistens rolleplacering i et professionssociologisk perspektiv [Journalism as a profession: About the journalist's role from the perspective of the sociology of professions]. In F. Henriksen (Ed.), *Sekvens 2000 – Film- & Mediesociologi Årbog [Sequence 2000 – Film & media sociology yearbook]* (pp. 159–184). Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen.
- Kristensen, N. N. (2003). *Udfordringen af journalistikken i lyset af kildernes professionalisering – slinger i valsen? [The challenge of journalism in the light of the sources' professionalisation – is there a hitch?]* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Copenhagen, Denmark].
- Kristensen, N. N., & Blach-Ørsten, M. (2015). Politisk kommunikation i Danmark [Political communication in Denmark]. In Ø. Ihlen, E. Skogerbø, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt, medier og politik: Norsk politisk kommunikation [Power, media, and politics: Norwegian political communication]*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Lund, A. B., & Ørsten, M. (2004). *Nyhedsmediernes dækning af valget til Europa-Parlamentet [News media coverage of the European elections]*. Copenhagen: Modinet.
- Ministry of Culture. (2013, December 26). *Lov om mediestøtte [Law of media subsidy]*. Retsinformation. <https://www.retsinformation.dk/eli/lta/2013/1604>
- Ministry of Culture. (2018, June 29). *Medieaftale for 2019–2023 [Media agreement for 2019–2023]*. <https://www.regeringen.dk/media/5470/29062018endelig-mediaaftale-2019-2023.pdf>
- Ministry of Finance. (2004, June). *Embedsmænds rådgivning og bistand: Betænkning fra udvalget om embedsmænds rådgivning og bistand til regeringen og dens ministre [Civil service advice and assistance: Report from the committee of civil service advice and assistance to the government and its ministers]*. Betænkning 1443 [Report 1443]. Albertslund, Denmark: Schultz. <https://fm.dk/udgivelser/2004/juni/betaenkning-nr-1443-embedsmaends-raadgivning-og-bistand/>
- Ministry of Finance. (2013, May). *Ministrenes særlige rådgivere – et serviceeftersyn: Betænkning fra udvalget om særlige rådgivere [Ministers' special advisers – a service review: Report from the expert committee on special advisors]*. Betænkning 1537 [Report 1537]. Albertslund, Denmark: Schultz. <https://fm.dk/udgivelser/2013/maj/betaenkning-nr-1537-om-ministrenes-saerlige-raadgivere-et-serviceeftersyn/>
- Ministry of the State. (1953, June 5). *The constitutional act of Denmark* [Translation from Danish]. [https://www.stm.dk/\\_p\\_10992.html](https://www.stm.dk/_p_10992.html)

- Möller, T. (2009). *Lobbyism i den svenska riksdagen [Lobbyism in the Swedish parliament]*. <http://www.precis.se/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/RAPPORT-Lobbyism-i-den-svenska-riksdagen.1.pdf>
- Nielsen, R. K., & Schrøder, K. C. (2014). *Danskernes brug af digitale medier og nyheder 2014 [Danes' use of digital media and news 2014]*. Roskilde, Denmark: Roskilde University. [http://medienorge.uib.no/files/Eksterne\\_pub/Danskernes\\_brug\\_af\\_digitale\\_medier\\_og\\_nyheder\\_i\\_2014.pdf](http://medienorge.uib.no/files/Eksterne_pub/Danskernes_brug_af_digitale_medier_og_nyheder_i_2014.pdf)
- Ohlsson, J. (2015). *The Nordic media market*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Pedersen, O. K., Kjær, P., Esmark, A., Horst, M., & Carlsen, E. M. (2000). *Politisk journalistik [Political journalism]*. Aarhus, Denmark: Ajour.
- Phillips, L., & Schrøder, K. (2004). *Sådan taler medier og borgere om politik: En diskursanalytisk undersøgelse af politik i det medialiserede samfund [This is how media and citizens talk about politics: A discourse analytic study of politics in the mediated society]*. [https://unipress.dk/media/14521/87-7934-838-6\\_s\\_dan\\_taler\\_medier\\_og\\_borgere\\_om\\_politik.pdf](https://unipress.dk/media/14521/87-7934-838-6_s_dan_taler_medier_og_borgere_om_politik.pdf)
- Pollack, E., Allern, S., Kantola, A. M., & Ørsten, M. (2018). The new normal: Scandals as a standard feature of political life in Nordic countries. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 3087–3108. <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-72289>
- Rigsarkiv. (n.d.). *Grundloven 1849 [Constitutional act 1849]*. <https://www.sa.dk/ao-soegesider/da/billedviser?epid=21194907#333645,67208826>
- Rommetvedt, H., Thesen, G., Christiansen P. M., & Nørgaard, A. S. (2013). Coping with corporatism in decline and the revival of parliament interest group lobbyism in Denmark and Norway, 1980–2005. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(4), 457–485. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012453712>
- Schlutz, I. (2007). Fra partipresse over omnibuspresse til segmentpresse [From party press, over omnibus press, to segmented press]. *Journalistica*, 2(5), 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.7146/journalistica.v2i5.1807>
- Schrøder, K. C., & Ørsten, M. (2018). Denmark. In N. Newman, R. Fletcher, A. Kalogeropoulos, D. A. L. Levy, & R. K. Nielsen (Eds.), *Reuters Institute digital news report 2018* (pp. 74–75). Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <http://www.digitalnews-report.org/survey/2018/denmark-2018/>
- Schrøder, K., Blach-Ørsten, M., & Eberholst, M. K. (2018). *Danskernes brug af nyhedsmedier 2018 [Danes' use of news media 2018]*. Centre for News Research, Roskilde University. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1285599>
- Schrøder, K., Blach-Ørsten, M., & Eberholst, M. K. (2019). *Danskernes brug af nyhedsmedier 2019 [Danes' use of news media 2019]*. Centre for News Research, Roskilde University. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3243164>
- Siune, K., & Borre, O. (1975). Setting the agenda for a Danish election. *Journal of Communication*, 25(1), 65–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1975.tb00555.x>
- Siune, K. (1982). *Valgkampe i tv og radio: Politiske partiers anvendelse af tv og radio, herunder samspillet med journalisterne [Election campaigns in TV and radio: Political parties' use of TV and radio, including the interaction with journalists]*. Politica.
- Siune, K. (1993). The Danes said NO to the Maastricht treaty: The Danish EC referendum of June 1992. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 16(1), 93–103. [https://tidsskrift.dk/scandinavian\\_political\\_studies/article/view/32783/31016](https://tidsskrift.dk/scandinavian_political_studies/article/view/32783/31016)
- Skovsgaard, M., Albæk, E., Bro, P., & de Vreese, C. (2012). Media professionals or organizational marionettes? In D. H. Weaver, & L. Willnat (Eds.), *The global journalist in the 21st century* (pp. 155–170). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203148679>
- Strömbäck, J., Ørsten, M., & Aalberg, T. (2008). Political communication in the Nordic countries: An introduction. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.) *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 11–24). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Svith, F., Jacobsen, P. F., Rasmussen, S. K., Jensen, J. L., & Andersen, H. T. (2017). *Lokal- og regionalmediers indhold, rolle og betydning i lokaalområder [Content, role, and significance of local and regional media in local areas]*. Copenhagen: The Agency for Culture and Palaces.

- Syvvertsen, T., Enli, G., Mjøs, O. J., & Hallvard, M. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital age*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- Søndergaard, H., & Helles, R. (2014). Media policy and new regulatory systems in Denmark. In E. Psychogiopoulou (Ed.), *Media policies revisited: The challenge for media freedom and independence* (pp. 41–54). London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137337849>
- Thomsen, S. R. (2001). Tripelvalget 2001: Valgvind, meningsmålinger og valgkamp [The triple election 2001: Election winds, polls and election campaign]. *Politica*, 34(1), 98–112. <https://doi.org/10.7146/politica.v34i1.69885>
- Vesa, J., Kantola, A., & Binderkrantz, A. S. (2018). A stronghold of routine corporatism? The involvement of interest groups in policy making in Finland. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 41(4), 239–262. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12128>
- Öberg, P. O., Svensson, T., Christiansen, P. M., Nørgaard, A. S., Rommetvedt, H., & Thesen, G. (2011). Disrupted exchange and declining corporatism: Government authority and interest group capability in Scandinavia. *Government and Opposition*, 46(3), 365–391. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2011.01343.x>



## Chapter 3

# Media and politics in Iceland

Jón Gunnar Ólafsson & Valgerður Jóhannsdóttir

### Abstract

This chapter outlines the political and media landscapes in Iceland in comparison to the other four Nordic countries. The political communication literature routinely groups the Nordic countries together and defines them in terms of a Nordic model. Iceland has, however, seldom been included in this literature, and research on political communication in the country is scarce. The chapter shows that the Icelandic media and political systems differ in significant ways from those in the other Nordic countries. Corporatism is less developed in Iceland, as is journalistic professionalism, and remnants of political parallelism have carried over to a highly commercial media system. This has operated without the public service requirements or support for private media that characterise the other Nordic countries. Iceland was particularly impacted by the 2008 financial crisis, and the years following have seen various changes regarding media and politics. Recent developments indicate that the Icelandic system might be becoming more similar to the other Nordic countries.

**Keywords:** Iceland, Nordic model, media system, political communication, journalism

## Introduction

This chapter introduces developments and changes in the media structure in Iceland in recent years and examines the relationship between media and politics in the small country. First, we introduce the main actors and institutions in the political and media systems in Iceland. We illustrate how the established four-party system has recently given way to a more fragmented and fluid political system following the 2008 financial crisis. We also show how rapid economic, political, and technological changes have impacted the Icelandic media landscape.

Second, we demonstrate how the Icelandic political and media systems differ from the other Nordic countries. Iceland is routinely ignored in political com-

munication research, and when mentioned, it is often simply grouped together with Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland and defined as some sort of “Nordic model”. We show that this is problematic. Available studies and data focusing on the Icelandic case paint a picture of a highly commercial media system, but with less-developed journalistic professionalism and without the public service requirements or public support of private media that characterise the other four Nordic countries. Remnants of political parallelism from the past have carried over to a new media system moving closer to the liberal model, and Iceland shares similarities with the polarised pluralist countries when it comes to a tight bond between the political and business spheres and a weak media regulatory body.

Third, we outline the existing political communication research on Iceland. It is difficult to define specific theoretical perspectives in relation to this research, since political communication is an under-developed field of study in Iceland. Much of the scarce research that does exist has focused on mapping the structural landscape and catching up with foundational research that has been carried out in the other Nordic countries in recent years and decades. Recently, however, more scholars have entered the field with new insights on media and politics. Finally, we discuss the challenges to political communication research in Iceland and highlight areas for future studies.

## The political landscape

Iceland is a parliamentary republic. It became a sovereign state in 1918 but remained in a royal union with Denmark until 1944, when it adopted its republican constitution. *Alþingi*, the Icelandic legislature, is a unicameral parliament. It consists of 63 members who are elected in six multimember constituencies by two-tier proportional representation (the d’Hondt method). Fifty-four members are elected according to constituency results whilst the nine remaining supplementary seats are allocated on the basis of national results amongst the parties obtaining at least 5 per cent of the national vote (Harðarson, 2008).

Historically, there have been four main parties in the Icelandic party system that took shape between 1916–1930. The traditional four types of parties are easily recognisable when compared to similar European parties. They consist of a conservative party (the Independence Party), an agrarian or centre party (the Progressive Party), a social democratic party, and a left-socialist or communist party. A restructuring has regularly taken place on the left side of the political spectrum, and the two parties to the left are now called the Social Democratic Alliance and the Left-Green Movement. In addition to these four parties, there have usually been one or at most two other smaller parties represented in the Icelandic parliament (Harðarson, 2008; Önnudóttir & Harðarson, 2018).

The 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath shook the foundation of Icelandic politics, including the four-party system. The collapse of all major banks in Iceland caused economic and political turmoil and spurred massive protests in the country, often referred to as the “pots and pans revolution” (Bernburg, 2016). Although the economy has recovered remarkably well (Jónsson & Sigurgeirsson, 2017), there is still considerable political instability, witnessed recently by early elections following the Panama Papers scandal in 2016 and early elections again in the autumn of 2017 (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018). Trust in various institutions in Iceland collapsed following the crisis. In February 2008, a few months before the crisis hit, 42 per cent of Icelanders said they trusted the Icelandic parliament – a year later, trust had plummeted to only 13 per cent. In 2012, trust in the parliament hit an all-time low of 10 per cent, and the most recent poll in 2020 measured it at 23 per cent (Gallup, 2020). As Bjarnason (2014) illustrates, trust in most institutions fell particularly sharply in Iceland in comparison to other countries. Various studies have shown that public trust is more likely to fall in countries that go through an economic crisis when compared with countries that do better in economic terms. This is not necessarily suggesting causation, but this correlation has been shown in various studies, as Bjarnason illustrates.

The years following the financial crisis have seen a substantial change in the vote share of the four established political parties, as well as the number of political parties represented in the Alþingi. Until the election of 2013, the four parties usually received a total of around 85–90 per cent of the vote in parliamentary elections. In 2013, the four parties received 75 per cent, and this shrunk even further to 63 per cent in 2016 and 65 per cent in 2017. The established parties appear to have lost their dominant status following the crisis, creating a vacuum for new political parties and voices to emerge. Since the 2009 election, there have been six new political parties in the Icelandic parliament. Four of them – the Pirate Party, the People’s Party, the Centre Party, and the Reform Party – won representation in the parliament in the 2017 election. This means that there are currently eight political parties represented in the Alþingi – a record number. The Icelandic Election Study (ICENES) illustrates that the proportion of partisan voters has been declining. In 1983, the proportion of respondents who said that they supported a particular party was 50.2 per cent, but in 2016, this number had almost halved, with only 29.5 per cent claiming to support a party (Önnudóttir & Harðarson, 2018). Put simply, there are more political parties now than ever before, and Icelandic voters are more willing to switch their support than they were previously.

In general, neoliberalism has been more influential in Icelandic politics and policy-making than in the other Nordic countries (Jónsson, 2014; Ólafsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2014). This is not surprising considering the historically dominant role of the conservative Independence Party. Iceland deviates from the Scandi-

navian norm of strong social democratic parties. The Independence Party has been by far the most dominant political force in the country, enjoying around 40 per cent of the votes in the pre-crisis four-party era. It has also been the most dominant party in government; in the 76 years since the foundation of the republic, the party has been in government for 57 years. It has been “the party of officialdom and the establishment of Iceland” (Kristinsson, 2012: 189). However, in the post-crisis era, the vote share of the Independence Party has shrunk substantially, with the party winning 25.2 per cent of the vote share in the 2017 election (Statistics Iceland, 2017a).

Iceland has a multiparty system and proportional representation, but power sharing, compromise, and cooperation between opposing forces is not a very fitting description of Icelandic politics, unlike Hallin and Mancini’s (2004) description of the Nordic system (Harðarson, 2008; Jónsson, 2014; Kristinsson, 2018; Skogerbø et al., Chapter 1). Jónsson (2014: 11) notes that the main division of power has not been between the legislative and executive branches of government, “but between the majority and minority in Parliament”. Kristinsson (2018: 5) argues that privileged access to state power was crucial in the patronage network of parties and politicians that characterised Icelandic politics, which in return “encouraged political conflict and competition for power”. Unlike the other Nordic countries, minority governments have usually not been tolerated (Jónsson, 2014) as there have only been four minority governments in Iceland since the foundation of the republic in 1944.

The distinction between majority and consensus rule is connected to the political role of interest groups in society, or in other words, the level of corporatism. Corporatism developed late in Iceland and only in limited areas of policy. Jónsson (2014) argues that this can largely be explained by the political weakness of the social democrats and the left. Nonetheless, the media system in Iceland in the twentieth century bore more resemblance to organised pluralism – typical in both the democratic corporatist countries and the polarised pluralist countries – than the individual pluralism prevalent in the liberal countries. Organised pluralism is associated with external pluralism and political parallelism in the media, and the Icelandic press had strong ties to political parties until the end of the twentieth century. Each of the national newspapers was affiliated to one of the four main political parties (Harðarson, 2008). The political parties dominated most spheres of society, including foreign trade, banking, literature, housing, and jobs in the government and the media (Jóhannsdóttir, 2019; Kristinsson, 2012). This is a characteristic that Iceland shares with the polarised pluralist countries, where clientelism was strong through much of the twentieth century and whose legacy Hallin and Mancini (2004: 58) claim “is still important to understanding the media system in that region”. The Icelandic media system, similar to the political one, in some ways differs from the systems in the other four Nordic countries.



## The media landscape

In the 1970s and onward, the political parties' hold on society in general – and the media in particular – began to subside. Political parallelism in the media gave way to more market-driven media. The political parties' hold on the publicly funded National Broadcasting Service (RÚV) started to lessen in the last decades of the twentieth century (Guðmundsson, 2009; Harðarson, 2008). In 1997, the last political party newspaper ceased publication, and the first Icelandic online news publication appeared in 1998 (Friðriksson, 2000). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the first free daily newspaper was launched (Karlsson, 2004).

The media system that emerged in Iceland in the beginning of the twenty-first century was characterised by a high supply of all forms of media. The quantity and diversity are perhaps greater than might be expected in a country of around 360 thousand people (Statistics Iceland, n.d.). At the time of writing in 2020, there are two national daily newspapers, two weeklies, one biweekly, and several online news sites with no links to traditional media, all of which play an increasingly prominent part in the provision of daily news. There are also some specialised publications, as well as regional and local papers, but most of them are small, and local media have always been weak in Iceland (Guðmundsson, 2006; Statistics Iceland, n.d.). The Icelandic media market is dominated by four media companies, in terms of revenue, audience share, and number of journalists employed: RÚV and three private media companies, Torg, Sýn, and Árvakur.

The Icelandic media market has been in turmoil in recent years and mergers and takeovers have been frequent. Until 2017, the company 365 Media was by far the biggest private media company in Iceland, operating several television and radio stations, newspapers and online sites, as well as magazines and telecoms. However, in March 2017, the broadcasting part of 365 Media was sold to Sýn (Vodafone Iceland), which is now the only private actor in broadcasting that has its own news operation, Channel 2 (Stöð 2) and radio Bylgjan. Sýn also took over *Vísir*,<sup>1</sup> the second most-read online news site in the country. The free paper *Fréttablaðið*, the most-read newspaper in Iceland, and an online news site of the same name,<sup>2</sup> was part of 365 Media and is now owned by the company Torg. The company also publishes the tabloid newspaper *DV* and its online counterpart.<sup>3</sup> *DV* has had a somewhat rocky past; its ownership has changed hands several times and so has its publication frequency, now published once a week (B. Þ. Guðmundsson, 2017). Torg also owns the talk show television station Hringbraut and its online counterpart.<sup>4</sup>

The third large private company is Árvakur. It publishes *Morgunblaðið*, Iceland's oldest newspaper, with historical links to the conservative Independence Party. The paper dominated the newspaper market for most of the twentieth

century, both in terms of circulation and revenue. However, it lost its leading position when free papers entered the scene. *Morgunblaðið*'s website, *Mbl*,<sup>5</sup> on the other hand, has been the most-read online news site in Iceland since its foundation in 1998. Árvakur was near bankruptcy after the 2008 financial crash and was consequently taken over by one of the banks and sold to a group of investors with ties to the fishing industry in 2009 (Guðmundsson, 2013; Kolbeins, 2015).

In addition to these private companies, there is the public broadcaster RÚV, which has maintained a strong and stable position in the media market despite increasing competition, not least by online media (Ohlsson, 2015). In 2020, RÚV was, as the other Nordic public service corporations, funded by a broadcasting tax (Ohlsson, 2015; Schweizer & Puppis, 2017) and allowed to carry advertisements and advertising sales amounting to approximately one-third of its revenue (RÚV, 2015). In this sense, RÚV has also always been a commercial station (Brodðason & Karlsson, 2005), but it is not permitted to sell advertisements online. Its share of the total revenue of the media in Iceland is around 20 per cent and has been stable since the turn of the century (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018).

In addition, the Icelandic news media market encompasses one weekly business paper, *Viðskiptablaðið*, one weekly free paper focusing on news and culture, *Mannlíf*, and two small national media outlets, *Stundin*<sup>6</sup> and *Kjarninn*.<sup>7</sup> Both were founded by journalists and, though not the most-read news sites in the country, have been quite influential and often cited in the mainstream media. *Stundin* is subscription based and is also published in print twice a month. *Kjarninn* is financed by advertising and its content is open to everyone, but it also receives substantial revenue from a monthly voluntary subscription (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018). In addition to its online news site, *Kjarninn* publishes the weekly magazine *Vísbending*, focusing on business and economics.

It is a distinctive characteristic of the Icelandic press market that it has “produced neither elite-oriented quality papers nor extremely populist tabloids” (Karlsson, 2004: 242). In a market as small as the Icelandic one, there is little room for readership segregation based on purchasing capacity and other socioeconomic divisions, and Icelandic newspapers mostly cater for readership among the general population. The strong position of the free papers in the Icelandic media market is also somewhat unique. In 2010, Iceland and Luxemburg were the only European countries where the penetration of free newspapers was higher than that of their paid-for counterparts (Bakker, 2013; see also Karlsson, 2009). The free papers have been general-purpose papers with serious coverage of domestic and international news, not down-market tabloids, and delivered to people’s homes (Bakker, 2008).

Newspaper circulation and readership in Iceland has traditionally been very high, but it is declining. The publication of the free paper *Fréttablaðið* in 2002

did increase newspaper penetration, or at least postponed its decline, but its circulation is also dwindling (Harrie, 2017). Whilst newspaper readership has been in steady decline for a long time, online news reaches increasingly more people. By far the most-read online news sources are Árvakur's website *Mbl* and Sýn's *Vísir*. As in the other Nordic countries, the Internet is ubiquitous, with 99 per cent of Icelanders between the ages of 16 and 74 using the Internet regularly (Internet World Stats). Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform – with a total of 93 per cent using it regularly – and more Icelanders are on social media compared to their Nordic cousins (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018).

In economic terms, Icelandic media expanded tremendously towards the end of the past century and in the first years of the twenty-first century. From 1995 to 2008, television revenue more than doubled, and the revenue growth in radio and newspapers were 56 and 51 per cent, respectively (online editions included) (Karlsson, 2009; Statistics Iceland, 2018). The new media system that emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century was, however, not only characterised by a high supply of all forms of media but also by increasing commercialisation, convergence, and intense ownership concentration in private media (Harðarson, 2008). Also, with the Media Act of 2011, a new administrative commission was established (the Media Commission), which carries out the supervision of the media market and attends to day-to-day administration in the fields covered by the law (Act no. 38, 2011).

The financial crisis that rocked the economies of countries in Western Europe in 2008 was a blow to a media industry already in turmoil. Iceland was particularly impacted by the financial crisis. The ensuing political and economic turmoil in the country has received substantial academic attention from political scientists, economists, sociologists, and historians, among others (Bernburg, 2016; Indriðason et al., 2017; Jóhannesson, 2009; Johnsen, 2014; Jónsson, 2009). Less attention, however, has been paid to investigating developments in the Icelandic media in the aftermath of the crisis, even though the crisis affected the media in many ways (with the notable exception of Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018).

Between 2007 and 2010, the revenues of media companies in Iceland declined by approximately a quarter, and in 2018, they were still 17 per cent lower than before the financial crisis (Statistics Iceland, 2018). According to Friðrik Þór Guðmundsson (2016: 41) the total turnover of the five largest media companies “almost halved between the years 2007 and 2009, measured in fixed prices”. The advertising revenue of the media fell by 68 per cent from its peak in 2007–2009, calculated in 2015 fixed prices (Statistics Iceland, 2017b). As a result, some publications ceased to exist, and others downsized. Almost a third of the journalist population was laid off, among them many experienced journalists (Jóhannsdóttir, 2015; Kolbeins, 2012).

As noted earlier in the chapter, trust in various institutions fell drastically following the financial crisis. Trust in the media was not measured regularly in Iceland before the crisis, but Markaðs- og miðlarannsóknir [Market and Media Research] has measured trust in the media since December 2008 (Markaðs- og miðlarannsóknir, n.d.). At this time, only 23 per cent of Icelanders said that they trusted the media as a whole. Seven other institutions were less trusted, including the government (19%), the parliament (18%), the Financial Supervisory Authority (5%), and the banking system (5%). In a comparable survey conducted in May 2009 (following the “pots and pans” protests and the fall of the government in February of the same year), trust in the media as a whole had fallen from 23 per cent to 15 per cent. In the years following, trust in the media has never reached higher than 19 per cent (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018).

Trust in “the media” or “the press” as an institution is one thing, and trust in individual media outlets is another. As seen in Table 3.1, trust in most individual Icelandic outlets is considerably higher than in the media as a whole from 2009–2016. Trust in RÚV has remained consistently the highest during this whole period, from 69–79 per cent.

**Table 3.1** Trust in Icelandic media outlets (per cent)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2016
RÚV news	70	79	72	75	77	71	69
Channel 2 news	36	44	42	45	44	41	41
Mbl	54	52	50	51	50	47	41
Morgunblaðið	52	46	43	45	46	41	37
Fréttablaðið	34	35	37	41	39	35	30
Vísir	24	30	33	35	35	34	33
Viðskiptablaðið	22	26	26	33	31	26	27
Stundin	–	–	–	–	–	–	26
Kjarninn	–	–	–	–	–	27	31
DV	4	9	9	10	10	14	7

*Comments:* The figures show the share of respondents who state they trust the outlets “very much” or “fairly much”. Figures following 2016 have not been released by the company at the time of writing.

*Source:* Market and Media Research, n.d.

## Iceland: A (not so) Nordic system?

Nordic media is often used as an example of media industries that have been able to provide users with socially relevant content and at the same time flourish as successful businesses. Furthermore, Nordic citizens repeatedly rank high in international comparisons of political knowledge (Curran et al., 2009; McQuail, 1992). The media system in Iceland has in many respects developed in a way

similar to the other Nordic countries, but there are also important differences (see Skogerbø et al., Chapter 1).

Harðarson (2008) previously analysed the Icelandic media system, using Hallin and Mancini's (2004) framework, and placed the country within the democratic corporatist model. He made a distinction between the old system, which in some ways shared features with the polarised pluralist model, and the new media system of the twenty-first century, which "clearly has moved towards the liberal model in many respects" (Harðarson, 2008: 79). Other Nordic academics have argued that neoliberalism has been more influential in Iceland than in the other Nordic countries and that its media system has moved closer to the liberal model (Ahva et al., 2017; Syvertsen et al., 2014).

Corporatism is less developed in Iceland than in the other Nordic countries, as outlined earlier in the chapter in relation to Icelandic politics. State involvement has been limited to RÚV whilst all other media outlets are based on commercial grounds. Private media has not been subject to regulation or requirements aimed at ensuring media pluralism and public service journalism, like private media in the other Nordic countries has (Guðmundsson & Kristinsson, 2019; Harðarson, 2008; Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018; Karlsson & Broddason, 2018). The press does not receive any direct subsidies, and the state's involvement in the newspaper industry has been very limited. "To this extent, Iceland does not fit into the model of an active state vis-a-vis the media that is commonly used to describe the Nordic media system", according to Ohlsson (2015: 27).

Karlsson (2004: 227–228) notes that in Iceland "there has strangely enough been virtually unanimous agreement across the political spectrum from the right to the left, contending that the press and the private media in general should be left to themselves". Before the 2008 financial crisis, that was also the prevalent view of private media companies and the Union of Icelandic Journalists. However, this view has changed. A committee established in December 2016 to examine the economic situation of private media in Iceland concluded that it was worrying in light of the media's important role in democratic societies; the committee put forward several proposals to ease the difficulties (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2018). In autumn 2019, legislation proposing press subsidies for private media was tabled in the parliament. According to the bill, news media companies that fulfil certain requirements, such as publishing regularly for the general public, producing diverse content of societal importance, and reporting original content at least in part, will be eligible for a refund of up to 18 per cent of their production cost (Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið, 2019). The ministry looked to the arrangement of press subsidies in the other Nordic countries. The new bill would constitute a major change in Icelandic media policy. It was met with considerable opposition, both from parties outside the government, as well as from the Independence Party, one of the three parties currently in

government. The bill did not become law before the parliamentary recess in early summer of 2020.

There are indications of increased partisanship – or instrumentalisation – of the media in the last decade. Owners of private media companies have openly claimed that their objective was to influence public opinion. In 2009, a group of investors with interests in the fishing industry acquired the publishing company *Árvakur*. In an interview, a shareholder stated that an objective of the investment was to influence public debates and political decisions. Another example is the decision by Exista (a big investment company) in 2007 to invest in the business paper *Viðskiptablaðið*. One of the owners claimed this was necessary, as almost all other media outlets were in the hands of two other main business blocks (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018).

Guðmundsson (2013) argues that elements of political parallelism have carried over into the new era of commercial media. The perception of a connection between traditional media and political parties is deep-rooted, and politicians in particular appear to have very little confidence in journalistic professionalism or the impartiality of the news media. Guðmundsson (2013: 510) also states that the historical proximity of political parallelism, a relatively recent professionalisation of journalists, an unregulated media environment, and an “extreme ownership concentration of the media, where ownership powers and political parties became mixed with each other”, have led to the development of a “politically commercial media system”. Ohlsson and Facht (2017: 93) also remark that the Icelandic media market is “characterised by a comparatively tight bond between the political sphere and the domestic enterprise sector” and associations with external stakeholders contribute “to the relationships in the media market being more problematic than they are in the other Nordic countries”.

Iceland has a history of the state playing a large role in the economy (Kristinsson, 1996), just like the states in polarised pluralist countries in Southern Europe. A weak media regulatory body is another element Iceland has in common with polarised pluralist countries (Hallin & Papathanassopoulos, 2002). The Icelandic Media Commission has broad functions and duties but has been underfinanced and understaffed from the very beginning: its board of five and staff of three are responsible for supervising the Icelandic media market, both private media and RÚV, in accordance with Iceland’s media legislation. This includes collecting and publishing data about the media market as well as handling complaints about the conduct of individual media outlets. The commission’s role is also to promote media literacy and diversity in the media and to guard freedom of speech and the public’s right to information, to name but a few of its many duties (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018).

RÚV holds a very strong position in the media market in Iceland, appears to retain a high level of legitimacy, and enjoys far more trust than other me-

dia in Iceland, as outlined earlier. Hallin and Mancini (2004: 167) posit that the Nordic countries tend to organise their public service companies in “the direction of the professional model, according to which the running of Public Service Broadcasting is left to professionals in order to avoid political involvement”. Moe and Mjøs (2013: 88) also argue that the “running and supervision of Public Service Broadcasting in the Nordic countries are characterized, although in different ways and to varying degrees, by a separation between the institutions and the political powers”. However, these studies did not include Iceland, and Jóhannsdóttir (2019) argues that the Icelandic system of broadcast governance, in effect, resembles more what Hallin and Mancini (2004: 48) call the “government model”.

RÚV enjoys less institutional autonomy than public service broadcasting companies in the other Nordic countries and has been subject to more political interference. Policy and regulations around the Nordic public service broadcasting companies have generally been rather stable, whereas legislation regarding RÚV has been subject to frequent changes, depending on the composition of the political majority in parliament at the time (Karlsson & Broddason, 2018). Kristinsson’s (2012) study of party patronage in Iceland illustrates attempts by political parties to gain control over not just RÚV but also private media companies, since the media is seen as being of strategic importance in politics. RÚV was made a state-owned limited company in 2013. This was said to increase its autonomy from the legislative and executive powers. However, some argue that the change from a license fee to a broadcasting tax to finance RÚV’s operations has created a very unclear situation for the company and made it more dependent on the state (Engblom, 2013).

### Political communication research in Iceland

We have outlined differences between Iceland and the other four Nordic countries in terms of its media and political systems. Another important difference concerns the few political communication studies in Iceland when compared to Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. It is difficult to define specific theoretical perspectives in existing research in Iceland, since political communication is a minor field of study in the country. The same applies to studies of media and communications more generally.

Much of the scarce political communication research that does exist has focused on mapping the structural landscape and, to some extent, catching up with foundational research that has been carried out in the other Nordic countries in recent years. In relation to this, Icelandic academics have used the work of Hallin and Mancini (2004) to analyse the political and media systems in Iceland and how they differ from those in the other Nordic countries (Guðmundsson,

2013; Harðarson, 2008; Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018). Jóhannsdóttir's (2019) findings suggest that the Icelandic media system does not fit neatly with any of the three models in Hallin and Mancini's typology and is best described as a mixed case or a hybrid system (see also Guðmundsson, 2019).

Three studies have been conducted that examine media content in Iceland through the frameworks of soft news and entertainment, and hard news. Karlsson (2004) found that commercialisation had increased considerably around the turn of the century, not least due to the arrival of free papers, and argued that this had led to a definite trend towards more entertainment news. Guðmundsson (2012) came to a similar conclusion in a study of the three main Icelandic newspapers published from 2008–2010. The proportion of soft news in major printed newspapers had increased considerably from previous years. The findings from a study of hard and soft news coverage in *Fréttablaðið* and *Morgunblaðið*, and their online counterparts, indicated that the daily press published less political and economic news in 2013 than in 2005, whereas the amount of soft news had increased significantly, particularly online (Jóhannsdóttir, 2018).

Election coverage has only been examined in one study. In her analysis of the 2013 parliamentary election coverage, Kolbeins (2016) found a clear tendency for horse-race stories. Guðmundsson (2013) also examined the 2013 elections, but his focus was on examining political candidates' attitudes towards political parallelism and professionalism in the media. His findings suggest that politicians have little faith in professionalisation, impartiality, and balance in the news media in Iceland. In a recent study of how political candidates assessed and used different types of social, local, and news media for election campaign purposes, Guðmundsson (2019) found that several types of media logics coexisted. The study sought to unveil the use of Snapchat in relation to other media and disclosed clear age differences in use; but, candidates' use of Snapchat and other social media did not preclude valuing traditional media highly and vice versa.

Another area of study concerns journalists. Professionalism in journalism began to develop in Iceland somewhat later than in the other Nordic countries. The reasons are primarily rooted in the stronghold of the party press, which meant that politics and political views were an important indicator of a person's ability to work in the media, whilst professionalism was not held in particularly high regard in the field. This changed rapidly as the politicians' hold on the media began to weaken (Guðmundsson, 2013). The education of journalists has greatly improved, and just over two-thirds of Icelandic journalists have a university degree (Kolbeins, 2012); however, in an international context, this is not particularly high. Data from the Worlds of Journalism Study shows that in 53 of the 67 countries studied, 75 per cent or more of the journalists have some form of university education. Furthermore, formal education in journalism is not nearly as common in the Icelandic media as it is in the other Nordic countries. A quarter of Icelandic journalists have a formal degree in journalism or media



studies, compared to 56 per cent in Finland, 64 per cent in Norway, 68 per cent in Sweden, and 82 per cent in Denmark (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2018).

According to Ahva and colleagues (2017), journalists in Iceland (like their Nordic colleagues) consider objective reporting to be very important in their work and see themselves as detached watchdogs. Their professional identity is also one of autonomy, experiencing little influence from politics or economic forces in their daily work (Ahva et al., 2017; Kolbeins, 2012; Nord, 2008). Guðmundsson and Kristinsson (2019: 1700) showed that although oriented towards public service, journalists “are undermined by the realities of the media market”. They identified four factors that intensified the pressure journalists experience in their everyday work, including the technological competence required, increasing time spent on interacting with users, the growing professionalisation of special interests and public relations pushing content to the media, and, not least, the increasing competition and commercialisation pushing journalists to consider what might sell. The authors conclude, as do Strömback and Karlsson (2011) in their study, that the changes in the news media environment may have decreased journalists’ influence over their own practices and increased the influence of media owners.

Journalists in small media systems can be seen to be less autonomous than journalists in larger countries. Small audience markets and small advertising markets translate into small job markets, which in general means fewer employers, fewer senior positions, and fewer alternatives in terms of career routes and progression (Örnebring & Lauk, 2010). All Icelandic media companies are small in international comparison, and as Harðarson (2008: 80) states, “staff-shortages seriously limit Icelandic journalists’ possibilities for high-class journalism”. Journalists are seldom specialists, which may make them more dependent on their sources, including high-level politicians, and the small job market can make them less resistant to commercial pressures and ownership power.

Ólafsson (2019) conducted 50 interviews with Icelandic politicians and journalists in Iceland and surveyed the public. His work focuses on examining perceptions concerning routine political coverage in the Icelandic media, the relationship between journalists and politicians in Iceland, as well as interactions between journalists, politicians, and the public on social media, particularly Facebook. The study illustrates how Iceland’s smallness impacts political dissemination and that existing political communication frameworks need to be expanded in order to examine the Icelandic case and other small states, both offline and online. Moreover, Ólafsson shows how small states like Iceland can be seen as particularly exaggerated cases concerning recent media and political developments (Ólafsson, 2020). As such, they can provide us with important clues concerning where the larger democracies of the world are heading.

## Conclusion

We have illustrated that the Icelandic system is unlike the systems in the other four Nordic countries in several ways. To some extent, it can be described as a hybrid of the three models identified by Hallin and Mancini (2004). The available studies and data paint a picture of a highly commercial media system with less developed journalistic professionalism than in the liberal countries and without the public service requirements and public support of private media that characterise the democratic corporatist countries. Remnants of political parallelism from the past have carried over to a new liberal media system. Iceland also shares similarities with polarised pluralist countries when it comes to a weak media regulatory body and a tight bond between the political and business spheres.

Political communication research in Iceland is scarce. There are few Icelanders who study media and communication, and political scientists in Iceland have focused little on studies of political communication. Another challenge for research in Iceland concerns the lack of available data. Statistics concerning the structure and development of the media industry are more limited in Iceland than in many other European countries. Public authorities do not monitor the media market to the extent that other Nordic countries do, nor has the industry itself agreed upon the gathering of common key indicators (Ohlsson, 2017). Yet another challenge is that Iceland is routinely ignored in comparative research. It was, for example, the only Nordic state left out of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) study, and it is also the only Nordic state excluded from the annual *Reuters Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2020).

There are many important areas of future research on the Icelandic case. Since this is an anthology on the developments in the Nordic countries, we would like to encourage Nordic scholars to include Iceland in their future studies. Political communication research concerning all aspects of it is needed. In particular, we would highlight that more studies should be directed towards the impact Iceland's smallness has on political dissemination and the media market. If press subsidies for private media outlets are taken up in Iceland, it is important to examine the impact that they have. This is an area that would be interesting for us to study in collaboration with Nordic colleagues. We are living in times of great change when it comes to public service broadcasters and the digital landscape, which would also be an interesting area to explore in collaboration with academics in the Nordic countries. Iceland is a case that differs to some extent from the other four Nordic countries, and we hope that future research including this small state will enrich the political communication discipline, both from a Nordic perspective and more generally.

## Notes

1. <https://www.visir.is>
2. <https://www.frettabladid.is>
3. <https://www.dv.is>
4. <https://hringbraut.frettabladid.is/>
5. <https://www.mbl.is>
6. <https://www.stundin.is>
7. <https://www.kjarninn.is>

## References

- Act no. 38. (2011). *Media act*. Reykjavík: Alþingi. <https://www.althingi.is/lagas/nuna/2011038.html>
- Act no. 54. (2013). *Act on changes to the media act no. 38/2011 (Ownership rules and improvements)*. Reykjavík: Alþingi. <https://www.althingi.is/altext/stjt/2013.054.html>
- Ahva, L., van Dalen, A., Hovden, J. F., Kolbeins, G. H., Nilsson, M. L., Skovsgaard, M., & Väliverronen, J. (2017). A welfare state of mind? Nordic journalists' conception of their role and autonomy in international context. *Journalism Studies*, 18(5), 595–613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1249005>
- Bakker, P. (2008). The simultaneous rise and fall of free and paid newspapers in Europe. *Journalism Practice*, 2(3), 427–443. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512780802281164>
- Bakker, P. (2013). The life cycle of a free newspaper business model in newspaper-rich markets. *Journalistica: Tidskrift for Forskning i Journalistik*, 7(1), 33–51. <https://doi.org/10.7146/journalistica.v7i1.15802>
- Bernburg, J. G. (2016). *Economic crisis and mass protest: The pots and pans revolution in Iceland*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315578699>
- Bjarnason, T. (2014). Traust til Alþingis, lögreglu, stjórnmalamanna og forseta Íslands í kjölfar hrunsins [Trust during crisis: Trust in parliament, the police, politicians and the president of Iceland following the collapse]. *Íslenska þjóðfélagið*, 5(2), 19–38. <http://www.thjodfelagid.is/index.php/Th/article/view/67>
- Broddason, P., & Karlsson, R. (2005). Medien in Island [The media in Iceland]. In Hans-Bredow-Institut, *Internationales handbuch medien 2004/2005 [International Handbook of Media 2004/2005]* (pp. 346–367). Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Curran, J., Iyengar, S., Lund, A. B., & Salovaara-Moring, I. (2009). Media system, public knowledge and democracy: A comparative study. *European Journal of Communication*, 24(1), 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323108098943>
- Engblom, L.-Å. (2013). Public service financing in the Nordic countries. In U. Carlsson (Ed.), *Public service media from a Nordic horizon: Politics, markets, programming and users* (pp. 93–106). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Friðriksson, G. (2000). *Nýjustu fréttir: Saga fjölmiðlunar á Íslandi frá upphafi til vorra daga [The latest news: The history of the media in Iceland]*. Reykjavík: Iðunn.
- Gallup (2020). *Traust til stofnana [Trust in institutions]*. Reykjavík: GI Rannsóknir ehf. <https://www.gallup.is/nidurstodur/thjodarpuls/traust-til-stofnana/>
- Guðmundsson, B. (2006). The role of local media in sustaining viability in rural and smaller regional communities in Iceland. In E. Aradóttir (Ed.), *Nordic-Scottish university network for rural and regional development [Proceedings of NSN's annual conference, Sept. 22–25, 2005, Akureyri, Iceland]* (pp. 147–159). University of Akureyri.
- Guðmundsson, B. (2009). Traust á sögulegum grunni: Rannsókn á fréttareglum Ríkisútvarpsins [Trust on historical grounds: A study on the news guidelines at the National Broadcasting Service]. *Stjórnmal & stjórnsýsla*, 5(2), 295–310. <http://hdl.handle.net/1946/9116>
- Guðmundsson, B. (2012). Umræðuvettvangur íslenskra dagblaða með hliðsjón af greiningarramma Colin Sparks [Icelandic newspapers in light of Colin Sparks's model of different types of press]. *Stjórnmal & stjórnsýsla*, 8(2), 323–342. <http://hdl.handle.net/1946/14847>
- Guðmundsson, B. (2013). Pólítísk markaðsfjölmiðlun [A politically commercial media system]. *Stjórnmal & stjórnsýsla*, 9(2), 509–530. <http://hdl.handle.net/1946/22387>

- Guðmundsson, B. (2019). Logics of the Icelandic hybrid media system: Snapchat and media-use before the 2016 and 2017 Althing elections. *Nordicom Review*, 40(1), 43–59. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0001>
- Guðmundsson, B., & Kristinsson, S. (2019). Journalistic professionalism in Iceland: A framework for analysis and an assessment. *Journalism*, 20(12), 1684–1703. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917695416>
- Guðmundsson, B. P. (2017, September 7). Sigurður kaupir DV í fjórða sinn [Sigurður buys DV for the fourth time]. *RÚV*. <https://www.ruv.is/frett/sigurdur-kaupir-dv-i-fjorda-sinn>
- Guðmundsson, F. Þ. (2016). Iceland's media market after the collapse of 2008: Fewer journalists – lighter material. *Nordicom Information*, 38(1), 41–45.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hallin, D. C., & Papathanassopoulos, S. (2002). Political clientelism and the media: Southern Europe and Latin America in comparative perspective. *Media, Culture & Society*, 24(2), 175–195. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016344370202400202>
- Harðarson, Ó. Þ. (2008). Media and politics in Iceland. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 63–82). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Harrie, E. (2017). *Newspapers in the Nordic media landscape 2017*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Indriðason, I. H., Önnudóttir, E. H., Þórisdóttir, H., & Harðarson, Ó. (2017). Re-electing the culprits of the crisis? Elections in the aftermath of a recession. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 40(1), 28–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12081>
- Internet World Stats. (2019). Internet in Europe stats. <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm#europe>
- Johnsen, G. (2014). *Bringing down the banking system: Lessons from Iceland*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137347350>
- Jóhannesson, G. T. (2009). *Hrunið: Ísland á barmi gjaldþrots og upplausnar upplausnar [The collapse: Iceland on the brink of bankruptcy and chaos]*. Reykjavík: JPV.
- Jóhannsdóttir, V. (2015). Women in journalism: The situation in Iceland. *Nordicom Information*, 37(2), 33–40.
- Jóhannsdóttir, V. (2018). Commercialization in the Icelandic press: An analysis of hard and soft news in major print and online media in Iceland in times of change. *Journalism*, 1–17. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918768494>
- Jóhannsdóttir, V. (2019). *The state of the Icelandic news media in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century* [Doctoral dissertation, Roskilde University, Denmark].
- Jóhannsdóttir, V., & Ólafsson, J. G. (2018). The Icelandic news media in times of crisis and change. *Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration*, 14(1), 189–210. <https://doi.org/10.13177/irpa.a.2018.14.1.9>
- Jónsson, Á. (2009). *Why Iceland? How one of the world's smallest countries became the meltdown's biggest casualty*. London: McGraw Hill Professional.
- Jónsson, Á., & Sigurgeirsson, H. (2017). *The Icelandic financial crisis: A study into the world's smallest currency area and its recovery from total banking collapse*. London: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-39455-2>
- Jónsson, G. (2014). Iceland and the Nordic model of consensus democracy. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 39(4), 510–528. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468755.2014.935473>
- Karlsson, R. (2004). Iceland: Mapping the newspaper market 1980–2003. In B. Schneider, & W. Schütz (Eds.), *Europäische Pressemärkte [European press markets]* (pp. 223–263). Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften.
- Karlsson, R. (2009). Þróun fjölmiðlamarkaðarins, Frumvarp til laga um fjölmiðla, Fylgiskjal I, þingskjal 740–423 mál. 202–372 [Media bill: The development of the media market. Appendix 1]. <https://www.althingi.is/altext/139/s/0215.html>
- Karlsson, R., & Broddason, Þ. (2018). Íslenska fjölmiðlakerfið: Markaður, stjórnmál og völd [The Icelandic media system: Market, politics and power]. In V. Árnason, & H. A. Henrysson

### 3. MEDIA AND POLITICS IN ICELAND

- (Eds.), *Hvað einkennir íslenskt lýðræði?* [What defines Icelandic democracy?] (pp. 171–211). Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan.
- Kolbeins, G. H. (2012). Siðferði og starfshættir íslenskra blaða- og fréttamanna [Ethics and working practices of Icelandic journalists]. Þjóðarspejillinn 2012. Rannsóknir í félagsvísindum XIII [Conference in social sciences].
- Kolbeins, G. H. (2015). Icelandic media firms viewed from the perspective of agency theory. *Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration*, 11(1), 1–20.
- Kolbeins, G. H. (2016). Public opinion polls and experts in election news. *Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration*, 12(1), 127–150.
- Kristinsson, G. H. (1996). Parties, states and patronage. *West European Politics*, 19(3), 433–457. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402389608425145>
- Kristinsson, G. H. (2012). Party patronage in Iceland: Rewards and control appointments. In P. Kopecký, P. Mair, & M. Spirova (Eds.), *Party patronage and party government in European democracies* (pp. 186–205). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Kristinsson, G. H. (2018). The Icelandic power structure revisited. *Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration*, 12(1), 1–34.
- Markaðs- og miðlarannsóknir [Market and media research] (n.d.). *Traust til fjölmiðla*. [Trust in media]. Reykjavík: Markaðs- og miðlarannsóknir ehf. <https://mmr.is/frettir/birtarnieurstoeur/588-traust-til-fjolmidla>
- McQuail, D. (1992). *Media performance: Mass communication and the public interest*. London: Sage.
- Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið. (2018). Rekstrarumhverfi fjölmiðla: Tillögur nefndar um bætt rekstrarumhverfi einkarekinna fjölmiðla [The media environment: Suggestions on improved conditions for privately owned media outlets]. Reykjavík: Menntamálaráðuneytið.
- Mennta- og menningarmálaráðuneytið. (2019). Drög að frumvarpi til laga um breytingu á lögum um fjölmiðla, nr. 38/2011 (stuðningur við öflun og miðlun fréttu, fréttatengds efnis o.fl.) [Draft bill concerning changes to the media act, no. 38/2011 (support for gathering and disseminating news, news related content etc.)]. [https://samradsgatt.island.is/oll-mal/\\$Cases/Details/?id=1293](https://samradsgatt.island.is/oll-mal/$Cases/Details/?id=1293)
- Moe, H., & Mjøs, O. J. (2013). The arm's length principle in Nordic public broadcasting regulation. In U. Carlsson (Ed.), *Public service media from a Nordic horizon: Politics, markets, programming and users* (pp. 75–106). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Simge, A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2020). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2019*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DNR\\_2020\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DNR_2020_FINAL.pdf)
- Nord, L. (2008). Comparing Nordic media systems: North between west and east? *Central European Journal of Communication*, 1(1), 95–110.
- Ohlsson, J. (2015). *The Nordic media market 2015*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Ohlsson, J., & Facht, U. (2017). *Ad wars: Digital challenges for ad-financed news media in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Ólafsdóttir, K., & Ólafsson, S. (2014). *Economy, politics and welfare in Iceland – booms, busts and challenges* [Nordmod 2030: Sub-report. 4. Fafo-report]. <https://www.fafo.no/images/pub/2014/20360.pdf>
- Ólafsson, J. G. (2019). *Media, democracy and small states: Political communication in Iceland* [Doctoral dissertation, Goldsmiths, University of London, England].
- Ólafsson, J. G. (2020). Factoring size into the equation: Media studies, politics, and small states. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, 2(1), 145–156. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njms-2020-0013>
- Önnudóttir, E. H., & Harðarson, Ó. Þ. (2018). Political cleavages, party voter linkages and the impact of voters' socio-economic status on vote-choice in Iceland, 1983–2016/17. *Icelandic Review of Politics & Administration*, 14(1), 101–130.
- Örnebring, H., & Lauk, E. (2010). *Does size matter? Journalistic values and working conditions in small countries* [Conference presentation]. 2010 ECREA Conference, Hamburg, Germany.
- RÚV. (2015). *Ársskýrsla 2014/2015* [Annual Report 2014/15]. Reykjavík: RÚV.
- Schweizer, C., & Puppis, M. (2017). Public service media in the 'network' era: A comparison of remits, funding, and debate in 17 Countries. In F. G. Lowe, H. Van den Bulck, & K. Donders

- (Eds.), *Public service media in the networked society* (pp. 109–214). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Statistics Iceland. (2017a). *Parliamentary election October 28th 2017*. Reykjavík: Statistics Iceland. <https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/elections/general-elections-to-the-althingi-28-october-2017/>
- Statistics Iceland. (2017b). *Advertisement revenue of the media halved since 2007 in real prices*. Reykjavík: Statistics Iceland. <https://statice.is/publications/news-archive/media/advertising-revenue-of-the-media-1996-2015/>
- Statistics Iceland. (2018). *The public service broadcaster holds 21 per cent of the total media revenue in 2016*. Reykjavík: Statistics Iceland. <https://www.statice.is/publications/news-archive/media/media-revenue-2016/>
- Statistics Iceland. (n.d.). *Population by municipality, sex, citizenship and quarters 2010–2017*. Reykjavík: Statistics Iceland.
- Strömbäck, J., & Karlsson, M. (2011). Who's got the power? Journalists' perceptions of changing influences over the news. *Journalism Practice*, 5(6), 643–656. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2011.592348>
- Syvertsen, T., Mjøs, O. J., Enli, G., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

## Chapter 4

# Media and politics in Finland

Kim Strandberg & Tom Carlson

### Abstract

This chapter depicts developments in Finland during the last decade regarding the interplay between the political system and the media system, both in general and in conjunction with elections. We also suggest central theoretical perspectives through which the developments in Finland can be understood. The theoretical lenses that are discussed as most relevant for the Finnish case are mediatisation and hybrid media theory. Additionally, we provide an overview of the foci and methodological developments within the field of political communication research in Finland. Essentially, as in most of the Nordic countries that this anthology addresses, all three of these areas have undergone changes in Finland during the last decade. Finally, the chapter points out future challenges for Finnish political communication research.

**Keywords:** Finland, media, political communication, journalism, hybrid media

### Introduction

In Finland, the most recent decade has been one of swift and rapid changes when it comes to the political landscape, the structure of the media sector, media consumption habits, journalistic practices, and political communication research. Concerning the political landscape, Finland has, like the other Nordic countries, seen a new rise of electoral support for populist parties. Starting in the 2011 parliamentary elections, the Finns Party (previously named the True Finns Party) suddenly surged in popularity and gained a strong foothold in parliament. This trend continued in the next election in 2015, and the Finns Party was included in the government for the mandate period 2015–2019, followed by a strong election in 2019 too. As we shall discuss, this has broken the long tradition of the Finnish party system being dominated by a “big three” of the Social Democratic Party, the Centre Party, and the conservative National Coalition Party (Karvonen, 2014; Karvonen et al., 2016).

---

Strandberg, K., & Carlson, T. (2021). Media and politics in Finland. In E. Skogerbø, Ø. Ihlen, N. N. Kristensen, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Power, communication, and politics in the Nordic countries* (pp. 69–89). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299-4>

Among the democratic corporatist media systems in the Nordic countries, the Finnish media system is arguably the closest to Hallin and Mancini's (2004) liberal model, albeit with clear elements of the democratic corporatist model; however, several aspects have recently changed. The structure of the media sector is increasingly moving from analogue outlets to digital formats. In many ways, one could say that a hybridisation of the media system has occurred since the boundaries between offline and online versions of the same media outlets have blurred, which is also manifested in how digital subscriptions and viewer- and readership have risen. Ownership of media outlets has become more concentrated than before, and the journalistic profession has been forced to adapt to a rapidly evolving and less secure situation than ever before. The media audiences have also changed their habits from the analogue to the digital, and especially the use of social media has surged. This has also been reflected in the extent to which social media is prioritised in election campaigning by candidates and parties. An interesting point is that the Finns Party was one of the first to realise the potential of social media to bypass traditional media in communication with voters. The extent to which voters use online sources when seeking information in conjunction with elections is also a notable trend. Moreover, the rise of social media has been accompanied with elements of what we later discuss as an "elite bubble" of journalists, politicians, and academic experts. These newfound ties between journalists and politicians in social media arguably represent a return to the politics-media coupling of old, albeit with a more critical slant towards the political elite (see Eloranta & Isotalus, 2016; Marttila et al., 2016; Ruoho & Kuusipalo, 2019; Vanikka & Huhtamäki, 2015).

For political communication scholars, the aforementioned rather quick developments in Finland have brought with them both challenges and possibilities. The old saying of shooting at a moving target has never been more accurate, and it challenges scholars to constantly evolve their methodological skills. At the same time, the availability of massive amounts of data has never been greater. Rather ironically, the challenge is now to understand what research questions the data can answer and by which methods it can best be studied. Thus, the trends regarding what contemporary political communication scholars in Finland focus on, and which research methods they employ, mirror general societal developments and the rising popularity of social media. Regarding these aspects, the role of online filter bubbles and polarisation has become a hot topic, and big data automatically collected from social media is a commonly used type of research data.

In this chapter,<sup>1</sup> we give an overview of these recent developments in Finland. We also apply theoretical lenses for understanding media and politics in Finland and relate the Finnish context to the other Nordic countries. The chapter has five sections and a concluding part. We begin, in the next section, by more closely scrutinising the political system, the recent Finnish elections, and the parties.



## The political system, elections, and parties

Finland has often been classified as a semi-presidential system. However, a series of constitutional reforms in the 1990s and early 2000s have gradually removed power from the president, whereby it is now quite a stretch to call Finland a semi-presidential system (see Anckar, 1999; Paloheimo, 2016). In fact, Karvonen and colleagues (2016: 14–15) state that contemporary Finland is “a parliamentary democracy with a government that is accountable to the parliament and a directly-elected president”. Parliamentary elections are held every fourth year, presidential elections every sixth year, and elections for the European Parliament every fifth year. The national parliament is unicameral, with 200 seats. The country is divided into 14 multimember constituencies, where the number of seats in parliament from each district is based on the population size in that district, and one single-member district (the autonomous province of Åland). In presidential and European Union elections, the country as a whole is a single electoral district.

The Finnish multiparty system reflects what has historically been the structural foundations and cleavages in Finnish society (Karvonen, 2014; Westinen et al., 2016): the left-right dimension (the Left Alliance and the Social Democrats versus bourgeoisie parties, in particular the National Coalition Party), the rural-urban (the Centre Party versus the Social Democrats), and, to some extent, the position of the Swedish-speaking minority (the Swedish People’s Party). However, the structural transformation that changed Finland from an agricultural country to a post-industrial society – a process which, in a Western European comparison, took place late (1950s–1960s) and was dramatically rapid – affected the Finnish major parties’ core value base as well as their pool of “own” voters (see Karvonen, 2014). As a case in point, the Agrarian Party (now the Centre Party) used to focus on representing rural Finland, where farmers were the party’s primary support base. Because of the structural changes, less than 3 per cent of the Finnish citizens now work with agriculture, effectively eroding the traditional voter base of the Centre Party. In conjunction with the socioeconomic structural changes, sociocultural dimensions have over time gained a more predominant role in Finnish society and in the party system (Westinen et al., 2016). These dimensions concern issues such as attitudes towards immigration, the European Union, globalisation, the environment, and minority rights. Thus, parties like the Green League were established in the late 1980s without a clear socioeconomic basis. At the same time, the traditional socioeconomically based parties have essentially become, in the words of Kirchheimer (1966: 190), “catch-all electoral machines”, as their traditional bases of voter support have eroded over time. This development has had a profound effect on the campaign messages of these parties. In short, the messages have become vague: the parties no longer appeal to clearly

defined population segments and the use of attacking offensive strategies has declined (Carlson, 2001; Karvonen & Rappe, 1991; Rappe, 1996). This trend still prevails today. The long tradition of forming majority governments (see below) also hampers negative campaigning by the major parties.

A number of specific features are noteworthy in the contemporary Finnish party system (Karvonen, 2014; Karvonen et al., 2016) – the high degree of party system fragmentation is chief among these (typically eight or nine parties are represented in the parliament). Moreover, no single party is nowadays significantly larger than the rest, and no party tends to receive more than 20–25 per cent of the votes, which means that broad coalition governments are needed and formed. In fact, modern Finnish politics has often been a competition between three major parties: The Social Democratic Party, the National Coalition Party, and the Centre Party. In the last three parliamentary elections, though, the populist Finns Party has surged in popularity, breaking the traditional “big three”. Table 4.1 depicts the election results in the last four parliamentary elections and illustrates the rise of the Finns Party (for a longer period, 1945–2011, see Karvonen et al., 2016).

**Table 4.1** Election results, turnout, and governments, 2007–2019

	2007	2011	2015	2019
Finnish Social Democratic Party (SDP)	21.4	19.1	16.5	17.7
Finns Party (Fin)	4.1	19.1	17.7	17.5
National Coalition Party (NCP)	22.3	20.4	18.2	17.0
Centre Party of Finland (Centre)	23.1	15.8	21.1	13.8
Green League (Green)	8.5	7.3	8.5	11.5
Left Alliance (Left)	8.8	8.1	7.1	8.2
Swedish People’s Party in Finland (SPP)	4.6	4.3	4.9	4.5
Christian Democrats in Finland (CD)	4.9	4.0	3.5	3.9
Blue Reform (Blue)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	1.0
Others	2.3	2.0	2.5	5.0
Turnout <sup>a</sup>	67.9	67.4	66.9	72.0
Parties in government	Centre+NCP+SPP+Greens	NCP+SDP+SPP+Left <sup>b</sup> +Green+CD	Centre+NCP+Fin+Blue <sup>c</sup>	SPD+Centre+Left+Green+SPP

<sup>a</sup> Per cent of eligible voters living in Finland.

<sup>b</sup> The Left Alliance left the government in April 2014 and the Finns Party split into the Finns Party and Blue Reform (later Blue Future) in June 2017.

<sup>c</sup> Blue Reform remained in government until the whole government resigned prematurely in March 2019, one month before the upcoming elections.

Source: Ministry of Justice election information service<sup>3</sup>

The recent populist wave is not, however, the first of its kind in Finland. In the 1970s and early 1980s, the populist Rural Party experienced several good elections that led all the way to a position in two governments in the 1980s. The last row in Table 4.1 illustrates the consensus-seeking nature of Finnish politics, whereby broad and often oversized majority coalition governments have been the norm, in contrast to the other Nordic countries (cf. Karvonen, 2014).

Finland has a proportional election system in parliamentary elections. The feature of that system that has the most bearing on election campaigning and political communication is that Finland has a fully open-list ballot with mandatory preferential voting. Voters have one vote, which cannot be cast for a party list; they are obliged to cast the vote on one particular candidate that they choose from the parties' unranked lists of candidates running in the constituency (see von Schoultz, 2018). The number of votes cast for each candidate determines the ranking order of candidates on each party's list. Consequently, there are two kinds or levels of campaigns (von Schoultz, 2018). Firstly, the party organises a collective national campaign highlighting campaign issues and themes. Over time, these campaigns have become personalised as the party leaders are now one of the most important focal points in the Finnish campaigns and elections (e.g., Karvonen, 2010; von Schoultz, 2016). Secondly, the candidates invest in personal campaigns in their constituencies and usually have their own support groups organising campaign activities, raising money, and generating publicity, including television advertising (Mattila & Ruostetsaari, 2002). These groups generally operate independently from the parties; the local party organisation may function as a background resource and coordinator.

Regarding the costs of campaigning, von Schoultz (2018: 614) notes that this burden has over time "been pushed toward candidates, who collectively spend a considerably larger amount on their individual campaigns than the parties do on their central campaigns". Some estimates (e.g., Mattila & Sundberg, 2012; Moring & Borg, 2005) suggest that the candidates themselves handle as much as 75 per cent of the total campaign spending in an election. Candidates mostly raise campaign funds from donations and private resources (including personal bank loans). This kind of individualised and personalised campaigning by candidates – in combination with Finland's relatively liberal regulation of campaign spending (see, e.g., Hofverberg, 2016) – is a bit of an exception in the Nordic context. Furthermore, it has driven innovation and development in campaigning techniques, especially in the era of the Internet and social media (see Strandberg, 2013; Strandberg & Carlson, 2017).

## The media system and general use of media outlets

Similar to the other Nordic countries, Finland fits within Hallin and Mancini's (2004) typology as a democratic corporatist media system (see also Skogerbø et al., Chapter 1). However, Finland has differed from most Nordic countries (except, to some extent, Iceland) in the fact that its television system has partially been funded by advertising since the beginning. Looking at daily reach among the Finnish population (Statistics Finland, 2019b), the public broadcaster Yleisradio (YLE) has a share of 54 per cent of the population and the two main private broadcasters, MTV Media and Nelonen Media, have shares of 49 and 42 per cent, respectively. Concerning daily reach of radio, YLE reaches 38 per cent of the population while private radio channels together reach 49 per cent. A general long-term trend towards increased concentration of ownership within all media sectors (print, television, radio, online) has continued in the last decade in Finland (see Grönlund, 2016). For instance, the newspaper market shares are dominated by Sanoma News and Alma Media, television by YLE and MTV Media (and to some extent Nelonen), and the Internet service provider market by Elisa, TeliaSonera, and DNA. In November 2019, the European Commission approved the proposed acquisition of the Bonnier Broadcasting Holding – a television broadcasting company active primarily in Sweden and Finland, owning the Finnish MTV Media group – by Telia Company. This affair is increasing media concentration in Finland; nonetheless, it is worth noting that the media ownership concentration in Finland is, in fact, remarkably low in a global comparison (Noam & Mutter, 2016).

Finns have a reputation of being heavy media users, and while that is certainly still true today, the latest decade has seen a rapid shift towards digital outlets instead of offline outlets. For instance, the circulation of printed newspapers per 1,000 citizens has dropped from 577 in 2008 to only 258 in 2017, and the number of printed and digital newspaper editions is now virtually the same (Statistics Finland, 2019a). In other words, it is only a matter of time before digital editions surpass printed newspaper editions. The number of newspapers with a weekly circulation of at least four issues was as low as 38 in 2018, which is a decline from 49 in 2010 (Statistics Finland, 2019c). Regarding the share of time that Finnish citizens spend consuming media per day, the Internet now dominates with a share of 47 per cent, followed by television with a share of 24 per cent. Therefore, traditional media in Finland has, so to speak, gone digital in the last decade, which is a trend found in most Nordic countries. A parallel development, and one of the explanations for the aforementioned digitalisation trends, is the rapid growth of online media during the same period. As Table 4.2 shows, frequent use of the Internet is as high as 91 per cent among the Finnish population, having grown from 71 per cent in 2008, which is the

highest share of all media outlets. More than half the population, a share that is rapidly growing, also use some form of social media frequently.

**Table 4.2** Active use of media among the Finnish population (per cent)

Media	Active use
TV <sup>a</sup>	77
TV-set <sup>b</sup>	69
Online <sup>b</sup>	21
Newspapers <sup>a</sup>	58
Printed <sup>b</sup>	43
Online <sup>b</sup>	56
Radio <sup>a</sup>	58
Internet <sup>a</sup>	91
Social media <sup>a</sup>	53
FB <sup>c</sup>	49
Twitter <sup>d</sup>	36
Instagram <sup>d</sup>	54

<sup>a</sup> Statistics Finland, n.d.

<sup>b</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 90, Data Annex, 2018

<sup>c</sup> Internetworldstats, 2020

<sup>d</sup> Users in total, 2019 (from Statista 2019a; 2019b)

An interesting aspect of how Finns use “new media” is that these users have clearly matured beyond the early adopter stage. Thus, as Table 4.3 shows, only the oldest age group (aged 75–89) seldom use the Internet while all other age groups use it to a high extent. Moreover, while the youngest citizens are still those who use more advanced online services to the highest extent (e.g., streaming of music or video), the share of middle-aged citizens using such services is substantial.

**Table 4.3** Use of online media according to age group, 2016 (per cent)

	16–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65–74	75–89	All
Uses the Internet	100	99	100	99	92	74	31	88
Music streaming (or similar)	98	90	79	60	37	24	9	58
Broadcasting companies’ online services	78	77	76	67	52	45	17	61
Online streaming services (Netflix, etc.)	69	59	42	30	11	4	2	31
YouTube	97	93	88	69	43	25	5	62
Newspapers’ or TV-outlets’ online news	88	91	93	84	70	57	21	74

Source: Statistics Finland, 2016

In sum, the newspaper sector in particular has had a rough last decade with several outlets closing and many others having economic worries. The shift towards digital platforms for both printed and visual media is now also in full effect, and it is only a short matter of time before online services become the default. All major media providers have adapted to these changes rather swiftly and, tellingly, Finns are still high media consumers despite these massive structural changes.

## Contemporary political journalism – trends and challenges

To date, Finland remains firmly among the world-leading countries in the World Press Freedom index. Nevertheless, the aforementioned developments regarding ownership and circulation in the Finnish media sector have had a bearing on the everyday work of political journalists in Finland whereby the increasing tempo, economic troubles, and increasing digitalisation are all aspects that journalists experience hands-on in their everyday work (Pöyhtäri et al., 2016). On the other hand, amidst all the turmoil, Finnish journalists remain firm in their core values where autonomy and professional ethics are at the forefront (Väliverronen, 2018).

Over decades, Finnish political journalism has experienced what one might call paradigm shifts, ranging from a highly politicised, partisan era, through a phase of neutral observers, or watchdogs, into an emerging and ongoing era of a more active – albeit politically neutral – journalism (e.g., Niemikari et al., 2019; Väliverronen, 2018). According to Kantola (2012), these macro level shifts are still partially reflected among the views that current Finnish political journalists of different generations hold about their profession in relation to those in power. Kantola distinguishes between three generations of political journalists. The first category is “the solid moderns” (the retiring generation of political journalists), often having a political background before becoming journalists and holding a strong public-service ethos, seeing their role as informing the public about relevant events within the political realm. They are more or less conveyers of the elite’s message to the people. The second group (who became journalists in the early 1980s) is “the liquefying moderns” and can be characterised as professional and neutral, non-partisan observers of society. They put the profession above all else and place great value in a detachment from all things political.

The third generation of political journalists (the current young journalists) is “the liquid moderns”, or as Kantola (2012: 617) also calls them, “the project people”. They are accustomed to the fast-paced, ever-changing nature of the contemporary profession. They often focus on the man or woman in the street rather than the political elite, and one could even say that anti-

institutional values are commonplace among the liquid political journalists (see also Väliverronen, 2018). This new generation thus strongly values autonomy from the political realm but is also more prone to have opinions on societal matters and feel that journalism can be opinionated (see also Reunanen & Koljonen, 2018). Väliverronen's (2018) study of journalists' role perceptions only partially confirms Kantola's (2012) analytical groups, and he remarks that the "guild" of political journalists in Finland remains rather homogenous in its core values and professional ethics. Nevertheless, Reunanen and Koljonen (2018) point out that the youngest generation of political journalists appear to focus more on opinionated journalism than their older peers do.

Whereas core values seem rather stable within Finnish political journalism during the last decade, the broader structural changes in the media sector and shifting platform preferences from print to digital among news audiences have also been felt in the political newsrooms in Finland. Especially the rapid growth of social media is, if not outright upending, at least clearly changing the way journalists carry out their profession (e.g., Pöyhtäri et al., 2016). Having interviewed Finnish political journalists on their views about the growth of online media, Pitkänen (2009) extracts several key points where the journalistic profession is adjusting to the new digital reality. The first aspect is the increased speed of news production. The online world has a much greater need for immediacy that sometimes comes at the expense of journalistic quality. Another circumstance that affects the way journalists work is the increased interaction with the audience and the growth of user-generated content. In a way, interaction is a positive thing, for instance by providing quick feedback on stories, but the uglier side of online discussions, such as toxicity and racism, has increasingly become a problem in Finland. Accordingly, over time, many Finnish outlets have imposed restrictions on anonymous reader comments. Social media and the Internet have also brought with them new types of content such as blogs, tweets, social media posts, and even Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) that often provide political journalists with content for their news stories. A challenge is evident, though, as journalists seek to maintain their political neutrality while at the same time increasingly following and engaging with the political elite through social media (e.g., Ruoho & Kuusipalo, 2019). A recent broad-ranging challenge for journalism is of course the post-truth discourse (e.g., fake news), whereby the core notion of news being trustworthy is challenged.

## Media and elections

We discussed earlier how the onus to campaigns is mostly on the individual candidates in Finland and that this has shown in terms of campaign innovation and rather quick adoption of new campaigning techniques. This has been

especially true regarding all forms of online campaigning ever since the Internet rose to broader popularity in the 1990s and later on in the era of social media (see Carlson & Strandberg, 2012; Strandberg, 2013, 2016; Strandberg & Carlson, 2017). If we consider the main changes in the Finnish campaign landscape since the mid-2000s, the overarching observation is that Finnish campaigns have increasingly “gone digital”. This is not to say that traditional forms of campaigning such as television and newspaper ads, election posters, and rallies have vanished; these are still very much a part of Finnish campaigns (Carlson, 2017; Moring, 2017; Railo & Ruohonen, 2016). Another mainstay of Finnish campaigns that has been unaffected by the digitalisation trend is live television debates featuring party leaders, albeit these debates are now part of a cross-media landscape rather than isolated to one media outlet (see, e.g., Eloranta & Isotalus, 2016).

Nevertheless, it is clear that campaigns in Finland are predominantly moving more and more online and that the parties and politicians have gradually started to think in terms of long-tail campaign logic (Koster, 2009; Strandberg, 2013). Essentially, the key difference between mass marketing and long-tail marketing is that the former seeks to mainly reach a large mass through few outlets, whereas the latter builds its “mass” through an array of narrowly niched campaigned nano messages disseminated through various channels (see Anderson, 2006). Indeed, looking over time at the development of the share of candidates having a campaign presence in various online outlets in conjunction with parliamentary elections (see Table 4.4), the fragmentation of the online campaign sphere is evident.

**Table 4.4** Candidates with online campaign presence in Finnish parliamentary election campaigns, 2007–2019 (per cent)

	2007 (N = 1,997)	2011 (N = 2,315)	2015 (N = 2,114)	2019 (N = 2,468)
Websites	67	69	61	80
Blogs	34	55	57	42
YouTube videos	6	29	10	15
Facebook	–	88	73	87
Twitter	–	19	51	53
Instagram	–	–	13	41
Other social media	–	–	13	15

*Source:* All data is original data collected by Strandberg in conjunction with elections (previous publications, e.g., Strandberg, 2009, 2012, 2016).

For each election, there has been an online outlet which has suddenly surged in popularity among candidates running for election: blogs in 2007, Facebook



in 2011, Twitter in 2015, and Instagram in 2019. Taking a more detailed look at the latest campaign leading up to the April 2019 elections, 12 per cent of all candidates used five or more online applications in their campaigns, 38 per cent employed either three or four outlets, and half of the candidates used two or fewer. Throughout all of these elections, the same factors have predicted candidates' online presence: running for a party with plenty of resources (i.e., the traditional big three of the Social Democratic Party, the Centre Party, or the National Coalition Party), being an incumbent MP, having a high education, being young, and being female. As is the case in most developed countries, candidates running for the Greens have been quick to adopt online campaigning in Finland and are at the forefront in innovating online campaign techniques (see Strandberg, 2006, 2016). The Finns Party has also seized opportunities for disseminating its campaign messages via online outlets with highly viral campaigns in both the latest parliamentary and European Parliament elections.

An interesting development – which has also occurred in other Nordic countries – related to parties' and politicians' use of especially Twitter since the 2015 elections, is the emergence of what some observers (e.g., Ruoho & Kuusipalo, 2019; Vainikka & Huhtamäki, 2015; see also Fuchs, 2014: 199) call the Finnish “political Twitter elite”. In a way, this symbiosis has grown due to party leaders, other politicians, and journalists gaining from following and engaging with each other (Vainikka & Huhtamäki, 2015; see also Eloranta & Isotalus, 2016; Marttila et al., 2016; Ruoho & Kuusipalo, 2019). Twitter is a particularly effective channel through which journalists can, so to speak, smell a news story (e.g., Broersma & Graham, 2012; Verweij, 2012) and corresponds to the need of politicians to gain publicity during campaigns. This development is also interesting since a decreased political parallelism whereby Finnish journalists actively distanced themselves from the political elite was a clear trend in the late twentieth century. In a sense, this newly surged “Twitter bubble” thus represents a shift back towards potentially more political parallelism. Ruoho and Kuusipalo (2019) conclude their social network analysis by stating that the interdependence of journalists and politicians is increasing and forming a mediated elite, which reinforces existing power structures.

As has been evident thus far in this chapter, the general use of online media and the use of online outlets by the political elite has surged in Finland. In this section, we shed some light on how Finnish citizens use various media sources in conjunction with elections. As Table 4.5 shows, the development among citizens has been less dramatic than among the political elite.

**Table 4.5** Citizens' use of old and new media for following elections, 2007–2019 (per cent)

	2007 (N = 1,422)	2011 (N = 1,297)	2015 (N = 1,602)	2019 (N = 1,598)	2019 (18–24 yrs; n = 135)
<b>Old media</b>					
TV-news and current affairs	66	68	58	65	39
Election debates or interviews on TV	43	53	44	56	36
TV entertainment feat. politicians	24	22	19	26	17
TV ads	34	20	19	n.a.	n.a.
Newspaper columns or articles	49	54	44	48	37
Newspaper ads	40	32	23	n.a.	n.a.
Radio programmes	17	19	18	18	10
<b>New media</b>					
Party or candidate websites	7	10	9	12	23
Online election news	12	27	31	29	42
Online election coverage in general	–	–	11	30	44
Voting advice applications (VAAs)	13	20	26	32	59
Blogs	3	5	6	6	9
YouTube	–	3	8	12	27
Social media	–	9	15	24	44

Source: The Finnish National Election Survey datasets for respective election years. Data for 2007–2015 available at the Finnish Social Science Data Archive.<sup>3</sup>

One trend is that the use of traditional information sources is strong and stable across time while there is, simultaneously, a clear uptick in the use of online sources. Some indications of the aforementioned general media use trend of online versions replacing offline equivalents can also be seen in the rise of online news sources and online election coverage in general. Among the youngest age group (the column furthest to the right), young Finns' high level of Internet and social media use is also reflected in how they seek election-related information. Thus, VAAs are the most popular, followed by social media, online election coverage in general, and online news. VAAs, which are often provided by both public and private news corporations, were adopted earlier in Finland than in other Nordic countries, with the first one launched already in the 1999 parliamentary election campaign (Mykkänen & Moring, 2006). These have become a popular mainstay and one of the focal points of media attention in contemporary Finnish campaigns. The popularity of VAAs in Finland is understandable, since they provide a

quick and accessible way for voters to find suitable candidates among the several hundred that run for parliament in every electoral district. In fact, 36 per cent of all voters and more than 80 per cent of the youngest voters in 2019 stated that VAAs had influenced their voting decisions “rather much” or “very much”. As we touched upon earlier, Finnish news media often also use the candidate responses to VAAs as sources for news during the campaign. Thus, in a sense, VAAs form one of the cores of the contemporary Finnish election media ecology.

### Theoretical perspectives, research foci, methods, and challenges

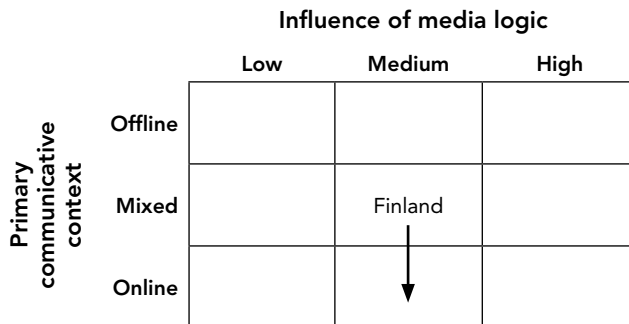
Hardly surprising, and similar to all Nordic countries, the concept of mediatisation can be deemed as relevant when seeking a broad theoretical understanding of the developments described in this chapter. We argue that the current situation in Finland mostly resembles what Strömbäck (2008) depicts as the third phase of mediatisation. Accordingly, the role of media logic in politics is important but yet to be fully incorporated into everyday politics, and media are still regarded as external to political actors. Finnish parties and their politicians clearly realise the importance of getting attention, but most of them are, so to speak, still learning the ropes regarding the most efficient way to do so. This has been accentuated in the social media era where most parties and candidates know that campaigning in social media is necessary but not all of them know how to get the most out of it. Whether Finland will ever reach Strömbäck’s (2008) fourth phase of mediatisation is hard to tell. In a sense, Finnish society as a whole is less (or more slowly at least) affected by global megatrends depicted in the media – for instance #metoo and #FridaysForFuture – whereby media coverage is certainly vast, but the magnitude of impact on the public, except for certain urban segments of society, is fairly modest. Tentatively, a full-scale mediatisation is therefore unlikely in a society where a certain cultural resistance to new mediated events is evident. This situation is even further accentuated by how Finnish populist politicians tend to have a more critical or sceptical stance towards news media, journalists, and the agenda-setting role of traditional news media. In the 2019 campaign, for instance, a leading and successful theme for the Finns Party was that there had already been enough talk about the climate and that Finland had done more than its share on the issue.

Since the mediatisation thesis is more of a grand theory on the influence of media logic in politics and the public space, its applicability is arguably limited in other areas, for instance in understanding the developments regarding the growth of online media usage in general, the shifts from offline to online news outlets, as well as the increasing role of the Internet and social media depicted in this chapter (see also Schulz, 2014). In that respect, we find that

the concept of a hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017) is better equipped to explain the current situation in Finland. Thus, the rapid growth of social media has undoubtedly led to the media logic of old and new blending, while, at the same time, new media has not replaced the old. Thus, new media practices working according to crowdsourced bottom-up logics have emerged and grown alongside the elite-driven traditional mass media practices with the one-to-many logic of communication. To some extent, it is perceivable that traditional media power is challenged by these developments. However, the Finnish mass media broadcasters of old, such as the public broadcaster YLE, other commercial companies, and the bigger newspapers, have adapted rather quickly and now maintain modern state-of-the-art online presences which, as demonstrated in Table 4.3, have quickly become immensely popular among the citizens. Consequently, while still being a society with high levels of news consumption, Finland is in a transition concerning where this consumption takes place, from offline to online platforms. An important observation is that the competition for attention is much more equal in the hybrid media stage than it was in the era of mass media. Rather ironically, media actors themselves are now competing for attention with citizens and politicians, instead of the latter two being dependent on media for being noticed.

In summary, the two broad theories of mediatisation and hybrid media systems emanate an understanding of media and politics in Finland with two levels, one regarding the impact of media logic in the public space and one regarding the contexts of this same space. This forms an analytical framework depicted in Figure 4.1.

**Figure 4.1** *Theoretical summary of media and politics in Finland*



Finland, we argue, is now situated in the middle ground of this interplay between mediatisation and hybridisation. If any prediction for the future is to be made, the obvious development is that the relative influence of the online context will grow even stronger.

We now move from broad theoretical perspectives to what we would call a meta-perspective on the Finnish political communication research field. We provide an overview of the topical and methodological trends during the last decade in Finnish research on political communication. Given how digitalisation has been the major trend in media usage in general, and regarding the use of media in conjunction with elections, it is hardly surprising that the major foci of Finnish political communication research is on social media, and currently especially Twitter. So-called online filter bubbles and their connection to societal polarisation have also been key research topics (see Nelimarkka et al., 2018), and national funding has been granted on the topic to several communication research projects.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, there are still studies in which broader overviews of election campaigns and the public discourse in the media are conducted (e.g., Hatakka et al., 2013; Moring & Mykkänen, 2012; Railo & Ruohonen, 2016) as well as studies of traditional campaign communication such as election posters (Carlson et al., 2017) and political advertising on television (Moring, 2017). The general patterns of online electoral competition within the theoretical framework of normalisation or equalisation (Margolis & Resnick, 2000) are also still studied in conjunction with elections (Strandberg, 2009, 2016). Likewise, Strandberg (2013, 2016) has also studied how voters' use of online media in conjunction with elections correspond to Norris's (1999) well-known perspective of mobilisation versus reinforcement. Rather interestingly, Strandberg (e.g., 2016) has found that the more online campaigning in Finland has matured, the more normalised (i.e., dominated by big parties) it has become, albeit with some indication of mobilisation evident among voters.

The recent wave of Twitter studies (e.g., Eloranta & Isotalus, 2016; Marttila et al., 2016; Vainikka & Huhtamäki, 2015) has generally focused on describing the topics and scope of Twitter as a space for public discourse, as well as how Twitter mirrors election debates on television (Eloranta & Isotalus, 2016). There is also some emerging research in which both direct and indirect influence of social media on citizens' political engagement is studied (e.g., Suuronen, 2018). As discussed earlier, the findings indicate that something of an elite Twitter bubble is discernible in Finland (Vainikka & Huhtamäki, 2015) even though, as Eloranta and Isotalus (2016) note, Twitter is very much still a marginal phenomenon in Finland. This echoes findings from other Nordic countries (e.g., Larsson & Moe, 2012) and indicates that Twitter is receiving a disproportional amount of scholarly attention. Of course, the main reason for the hype with Twitter studies is the ease through which massive amounts of data can be obtained through the Twitter application programming interface.

This leads us to a second observation regarding the contemporary political communication research in Finland: methodological developments. Above all, big data studies have become common and Twitter is their main focus (see Laaksonen et al., 2013, 2017). In order to study massive amounts of data, several

automated methods of both collecting and analysing data have increasingly been employed. Two interesting trends are how classic social science methods such as network analysis (see Laaksonen et al., 2013) and content analysis (see Nelimarkka, 2019) have been adapted to the social media era. An array of experimental studies in citizens' online discussions have also been conducted in the last decade (e.g., Grönlund et al., 2009; Strandberg, 2015; Strandberg & Berg, 2015; Strandberg et al., 2019). An interesting new development concerning data availability is the fact that some media publishers, such as YLE,<sup>5</sup> regularly release the underlying data from their VAAs for use by the research community. Moving forward, it seems to us that big data studies of social media will grow even more. The ongoing trend that Finnish political communication scholars predominantly focus on digital media will thus continue as well.

There are, however, some challenges that contemporary political communication research faces. One is, so to speak, to put the "political" back in political communication research. The abundance of available data has brought with it the side effect of making research rather data driven and focused on the communication technology. Rather often, actual research questions seem to be afterthoughts, and theoretical knowledge of political science guiding the analysis of social media data is lacking. A similar backfire effect of the current trend of big data in research is that very few scholars look at the *depth* of political use of social media. Qualitative methods, which would provide depth to the picture of social media in political communication, are seldom used. Other challenges for the field are methodological in nature. Data access has become more difficult in the wake of the Cambridge Analytica scandal and Facebook's decision to close access to its application programming interface. Likewise, the General Data Protection Regulation has imposed restrictions that affect what scholars are able to do with social media data.

### Conclusion: Same but different?

In this chapter, we have demonstrated that several broad changes have occurred in the recent decade regarding the Finnish parties and election results, the media habits of the Finnish people, the channels candidates and parties use in campaigns, and the ways in which citizens seek information about elections. Moreover, the hybrid media system is very much in effect by now with all major media actors being active on cross-platform outlets and Twitter serving as an arena for interaction between the political and media elites. Communication scholars have shifted most of their attention to social media, and big data studies are predominant among younger scholars. However, are these developments in any way different from the other Nordic countries, and is Finland still something of an odd case within the Nordic context? In many ways, most

of the abovementioned developments are not unique to Finland. In fact, most chapters of this anthology describe similar changes in their respective countries, in as much as populists have strong electoral support in all Nordic countries, citizens use digital media to an ever-increasing degree, and the coupling between offline and online media is continuously growing. Of course, these trends are not only Nordic, but global. Where Finland still stands out, we would argue, concerns not so much the media-related developments, but the fact that the political system remains an exception within the Nordic context. For instance, the typical Finnish oversized coalition governments have continued to be the norm in the last decade. Moreover, the candidate-centred campaigning, and how this is linked to innovation in campaign communication, also stands out in a Nordic comparison. Additionally, the current trends within political communication research in Finland appear, at least on the surface, to be more streamlined than in other Nordic countries. To conclude, on the one hand, Finland and all Nordic countries are clearly part of global megatrends that, to some extent, render the political communication environments more similar. On the other hand, this chapter, like others in this anthology, shows that every country is unique and adapts these trends to fit the national culture of politics and communication. So, perhaps the political communication systems in the Nordic countries are more similar than they were ten years ago, but, at the same time, they remain different from each other.

## Notes

1. We wish to thank professor emeritus Tom Moring for inspiration, some background data, and ideas for structuring this chapter. Needless to say, the content is solely our responsibility.
2. <https://tulospalvelu.vaalit.fi/>
3. 2007 dataset: FSD2269; 2011 dataset: FSD2653; 2015 dataset: FSD3067; 2019 dataset: not yet archived (<https://www.fsd.tuni.fi/en/>).
4. One example of such a project is “BIBU – Tackling Biases and Bubbles in Participation”, led by professor Anu Kantola at the University of Helsinki.
5. See, for instance, <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10725384>

## References

- Anckar, D. (1999). Finland inför millenniumskiftet: En regimbestämning [Finland ahead of the turn of the millennium: A regime determination]. *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 103(3), 241–261.
- Anderson, C. (2006). *The long tail: Why the future of business is selling less of more*. New York: Hyperion.
- Broersma, M., & Graham, T. (2012). Social media as beat: Tweets as news source during the 2010 British and Dutch elections. *Journalism Practice*, 6(3), 403–419. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1512786.2012.663626>
- Carlson, T. (2001). *Partier och kandidater på väljarmarknaden: Studier i finländsk politisk reklam [Parties and candidates on the electoral market: Studies of Finnish political advertising]*. Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademis Förlag.
- Carlson, T. (2017). Election posters in Finland: Cueing emotions with visual imagery. In C. Holtz-Bacha, & B. Johansson (Eds.), *Election posters around the globe: Political cam-*

- paigning in the public space* (pp. 115–137). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32498-2>
- Carlson, T., Johansson, B., & Vigsø, O. (2017). Persuading beyond words: Visual appeals in the 2014 European election campaign. In C. Holtz-Bacha, E. Novelli, & K. Rafter (Eds.), *Political advertising in the 2014 European Parliament elections* (pp. 191–214). London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56981-3>
- Carlson, T., & Strandberg, K. (2012). The rise of web campaigning in Finland. In J. M. Ramos, & R. L. Fox (Eds.), *iPolitics: Citizens, elections and governing in the new media era* (pp. 125–150). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>
- Eloranta, A., & Isotalus, P. (2016). Vaalikeskustelun aikainen live-twiittaaminen – kansalaiskeskustelun uusi muoto? [Live tweeting of election debates – the new form of citizen debate?] In K. Grönlund, & H. Wass (Eds.), *Poliittisen osallistumisen eriytyminen – Eduskuntavaalitutkimus 2015 [The differentiation of political participation – Finnish national election study 2015]* (pp. 138–158). Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.
- Fuchs, C. (2014). *Social media: A critical introduction*. London: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446270066>
- Grönlund, K., Strandberg, K., & Himmelroos, S. (2009). The challenge of deliberative democracy online: A comparison of face-to-face and virtual experiments in citizen deliberation. *Information Polity*, 14(3), 187–201. <https://www.doi.org/10.3233/IP-2009-0182>
- Grönlund, M. (2016). Media ownership and concentration in Finland. In E. M. Noam (Ed.), *Who owns the world's media? Media concentration and ownership around the world* (pp. 61–74). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199987238.001.0001>
- Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hatakka, N., Railo, E., & Ruohonen, S. (2013). *Kuntavaalit Mediassa [Municipal elections in the media]*. Helsinki: Kunnallissalan Kehittämissätiö.
- Hofverberg, E. (2016). *Regulation of campaign finance and free advertising: Finland*. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/campaign-finance-regulation/finland.php>
- Internetworldstats. (2020). FB subscribers, 2018. Retrieved July 14, 2020, from <https://www.internetworldstats.com/europa.htm#fb>
- Kantola, A. (2012). From gardeners to revolutionaries: The rise of the liquid ethos in political journalism. *Journalism*, 14(5), 606–626. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884912454504>
- Karvonen, L. (2010). *The personalisation of politics: A study of parliamentary democracies*. Colchester, UK: ECPR Press.
- Karvonen, L. (2014). *Parties, governments and voters in Finland*. Colchester, UK: ECPR Press.
- Karvonen, L., & Rappe, A. (1991). Social structure and campaign style: Finland 1954–1987. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 14(3), 241–259. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.1991.tb00118.x>
- Karvonen, L., Paloheimo, H., & Raunio, T. (2016). Introduction: Finland 1970–2015: A transformed political landscape. In L. Karvonen, H. Paloheimo, & T. Raunio (Eds.), *The changing balance of political power in Finland* (pp. 9–29). Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press.
- Kirchheimer, O. (1966). The transformation of Western European party systems. In J. LaPalombara, & M. Weiner (Eds.), *Political parties and political development* (pp. 177–200). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Koster, J. (2009, February). Long-tail nanotargeting: Al Franken's online ad buys earned an unbelievable return on investment. *Politics Magazine*, 30(2), 23–26.
- Laaksonen, S., Matikainen, J., & Tikka, M. (2013). *Otteita Verkosta: Verkon ja sosiaalisen median tutkimusmenetelmät [Extracts from the Internet: Research methods for the Internet and social media]*. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Laaksonen, S., Nelimarkka, M., Tuokko, M., Marttila, M., Kekkonen, A., & Villi, M. (2017). Working the fields of big data: Using big-data-augmented online ethnography to study candidate–candidate interaction at election time. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 14(2), 110–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2016.1266981>



- Larsson, A., & Moe, H. (2012). Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign. *New Media & Society*, 14(5), 729–747. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811422894>
- Margolis, M., & Resnick, D. (2000). *Politics as usual: The cyberspace “revolution”*. London: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452233475>
- Marttila, M., Laaksonen, S., Kekkonen, A., Tuokko, M., & Nelimarkka, M. (2016). Digitaalinen vaalitelta: Twitter politiikan areenana eduskuntavaaleissa 2015 [The digital election tent: Twitter as a political arena in the 2015 parliamentary elections]. In K. Grönlund, & H. Wass (Eds.), *Poliittisen Osallistumisen Eriytyminen – Eduskuntavaalitutkimus 2015 [The differentiation of political participation – Finnish national election study 2015]* (pp. 117–137). Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.
- Mattila, M., & Ruostetsaari, I. (2002). Candidate-centred campaigns and their effects in an open list system: The case of Finland. In D. M. Farrel, & R. Schmitt-Beck (Eds.), *Do campaigns matter? Campaign effects in elections and referendums* (pp. 92–107). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203166956>
- Mattila, M., & Sundberg, J. (2012). Vaalirahoitus ja vaalirahakohu [Election funding and the election funding scandal]. In S. Borg (Ed.), *Muutosvaalit 2011 [The elections of change 2011]*. Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.
- Moring, T. (2017). Audiovisual political advertising in Finland. In C. Holtz-Bacha, & M. R. Just (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of political advertising* (pp. 240–252). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694504>
- Moring, T., & Borg, S. (2005). Vaalikampanja [The election campaign]. In H. Paloheimo (Ed.), *Vaalit ja demokratia suomessa [Elections and democracy in Finland]* (pp. 62–78). Porvoo, Finland: WSOY.
- Moring, T., & Mykkänen, J. (2012). Vaalikampanjat ja viestinnällistyminen [Election campaigns and entertainmentisation]. In S. Borg (Ed.), *Muutosvaalit 2011 [The elections of change 2011]*. (pp. 62–78). Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.
- Mykkänen, J., & Moring, T. (2006, November). *Dealigned politics comes of age? The effects online candidate selectors on Finnish voters* [Conference presentation]. Conference of Politics on the Internet: New forms of media for political action, Tampere, Finland.
- Nelimarkka, M. (2019). Aihemallinnus sekä muut ohjaamattomat koneoppimismenetelmät yhteiskuntatieteellisessä tutkimuksessa: kriittisiä havaintoja [Concept modelling and other non-programmed machine-learning methods in social science research]. *Politiikka*, 61(1), 6–33.
- Nelimarkka, M., Laaksonen, S.-M., & Seeman, B. (2018). Social media is polarized: Towards a new design agenda for mitigating polarization. In *DIS '18 [Proceedings of the 2018 Designing Interactive Systems Conference]* (pp. 957–970). New York: Association for Computing Machinery.
- Niemikari, R., Raunio, T., & Moring, T. (2019). Finland: Informal interdependence and occasional clashes. In K. M. Johansson, & G. Nygren (Eds.), *Close and distant: Political executive – media relations in four countries* (pp. 29–54). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Noam, E., & Mutter, P. (2016). Finland: Data summaries. In E. M. Noam (Ed.), *Who owns the world's media? Media concentration and ownership around the world* (pp. 75–79). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199987238.001.0001>
- Norris, P. (1999). Who surfs? New technology, old voters and virtual democracy. In E. Kamarck, & J. Nye (Eds.), *Governance.com? Governance in a networked world* (pp. 71–94). Hollis, New Hampshire: Hollis Publishing.
- Paloheimo, H. (2016). The changing balance of power between president and cabinet. In L. Karvonen, H. Paloheimo, & T. Raunio (Eds.), *The changing balance of political power in Finland* (pp. 57–89). Stockholm: Santérus Academic Press.
- Pitkänen, V. (2009). Mullistaako internet politiikan journalismin? [Will the Internet revolutionise the politics of journalism?] In V. Pernaa, M. K. Niemi, & V. Pitkänen (Eds.), *Politiikan journalismin tila Suomessa [The state of political journalism in Finland]* (pp. 109–144). Turku, Finland: Kirja-Aurora.

- Pöyhkäri, R., Välierronen, J., & Ahva, L. (2016). Suomalainen journalistin itseymmärrys muutosten keskellä [Self-understanding of Finnish journalists amidst changes]. *Media & Viestintä*, 39(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.23983/mv.61434>
- Railo, E., & Ruohonen, S. (2016). Vaalikampanjat ja julkisuuden agenda [Election campaigns and the public agenda]. In K. Grönlund, & H. Wass (Eds.), *Poliittisen osallistumisen eriytyminen: Eduskuntavaalitutkimus 2015* [The differentiation of political participation – Finnish national election study 2015] (pp. 76–94). Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.
- Rappe, A. (1996). Party propaganda in motion: Finland 1954–1991. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 19(4), 329–358. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.1996.tb00398.x>
- Reunanen, E., & Koljonen, K. (2018). Not partisans, but participants. *Journalism Studies*, 19(5), 726–744. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1204940>
- Ruoho, I., & Kuusipalo, J. (2019). The inner circle of power on Twitter? How politicians and journalists form a virtual network elite in Finland. *Observatorio Journal*, 13(1), 70–85.
- Schulz, W. (2014). Mediatization and new media. In F. Esser, & J. Strömbäck (Eds.), *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies* (pp. 57–73). Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137275844>
- Standard Eurobarometer 90, Data Annex. (2018). Tables QE3.1 and QE3.2 (pp. 147–150). <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/84928>
- Statista. (2019a). Instagram use in Finland 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/560859/share-of-instagram-users-in-finland-by-usage-frequency/>
- Statista. (2019b). Twitter use in Finland 2019. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/560864/share-of-twitter-users-in-finland-by-usage-frequency/>
- Statistics Finland. (n.d.). TNS Atlas Intermedia/TNS Gallup Oy (table 1.18). Daily reach of various media. [https://pxhopea2.stat.fi/sahkoiset\\_julkaisut/joukkoviestintatilasto/data/t118.xls](https://pxhopea2.stat.fi/sahkoiset_julkaisut/joukkoviestintatilasto/data/t118.xls)
- Statistics Finland. (2019a). Circulation of printed newspapers per thousand persons 1980–2017 [Data file]. [https://pxhopea2.stat.fi/sahkoiset\\_julkaisut/joukkoviestintatilasto/data/215.xls](https://pxhopea2.stat.fi/sahkoiset_julkaisut/joukkoviestintatilasto/data/215.xls)
- Statistics Finland. (2019b). Daily reach of television channels 1993–2018 [Data file]. [https://pxhopea2.stat.fi/sahkoiset\\_julkaisut/joukkoviestintatilasto/data/519.xls](https://pxhopea2.stat.fi/sahkoiset_julkaisut/joukkoviestintatilasto/data/519.xls)
- Statistics Finland. (2019c). Newspapers by frequency of issue 1980–2018 [Data file]. [https://pxhopea2.stat.fi/sahkoiset\\_julkaisut/joukkoviestintatilasto/data/201.xls](https://pxhopea2.stat.fi/sahkoiset_julkaisut/joukkoviestintatilasto/data/201.xls)
- Strandberg, K. (2006). *Parties, candidates and citizens on-line: Studies of politics on the Internet*. Åbo, Finland: Åbo Akademi University Press.
- Strandberg, K. (2009). Internet Vaalikampanjassa – Etulinjassa vai marginaalissa? [Internet campaigning – in the frontline or margin?]. In H. Paloheimo, & S. Borg (Eds.), *Vaalit Yleisödemokratiassa* [Elections in audience democracy] (pp. 60–93). Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Strandberg, K. (2013). A social media revolution or just a case of history repeating itself? – The use of social media in the 2011 Finnish parliamentary elections. *New Media & Society*, 15(8), 1329–1347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812470612>
- Strandberg, K. (2015). Designing for democracy? An experimental study comparing the outcomes of citizen discussions in online forums with those of online discussions in a forum designed according to deliberative principles. *European Political Science Review*, 7(3), 451–474. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773914000265>
- Strandberg, K. (2016). Ehdokaiden ja kansalaisten internetin ja sosiaalisen median käyttö vuosien 2003–2015 eduskuntavaaleissa [Use of Internet and social media by candidates and citizens in parliamentary elections in the years 2003–2015]. In K. Grönlund, & H. Wass (Eds.), *Poliittisen osallistumisen eriytyminen: Eduskuntavaalitutkimus 2015* [The differentiation of political participation: National election study 2015] (pp. 95–116). Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.
- Strandberg, K., & Berg, J. (2015). Stretching the boundaries of on-line deliberation: An experimental study evaluating the impact of temporality and identifiability on discussion quality in on-line deliberations. *Javnost – The Public*, 22(2), 164–180.
- Strandberg, K., & Carlson, T. (2017). Expanding the online political demos but maintaining the status quo? Internet and social media use by Finnish voters prior to elections, 2003–15. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 40(1), 82–106. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12082>

- Strandberg, K., Himmelroos, S., & Grönlund, K. (2019). Do discussions in like-minded groups necessarily lead to more extreme opinions? Deliberative democracy and group polarization. *International Political Science Review*, 40(1), 41–57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512117692136>
- Strömbäck, J. (2008). Four phases of mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(3), 228–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208319097>
- Suuronen, A. (2018). *Political competition and social media: Has Facebook changed the status quo of Finnish politics?* [Master's thesis, University of Tampere, Finland].
- Vanikka, E., & Huhtamäki, J. (2015). Tviittien politiikka – poliittisen viestinnän sisäpiirit Twitterissä [Politics of the tweets – the inner circles of political communication on twitter]. *Media & Viestintä*, 38(3), 165–166.
- Verweij, P. (2012). Twitter links between politicians and journalists. *Journalism Practice*, 6(5–6), 680–691. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2012.667272>
- von Schoultz, Å. (2016). Puolueiden puheenjohtajien merkitys äänestyspäätöksen kannalta [The impact of party leaders for vote choices]. In K. Grönlund, & H. Wass (Eds.), *Poliittisen osallistumisen eriytyminen: Eduskuntavaalitutkimus 2015* [The differentiation of political participation – Finnish national election study 2015] (pp. 159–176). Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.
- von Schoultz, Å. (2018). Electoral systems in context: Finland. In E. S. Herron, R. J. Pekkanen, & M. S. Shugart (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of electoral systems* (pp. 601–626). New York: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190258658.001.0001>
- Väliveronen, J. (2018). More of the same or a different breed altogether? A national comparison of role perceptions among Finnish political journalists. *Nordicom Review*, 39(1), 51–66. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2018-0001>
- Westinen, J., Kestilä-Kekkonen, E., & Tiihonen, A. (2016). Äänestäjät arvo- ja asenneulottovuukilla [Voters on values and attitude dimensions]. In K. Grönlund, & H. Wass (Eds.) *Poliittisen osallistumisen eriytyminen: eduskuntavaalitutkimus 2015* [The differentiation of political participation – Finnish national election study 2015] (pp. 273–297) Helsinki: Ministry of Justice.



## Chapter 5

# Media and politics in Norway

Eli Skogerbø & Rune Karlsen

### Abstract

This chapter discusses the development of the Norwegian political and media systems. Norway is a small, stable, established welfare democracy characterised by a constitutional monarchy, unitary structure, parliamentary government, proportional representation election system, multiparty politics, and coalition governments. The main characteristics of the media system are that it is digital and “hybrid”, as literally all legacy media (television, broadcasting, newspapers – national, regional, and local) are produced, distributed, and consumed on multiple platforms. In this chapter, we discuss Norwegian political communication research, emphasising the dominating theoretical strands that can be singled out for this particular national research community: election communication, social media and politics, political journalism, public-sphere studies, and studies of political rhetoric. In conclusion, we discuss some future challenges related to developments in the political sphere and media environment, highlighting disruptive changes in the media and new political issues.

**Keywords:** Norway, political system, media system, political communication, Nordic countries

## Introduction

In 2020, Norway can be described as a digital society. News media, public administration, and civic organisations have implemented digital services that are available on the Internet and on mobile platforms and used by a large majority of the citizens. Political actors such as parties, organisations, media, and journalists are seasoned users and producers of digital political news and social media, well versed in the still existing media logics, and exploit the options of the hybrid media system (Chadwick, 2017).

This chapter takes these observations as a starting point and introduces the structures and factors of Norwegian political communications by covering four main features. First, we describe the main features of the political and

media systems. Then we discuss the different aspects of Norwegian political communication research, and finally we address future challenges related to developments in the political sphere and media environment.

We start by outlining the main institutions and actors within the Norwegian political system, pointing to the increasing number of political parties that have gained representation in parliament and the growing amount of political actors that influence agenda-setting and policy-making. Then the media system is outlined and discussed. Norway is a clear example of a public media system with a strong public service institution: the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK). NRK has maintained its position into the digital age in combination with other privately owned and funded local and nationwide broadcasters and newspapers, most of which have grown into multiplatform news providers. We see major shifts in the distribution and consumption patterns of all types of media content, creating clearer sociodemographic divides in audiences than were the case some decades ago. Further, we outline what we regard as some main strands of theories that have been applied in political communication research (Ihlen et al., 2015), most importantly institutional perspectives on media and politics. Among these are the mediatisation perspective (Lundby, 2009) and its forerunners (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Asp, 1986; Hernes, 1977). Other, and related, perspectives are those tied to election research, political journalism, lobbying, and rhetoric. Within these fields we find studies from several different disciplines, such as media studies, political science, sociology, social anthropology, history, and rhetoric. Throughout the chapter, we point to practices and research that distinguish Norway from Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland.

## The political system

Norway is a small, stable, established welfare democracy, characterised by a constitutional monarchy, unitary structure, parliamentary government, proportional representation election system, multiparty politics, and coalition governments (Lijphart, 2013). Like Iceland and Finland, Norway has a colonial past and a rather short history as an independent state. Independence dates from 1905, when the union with Sweden was peacefully dissolved, but a separate constitution was already in place from 1814, written in a short interlude after the Napoleonic wars when Norway was transferred from Denmark to Sweden. The Swedish king recognised most parts of the constitution and allowed for extensive and increasing Norwegian self-governance, parliamentary government (from 1884), and a comparatively strong system of local governance to be set up prior to independence (Myhre, 2015).

In terms of political communication, a rather interesting point is that the Constitution Day, 17 May, has grown into a world-famous folk festival and

media event. The 17 May celebrations attract hundreds of thousands of locals and tourists all over the country who watch the children's parades and listen to speeches about the value of democratic government, rule of law, and freedom of speech. As a media event, 17 May is on all channels, from NRK's multichannel broadcasts that cover both the capital and smaller municipalities throughout the entire country, to social media posts and local and hyperlocal newspaper coverage. Within the Nordic countries, this massive celebration of the democratic political system is unique to Norway, and in Anderson's (2006) now famous phrase, a specific marking of the "imagined community" that the Norwegian polity rests on. The Norwegian population is – historically and currently – multilingual and multiethnic, with a dominant Norwegian-speaking majority, a small indigenous population (the Sámi), and, like the other Nordic countries, several other small "national" minorities. Over the past five decades, immigration from non-Nordic countries has increased, and thereby also the number of cultural and religious minorities, creating a diverse, multilingual, and multicultural society.

Economically and industrially, Norway stands out from the other Nordic countries as a major producer of oil and gas. The petroleum industry employs – directly and indirectly – around 170,000 people. The main political impact of the oil industry, however, can be found in the Government Pension Fund Act, which manages the popularly termed "Oil Fund", which ensures long-term management of the petroleum industry's public revenues for future generations. The Oil Fund was established in 1996 and rested on a long-term political consensus that the oil industry should be regulated to secure Norwegian interests in the resources and revenues. In 2019, the fund reached a value of NOK10 billion (Norges Bank, 2020), and is a major asset for Norwegian governments for securing and financing the welfare state, mitigating crises, and for international investment. Increasingly and expectedly the policies and investments in the petroleum industry are causing political conflicts, as it contributes to emissions from fossil fuels and climate problems.

### *Governance and representative systems*

Unlike Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, Norway is not a member of the European Union. Nevertheless, it is, together with Iceland (and Liechtenstein) included in the European Single Market through the European Economic Area Agreement, meaning that European legislation and regulation concerning all matters – including free movement of goods, services, labour, and capital – are either directly or indirectly included in Norwegian law and regulation. In the media and communications sector, this includes regulations concerning audiovisual services, e-commerce, telecommunications, privacy, and many other related areas. Like the other Nordic countries, Norway is a member of the

European Council and has implemented the European Convention on Human Rights into their constitution.

The parliament, the Storting, has 169 members, elected for four-year periods. The electoral system is based on proportional representation, a closed-list system, and a modified Sainte-Laguë formula that has been in use since the 1950s. The 19 constituencies were, until 2017, identical to the country regions, and district magnitude (the number of seats from a district) ranges from 4 to 20. Despite recent regional reforms, the constituencies will be kept as they were in 2017 until 2025 (Regjeringen, 2020).

Over the second half of the twentieth century, a series of electoral reforms, aimed at greater proportionality in representation, were implemented. A pool of national second-tier seats were introduced, and from the 2005 election, the number of adjustment seats was 19, equalling the number of county constituencies. Parties must obtain 4 per cent of the national vote to be eligible for adjustment seats. The overall partisan proportionality has been enhanced since the introduction of the adjustment seats (Aardal, 2011).

In national parliamentary elections, which take place on a Monday in September every four years, it is in practice not possible for voters to change the ranking of the candidates on the party list, as it requires a high share of voters making the exact same changes. Moreover, political parties recruit candidates for parliament through nomination processes in which local branch delegates meet at county nomination conventions to finalise the list. Recently, however, there has been a tendency for some county party branches to open their nomination process to allow greater participation by registered party members (Narud, 2008). Still, decentralised decision-making remains the norm in Norway, making the county party branches the decisive arena for parliamentary nominations (Valen et al., 2002). Hence, candidate selection procedures – in combination with the absence of preferential voting – leave parties with considerable control over parliamentary nominations. The Norwegian case may thus be regarded as more party-controlled than its Nordic neighbours (Narud et al., 2002; see also Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11).

Local and regional elections also take place every four years between parliamentary elections and return representatives to the (from 2020) 356 municipal and 10 regional councils. In practice, this arrangement means that Norwegian voters experience election campaigns in September every two years. Voters choose between parties listing pre-ranked candidates. In local and regional elections, the regulation allows for preference voting and to some extent results in changes in the ranking of candidates. Election campaign periods are in practice divided into long-term (6–12 months before an election) and the intense short-term (the last four weeks before election day) election campaign periods, for both national and local elections (Aardal et al., 2004).



From 1989, the Sámi Parliament, the representative body for the Sámi population, is elected on the same day as the national parliament. It has 39 members representing seven constituencies covering the entire country. The Sámi Parliament was established by constitutional amendments and has consultative powers and may consider any issue it considers relevant (Josefsen et al., 2017; see also Josefsen & Skogerbø, Chapter 10).

### *The parties*

The multiparty system originates from what Rokkan (1967) called cross-cutting social and political cleavages in Norwegian society. As in Denmark and Finland, the Nordic five-party model yielded to a more fragmented party system long ago. Placed from the political left to the political right, nine parties were represented in parliament in 2020: the Red Party (R), the Socialist Left Party (SV), the Labour Party (A), the Green Party (MDG), the Centre Party (Sp), the Christian Democrats (KrF), the Liberal Party (V), the Conservative Party (H), and the Progress Party (FrP).

Norway's first two political parties, the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party, were formed in 1884. They grew out of the territorial and cultural cleavages between the centre and the periphery. The Conservative Party eventually became the party for the growing group of industrial leaders and other business people and has always balanced conservative values against liberal business values (Heidar & Saglie, 2002). The Labour Party, founded in 1887, was based in the labour movement and became increasingly central to Norwegian democratic politics throughout the twentieth century. The party sat with a majority in the Storting from 1945 to 1961 and was central to the development of the welfare state. The Christian Democrats was founded in 1933 and has its roots in lay Christianity, a movement that to some degree was in opposition to the state church, whereas the party in recent decades considers itself a general Christian democratic party (Heidar & Saglie, 2002). The Centre Party was formed in 1921 under the name of the Farmer Party and has particularly defended primary and district interests in Norwegian politics (Heidar & Saglie, 2002). The Socialist Left Party (first as the Socialist People's Party) was formed in 1958 based on a major disagreement within the Labour Party regarding the NATO issue. The party is to the left of the Labour Party (E. Allern et al., 2016), and obtained issue ownership on the environmental issue (Heidar & Saglie, 2002). The Red Party has its roots in old Norwegian communist parties and was formed in 2007 through a merger of the Workers' Communist Party and the Red Electoral Alliance. The Progress Party was formed in 1973 on the basis of a protest movement against high taxes and fees. The party is considered a populist right party and has since the 1980s profiled itself as a party opposing immigration. Recently, the environmental Green Party finally had its parliamentary breakthrough and

added to the plethora of Norwegian parties. Table 5.1 gives an overview of the electoral success of the political parties since 2005.

**Table 5.1** Election results and voter turnout (per cent), and governments, 2005–2017

	2005	2009	2013	2017
Red Party (Red Electoral Alliance) <sup>a</sup>	1.2	1.3	1.1	2.4
Socialist Left Party	8.8	6.2	4.1	6.0
Labour Party	32.7	35.4	30.8	27.4
Centre Party	6.5	6.2	5.5	10.3
Green Party	– <sup>b</sup>	0.3	2.8	3.2
Christian Democrats	6.8	5.5	5.6	4.2
Liberal Party	5.9	3.9	5.2	4.4
Conservative Party	14.1	17.2	26.8	25.0
Progress Party	22.1	22.9	16.3	15.2
Others	1.9	0.9	1.6	1.8
<hr/>				
Voter turnout	77.1	76.0	78.2	78.3
<hr/>				
Parties in government	Labour+ Centre+ Socialist Left	Labour+ Centre+ Socialist Left	Conservative+ Progress	Conservative+ Progress+ Liberal+ Christian Democratic <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> The Red Electoral Alliance dissolved in 2007 and was reorganised into the Red Party in the same year.

<sup>b</sup> The Green Party is included in Others.

<sup>c</sup> The Liberal Party joined in January 2018 and the Christian Democratic Party in January 2019. The Progress Party left in January 2020.

Source: Valgresultat.no, 2018; Bjørklund, 2005

Turnout in Norwegian national elections dropped somewhat in the late 1980s, but on average, more than three-fourths (about 77%) of the Norwegian electorate participate in parliamentary elections. As discussed in Chapter 11 (Hopmann & Karlsen), this is a comparatively high turnout level, but still somewhat lower than Sweden and Denmark.

The traditional left-right conflicts, such as jobs, taxation, welfare issues, health, and education, continue to be important in each election (Bergh & Karlsen, 2019), but other issues have been instrumental in changing the party system. These changes reflect both sociodemographic changes in the electorate as well as changing conflict patterns. As mentioned above, increased importance of climate and environmental issues has opened for the Green Party. Issues concerning immigration or refugee and asylum politics have been returning

to the political agenda since the 1980s, despite the fact that Norway has had strict immigration laws and, compared to Sweden, received a relatively small number of refugees over the past decades. Neither are there any foreseeable changes concerning immigration policies, as there is a broad alliance in parliament supporting the current policies. Nevertheless, the issue continues to have mobilising potentials both for the Progress Party and for splitting other parties, such as the Labour Party.

Parliamentary government entails that governments are formed based on support in parliament. In Norway, a majority is not needed to form a government, but the government must resign if a majority expresses no confidence. This is labelled negative parliamentarism. Minority governments have been the norm in much of the postwar period, meaning that the parties forming the Cabinet have to negotiate political outcomes with the opposition in parliament. Majority governments were less frequent until 2005, when the Labour Party, for the first time, led a coalition including the Socialist Left Party and the Centre Party. The coalition remained in power until 2013, when the Red-Green majority lost the election. From 2013 until 2020, the Conservative Party led shifting coalitions, for the first time involving the Progress Party, and from 2019 to 2020, a majority government. The successful cooperation by the non-socialist parties in government was long regarded as the breakthrough of bloc politics until the Progress Party left the coalition in January 2020.

Coalition-building and compromise-formation – rather than consensus – are as typical traits of Norwegian governments as they are of the other Nordic countries (see Chapters 2, 3, 4, & 6). The foundation of the welfare state relies on the corporatist structure that involves concerned interests in policy formation (Pedersen & Kuhnle, 2017). Collaboration, negotiations, and agreements between industry, trade unions, and the state form main pillars of the welfare state and secure high employment rates among both women and men. Although the current importance and strength of the corporatist system is disputed – as Rommetvedt (2017) argues in a recent analysis of corporatism in the Nordic countries – Norwegian politics in 2020 still show many signs of corporate negotiations. A recent example can be found in the report preceding the 2019 white paper on media policy (Meld. St. 17 [2018–2019]), prepared by a committee which involved all main-sector interests (Mediemangfoldsutvalget, 2017). Over the past few decades and in line with developments in other Nordic countries, lobbying has become more important, both as a channel of influence and as a profitable industry. A discussion has ensued regarding the relationship between the lobbying channel and the corporatist channel (see Ihlen et al., Chapter 15).

## The media system

On any ranking of freedom of expression, transparency, and journalistic autonomy, Norway and the other Nordic countries rank high (Nielsen et al., 2019). These features are anchored in the constitution (§100) which states that it is a state responsibility to secure means for societal dialogue and information provision for citizens. A number of legislative and regulatory measures have been implemented to secure this along with integration of international conventions into the media legislation. As discussed in Chapter 1, Norway was placed, with the other Nordic countries, as a democratic corporatist type in the now seminal book on comparing media systems by Hallin and Mancini (2004). Further, media and communications policies have clear traits of being set up within the framework of the welfare state – as particularly Syvertsen and colleagues (2014) have argued – and with characteristics shared with the other Nordic countries (Ohlsson, 2015; Skogerbø et al., Chapter 1). In 2020, the main characteristics of the media system are that it is digital and “hybrid”, as literally all legacy media (television, broadcasting, newspapers – national, regional, and local) are produced, distributed, and consumed on multiple platforms. Whereas most newspapers may be found in print versions, digital subscriptions have increased steeply, in contrast to most other countries (Newman et al., 2019). The broadcasters operate traditional radio and television channels, but their offerings are available online and on mobile apps, too. Within this hybrid system, NRK has retained – and, it can be argued, strengthened – its role as a producer of national and regional news as well as of traditional and innovative media content in all genres. Although the traditional role as a nation-building institution no longer means standardisation of language and culture, the remit of NRK states that the institution has the responsibility to provide programmes for the entire population, with specific responsibilities for producing programmes in Norwegian and Sámi as well as catering to other linguistic, ethnic, and cultural minorities. These demands are met in different ways: by maintaining a continuous presence and production of news in all regions of the country; by producing shows and entertainment that address the diversity of the Norwegian population (e.g., the web-series *Skam* [*Shame*] and the music competition show *Stjernekamp* [*Star fight*]); and by producing content that is distributed and streamed on several platforms (e.g., Sakte-TV [Slow-TV] productions and the television series *Exit*).

The funding and subsidy system and the public service media with “arm’s length” distance to the state are among the fundamental pillars of the welfare state system. Media subsidies in the form of various support mechanisms make up the second main tool for maintaining the media infrastructure. The largest subsidies are exemptions from value added tax for print and online newspapers (which is an indirect subsidy), and the direct subsidies – before 2020, licence

fees, and from 2020 onwards, taxes – that fund NRK. Less in volume but attracting more public attention are the direct subsidies that are allocated to media, mainly newspapers that have secondary positions in competitive markets and small local newspapers or newspapers that serve minority groups (e.g., linguistic, ethnic, cultural, or religious).

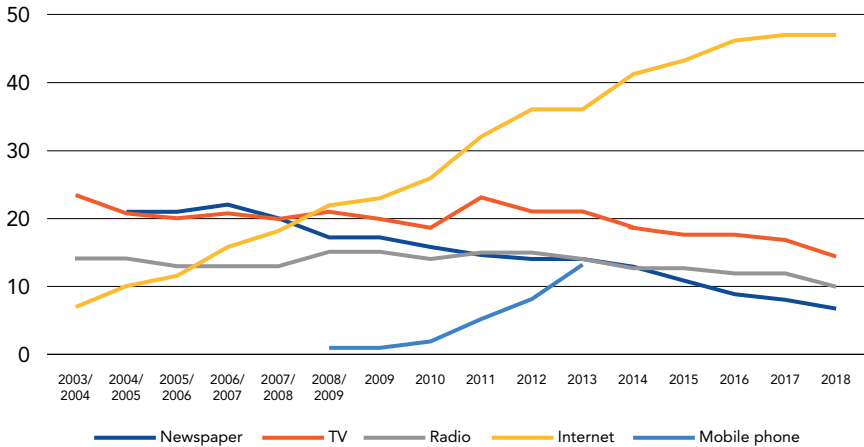
Localism and decentralisation make up a considerable part of Norwegian political and media history (see also Lindén et al., Chapter 8). Understanding the history of local media means understanding the rise and growth of three central elements in the formation of Norwegian society: how the media, which initially only encompassed local newspapers, have voiced diverse political, economic, and cultural interests (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2019); how the welfare state has shaped the communication structures and to some extent vice versa (Ahva et al., 2017); and how local media and local journalism have been instrumental to two conflicting lines of development, namely standardisation and assimilation, and diversity and localism (Skogerbø, 2020). Local media structures have remained remarkably stable in spite of the technological and economic shifts that have seriously altered media production, distribution, and consumption. More than 25 years have passed since the Internet was commercialised, during which local journalism practices and local media have met with disruptive innovations that they have had to adapt to and incorporate (Olsen & Solvoll, 2018a, 2018b). What needs explanation then is not the changes, but the apparent stability of the structure. Decentralisation has not only remained, it has increased, both in newspaper titles, in the increasing support to regionalisation of NRK's programme, and in the stability of independent local broadcasting. These trends have appeared parallel to the disruptions of market models, consumption habits, and format changes in the media business, and indicate that localism, one of the deep structures of Norwegian society, may indeed be a characteristic of the Norwegian media structure in the foreseeable future (Skogerbø, 2020).

Social media, such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok, are partly substituting for, partly adding to, the legacy media as channels for production, distribution, and consumption of both legacy media and user-generated content. Further, a range of new service providers, such as the most well-known streaming services Spotify, Tidal, Netflix, HBO, and many more, have entered the media market over the past decades. Concurrently – as in the other Nordic countries except Iceland – immigration has, over the past decades, become a recurring political issue that has mobilised populist politics and fed into a new type of media: the alt right “alternative media” (see Herkman & Jungar, Chapter 12; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, Chapter 13).

### *Media users*

As in the other Nordic countries, media habits and consumption patterns have to a large degree shifted to digital platforms (See Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1** News sources, 2003–2018 (per cent)



*Comments:* The figure shows the results of a survey asking the participants what their most important news source is. Mobile phones were only included in the survey between 2008/2009–2013. With regard to newspapers, the figures refer to print copies.

*Source:* Medienorge, 2019a

Figure 5.1 shows that the Internet has become the overall most important source for news consumption, a pattern that is common to all Nordic countries. The figure shows those who agree as to what news source is their most important one as well as changes over time. The decline in importance is sharpest for newspapers and least dramatic for radio. The Internet has undoubtedly taken over as the most important source. From the figures in Figure 5.1, we cannot differentiate between the websites of news media, social media, and other Internet sources; nevertheless, Figure 5.1 clearly illustrates the major shifts in consumption patterns that have taken place after 2000. When looking at age differences, statistics show that Internet sources are the most important for those under 40. These groups are also less likely to read local newspapers, watch television, or listen to radio news (Medienorge, 2019a, 2019b).

### Research strands in Norwegian political communication

Political communication researchers in Norway have been and still are located at different institutions and tied to many different disciplines, such as media

studies, media sociology, political science, rhetoric, law, and more (Ihlen et al., 2015). In the following, we outline some strands of research that have been prominent in the past decades.

### *Election studies*

One strand stems from election studies, with the very early study of voters' preferences for newspapers in the 1957 parliamentary election as its first example (Rokkan & Torsvik, 1960). This early publication revealed that voters of different party affiliations with access to newspapers did not necessarily read their own party outlet, but they selected their newspapers for more reasons than party preference. Neither did this first study – inspired by and yielding results in line with Paul Lazarsfeld's two-step hypothesis (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948) – provide much support for strong media effects on voting behaviour. It was suggested that the news media had few direct effects on political behaviour, a finding corroborated by many international studies, and a period of theorising later termed “the phase of powerless media” by Swedish media researcher Kent Asp (1986). This line of continued studies of individual media effects has also permanently been included in the election studies surveys in the form of questions about information sources for voters (e.g., Karlsen & Aalberg, 2015). More recently, the election study project also fields a separate campaign panel study emphasising media use and changes during the campaign (Haugsgjerd et al., 2019). More sporadically, studies of election reporting have been added to the election studies (Aardal et al., 2004; S. Allern, 2011) thereby adding insights and theories from agenda-setting studies, framing, and political journalism to election studies (Thorbjørnsrud, 2009). Since 2009, election studies have also included surveys of the candidates running for parliamentary elections, and the research focus has been on candidate campaigning, particularly their communicative efforts (Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016; Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2015). In recent years, the professionalisation of political communication and political parties has also begun to receive scholarly attention (Karlsen, 2010, 2019). The involvement of communication professionals in party politics and campaigning is clearly a relevant topic for future research, not only in Norway, but in the other Nordic democracies, too (see Chapters 2, 3, 4, & 6).

### *Social media and politics*

Over the past decade, election studies have included a range of studies on how social media have been implemented in political communication in general, and in election campaign communication in particular (Kalsnes et al., 2017), which is the second strand of research in Norwegian political communication. In particular, Twitter, and to some extent Facebook – new channels for politi-

cal actors to mobilise members, followers, and voters – have attracted much scholarly attention. Quite early, methods were developed to collect and analyse Twitter data that gave room for comparative studies across elections and countries (Larsson & Moe, 2012, 2014; Moe & Larsson, 2013). Enli and Skogerbø (2013) noted that social media such as Facebook and Twitter rapidly became campaigning tools for parties and individual candidates, seemingly reinforcing the image of “celebrity politicians” and extending the room for personal campaigning in a party-centred system. Other studies show a variety of interactive social media practices among politicians and parties (Larsson, 2014; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2016); between and within political systems (Enli & Moe, 2015); and between politicians representing small and large parties, to mention some of the aspects that have been addressed. One line of research is the series of studies on how political actors use social media to interact with voters (Enli, 2015; Karlsen & Enjolras, 2016). Karlsen and colleagues have, in a number of publications, discussed how social media influence and shape political debates. Among other issues, they have studied the echo chamber hypothesis, that is, whether the fragmentation of the media leads to formation of closed rooms, echo chambers (Sunstein, 2007), or filter bubbles (Pariser, 2011). In line with international findings (Bruno, 2019), there is little evidence in the Norwegian studies that social media lead to fragmentation to the degree that these theories suggest (Karlsen, 2015; Karlsen et al., 2017). In sum, these studies show that social media have extended the political space for interaction between politicians and other societal groups. This is true not only in a quantitative sense – by adding to the sheer number of places where communication takes place – but is also valid in qualitative terms, as this plethora of services all feature different affordances allowing for various types of staging, interaction, and performances.

### *Media distortion, mediatization, and political journalism*

A third strand that has been important for decades started with an article by Norwegian sociologist and co-leader of the first Power Project, Gudmund Hernes (1977). Hernes argued – in line with the thesis on limited media effects on political attitudes – that the media may have little influence on attitudes and direct decision-making, but considerable power in “distorting” the way politics is mediated and communicated. This distortion took place by way of the media adapting political messages to media formats as well as pressure groups adapting their messages to fit with journalistic criteria. The concept was developed in later publications (Eide & Hernes, 1987) and has remained a major theory in Norwegian studies of media power (Sæbø & Slaatta, 1997). The early publications foreran the later concepts of “media logic” (Altheide, 2013; Altheide & Snow, 1979) and “mediatization”, first formulated by Asp (1986) and later developed by Knut Lundby (2009), Jesper Strömbäck (Esser & Strömbäck,



2014; Strömbäck, 2008), Stig Hjarvard (2013), and many others inside and outside the Nordic countries. The influence of the early conceptualisation of media influence as having a distorting influence on politics remained a theme in Norwegian political communication (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Aalberg & Jensen, 2007), and the international debate on mediatisation contributed to its development without removing the importance of the early contributions. In other words, the observation that political actors, politicians, as well as grassroots movements use the media logic to draw attention to their causes was incorporated early in Norwegian political communication research and developed further in studies of power, politics, and journalism (S. Allern, 1997; Knudsen, 2016). Norwegian researchers have also extended the study of mediatisation to other parts of the political system, namely public bureaucracies (Figenschou et al., 2017; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014).

Today, Norwegian studies of political journalism cover many themes and partly overlap with other fields (S. Allern, 2011, 2015; Thorbjørnsrud, 2009; see also Allern et al., Chapter 7). Local political journalism has been studied for decades and has recently regained much attention (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2019). Political journalism on different platforms (Rogstad, 2015), the relationship between sources and journalists (S. Allern, 1992, 1997; Skogerbø & Moe, 2015), scandals (S. Allern & Pollack, 2012), and political journalism in minority media (Ijäs, 2012; Skogerbø et al., 2019) are among the themes that may be subsumed under political communication.

### *The public sphere and rhetoric*

A fourth group of perspectives that has attracted much attention in political communication is studies of public speeches, rhetoric, and the public sphere. Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) was translated into Norwegian (Habermas, 1971) nearly 20 years before its English version and had major impact on studies of political and democratic communication. Partly overlapping with the other strands that we have singled out, the public sphere perspective has been discussed and applied as a framework for assessing media performance and political journalism (Eide, 1984), as a theoretical and normative framework for analysing political communication (Aalberg et al., 2015), and for assessing the growth and transformation of the Norwegian public sphere (Gripsrud, 2017). Another, partly linked, tradition – the study of political rhetoric – is becoming increasingly vocal in political communication studies (Kjeldsen, 2015; Kjeldsen et al., Chapter 18). Norwegian scholars have looked at, for instance, the credibility of political orators (Johansen, 2002) and visual political rhetoric (Krogstad, 2015). To date, Johansen's book (2019) on the emergence, growth, and distribution of rhetorical power in political communication in pre-democratic Norway is the most comprehensive study

in the field. This strand of research and the integration of rhetoric and visual political rhetoric also represent the interdisciplinarity of Norwegian political communication in the sense that we find research grounded in the humanities, the social sciences, and to some extent other disciplines.

These four main lines of research amount to substantial, but not exhaustive, categories of Norwegian political communication research. The field is fast developing, quantitatively and qualitatively. Researchers from diverse disciplines extend the numbers of themes, methods, and data sources that can be subsumed under the umbrella of political communication practically as we speak, and thereby also questions and challenges for the future.

### Future challenges

There are at least two major challenges for future political communication research as we see it. First, the changing media: Much attention has, over the past decade, been given to the growth, application, and impact of social media for political communication, which in many different ways have changed the conditions for communication between parties, politicians, and voters, in Norway and elsewhere (see, e.g., Kalsnes et al., 2017; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2016). Mediatisation – in the version of a theory describing the distorting effects that journalism seemingly has on political practices (Aalberg & Jenssen, 2007) – may have lost some of its descriptive and explanatory power (Nygren & Niemikari, 2019; see also Strandberg & Carlson, Chapter 4) as digital media provide so many ways for “dodging the gatekeepers” (Skovsgaard & van Dalen, 2013). Parties and politicians have increased their power as sources by having access to many alternative platforms for publishing news, such as producing their own messages and content, publishing on their own channels, and being able to negotiate the conditions on which they appear in the news media (Brands et al., 2018; Maurer & Beiler, 2018). Simultaneously, the legacy news media no longer have the same hold on audiences that they once had, in Norway probably the strongest in the 1980s and 1990s as media consumption rose to unprecedented figures both in time and spending (Skogerbø & Syvertsen, 2004). Still, mediatisation is a useful term for describing macro-processes of social and political change (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Hjarvard, 2013). So far, much less attention has been given to the fact that the environments in which journalism is produced are undergoing fundamental changes. Key to future research is thus to theorise and reconceptualise the political communication process in a constantly changing media system.

Second, the changing politics: Over the past decade, political communication research in Norway has, as mentioned above, studied new themes, such as social media’s impact on election campaigns, populism, political journalism,

lobbyism, and alternative media. All these include important topics, approaches, and perspectives, yet it remains to be seen whether any of them are adequate for analysing the challenges created by the climate crisis, on the one hand, and the major challenges to privacy created by increasingly sophisticated technologies for surveillance and monitoring of social and political phenomena, on the other. What new constellations of political actors – if any – do the increasingly pressing effects of climate and environment issues give rise to? The 2017 election sent shockwaves through established parties that were hit by the strength of the toll-road protests, and similar protests may emerge on other issues. In this perspective, there may be unpredicted and unexpected challenges to political communication practices and research that we do not overview at this point in time.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have outlined the main aspects of Norwegian political communication and the political and media systems in which political communication takes place. Norway can be described as a constitutional monarchy and an affluent, small, stable welfare democracy. The revenues and management of the petroleum industry act as a financial backbone, but they are also vulnerable in light of the climate crisis. Norway is a multiparty political system where governments are created on the basis of negative parliamentarism: a cabinet does not need to be supported by a majority in parliament (the Storting), but it must resign if a majority votes against it. The electoral system is proportional representation and consists of four-year electoral terms (national and local).

The Norwegian media system, along with the other Nordic systems, is what Hallin and Mancini (2004) categorised as democratic corporatist, a categorisation still open to debate (Enli & Syvertsen, 2020; Syvertsen et al., 2014). Over the past decade, the media industry has transformed into a digital and hybrid sector in which journalism is produced, distributed, and consumed on a variety of digital and social media platforms, most notably smartphones and other portable devices. These changes have caused major challenges to business models and consumption patterns, but there are also clear signs of continuity. The public broadcaster NRK and its commercial counterpart, TV2, have adapted to the digital environment. Media policy-making, funding, and the media subsidy system have been changed but upheld, and the local media structures, in particular local newspapers, were until 2020 surprisingly stable. Accordingly, political communication in the 2020s takes place on a large number of arenas: the traditional news media, many kinds of digital and social media, and offline. As always, it takes many different forms, expressions, and messages, and there is a marked shift to Internet and social media platforms as main sources for the youngest generations.

Following this description, we outlined four strands of political communication research in Norway. First, we outlined election studies, which have a long history and theoretically span the phase of powerless media to agenda-setting and framing and contemporary discussions of professionalisation, populism, and election communication on social and digital media. Second, we outlined social media and politics, partly overlapping with the former, which have over the past decade generated a host of studies on the use, implementation, and impact that social media and new media forms have on political campaigns, political influence, and political debate and discussion. Third, we emphasised mediatisation and political journalism, which are also long-term interests of Norwegian researchers. How media logics and journalistic practices influence political communication have been explored for decades and from many angles and perspectives and have recently been employed to analyse new problems and actors, such as bureaucracies and Twitter communication. Fourth, we outlined studies on the public sphere and rhetoric. Over the years, a host of studies on the development of political speeches and on the conditions for public sphere developments have been published (e.g., Gripsrud, 2017; Johansen 2019).

Lastly, we identified two future challenges for Norwegian political communication research. The first is simply that the media are changing and digital media open up for a host of new practices of both producing and consuming political communication. We pointed to the increased possibilities of sources for “dodging the gatekeepers”, legacy media losing its hold on its audience, but there are many other examples. The second challenge is that politics are changing and will create new forms of communication; the recurrent and permanent crises, such as pandemics and the climate crisis, are some of the issues that will demand much attention in the years to come. Other factors are security issues raised by the increased opportunities for surveillance and the pressures on privacy. These and many other issues will demand research into the conditions for sustaining democratically viable political communication practices.

In conclusion, we will nevertheless point to two main characteristics following our discussion. First, Norwegian democracy stands out as being stable despite the several global crises over the past decade and some turbulence in the Norwegian government. The large picture shows a resilient and stable welfare state. Simultaneously, the media industries and the political communication structures have been disrupted and changed by digitisation and hybridisation, yet, there are also clear signs that the large media houses adapt and transform their editorial and journalistic performance to the new conditions, but other political actors do as well.

## References

- Aalberg, T., & Curran, J. (Eds.). (2012). *How media inform democracy: A comparative approach*. London: Routledge.

- Aalberg, T., Elvestad, E., & Skogerbo, E. (2015). Demokrati og offentlighet [Democracy and the public sphere]. In Ø. Ihlen, E. Skogerbo, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon* [Power, media and politics: Norwegian political communication] (pp. 22–33). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Aalberg, T., & Jenssen, A. T. (2007). *Den medialiserte politikken* [The mediated politics]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Aardal, B. (2011). The Norwegian electoral system and its political consequences. *World Political Science Review*, 7(1), 1–31.
- Aardal, B., Krogstad, A., & Narud, H. M. (2004). *I valgkampens hete: Strategisk kommunikasjon og politisk usikkerhet* [In the heat of the election campaign: Strategic communication and political uncertainty]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Ahva, L., van Dalen, A., Hovden, J. F., Kolbeins, G. H., Löfgren Nilsson, M., Skovsgaard, M., & Väliverronen, J. (2017). A welfare state of mind? *Journalism Studies*, 18(5), 595–613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1249005>
- Allern, E., Heidar, K., & Karlsen, R. (2016). *After the mass party: Continuity and change in political parties and representation in Norway*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Allern, S. (1992). *Kildenes makt: Ytringsfrihetens politiske økonomi* [The power of the sources: The political economy of freedom of speech]. Oslo: Pax.
- Allern, S. (1997). *Når kildene byr opp til dans: Et søkelys på profesjonelle kildeorganisasjoners mediestrategier og nyhetsinnflytelse* [When the sources ask for a dance: A searchlight on professional media organisations' media strategies and news influence]. Fredrikstad, Norway: Department of Journalism.
- Allern, S. (2011). *Fjernsynsvalgkampen: Program, deltakere og maktkamp 1961–2009* [The television election campaign: Programme, participants and power struggle 1961–2009]. Oslo: Pax.
- Allern, S. (2015). Politisk journalistikk på norsk: Sjanger, journalistroller og maktrelasjoner [Political journalism in Norwegian: Genres, journalist roles, and power relations]. In Ø. Ihlen, E. Skogerbo, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon* [Power, media and politics: Norwegian political communication] (pp. 196–206). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Allern, S., & Pollack, E. (2012). *Scandalous! The mediated construction of political scandals in four Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Altheide, D. L. (2013). Media logic, social control, and fear. *Communication Theory*, 23(3), 223–238. <https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12017>
- Altheide, D. L., & Snow, R. P. (1979). *Media logic* (Vol. 89). London: Sage.
- Anderson, B. (2006). *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Asp, K. (1986). *Mäktiga massmedier: Studier i politisk opinionsbildning* [Powerful mass media: Studies in political opinion formation]. Stockholm: Akademilitteratur.
- Bergh, J., & Karlsen, R. (2019). Politisk dagsorden og sakseierskap ved stortingsvalget i 2017 [Political agenda and case ownership in the 2017 parliamentary elections]. In J. Bergh, & B. Aardal (Eds.), *Velgere og valgkamp: En studie av stortingsvalget 2017* [Voters and the election campaign: A study of the 2017 parliamentary elections] (pp. 27–43). Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Bjørklund, T. (2005). Stortingsvalget 2005: Velgere som velferds klienter [The parliamentary elections 2005: Voters as welfare clients]. *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift*, 4(22), 444–454.
- Brands, B. J., Graham, T., & Broersma, M. (2018). Social media sourcing practices: How Dutch newspapers use tweets in political news coverage. In J. Schwanholz, T. S. Graham, & P.-T. Stoll (Eds.), *Managing democracy in the digital age* (pp. 159–178). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.
- Bruns, A. (2019). *Are filter bubbles real?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eide, M. (1984). “Etter det vi forstår på politisk hold– ”: Politikere og massemedia [“According to what we understand in political terms– ”: Politicians and mass media]. Bergen: Scandinavian University Press.

- Eide, M., & Hernes, G. (1987). *Død og pine: Om massemedia og helsepolitikk* [Death and torment: About mass media and health policy]. Oslo: Fafo.
- Enli, G. (2015). Politisk logikk eller medielogikk? – Norske partilederes strategier, imagebygging og autentisitet i sosiale medier [Political or media logic? – Norwegian party leaders' strategies, image-building, and authenticity in social media]. *Norsk Medietidsskrift*, 22(3), 1–19.
- Enli, G., & Moe, H. (Eds.) (2015). *Social media and election campaigns – Key tendencies and ways forward*. London: Routledge.
- Enli, G. S., & Skogerbø, E. (2013). Personalized campaigns in party-centred politics. *Information, Communication & Society*, 16(5), 757–774. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.782330>
- Enli, G., & Syvertsen, T. (2020). The media welfare state: Why such a concept, what it is used for, does it have a future? *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, 2, 37–45. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njms-2020-0004>
- Esser, F., & Strömbäck, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Figenschou, T., Karlsen, R., Kolltveit, K., & Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2017). Serving the media ministers: A mixed-methods study on the personalization of ministerial communication. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 22(4), 411–430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161217720772>
- Gripsrud, J. (2017). *Allmenningen: Historien om norsk offentlighet* [The history of the Norwegian public sphere]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1971). *Borgerlig offentlighet – dens framvekst og forfall: Henimot en teori om det borgerlige samfunn* [Civil bourgeoisie – its emergence and decay: Towards a theory of bourgeois society]. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of Bourgeois society*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Haugsgjerd, A., Karlsen, R., & Aalberg, T. (2019). Velgere i valgkamp – forsterkes politiske forskjeller? [Voters in electoral campaigns – are political differences amplified?] In J. Bergh, & B. Aardal (Eds.), *Velgere og valgkamp: En studie av stortingsvalgkampen 2017* [Voters and the election campaign: A study of the 2017 parliamentary elections] (pp. 81–102). Oslo: Cappelen Damm.
- Heidar, K., & Saglie, J. (2002). *Hva skjer med partiene?* [What is happening with the parties?] Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk.
- Hernes, G. (1977). Det medievridde samfunn [The media-twisted society]. *Samtiden*, (1), 1–14.
- Hjarvard, S. (2013). *The mediatization of culture and society*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203155363>
- Ihlen, Ø., Skogerbø, E., & Allern, S. (Eds.). (2015). *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon* [Power, media, and politics: Norwegian political communication]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Ijäs, A. J. (2012). *Samer i to norske nyhetsmedier: En undersøkelse av saker med samisk hovedfokus i Nordlys og Dagsrevyen i perioden 1970–2000* [Sámi in two Norwegian news media: An investigation of cases with Sámi focus in Nordlys and Dagsrevyen in the period 1970–2000]. Kautokeino, Norway: Sámi University of Applied Sciences.
- Johansen, A. (2002). *Talerens troverdighet: Tekniske og kulturelle betingelser for politisk retorikk* [The credibility of the speaker: Technical and cultural conditions for political rhetoric]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Johansen, A. (2019). *Komme til orde: Politisk kommunikasjon 1814–1913* [Speaking out: Political communication 1814–1913]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Josefsen, E., Mörkenstam, U., Nilsson, R., & Saglie, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Ett folk, ulike valg: Sametingsvalg i Norge og Sverige* [One people, different choices: Sámi Parliamentary elections in Norway and Sweden]. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Kalsnes, B., Larsson, A. O., & Enli, G. S. (2017). The social media logic of political interaction: Exploring citizens' and politicians' relationship on Facebook and Twitter. *First Monday*, 22(2). <https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v22i2.6348>

- Karlsen, R. (2010). Fear of the political consultant: Campaign professionals and new technology in Norwegian electoral politics. *Party Politics*, 16(2), 193–214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809341055>
- Karlsen, R. (2015). Followers are opinion leaders: The role of people in the flow of political communication on and beyond social networking sites. *European Journal of Communication*, 30(3), 301–318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323115577305>
- Karlsen, R. (2019). Partisentrert profesjonalisering – profesjonelle i norsk politikk [Party-centred professionalisation – professionals in Norwegian politics]. In E. H. Allern, J. Saglie, & Ø. Østerud (Eds.), *Makt og opposisjon: De politiske partiene som demokratisk paradoks* [Power and opposition: The political parties as a democratic paradox] (pp. 134–148). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Karlsen, R., & Aalberg, T. (2015). Selektiv eksponering for medialgkampen [Selective exposure to the media election campaign]. In B. Aardal, & J. Bergh (Eds.), *Valg og velgere: [Elections and voters]* (Ch. 6). Oslo: Cappelen Damm.
- Karlsen, R., & Enjolras, B. (2016). Styles of social media campaigning and influence in a hybrid political communication system: Linking candidate survey data with Twitter data. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 21(3), 338–357. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216645335>
- Karlsen, R., & Skogerbø, E. (2015). Candidate campaigning in parliamentary systems: Individualized vs. localized campaigning. *Party Politics*, 21(3), 428–439.
- Karlsen, R., Steen-Johnsen, K., Wollebæk, D., & Enjolras, B. (2017). Echo chamber and trench warfare dynamics in online debates. *European Journal of Communication*, 32(3), 257–273. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323117695734>
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2015). Politisk retorikk: Kunsten å overveie, avveie og bestemme seg [Political rhetoric: The art of considering, weighing, and deciding]. In Ø. Ihlen, E.
- Skogerbø, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon* [Power, media and politics: Norwegian political communication] (pp. 76–88). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Knudsen, E. (2016). Når nyhetsrammer og medialisering møtes – Hvordan og hvorfor ramme- og medialiseringsteori bør integreres tettere [When news frames and mediatization meet – How and why framework and mediatization theory should be integrated more closely]. *Norsk Medietidsskrift*, 23(4), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.0805-9535-2016-04-02>
- Krogstad, A. (2015). Visuell politisk retorikk [Visual political rhetoric]. In Ø. Ihlen, E. Skogerbø, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon* [Power, media and politics: Norwegian political communication] (pp. 244–256). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Larsson, A. O. (2014). Pandering, protesting, engaging: Norwegian party leaders on Facebook during the 2013 ‘Short campaign’. *Information, Communication & Society*, 18(4), 459–473. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.967269>
- Larsson, A. O., & Moe, H. (2012). Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign. *New Media & Society*, 14(5), 729–747. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811422894>
- Larsson, A. O., & Moe, H. (2014). Triumph of the underdogs? Comparing Twitter use by political actors during two Norwegian election campaigns. *Sage Open*, 4(4), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014559015>
- Larsson, A. O., & Skogerbø, E. (2016). Out with the old, in with the new? Perceptions of social (and other) media by local and regional Norwegian politicians. *New Media and Society*, 20(1), 219–236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816661549>
- Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948). *The people's choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign* (2nd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lijphart, A. (2013). *Patterns of democracy: Government forms and performance in thirty-six countries*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press.
- Lundby, K. (2009). *Mediatization: Concept, changes, consequences*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Mathisen, B. R., & Morlandstø, L. (Eds.). (2019). *Blindsoner og mangfold: En studie av journalistikken i lokale og regionale medier* [Blind zones and diversity: A study of journalism in local

- and regional media]. Stamsund, Norway: Orkana akademisk.
- Maurer, P., & Beiler, M. (2018). Networking and political alignment as strategies to control the news. *Journalism Studies*, 19(14), 2024–2041. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1310627>
- Mediemangfoldsutvalget. (2017). *Det norske mediemangfoldet: En styrket mediepolitikk for borgerne* [Norwegian media diversity: A strengthened media policy for the citizens]. <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/1e0e03eacdad4c2f865b3bc208e6c006/no/pdfs/nou201720170007000dddpdfs.pdf>
- Medienorge. (2019a). Min viktigste nyhetskilde [My most important news source]. Retrieved May 22, 2020, from <http://www.medienorge.uib.no/statistikk/medium/ikt/374>
- Medienorge. (2019b). Lesing av papiravis fordelt på type avis – resultat [Reading of paper newspapers by type of newspaper – results]. Retrieved May 22, 2020, from <http://medienorge.uib.no/statistikk/medium/avis/239>
- Moe, H., & Larsson, A. O. (2013). Untangling a complex media system. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.783607>
- Myhre, J. E. (2015). *Norsk historie 1814–1905: Å bygge ein stat og skape ein nasjon* [Norwegian history 1814–1905: To build a state and create a nation] (2nd ed.). Oslo: Samlaget.
- Narud, H. M. (2008). Partienes nominasjoner: Hvem deltar? Og spiller det noen rolle? [Party nominations: Who participates? And does it matter?] *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, 49(4), 543–573.
- Narud, H. M., Pedersen, M. N., & Valen, H. (Eds.). (2002). *Party sovereignty and citizen control: Selecting candidates for parliamentary elections in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway* (Vol. 253). Odense, Denmark: Heraldisk Selskab.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2019). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2019*. [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR\\_2019\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/inline-files/DNR_2019_FINAL.pdf)
- Nielsen, R. K., Gorwa, R., & Buning, M. D. C. (2019). *What can be done? Digital media policy options for strengthening European democracy*. [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/What\\_Can\\_Be\\_Done\\_FINAL.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2019-11/What_Can_Be_Done_FINAL.pdf)
- Norges Bank. (2020). The fund. Retrieved July 4, 2020, from <https://www.nbim.no/>
- Nygren, G., & Niemikari, R. (2019). Media logics as part of the political toolkit: A critical discussion on theories of mediatization of politics. In K. M. Johansson, & G. Nygren (Eds.), *Close and distant: Political executive-media relations in four countries* (pp. 197–220). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Ohlsson, J. (2015). *The Nordic media market: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden* (Vol. 13). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Olsen, R. K., & Solvoll, M. K. (2018a). Bouncing off the paywall – Understanding misalignments between local newspaper value propositions and audience responses. *International Journal on Media Management*, 20(3), 174–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14241277.2018.1529672>
- Olsen, R. K., & Solvoll, M. K. (2018b). Reinventing the business model for local newspapers by building walls. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 15(1), 24–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2018.1445160>
- Pariser, E. (2011). *The filter bubble: What the Internet is hiding from you*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Pedersen, A. W., & Kuhnle, S. (2017). The Nordic welfare state model. In O. Knutsen (Ed.), *The Nordic models in political science: Challenged, but still viable?* (pp. 219–238). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Regjeringen. (2020, April 27). Fordeling av mandatene ved neste stortingsvalg [Distribution of mandates at the next parliamentary elections]. Retrieved May 5, 2020, from [https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/fordeling-av-mandatene-ved-neste-stortingsvalg/id2699589/?utm\\_source=www.regjeringen.no&utm\\_medium=epost&utm\\_campaign=nyhetsvarsel%2027.04.2020&utm\\_content=Valg%20og%20demokrati](https://www.regjeringen.no/no/aktuelt/fordeling-av-mandatene-ved-neste-stortingsvalg/id2699589/?utm_source=www.regjeringen.no&utm_medium=epost&utm_campaign=nyhetsvarsel%2027.04.2020&utm_content=Valg%20og%20demokrati)
- Rogstad, I. L. (2015). *Tweets that matter: Politisk kommunikasjon i et nytt medielandskap* [Political communication in a new media landscape] [Doctoral dissertation, University of Oslo, Norway].
- Rokkan, S. (1967). Geography, religion and social class: Crosscutting cleavages in Norwegian politics. In S. M. Lipset, & S. Rokkan (Eds.), *Party systems and voter alignments. Cross-national perspectives*. New York: The Free Press.



- Rokkan, S., & Torsvik, P. (1960). The voter, the reader and the party press: An analysis of the of political preferences and newspaper reading in Norway. *International Communication Gazette*, 6(3), 311–328. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001654926000600305>
- Rommetvedt, H. (2017). Scandinavian corporatism in decline. In O. Knutsen (Ed.), *The Nordic models in political science: Challenged, but still viable?* (pp. 171–192). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Skogerbø, E. (2020). History of local media in Norway. In A. Gulyas, & D. Baines (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to local media and journalism*. Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge.
- Skogerbø, E., Josefsen, E., & Fjellström, A.-M. (2019). Indigenous political journalism in the Norwegian and Swedish public service broadcasters. *Journalism Studies*, 20(7), 991–1008. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1477550>
- Skogerbø, E., & Moe, H. (2015). Twitter på tvers – koblinger mellom journalister og politikere [Across Twitter – links between journalists and politicians]. *Norsk Medietidsskrift*, 3(22), 1–21.
- Skogerbø, E., & Syvertsen, T. (2004). Towards an information society? The value of media production and consumption. *Javnost – The Public*, 11(1), 45–60.
- Skovsgaard, M., & van Dalen, A. (2013). Dodging the gatekeepers? Social media in the campaign mix during the 2011 Danish elections. *Information, Communication & Society*, 16(5), 737–756. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.783876>
- Strömbäck, J. (2008). Four phases of mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(3), 228–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208319097>
- Sunstein, C. R. (2007). *Republic.com 2.0*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Syvertsen, T., Enli, G., Mjøs, O. J., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- Sæbø, G., & Slaatta, T. (1997). Makten og Hernes – i evighet: Maktutredningens medieforskning i et faghistorisk perspektiv [The power and Hernes – forever: The Power Inquiry's media research in a professional historical perspective]. *Norsk medietidsskrift*, 1(4), 47–82.
- Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2009). *Journalistenes valg: Produksjon, interaksjon, iscenesettelse: Møtet mellom journalistikk og politikk i en valgkamp med fokus på NRK Fjernsynets valgformater* [Journalists' choices: Production, interaction, staging: The meeting between journalism and politics in an election campaign focusing on the NRK Television's choice formats] [Doctoral dissertation, University of Oslo, Norway].
- Thorbjørnsrud, K., Figenschou, T. U., & Ihlen, Ø. (2014). Mediatization in public bureaucracies: A typology. *Communications*, 39(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2014-0002>
- Valen, H., Narud, H. M., & Skare, A. (2002). Norway: Party dominance and decentralized decision making. In H. M. Narud, M. N. Pedersen, & H. Valen (Eds.), *Party sovereignty and citizen control: Selecting candidates for parliamentary elections in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway* (pp. 169–215). Odense, Denmark: Odense University Press.
- Valgresultat.no. (2018). Tall for hele Norge: Stortingsvalg 2017 [Count for Norway: Parliamentary election 2017]. <https://valgresultat.no/?type=st&year=2017>



## Chapter 6

# Media and politics in Sweden

Lars Nord & Marie Grusell

### Abstract

This chapter introduces political communication in Sweden with a particular focus on the most important developments during the last decade, and we discuss current main actors and structures and the dynamic interplay between voters, politics, and media. Important changes are taking place with regard to the party system, the media system, and voter behaviour, and the current transformations have various causes. On the supply side, no part of the Swedish society is untouched by the new opportunities offered by digitalisation and new media technology. The hybrid media system parallels news media and social media and blurs the lines between information and entertainment. Mass media companies converge to platform neutral digital media companies, and political parties navigate between traditional and digital communication channels in their efforts to reach voters. On the demand side, new media habits and media diets develop, more individual and fragmented than ever before.

**Keywords:** political communication, Sweden, mediatisation, professionalisation, media system

## Introduction

Sweden has changed. It can be argued that the globally known “middle way” country (Childs, 1936), successfully balancing liberalism and social welfare, has now been transformed to a less notable country “somewhere in the middle” in most socioeconomic international rankings. From a political communication perspective, Sweden has traditionally been described as a blended country, successfully mixing liberal ideas of freedom of the press with state interventions to guarantee media pluralism in cases where the market is not able to achieve it. Whether these distinctive features prevail is, however, an open question.

Using the well-known typology from media scholars Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini, Sweden has often been referred to as a typical democratic-corporatist

country, where politics and media-relations have been characterised by a strong mass press, political parallelism, journalistic professionalism, and a vital role of the state (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In a specific overview of Swedish political communication published more than a decade ago, gradual changes within political and media systems were noted, but at the same time country-specific relations between politics, media, and the public were still considered relatively important for political communication developments (Strömbäck & Nord, 2008).

Today, the middle way metaphor has probably become an even more obsolete way to describe contemporary societal developments in Sweden. In some political communication aspects, the country could rather be described as an “extreme case”, for example with regard to digitalisation processes: people’s access to broadband and the use of mobile devices are extremely high in international comparison, and the profile of young audiences’ media use deviates more from other users than in other countries. Furthermore, the hitherto political stability and steady bloc-politics have now been replaced by new alliances across previous ideological borders, increased party fragmentation, and more complex parliamentary scenarios (Nord et al., 2018). Finally, legacy media such as daily newspapers and public service media face several serious challenges in the digital media landscape both with regard to economic and audience developments (Weibull et al., 2018).

The objective of this chapter is threefold. Firstly, we introduce political communication in Sweden with a particular focus on the most important developments during the last decade. Thus, we discuss the current main actors and structures and relevant aspects of the dynamic interplay between voters, politics, and media. Political parties are described with regard to election results, roles in the parliament or government, and structural and strategic communication profiles during election campaigns. Distinctive features of the Swedish political communication system that differ from the other Nordic countries are particularly observed.

Secondly, we address central political communication theories with relevance for these developments with a particular focus on the contemporary trends of mediatisation, professionalisation, and market orientation of political and media actors in Sweden. The merits and shortcomings of these three central theories are analysed, and possible future challenges and changes in media and politics-relations are discussed. Additionally, recent signs of fragmentation of the public sphere, the political system, and the media system are addressed.

Thirdly, we highlight some possible challenges for future political communication research in Sweden. Generally speaking, political communication research in Sweden as well as in other countries is struggling with the relevance of long-established theories of the field in the digital age (e.g., agenda-setting, gatekeeping) (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018). Furthermore, the most used methodo-

logical approaches in the field (e.g., surveys and content analysis) are not always perfect instruments to catch real-time developments and scattered audience behaviour. From an empirical point of view, political communication research in Sweden probably needs to widen the analytical perspective from the “usual suspects” – voters, parties, and media – to include other important actors (e.g., lobbyists, influencers, and alternative media). Last, but not least, it is relevant to address the risks with the ongoing internationalisation of political communication research encouraging more studies of Sweden as an interesting case in international comparison, but at the same time offering less substantial and comprehensive analyses of specific conditions of Swedish political communications with great societal relevance.

### Old democracy faces new political challenges

Sweden celebrated 100 years of democracy in December 2018. In 1918, a majority in the parliament decided to suggest universal suffrage in the country. However, the celebration activities were partly overshadowed by the current political crisis and the very long process to form a new government due to the complicated parliamentary situation after the outcome of the national elections in September 2018. There were, of course, very good reasons to remember 100 years of societal progress and democratic stability. But at the same time, the contemporary political situation illustrated new challenges facing the old democracy. More than 100 days of forming a new government was definitely more widely discussed than 100 years of democratic conditions.

The electoral system in Sweden is strictly proportional with a 4 per cent threshold for receiving seats in parliament. Voters use party list ballots with a possibility to mark one single candidate they prefer, but most votes are still based on sole party preferences. In contrast to all other Nordic countries, since 1970, Swedes vote every fourth year on national, regional, and local level on the same day. Additionally, there are elections to the European Parliament every fifth year (Bäck et al., 2015). This makes election campaigns rare, and Sweden has been referred to as the country in Europe where voters go to polling stations least frequently.

This electoral system has some obvious consequences. First of all, the national electoral campaign overshadows campaigns on lower administrative levels, which means that regional and local issues are somewhat neglected in media coverage and public debate during the election campaign. National party leaders are often more well known than local leaders by the public. Second, the system seems to promote voter turnout. Most people vote in all the three elections when they go to the polling stations, and thus voter turnout is remarkably high in Sweden, also on regional and local levels. On the national level, voter turnout

has increased in every election since 2002, and 87.2 per cent of the electorate voted in the national elections in 2018. However, voter turnout in the European Parliament elections is still much lower but reached an all-time high in 2019, with a voter turnout of 53.3 per cent of eligible voters (Bolin et al., 2019).

The party system in Sweden has historically been described as one of the most stable in the world, with the same five political parties represented in the parliament between 1918 and 1988, and with the Social Democrats in an almost hegemonic position, ruling the country for 42 years from 1934 to 1976. Political conflicts have regularly been based on left–right-wing ideological positions, but it is important to note that party politics in general and over time have been characterised more by policy compromises and agreements on single issues than by conflicting ideological struggles (Hadenius, 1996). However, relatively new political parties such as the Green Party, the Christian Democrats, New Democracy, and the Sweden Democrats have emerged on the national political scene since 1988, and the success of new parties on the regional and local level is even more evident. The party system has become more fragmented than ever, and power relations between the parties have changed (Bäck et al., 2015; Bäck & Hellström, 2018).

The long-time dominance of the Social Democrats in party politics – perhaps more notable than in any other Nordic country – is now definitely broken. The party is still the biggest in Sweden with 28 per cent of the votes in the 2018 national elections. More interesting is the fact that this is the lowest figure for the biggest party in parliament ever. Another historical record since 2018 is that the two major parties in recent decades, the Social Democrats and the Moderates, together do not reach a majority of the seats in parliament. The nationalist-conservative party, the Sweden Democrats, entered the parliament in 2010 with 5.6 per cent of the votes. In 2018, they received 17.6 per cent of the votes and are currently the third largest party in the Swedish Parliament (Nord et al., 2018). Table 6.1 shows the election results and voter turnout in the five latest national elections.

Party system changes reflect changing conflict patterns in the Swedish society. Traditional social conflicts between left and right positions – distributions of welfare, taxation, and jobs – still exist and play an important role. But they exist together with other conflict dimensions that sometimes tend to be more controversial and dominate public debate. One such dimension is the conflict between economic growth and sustainable environment, where increasing worries for climate change influence party politics. The most important new conflict dimension is, however, the increasing tension between nationalism and globalism, most intensively expressed in the debate about immigration. In the aftermath of the big migration flows to Europe in the autumn of 2015, Sweden received more refugees per capita than any other country on the continent. Immigration became a major topic in Swedish politics, and the only party at that

**Table 6.1** National election results and voter turnout in Sweden, 2002–2018 (per cent)

	2002	2006	2010	2014	2018
Centre Party	6.2	7.9	6.6	6.1	8.6
Christian Democrats	9.1	6.6	5.6	4.6	6.3
Liberals	13.4	7.5	7.0	5.4	5.5
Green Party	4.6	5.2	7.3	6.9	4.4
Moderates	15.3	26.2	30.1	23.3	19.8
Social Democrats	39.9	35	30.7	31	28.3
Sweden Democrats	1.4	2.9	5.7	12.9	17.5
Left Party	8.4	5.8	5.6	5.7	8
Voter turnout	80.1	82	84.6	85.8	87.2

Source: Valmyndigheten, n.d.

time with a restrictive immigration policy, the Sweden Democrats, managed to set the political agenda for the forthcoming years.

The continuous electoral successes of the Sweden Democrats have reshaped the political landscape and made government coalitions less foreseeable (Bäck & Hellström, 2018). In contrast to other Nordic countries, the right-wing nationalist populist party has been isolated by all other political parties, mainly because of its historical roots in neo-Nazism and racist movements. This parliamentary situation made it more difficult than ever to form effective governments, as the only way to prevent the Sweden Democrats from influence was to find new alliances across previous ideological borders. As the result, a minority government of Social Democrats and Greens was formed in January 2019, after four months of negotiations and with support from two former political opponents, the Liberals and the Centre Party.

The main reason behind party fragmentation is changing political preferences within the Swedish electorate. The most significant development with regard to voter behaviour is not a single drift towards left or right, but the overall increasing volatility that makes politics more unpredictable. Predispositions and party alignments seem to be of less importance, and voting decisions are taken later during the campaign. In 2018, a record number of 41 per cent of the electorate voted for another party than they did four years before. About one-third of the electorate made their decision during the campaign and one-fifth during the very last week of the campaign. In many cases, voters' new preferences are within the same group of parties as before, but an increasing number of voters also jump from one political camp to the other side of the political spectrum. It is also quite common to split the votes in national, regional, and local elections. About one-fourth of the electorate normally split their votes on election day (Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2016).

The volatility certainly reflects different public perceptions of politics. First of all, it is a result of decreased party membership and party identification. A

very small group of citizens – around 2 per cent – are still members of a political party, and the majority of Swedish voters do not single out any specific party that they generally identify themselves with in contrast to other parties. These figures have been going down for a very long time and contribute to a political reality where a majority of voters are relatively openminded in their final voting decisions. Traditional class-based and generational voting still exists, but individual preferences are becoming more important (Karlsson & Lundberg, 2015; Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2016).

Second, mistrust of politicians and political institutions in Sweden weakens steady party preferences; about 50 per cent of citizens express “some” or “a lot of” mistrust in political actors (Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2016). Furthermore, government parties in Sweden have regularly faced defeats in upcoming elections, while parties with no political responsibility have generally been more successful (Strömbäck, 2013). Still, it is important to note that citizens, despite political mistrust, seem to have considerable faith in the democratic system as a whole. A solid majority thinks democracy works well, and voter turnout figures are impressively high in international comparisons. Consequently, it may be relevant to describe Sweden as a “cool” democracy where citizens have little passion for political parties and regular personal involvement in political work, but do get mobilised during election campaigns and find it more or less a civic duty to cast their votes on election day.

### Reaching the voter in many more ways

These very significant political conditions – electoral volatility and high voter turnout – make party campaign communications extremely important, as there is much at stake in every election for every party. It is not possible for a single party to get all of the undecided voters, but a successful campaign can definitely be of great importance for the electoral outcome. There are also many indicators of changes of political party communications in recent election campaigns, both with regard to structures and strategies.

Contemporary election campaigns in Sweden are not arenas for amateurs, generalists, or idealists. On the contrary, campaigns are to a large extent managed by professional experts in distinctive areas of communication such as advertising, media management, polling, databases, or social media. In a comparative perspective, party campaign budgets have increased year by year. In 2018, the eight parties in the parliament together spent more than SEK 300 million on their campaign activities, and about 50 per cent of their budgets were advertising costs. This was even more than during the “super election year” of 2014, when both general elections and European Parliament elections were held.



However, party communications are not only developing because of financial and personal resources. Another significant trend is the increase of strategic considerations in the selection of communication channels and platforms and the more frequent use of feedback from voters, using tracking polls, focus groups, and other methods. (Nord & Strömbäck, 2018).

For a long time, the Swedish electoral campaign context was mainly journalist controlled. News programmes, television debates, and party leader hearings were perceived as the highlights of the campaign (Esaiaßon & Håkansson, 2002). In recent years, the combination of downsized newsrooms and more efficient government communication and news management may have changed the balance in favour of political sources (K. M. Johansson et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the increased importance of the Internet and social media changes the relationship between political parties and journalists. In all recent election campaigns, there has been speculations around when social media will take over as the single most important communication tool (Findahl, 2014; Nord et al., 2018). However, this has not happened, and social media are still supplementing rather than replacing traditional news media in election campaigns. On the other hand, digital and social media are undoubtedly becoming increasingly important for political communications as more and more people regularly use the new platforms for every election (Grusell & Nord, 2016; cf. Barrling & Holmberg, 2018).

From a party perspective, social media make it easier to communicate directly with the voter without relying on traditional media. The party use of social media as a new form of communication channel has expanded fast and has been increasingly integrated in the campaign toolbox during recent election campaigns. Today, social media are used by Swedish parties both as a refined tool for communication in the election movement and as a tool for reaching specific groups such as journalists and certain voter groups. All parties, regardless of party size and ideological perspectives, have been working intensively with social media during the last decade. The basic function of social media has been to facilitate communication between party members and arouse interest in different political activities but also to be a channel for mobilising nuclear voters and reaching out to new groups of voters (Bjereld et al., 2018; Grusell & Nord, 2016).

Until the national elections in 2014, all political parties claimed that news media were the most important campaign communication channel. During the election campaign in 2018, however, Facebook was perceived as the single most important communication channel, slightly more important than television news. Table 6.2 shows the party ranking of different communication channels in recent election campaigns.

**Table 6.2** Party perceptions of communication channels' importance in national elections, 2010–2018 (mean values)

	2010	2014	2018
Facebook	4.1	4.5	4.7
TV news	4.6	4.8	4.4
Direct mail	3.5	4.4	3.9
Newspapers	4.6	4.4	3.7
Radio news	4.5	4.2	3.7
Party website	4.6	4.5	3.4
Blogs	4.4	2.8	3.3
Posters	3.6	4.0	3.1
Party desks	4.1	4.1	3.1
Canvassing	3.0	2.5	3.0
TV ads	3.5	3.5	2.6
Internet banners	2.9	3.8	2.3

*Comments:* Communication channels were ranked by campaign managers on a five-point scale (1 = not important at all; 5 = very important);  $N = 8$ .

*Source:* Bolin et al., forthcoming

However, using social media effectively in order to reach the voters during election campaigns is not easy. For politicians who want to use social media to reach their voters, there are many pitfalls – Twitter is a good illustration of this. The national elections of 2010 were predicted, more than any previous election campaign, to be played out online and in social media, but for several different reasons this did not occur, primarily as politicians and political parties were not yet willing to “let go of the microphone”. Tweeting was largely a monologue instead of a dialogue (Grusell & Nord, 2012; cf. Small, 2011); for instance, a study by Larsson and Moe (2012) indicates that only a small proportion of political opinion-makers accounted for a very large number of tweets. Twitter seemed to act as a new channel for voices that already belonged to an elite or had high positions in the media and political life. Another observation was that Twitter was primarily used for giving out information rather than a way of conducting dialogue. Larsson and Moe (2012) say that their study indicates that if the use of Twitter had some effect, it was minimal. Twitter remained a marginal phenomenon even in the 2014 and 2018 elections.

This connection between party campaigns and media features brings us to taking a closer look at the Swedish media system that has undergone dramatic and significant changes in recent decades.

## A competitive and crowded media landscape

The Swedish media system has been described as somewhat of an archetype of a democrat corporatist model with a highly developed newspaper market,

a tradition of political parallelism, a high degree of journalistic professionalism, and with considerable state interventions in the media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). At the same time, a transformation process is evident, where newspaper markets face increased competition from global actors and the traditional links between political parties and media have weakened significantly.

From a media theory perspective, the Swedish media system is still a mixture between classical liberal ideas of the press as an independent fourth estate, and social responsibility ideas concerning the necessity for state interventions in order to maintain diversity and provide journalism produced for public good (Allern & Pollack, 2016). Direct press subsidies to the increasing number of newspapers with low market shares and strong public service media remain as cornerstones of Swedish media policy, even if critique from the private media sector and right-wing politicians against this policy tends to increase (Nord & Ots, 2019). Since 2019, press subsidies are part of a new platform-independent media subsidy system, where support to news media in regions with low media presence is included.

During the last decades, the Swedish media landscape has become highly digitalised and undergone considerable changes as commercial radio and television channels, free tabloid newspapers, and the Internet and social media have been introduced (Weibull et al., 2018). The digital media landscape can be described as more competitive and crowded; the supply of diverse media channels has increased significantly; media choices are more individual and usage patterns become more fragmented. Former mass media such as printed newspapers and broadcast radio and television still attract a huge audience, but are gradually losing terrain, especially in younger generations of the population (Ohlsson, 2019).

The Swedish newspaper market is changing dramatically and facing serious economic challenges (Weibull et al., 2018). Advertising revenues are moving from national newspapers to global giants like Facebook and Google, and the willingness to pay for news is declining, as news is free on many digital platforms. Media ownership is becoming more concentrated, and the number of journalists and newsrooms is decreasing, not least on the local level (Truedson, 2018). Paywalls and premium or plus content are countermeasures from the newspaper industry, and a few leading national media companies are still making good business, but the overall future looks gloomy. Readership figures may look impressive in international comparison but are declining.

Sweden, as well as the other Nordic countries, was once referred to as “the heartland” of public service media (Lowe & Steemers, 2012). But the latest decades have seen a deregulation of broadcast media and increased competition between public service media – financed by licence fees, taxes, or both – and commercial media, financed by advertisements and subscriptions. Furthermore, competition has grown in the digital era, when public

service and private media appear on the same digital platforms and when barriers between, text, audio, and visuals have vanished. The new situation has fuelled the debate about public service remit and their possible “market distortions” (Nord, 2016; Syvertsen et al., 2014). Since 2010, Sweden has agreed to implement a public value test regarding all new public service activities that need to be checked with regard to public service value and market impact (Wormbs, 2011).

However, public service radio and television stations continue to be major players in the Swedish media system. In both linear television and linear radio, public service maintains the market-leading position in terms of aggregate audience shares. In 2018, Sweden’s public service television accounted for 35 per cent of the traditional television daily viewing in the country. The equivalent proportion for Sweden’s public service radio was 75 per cent (Facht & Ohlsson, 2019). Some key figures of media use trends in Sweden are displayed in Table 6.3.

**Table 6.3** Some key figures on media use trends in Sweden, 2010–2018 (per cent)

	2010	2014	2018
Daily newspaper readership	75	67	55
Public radio audience market share	69	79	75
Public TV audience market share	35	35	35
Daily Internet use	76	83	88
Daily social media use	35	48	71

*Comments:* The table shows the share of the whole population that every day reads a newspaper, uses the Internet, or uses social media. Public media audience share is the share of total daily listener or viewer time.

*Source:* Ohlsson, 2019

## A truly digital society

Since the introduction of the Internet, the boundaries of both radio and television have become increasingly unclear. The movement from traditional to digital media is moving at a rapid pace. In 2017, more than 80 per cent of the Swedes had a smartphone and over 60 per cent had a reading tablet. In addition to this, 56 per cent had a subscription to a streaming video on demand (SVoD) service for film, series, or sports. The media consumption through the Internet is increasing, where, for example, Netflix is the market leader in SVoD in Sweden today. In the ad-financed part of the market, YouTube enjoys a corresponding special position (Ohlsson, 2018).

The usage of social media has in a short timespan gone from being part of the private sphere to becoming a natural part in the public conversation. In Sweden, access to and use of the Internet and social media is very high. Overall,

Swedes can be described as an increasingly digitised people. Virtually everyone uses the Internet, from a young age to retirement. The use of broadband via fibre at home is increasing, and more than half of Swedish households are connected to the Internet via fibre. The most common way of using the Internet daily, however, is via mobile phone. For young Swedes, aged between 16–25, there is a 100 per cent use of smartphones (Davidsson et al., 2018).

When the Swedes rank the most important sources of information on a five-point scale, the Internet now receives the highest average value for the first time: 3.7 compared with 3.5 for television and 3.2 for newspapers (Davidsson & Findahl, 2016). Public interest in seeking information about elections on the Internet has also increased. During the 2018 Swedish election campaign, more voters than ever turned to the Internet for political information. This trend was particularly strong among first-time voters. However, television was still perceived as the single most important source of information prior to the election by most voters: 73 per cent of the voters considered television as an important or a very important communication channel, while 41 per cent said the same about websites. Among social media, Facebook was considered the most important source of information (19%), Twitter came in second (12%), and YouTube ranked third (9%) (The Swedish Internet Foundation, 2018).

The most widespread social media platforms are spread across several age and education groups, but generally, the networks are dominated by young people (Davidsson & Thoresson, 2017). But there are also gender differences in usage patterns and differences between people in varying life stages (Findahl, 2013). Currently, the most popular social media platform in Sweden is Facebook, followed by Instagram (Davidsson et al., 2018). Although Facebook currently dominates in terms of social media, it is not certain that the company will hold this position in the future – this will be determined by the users. There is every reason to believe that users will move to other social networks if they are perceived as more attractive.

Furthermore, it is interesting to note that young children's use of the Internet continues to grow: 79 per cent of Swedish toddlers use the Internet, primarily for watching television and videos. By six years of age, 98 per cent use the Internet. In school, it is common to use the Internet both to seek information and as a part of schoolwork. YouTube is the most common service – virtually all young people under 25 years old use YouTube, a large majority of them daily (Davidsson et al., 2018).

Of the Internet users, 77 per cent use play services, half have a subscription to Netflix, and two-thirds listen to music on Spotify. Almost everyone uses Internet banking – the use of mobile Bank ID (a citizen identification and authentication solution) is increasing each year – and 71 per cent of Internet users have the app Swish (a mobile payment system). Additionally, e-commerce is a well-established way to buy goods: Almost all Internet users between the

ages 26 and 55 have bought objects via the Internet that have been delivered by mail (Davidsson et al., 2018).

To sum up, digitalisation processes are rapidly changing media habits and the use of media for political communications. This makes it relevant to ask whether traditional theoretical approaches to studying political communication in Sweden still matter.

### Three central theories become less central

Three theoretical perspectives – mediatisation, professionalisation, and market-orientation processes – stand out as the most central when analysing contemporary Swedish election campaigns (Nord & Strömbäck, 2018). Mediatisation processes are confirmed on different levels: media are the most important source of political information for most people, media organisations are increasingly independent from political institutions, media coverage is more driven by media logic than political logic, and political actors tend to adopt to this media logic in their efforts to catch public attention (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). Media content analyses of Swedish election campaigns and referendum campaigns have been conducted since 1979, and generally confirm that mediatisation is a useful theory for understanding shifting power relations in political communication over time (Asp & Bjerling, 2014; B. Johansson & Truedson, 2017).

Professionalisation processes appear both in political parties and media institutions. External experts and consultants are hired for specific tasks, more money is spent in the campaign (especially on advertising), more sophisticated tools are developed for analysing public opinion, and campaign strategies are more coherent and parts of permanent campaigning perspectives (Gibson & Römmele, 2009; Kioussis et al., 2015). At the same time, political journalism develops in similar ways. Election campaign coverage is generally well planned and following news department strategies. News coverage is characterised by professional news values and intentions to set the political agenda, not just mirroring political standpoints and controversies. Professional political journalism is both an arena for political debate and an independent actor trying to influence and direct this debate (Asp, 1986; Nygren, 2015). Content of political journalism in national news media is more often guided by structural bias than ideological bias. Winners and losers are picked in game-framed contexts, but political actors' positions vary over time. Professional considerations play a more important role in newsroom work than do political orientations (Asp & Bjerling, 2014; Nord & Strömbäck, 2018).

Finally, market orientation is a feature of political communication processes in Sweden, but perhaps not as evident as the other trends. Market orientation is, put simply, about attracting the largest shares of the audience or electorate

as possible. The media system has certainly become more market oriented; competition for audiences and advertisers between private, public, and global actors are tougher than ever. Mass media perspectives are increasingly obsolete in a digital media world where media diets are becoming more individual and fragmented and media choices are almost unlimited (Chadwick, 2013; Syvertsen et al., 2014).

The Swedish party system is not market oriented to the same extent yet. Policy positions are not mainly explained by a willingness to adopt to public opinion trends or attitudes of specific target groups. On the contrary, political ideology and well-established views on political issues are central in public debate, even if political parties do their best to package and frame their ideas and policy positions in order to make them as favourable as possible for potential voters. Signs of market orientation in politics sometimes appear, and results of internal opinion polls can make parties reframe their standpoints to some extent. Still, overall party politics are more about selling (convincing) than marketing (adjusting) (Lees-Marshment, 2001; Nord & Strömbäck, 2018).

The emphasis on these three processes of central importance for political communication is motivated by empirical observations of recent election campaigns, but does not exclude other perspectives or changes of their importance in the future. It may be argued that the processes of mediatisation, professionalisation, and market orientation are all consequences of a more general transformation of political communication conditions in terms of individualisation and fragmentation. The increased voter dealignment and volatility among the electorate make election outcomes less predictable (Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2016). There is much to gain from a successful campaign, and political parties therefore use professional methods and tools and try to get media exposure. It is plausible to assume that changing voter behaviours and attitudes are the main driving forces behind party professionalisation, mediatisation, and market orientation. In similar patterns, more independent voters and decreased party identification have facilitated media system trends towards more professional and active news journalism, media logic perspectives, and commercial audience orientation.

There is no doubt that the trends of mediatisation, professionalisation, and market orientation will be important in more election campaigns to come in Sweden. There are, however, signs of possible disruptions or changes that may affect all of these processes. For example, news media dominance of the public sphere cannot be taken for granted as social media platforms are increasingly used, also during election campaigns (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). Accordingly, mediatisation patterns may be more complex and based on more unpredictable interactions between news media and social media agendas and discourses. Some arguments support the idea that social media are becoming more central in this development, as they may be used effectively by political parties for direct and unedited communication with voters, and as they are

most widely used and appreciated by younger generations. Empirical observations of recent elections campaign suggest that political parties do not yet fully use the interactive potential of social media, and mainly perceive these as just another channel for uni-directional messages (Bjereld et al., 2018). While it is not realistic to assume that social media will replace news media as the main source for political information in forthcoming years, it can be expected that social media logics and structures – that differ in many ways from news media – are gradually becoming more important for the understanding of why political discourse is as it is (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Klinger & Svensson, 2015; Olsson & Eriksson, 2016).

Professionalisation trends are challenged in the media sector by decreasing resources for news departments and commercial pressure on regional and local newspapers (Nielsen, 2015). At the same time, the increased use of user-generated content blurs the line between media producers and media consumers. Hyperlocal media with less professional orientations expands, social media platforms become more important, and so-called alternative media, with more extreme political positions, emerge (Holt, 2016; Nygren et al., 2018). And perhaps most importantly, the increased possibilities to measure digital journalism impact in terms of audience sharing and clicking may decrease the importance of traditional news values and professional considerations in newsroom work and encourage audience-centred perspectives (Hanusch, 2017; Petre, 2018).

For political parties, professionalisation has always been a two-sided coin. Historically, all parties in Sweden are becoming more professionalised, regardless of size and ideological positions (Nord & Strömbäck, 2018). There is no sign of a return to more ad hoc–designed campaigns, and even more sophisticated tools and devices can be expected for the future. Still, professionalisation has never been a single key to electoral success (Moring et al., 2011). There is no clear correlation between professional campaigns and election results. On the contrary, successful parties sometimes conduct unprofessional campaigns. It is worth noting that some recent campaigns, such as Donald Trump’s in the US in 2016, generally have been perceived as less professional but more emotional and appealing to voters’ values (Allen & Parnes, 2017).

Similarly, market-orientation of political parties does not always guarantee success. It may work best for bigger, catch-all parties, who want to expand their base of possible voters. But smaller parties can have more success in profiling themselves as niche parties and sticking to specific values and thus be perceived as ideologically strong and convincing by certain segments of the electorate. It has also been claimed that too much market orientation of politics may be less appreciated in the Swedish political culture. When it comes to the media system, it is more difficult to see any countertrends, as there are no major signs of less-competitive media markets in general. On the margin, some media out-



lets may focus on more idealistic values of investigative journalism, targeting sub-audiences with such preferences.

Thus, established political communication theories generally still have explanatory value when analysing relations between parties, media, and voters in Sweden. At the same time, recent developments in terms of digitalisation of media markets and fragmentation of the public sphere impose huge challenges for future research. The following section of this chapter addresses this topic further and adds some other aspects to this discussion.

### Future challenges and directions of research

Political communication studies in Sweden have always been overshadowed by election studies focused on voter behaviour and party preferences among the electorate. The behavioural approach in political science was introduced at a very early stage, first by legendary political scientist Herbert Tingsten and later by a group of scholars in Gothenburg, initially led by Professor Jörgen Westerståhl. The very first systematic analysis of elections and voter behaviour started in 1958; thus, Sweden has among the most impressive longitudinal studies of voters and elections in the world. To a large extent, these studies also cover central political communication themes, even if they are traditionally more associated with political science.

Other aspects of political communication, such as election campaign communications and media coverage of election campaigns, have always existed but are growing in number in recent decades. Election campaigns are now systematically covered from different perspectives and with an increasing interest in the different roles of social media in political communication. However, studies of other actors outside the classical campaign context – such as lobbyists, influencers, and alternative media, just to mention a few – have to some extent been neglected compared to analyses of the interplay between voters, news media, and party politics. As contemporary political communication takes place in many arenas in society and beyond the election-campaign context (e.g., permanent campaigning), there is a need for more research with a broader approach to opinion formation processes and effects. Such approaches should include interest in new areas of political communication, for example, interactions based on emotional rather than rational aspects, and the non-politicisation of politics in terms of personalisation and privatisation trends, not least in social media.

Another challenge is imposed by the fact that political communication in Sweden, as most other social sciences, has become much more integrated in the international academic community and its traditions. There are obvious advantages with this process; publishing in peer reviewed international academic journals secures high quality of research and working in international research

networks facilitates understanding of country-specific contexts when these are put in international systematic comparisons. However, there is also a risk that the dominating paradigm of internationalisation in political communication leads to less interest for academic works that are highly interesting on the national level, but less attractive for international publishing and the individual academic career. For example, the total dominance of doctoral dissertations based on previously published international articles results in less monographs of typical Swedish phenomena. Ten years ago, it was perceived as a great problem that most Nordic political communication scholars produced their work in native languages and did not reach the international research community (Strömbäck et al., 2008). This problem hardly exists anymore; the problem is rather the lack of works that are nationally relevant.

Finally, it is worth adding that some of the challenges in Sweden are similar to those in many other countries. All over the world, academics in this field must deal with both theoretical and methodological challenges. Well-established central theories in the field, such as gatekeeping and agenda-setting, may still be of relevance, but are also regularly disputed in the light of the ongoing digitalisation and media development and increased media use fragmentation processes (cf. Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Davis, 2019). Additionally, traditional social science methods such as surveys and content analysis may be less accurate to catch these digital media developments. There is definitely a need for more innovative scientific methods based on new technology, such as real-time measurements and systematic analyses of metric data.

## Conclusion

When trying to summarise recent political communication developments in Sweden, it is obvious that important changes are taking place with regard to party system, media system, and voter behaviour. The current transformations have various causes. On the supply side, no part of the Swedish society is untouched by the new opportunities offered by digitalisation and new media technology. The hybrid media system parallels news media and social media and blurs the lines between information and entertainment and between private chats and public discussion. Mass media companies converge to platform-neutral digital media companies, and political parties navigate between traditional and digital communication channels in their efforts to reach voters. On the demand side, new media habits and media diets develop, more individual and fragmented than ever before. Electoral volatility is certainly a driving force in the development of campaign communications.

So, is there still a Swedish model of political communication? Do distinctive national or Nordic features prevail, or are they more or less replaced by global

and transnational trends? The answer to these questions is to a large extent in the eye of the beholder and depends on the perspective. In a national perspective, the abovementioned changes look very significant and indicate that political communication conditions have been drifting in a direction that makes Sweden look more like other countries. Parties become more professionalised, media more commercialised, and voters more volatile. However, in an international comparison, Sweden still stands out on a wide range of important factors, such as high voter turnout, high newspaper reach, strong public service media, and high level of digitalisation in almost all segments of the population. The most correct answer is perhaps that the current “middle way” goes in a slightly more international direction than ten years ago.

## References

- Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 31(2), 211–236. <https://www.doi.org/10.1257/jep.31.2.211>
- Allen, J., & Panres, A. (2017). *Shattered: Inside Hillary Clinton's doomed campaign*. New York: Crown.
- Allern, S., & Pollack, E. (2016). Journalistik som kollektiv nytta [Journalism as a collective benefit]. In O. Westlund (Ed.), *Människorna, medierna och marknaden: Medieutredningens forskningsantologi om en demokrati i förändring* [Citizens, media, and the market: The Media Inquiry's research anthology on a changing democracy] [SOU 2016:30] (pp. 31–52). Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer. <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2016/04/sou-201630/>
- Asp, K. (1986). *Mäktiga massmedier: Studier i politisk opinionsbildning* [Powerful media: Studies of political opinion formation]. Stockholm: Akademitratur.
- Asp, K., & Bjerling, J. (2014). *Mediekratin: Mediernas makt i svenska val* [Mediocracy: Media power in Swedish elections]. Stockholm: Ekerlids.
- Barrling, K., & Holmberg, S. (2018). Demokratins triangeldrama [Democracy's triangle drama]. In K. Barrling, & S. Holmberg (Eds.), *Demokratins framtid* [The future of democracy] (pp. 13–28). Stockholm: Sveriges Riksdag. <https://firademokratin.riksdagen.se/globalassets/05.-global/bestall-och-ladda-ner/demokratins-framtid-antologi-v2x.pdf>
- Bennett, L. W., & Pfetsch, B. (2018). Rethinking political communication in a time of disrupted public spheres. *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 243–253. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jq017>
- Bjereld, U., Blombäck, S., Demker, M., & Sandberg, L. (2018). *Digital demokrati? Partierna i en ny tid* [Digital democracy? Parties in a new age]. Stockholm: Atlas.
- Bolin, N., Falasca, K., Grusell, M., & Nord, L. (Eds.). (2019). *Euroreflections: Leading academics on the European elections 2019*. Sundsvall, Sweden: Demicom, Mid Sweden University.
- Bolin, N., Falasca, K., Grusell, M., & Nord, L. (forthcoming). *De svenska partiernas valkampanjer 2010–2018* [The Swedish political parties' election campaigns 2010–2018]. Sundsvall, Sweden: Demicom, Mid Sweden University.
- Bäck, H., Erlingsson, G. O., & Larsson, T. (2015). *Den svenska politiken: Strukturer, processer och resultat* [Politics in Sweden: Structures, processes, and results]. Stockholm: Liber.
- Bäck, H., & Hellström, J. (2018). Kris i regeringsfrågan? [Government crisis?] In K. Barrling, & S. Holmberg (Eds.), *Demokratins framtid* [The future of democracy] (pp. 269–298). Stockholm: Sveriges Riksdag. <https://firademokratin.riksdagen.se/globalassets/05.-global/bestall-och-ladda-ner/demokratins-framtid-antologi-v2x.pdf>
- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>
- Childs, M. (1936). *Sweden: The middle way*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Davis, A. (2019). *Political communication: A new introduction for crisis times*. Cambridge: Polity.

- Davidsson, P., & Findahl, O. (2016). *Svenskarna och internet 2016* [*The Swedes and the Internet 2016*]. Stockholm: The Swedish Internet Foundation.
- Davidsson, P., Palm, M., & Mandre, Å. M. (2018). *Svenskarna och internet 2018* [*The Swedes and the Internet 2018*]. Stockholm: The Swedish Internet Foundation. [https://internetstiftelsen.se/docs/Svenskarna\\_och\\_internet\\_2018.pdf](https://internetstiftelsen.se/docs/Svenskarna_och_internet_2018.pdf)
- Davidsson, P., & Thoresson, A. (2017). *Svenskarna och internet 2017* [*The Swedes and the Internet 2017*]. Stockholm: The Swedish Internet Foundation.
- Esaiasson, P., & Håkansson, N. (2002). *Besked ikväll! Valprogrammen i svensk radio och TV* [*Answer tonight! Election programmes in Swedish radio and TV*]. Stockholm: Stiftelsen Etermedierna i Sverige.
- Esser, F., & Strömbäck, J. (2014). *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137275844>
- Facht, U., & Ohlsson, J. (2019). *Medie-Sverige 2019* [*Media-Sweden 2019*]. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Findahl, O. (2013). *Svenskarna och internet 2013* [*The Swedes and the Internet 2013*]. Gävle, Sweden: World Internet Institute.
- Findahl, O. (2014). *Svenskarna och internet 2014* [*The Swedes and the Internet 2014*]. Gävle, Sweden: World Internet Institute.
- Gibson, R. K., & Römmle, A. (2009). Measuring the professionalization of political campaigning. *Party Politics*, 15(3), 265–293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809102245>
- Gottfried, J., & Shearer, E. (2016, May 26). *News use across social media platforms 2016*. Pew Research Center. <http://www.journalism.org/2016/05/26/news-use-across-social-media-platforms-2016/>
- Grusell, M., & Nord, L. (2012). Three attitudes to 140 characters: The use and views of Twitter in political party communications in Sweden. *Public Communication Review*, 2(2), 48–61. <https://doi.org/10.5130/pcr.v2i2.2833>
- Grusell, M., & Nord, L. (2016). Setting the trend or changing the game? Professionalization and digitalization of election campaigns in Sweden. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 19(3), 258–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377857.2016.1228555>
- Hadenius, S. (1996). *Svensk politik under 1900-talet: Konflikt och samförstånd* [*Swedish politics in the twentieth century: Conflict and consensus*] (4th ed.). Stockholm: Tiden.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hanusch, F. (2017). Web analytics and the functional differentiation of journalism cultures: Individual, organizational and platform-specific influences on newswork. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(10), 1571–1586. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1241294>
- Holt, K. (2016). “Alternativmedier”? En intervjustudie om mediekritik och mediemisstro [“Alternative Media”? An interview study on media criticism and media mistrust]. In L. Truedson (Ed.), *Migrationen i medierna – men det får en väl inte prata om? [Migration in the media – but are we allowed to talk about that?]* (pp. 113–149). Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies.
- Johansson, B., & Truedson, L. (Eds.). (2017). *När makten står på spel – journalistik i valrörelser* [*When power is at stake – journalism during election campaigns*]. Stockholm: SNS.
- Johansson, K. M., Mallin, M., & Nygren, G. (2019). Sweden: A professionally symbiotic relationship. In K. M. Johansson, & G. Nygren (Eds.), *Close and distant: Political executive-media relations in four countries* (pp. 97–123). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Karlsson, M., & Lundberg, E. (2015). Partimedlemmar [Party members]. In M. Hagevi (Ed.), *Partier och partisystem* [*Parties and party system*]. Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.
- Kiousis, S., Strömbäck, J., & McDevitt, M. (2015). Influence of issue decision salience on vote choice: Linking agenda setting, priming, and issue ownership. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 3347–3368.
- Klinger, U., & Svensson, J. (2015). The emergence of network media logic in political communication: A theoretical approach. *New Media & Society*, 17(5), 1241–1257. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814522952>

- Larsson, A. O., & Moe, H. (2012). Studying political microblogging: Twitter users in the 2010 Swedish election campaign. *New Media & Society*, 14(5), 729–747. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444811422894>
- Lees-Marshment, J. (2001). *Political marketing and British political parties: The party's just begun*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Lowe, G. F., & Steemers, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Regaining the initiative for public service media: RIPE@2011*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Moring, T., Mykkänen, J., Nord, L., & Grusell, M. (2011). Campaign professionalization and political structures: A comparative study of election campaigning in Finland and Sweden in the 2009 EP elections. In M. Maier, J. Strömbäck, & L. L. Kaid (Eds.), *Political communication in European parliamentary elections* (pp. 45–60). Farnham: Ashgate. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315601144>
- Nielsen, R. K. (Ed.). (2015). *Local journalism: The decline of newspapers and the rise of digital media*. London: L. B. Tauris.
- Nord, L. (2016). Sida vid sida – men i samma båt? [Side by side – but in the same boat?]. In O. Westlund (Ed.), *Människorna, medierna & marknaden: Medieutredningens forskningsantologi om en demokrati i förändring [Citizens, media, and the market: The Media Inquiry's research anthology on a changing democracy]* [SOU 2016:30] (pp. 237–260). Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer. <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2016/04/sou-201630/>
- Nord, L., Grusell, M., Bolin, N., & Falasca, K. (Eds.). (2018). *Snabbtänkt: Reflektioner från valet 2018 av ledande forskare [Quick thinking: Reflections on the 2018 election by leading academics]*. Sundsvall, Sweden: Demicom, Mid Sweden University.
- Nord, L., & Strömbäck, J. (2018). *Svenska valrörelser: Väljare, medier och partier under 2000-talet [Swedish election campaigns: Voters, media, and parties in the twenty-first century]*. Stockholm: Santérus.
- Nord, L., & Ots, M. (2019). Politiken och journalistiken [Politics and journalism]. In G. Nygren, & I. Wadbring (Eds.), *På väg mot medievärlden 2030 [Towards the media world 2030]* (pp. 53–74). Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.
- Nygren, G. (2015). Journalistik som profession [Journalism as a profession]. In M. Karlsson, & J. Strömbäck (Eds.), *Handbok i journalistikforskning [Handbook in journalism research]* (pp. 63–79). Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Nygren, G., Leckner, S., & Tenor, C. (2018). Hyperlocals and legacy media: Media ecologies in transition. *Nordicom Review*, 39(1), 33–50. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0419>
- Ohlsson, J. (2018). *Medieutveckling 2018: Medieekonomi [Media development 2018: Media economy]*. Stockholm: The Swedish Press and Broadcasting Authority. <https://www.mpr.se/documents/publikationer/medieutveckling/medieekonomi/medieekonomi%202018.pdf>
- Ohlsson, J. (Ed.). (2019). *Nordicom-Sveriges Mediebarometer 2018. [Nordicom-Sweden's Media barometer 2018]*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sv/mediebarometern-2019/rapporter-och-presentationer>
- Olsson, E.-K., & Eriksson, M. (2016). The logic of public organizations' social media use: Toward a theory of 'social mediatization'. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 5(2), 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X16654454>
- Oscarsson, H., & Holmberg, S. (2016). *Svenska väljare [Swedish voters]*. Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer.
- Petre, C. (2018). Engineering consent – How the design and marketing of newsroom analytics tools rationalize journalists' labor. *Digital Journalism*, 6(4), 509–527. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1444998>
- Small, T. A. (2011). What the hashtag? A content analysis of Canadian politics on Twitter. *Information, Communication & Society*, 14(6), 872–895. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2011.554572>
- Strömbäck, J. (2013). Valrörelser som politisk kommunikation [Election campaigns as political communication]. In J. Strömbäck, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Kampen om opinionen: Politisk kommunikation under svenska valrörelser [The battle of opinion: Political communication in Swedish election campaigns]* (pp. 9–34). Stockholm: SNS.

- Strömbäck, J., & Nord, L. (2008). Media and politics in Sweden. In J. Strömbäck, M. Örsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 103–124). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Strömbäck, J., Örsten, M., & Aalberg, T. (Eds.). (2008). *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Syvertsen, T., Enli, G., Mjös, O. J., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- The Swedish Internet Foundation. (2018). *Svenskarna och internet – valspecial 2018 [The Swedes and the Internet – election special 2018]*. Stockholm: The Swedish Internet Foundation. [https://internetstiftelsen.se/docs/Svenskarna\\_och\\_internet-\\_valspecial\\_2018.pdf](https://internetstiftelsen.se/docs/Svenskarna_och_internet-_valspecial_2018.pdf)
- Truedson, L. (Ed.). (2018). *Mediestudiers årsbok: Tillståndet för journalistiken 2017/2018 [Media studies yearbook: The state of journalism 2017/2018]*. Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies. [https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Mediestudier\\_ar-sbok\\_2018\\_webb.pdf](https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Mediestudier_ar-sbok_2018_webb.pdf)
- Valmyndigheten. (n.d.). Valmyndigheten [Election Authority]. <https://www.val.se>
- Weibull, L., Wadbring, I., & Ohlsson, J. (2018). *Det svenska medielandskapet: Traditionella och sociala medier i samspel och konkurrens [The Swedish media landscape: Traditional and social media interplay and competition]*. Stockholm: Liber.
- Wormbs, N. (2011). Swedish pre-screening of new services: Treading lightly. In K. Donders, & H. Moe (Eds.), *Exporting the public value test: The regulation of public broadcasters' new media services across Europe* (pp. 127–134). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

## Part Two





## Chapter 7

# Development trends and challenges in Nordic political journalism

Sigurd Allern, Mark Blach-Ørsten,  
Anu Kantola, & Ester Pollack

### Abstract

The objective of this chapter is to describe and discuss some important political journalism development trends in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The term political journalism traditionally refers to news, commentaries, and other genres related to the coverage of political processes, institutions, and policy questions. It is, however, difficult to draw a clear dividing line between political news and other types of current affairs coverage. While political logic once dominated the discourses of political journalism, the emergence of the news media as an independent institution gave journalists a substantial definitional power and an ability to define the communicative rules of the game, but professional political sources quickly learned to exploit news media logics for their own aims and objectives. During the last decade, the growth of social media networks and the relative weakening of the legacy media has created a less stable situation for the negotiation of control between journalists and their sources.

**Keywords:** political journalism, news regimes, policy professionals, sacerdotal traditions, communicative rules

## Introduction

Since the turn of the millennium, the digital revolution and the commercialisation of communication have challenged the terms of political journalism in at least two important ways. First, they have led to structural changes in the media system, resulting in severe effects; for example, legacy media organisations, especially print newspapers, have lost large parts of their advertising income to tech giants, such as Facebook and Google, and been forced to develop new business models to survive. One answer has been payment for online news content, a strategy which has been more important and successful in countries like Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland than in most other parts of the world (Newman et al., 2019). However, in most Nordic media organisations,

financial problems have also led to staff reductions and other editorial cuts, limiting the resources available for quality journalism based on investigations and reportage.

Second, the establishment of online media and social media networks have given political actors, such as governments, parties, and individual politicians, increased opportunities for communication with opinion leaders and voters, often independent of legacy media's editorial judgements and filters. Internet penetration in the Nordic countries is among the highest in the world, and the adoption of social media is generally high, giving political actors a means to reach the public without the assistance of legacy media. These parallel development trends represent a wide range of changes and challenges, not least affecting legacy media organisations, which have traditionally considered political journalism an important part of their democratic role.

The term “political journalism” traditionally refers to news, commentaries, and other journalistic genres related to the mediated coverage of political processes, institutions, actors, party programmes, and policy questions. Classical examples of political journalism are reports about government decisions, party initiatives, public policy proposals, parliament resolutions, and politicians' election campaigns.

However, this definition limits political journalism to an institutional context, which in many cases is problematic. It is difficult to draw a clear dividing line between political news and other types of current affairs coverage in the news media. Both “hard news” and feature stories concerning crime, the environment, unemployment, immigration, health, social services, and other societal questions may have political implications, leading to policy debates about priorities and the allocation of values in society. A news story without any direct link to parties or politicians can trigger discussions about politics or, as Lasswell (1936) defined the concept in a famous book title, *Politics: Who gets what, when, how*. News journalism and other types of current affairs journalism are intertwined in practice. Likewise, normative theories about media and democracy recognise that news and current affairs journalism – not only institutional political news – is “claimed to be the life blood of democracy” (Fenton, 2010: 3).

The intertwining of political and current affairs journalism is also reflected in the editorial departments of news organisations. Most local journalists are all-round reporters and desk editors, covering several news areas, including local politics and current affairs. Today's newsrooms are organised to emphasise convergence, speed, and technological skills in order to compete in the changing and increasingly convergent media markets. Lack of specialisation has been strengthened by a general tendency in today's media industry in which journalists are expected to meet higher demands for the production of content for different platforms and have less time for journalistic research and time-consuming reportage work (Nikunen, 2014).

However, national news organisations and some regional media houses in the Nordic countries still have some specialised political reporters who regularly cover traditional, institutional political news. These news outlets also offer daily political commentaries and analyses. The press lobbies of the parliaments in the Nordic countries are long-lasting examples of the organised relations between political journalists and politicians (Allern, 2001, 2010; Dalen & Skovsgaard, 2010). One contributing economic factor behind such continuing priorities may be that parliamentary and party-centred political news is relatively cheap to produce, especially compared with more investigative forms of journalism. News interviews and background interviews are easily organised and cost effective (Niemikari et al., 2019). In fact, according to Dalen and Skovsgaard (2010), Danish political journalists, covering the parliament as a regular “beat”, have experienced less internal, commercial pressure than other journalists in their media organisations. One reason may be that they are able, with small expenditures, to deliver a steady stream of news stories.

The objective of this chapter – based on a review of research literature in the field – is to describe and discuss some important political journalism development trends in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The next section discusses the media’s roles as channels, arenas, and actors on the scene of politics. Then, in “New political actors on the media scene”, we discuss the relations between journalists, politicians, and policy professionals. The next section, “The communicative rules of the game”, addresses how media formats and “logics” influence politics and power struggles. The following section, “Changing approaches to political journalism”, discusses conflicting news media strategies concerning the prioritisation and presentation of political news in today’s media environment. The last section comprises some concluding remarks about the future development of political journalism in a hybrid media system.

## Changing historical relations between media and politics

The relations between Nordic news media organisations and political institutions have gone through dramatic changes during the last half century. The traditional political role of the mass media – associated with the omnibus press and the party papers in the first two decades after World War II – was, first and foremost, to be a *channel* for other political institutions, such as political parties, governments, parliaments, and municipal authorities. In the contacts and negotiations between journalists and their political sources, the politicians generally had the upper hand and many of them played a double role as both politician and publisher. The state-owned public service channels, representing a monopoly in radio and television, primarily functioned as information disseminators and educational institutions, not as independent news producers (Bjerke, 2011; Djerf-Pierre, 2000; Esaiasson

& Håkansson, 2013; Hjarvard, 1999). The political parties strictly controlled the limited political debate programmes broadcast before national elections. In this period, the role of journalists was reduced to that of technical moderator, ensuring that the politicians received their agreed transmission time (Allern, 2010, 2011a; Esaiasson & Håkansson, 2002; Hjarvard, 1999).

In the late 1960s and 1970s, this party-controlled channel role was weakened and eventually abolished. An important part of the journalistic professionalisation process in this period focused on gaining independence from political parties. The media channels were gradually developed into *arenas* where the parties and politicians had to compete for visibility and influence. During the 1980s, the deregulation of telecommunication and broadcasting ended the public service channels' monopoly in radio and television, leading to changes that furthered this development. The party press also became history. News media organisations and journalists became, in an increasingly competitive media market, independent actors and political interpreters (Allern & Blach-Ørsten, 2011; Lund et al., 2009; Pedersen et al., 2000; Østbye, 1997; Østbye & Aalberg, 2008).

In Finland, these historical changes were described through the study of three generational groups of political journalists (Kantola, 2012, 2016a; see also Koljonen, 2013). The oldest group, characterised as “the solid moderns” in the news organisations, were, in many cases, directly engaged in politics and aligned with a political party in their youth (Kantola, 2012). They were carriers of national responsibility, had tight relations with their sources, and were critical of politics as “infotainment”. Today, most of them have retired from the newsrooms. Journalists that came into the profession in the 1980s (a middle generation characterised as “the liquefying moderns”) have independent professionalism as their central ethos (Kantola, 2012). Many of them have university educations and see themselves as professionals detached from politics. They have also endorsed storytelling techniques and market-oriented news criteria to a greater degree than the solid moderns. The youngest generation, described as “the liquid moderns”, has an anti-institutional, flexible identity and accepts opinionated journalism with an agenda (Kantola, 2012). They do not cover politics as a regular beat but participate in projects and teams using ad hoc sources.

Using a term taken from institutional theory, this development of journalism can be characterised as a succession of distinct news regimes with a set of norms and routines that cut across individual news media organisations (Blach-Ørsten, 2014; Ryfe, 2006). The “partisan news regime” associated with the party press was gradually influenced by the rise of public broadcasting and developed into an “independent news regime”, characterised by professional media organisations with an informal but central role in political processes (Blach-Ørsten, 2014: 93). Practically speaking, this is still the case today. There are, however, signs of changes to a new type of regime defined by competition more than

anything else. The “competitive news regime” is increasingly dependent upon professional sources that can deliver exclusives and scoops (Blach-Ørsten, 2014: 94). This may strengthen the interactions and cooperation between journalists and professional political actors.

It is notable that differences in political history and culture may lead to country-specific media coverage of political movements and parties. For example, this has been observed in the press coverage of the right-wing Nordic populist parties, organisations that have common traits, such as their opposition to immigration, but may also represent important differences concerning political history and life cycles (Herkman, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Jungar & Jupskås, 2014; Herkman & Jungar, Chapter 12).

Interesting differences were also revealed in a recent study of mediated political scandals related to the #metoo movement in the four Nordic countries. While there were several national scandals in the political field related to #metoo in Sweden and Norway, there was only one sexual harassment case related to the Finnish Parliament and none in Denmark. A likely hypothesis “is that the culture of silence related to questions regarded as personal and sexual is somewhat stronger in the Finnish and Danish political environments than in those of Sweden and Norway” (Pollack et al., 2018: 3103).

### New political actors on the media scene

Direct contact and negotiations between journalists and politicians comprise a basic relationship in political journalism. However, other professional political actors have grown in importance on the media scene. While politicians traditionally get their mandate through democratic elections, the new type of political actor is an employee or a consultant for hire who has political and communicative expert knowledge. In an analysis of this development in Sweden, Garsten and colleagues (2015) called this new category of political actors “policy professionals”; they are not elected but employed to pursue politics – they have power but no democratic mandate.

A large group of policy professionals are employed as political or communication advisors in government ministries and parliamentary party groups or as party organisation leaders. Others are employed as lobbyists or advisors in corporations and trade and interest organisations – or they have jobs as consultants in public relations firms offering lobbying advice (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017a; Ihlen & Gullberg, 2015; Kantola, 2016b; Karlsen, 2010; Lounasmeri, 2018; Svallfors & Tyllström, 2017). This labour market has opened revolving doors between politics and public relations, lobbying, and media organisations (Allern, 2011b, 2015; Allern & Pollack, 2018; Svallfors, 2016). Furthermore, former politicians and former journalists offer their professional competence

as a commodity on a new labour market. Historically, this phenomenon can be analysed as an expansion of market logic into public areas where market exchange had previously been restricted (Tyllström, 2013).

Policy professionals are also employed in think tanks – representing a type of expertise that is more engaged in strategic attempts of political and ideological opinion building than that of advisors who are more engaged in day-to-day politics. The expansion of think tanks today is a common phenomenon in the Nordic countries, and they are frequently referred to in the national media and among decision-makers. Politically, think tanks represent both business and labour union interests, but the largest and most influential organisations in the Nordic think tank landscape are financed by business interest organisations and represent a market liberal ideology (Allern & Pollack, 2016, 2020; Bjerke, 2016; Blach-Ørsten & Kristensen, 2016; Christensen & Holst, 2020; Kelstrup, 2016a, 2016b, 2018, 2020; Kelstrup & Blach-Ørsten, 2020; Lounasmeri, 2016, 2020; Óscarsdóttir, 2020; Sörbom, 2018).

The expansion of the public relations industry and the introduction of new types of policy professionals also represent a countermeasure to the professionalisation of journalism, namely, the growth of more professional news media sources. For many decades, political parties, government departments, corporations, trade organisations, and interest groups have prioritised building up their own communication expertise, handling both media relations and direct communication to stakeholders and voters. This is important because the relations between journalists and their sources largely explain the content of the news media, especially news and reportage material.

The journalist-source relationship also applies to political journalism. Reporters, commentators, politicians, advisors, and consultants with backgrounds in media or politics know each other well; they usually develop long-term, strategic relationships and regularly talk “on record” as well as “off record” (Dindler, 2015). Both parties initiate possible news stories and “follow-ups”. Gans (1980: 116), in his analysis of American news organisations, characterised such relations using a dance metaphor: “sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources. Although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading”.

While the ability of resourceful actors to engage journalists and lead the “tango” is also documented in Nordic media research (Allern, 1997, 2015; Kristensen, 2004; Mathisen, 2013; Sahlstrand, 2000), this should not be interpreted as though professionalised sources have permanent positions as primary definers; influence through agenda setting and the framing of news stories are always conquered through negotiations of control (Allern, 1997, 2018; Ericson et al., 1989; Schlesinger, 1990). The final decision concerning publicity is, after all, an editorial responsibility.

## The communicative rules of the game

According to theories of mediatisation, politics in the Nordic countries today is largely driven by a “news media logic” – in contrast to a “political logic” based on the conceptualisation “that politics ultimately is about collective and authoritative decision making as well as the implementation of political decisions” (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014: 14). While political logic is constituted by polity (the institutional framework of politics), policy (the content of politics), and politics (the power struggles over policy making), news media logic is constituted by professionalism (journalistic norms and criteria), commercialism (economically motivated rationales), and media technology (news production according to different technologies’ affordances) (Strömbäck & Esser, 2014).

In line with this, the news media define the communicative rules of the game, and politicians are, to a large degree, dependent on media coverage for gauging public opinion and generating attention (Esser, 2013). Politicians, therefore, adapt their initiatives to conventional media formats and general news values, such as conflicts, proximity, sensations, and personalisation (Blach-Ørsten, 2014; Skovsgaard & Dalen, 2013; Strömbäck, 2008; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014). The expansion of policy professionals as a new layer of non-elected advisors and communication specialists inside government institutions and parliamentary party groups confirms and reinforces this development. However, contradictory tendencies in relation to the news media also exist, such as when governments and parties consciously try (and succeed) to avoid the public floodlight by closing media access to important back regions (Albæk et al., 2014; Allern, 1997; Ericson et al., 1989).

How news media logic influences the power relations between journalists and political parties is, however, complicated to analyse. To interpret examples of the mediatisation of politics as a general expression of media power would be naïve, although such general conclusions are too often drawn on a weak empirical basis. The role of journalism in relation to business and marketing enterprises may illustrate the pitfalls of this reasoning. For nearly a century, commercial corporations and their public relations advisors have professionalised and refined their ability to adopt, use, and exploit media formats and general “news values”. A well-known strategy is to produce “information subsidies” – pre-packaged and framed news proposals – which may lower the editorial news threshold, influencing how information is prioritised and presented to the public (Allern, 1997, 2018; Gandy, 1982). Today’s media-trained politicians and professional communication advisors also know how to “spin” a story. They offer interviews and news “exclusives” to competing media organisations, as well as backstage “leaks” with information directed against political opponents. In the strategic dance between journalists and political sources, both parties can take the lead, and, as mentioned above, professional sources

often succeed (Allern, 1997; Gans, 1980; Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Kristensen, 2004; Schlesinger, 1990).

However, such promotional successes depend on several factors. Theories of news values generally predict that politicians in top positions get the most media coverage (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001, 2016). A Swiss study of politicians covered by the print media observed that “formal power in the policy-making process [...] easily translates into discursive power in the media, which can further strengthen the political power of an actor and ultimately lead to a self-perpetuating cycle of political influence and media coverage” (Tresch, 2009: 71).

A party's standing in the polls generally influences its media appearances, concluded a Swedish election study (Asp, 2006); the same conclusion was drawn in a Norwegian study of the representation of political parties in televised election programmes (Allern, 2011a). The consequence of such practices was characterised in a Danish study of election news as an incumbency bonus in political news coverage: “the more powerful you are, the more attention you receive”, and governments with more support (who are the expected winners of an election) had a larger incumbency bonus than weaker governments (Hopmann et al., 2011: 278). The news media's orientation towards party leaders and well-known politicians with good communication skills makes it harder for lesser-known politicians to gain media access (Skovsgaard & Dalen, 2013).

Therefore, a mediatised campaign – adapting to or adopting media formats and market-oriented news media logic – does not tell us much about who influences whom. In Norway – with its long history of televised election programmes – politicians have, since the 1970s, been professionally trained to master different programme formats, including question programmes, duels, or television-arranged “public meetings”; in other words, they have adapted to the “media logic” of the television channels. In 1997, TV 2 – one of the two leading Norwegian television channels – decided that their journalists that year should be political agenda-setters during the pre-election period. Polls about the voters' interest in different topics were made and followed up with news and reportages. The hope was that these party-independent initiatives would strongly influence and frame the discussions in the televised debate programmes. The strategy was afterwards summed up as a fiasco; the news initiatives had little or no influence on the political parties' prioritised agendas (Allern, 2011a). Thus, power over media formats does not guarantee political agenda-setting power. A Danish study of the 2011 national election drew the same general conclusion: political parties had substantial influence on which issues the news media covered during the election campaign, while the media had limited influence on the parties' agendas. According to Hopmann and colleagues (2012: 186), the news media “are not independent actors acting autonomously but are engaged in an interaction with political actors who are their central sources in election campaign coverage”.



As Van Aelst and colleagues (2014) summed up, concepts such as media logic and political logic may be seen as overlapping, but they are not mutually exclusive. Politics is about power, and media logic can be used as a tool to reach political goals, or – alternatively – it can be an obstacle; this was the conclusion of a recent study by Nygren and Niemikari (2019: 218), which found that “media logics set the rules of the game, and political sources can play the game to reach their goal according to political logics”.

These changes in political communication need to be seen in a historical perspective. While political logic once dominated the discourses of political journalism, the emergence of the news media as an independent institution gave journalists a role as actors with a substantial definitional power and the ability to define the communicative rules of the game. However, professional political sources quickly learned to use and exploit news media logics for their own aims and objectives. During the last decade, the growth of social media networks and the relative weakening of the legacy media have created a less stable situation for the negotiation of control between journalists and their sources.

### Changing approaches to political journalism

Following Blumler and colleagues (1989), we may distinguish between four different approaches to political journalism that characterise the priorities of modern news media organisations: the “sacerdotal”, “pragmatic”, “conventionally journalistic”, and “analytic” approaches.

First, the sacerdotal approach – which is understood as a type of priestly ritual – views political processes and institutions as sacerdotal to democracy and, therefore, as important per se. In line with this, news organisations must inform voters about political proposals, conflicts, and decisions; scrutinise the work of political power holders; and contribute to the democratic process by stimulating political debates. This interpretation of what journalism is and should be echoes the traditional, institutionally oriented definition of political journalism mentioned above. In the Nordic countries, as in some other Northern European countries and the UK, a sacerdotal approach has its historical roots in the party press and public service channels.

In this tradition, politics is an important beat to be covered by specialised and knowledgeable reporters who develop professional source relationships in the field. An organisational expression of this is the existence of a press lobby in the parliament, securing regular contact between journalists from the leading media organisations and national politicians. Another well-known feature in the Nordic countries is broad coverage of election campaigns, including interview programmes with party leaders and televised election debates (Allern, 2011a; Esaiasson & Håkansson, 2002; Johansson & Strömbäck, 2019). News deci-

sions and programme priorities are, in this tradition, strongly influenced by the agenda of the political institutions and parties.

Another characteristic feature of the sacerdotal approach is that political news is seen through a national, institutional prism. Domestic policy questions are prioritised and, in some cases, supplemented by foreign policy questions of national interest, which are on the parliamentary agenda. This scenario is still typical for the Nordic countries, regardless of whether they are members of the European Union, as is the case in other countries where the news media primarily operates in a national or local market (Aalbæk et al., 2014; Ihlen et al., 2010; Slaatta, 1999). Geographical proximity and possibilities for national framing are important criteria of newsworthiness; this also applies to political news journalism about European affairs (Heikkilä & Kunelius, 2014; Ørsten, 2004)

A contrast to prioritising politics, especially domestic politics, as important per se is represented by the pragmatic approach; political events are not institutionally predefined as newsworthy and must, therefore, compete with other types of news – including crime, disasters, sports, and celebrities – for the allocation of space on news pages or time in broadcasted news programmes. Media organisations working in this tradition will often have only a few specialised political reporters or commentators (or none).

The pragmatic approach means that politics (in contrast to content such as sports and entertainment) does not represent any reserved editorial news area. This is especially typical of the priorities of the popular tabloid papers and their online sites. With the exception of the final weeks before national elections, such pragmatism is, today, a typical editorial line. Political news competes with everything. The priorities are based on market-oriented and commercial news criteria related to the interests (and advertising value) of specific audience groups and segments of readers (Allern, 2002, 2010; Schultz, 2007). In all types of media, including television, an organisational expression of this development is an editorial system where journalists must try to “sell” their stories and reports to the central desk and its editors.

The pragmatic approach is close to the conventionally journalistic approach, which entails selecting and prioritising events laced with drama and conflict to fulfil market-oriented news values. A norms violation by a well-known politician, which can be framed as a political scandal, will always create headlines. The pragmatic and conventionally journalistic approaches are both associated with the dramatised storytelling tradition of newspapers and broadcasting channels, representing market-oriented, popular, and tabloid journalism.

The fourth type, the analytic approach, gives journalists the roles of interpreter and commentator. The rise of the punditocracy – or commentariat – in the Nordic press and the public service broadcasting channels over the last two decades represents an institutionalised expression of this approach (Nord & Stúr, 2009; Nord et al., 2012). The pundits are ascribed the role of the all-round

experts of the news media, commenting on polls and explaining what the politicians “really mean” and intend to do. A new, hybrid genre, also representing the analytic approach, is political news analysis, blurring the traditional distinction between news and views on the news pages.

Commentary, which is historically linked to the essay genre, is one of the classical genres of modern journalism, but, in the Nordic party press, political commentaries were mostly editorials, representing the collective voice of the paper and symbolising the difference between news and views. The development of political journalism representing an analytic approach has given commentaries and news analysis more prominence in all types of news media (Nord & Stúr, 2009; Nord et al., 2012). In an area of greater competition, news organisations have upgraded the market value of interpretations and political opinion making (Allern & Blach-Ørsten, 2011).

The structure of the news media industry has always been important for the relevance and strength of these different approaches to political journalism. A traditional, sacerdotal approach was a dominating feature of Nordic political journalism in the decades after World War II – lasting until the late 1980s. Politics mattered and political journalism was at the core of the journalistic profession in an era when national politics was regarded as the most vital public issue (Kantola, 2016a). The coverage was issue- and party-oriented, and stories concerning politicians’ personal or private lives were not part of the political reporting.

The changes in the media system throughout the last three decades have led to market changes that have generally weakened the sacerdotal approach and strengthened the other three approaches. Newspapers and other media organisations have been reorganised into media houses, publishing on several platforms, both online and offline. The state-owned Nordic radio and television public service channels – now also publishing online news – face tough competition but continue to be important parts of the media structure in all four countries (Syvertsen et al., 2014).

Combined with a “conventional” journalistic approach demanding drama, conflict, and lively pictures, one effect of this marketisation seems to be that institutionalised political news about processes and decisions is generally marginalised. Another important development trend is the strong increase in mediated national political scandals in the Nordic countries during the last two decades. Commenting on well-known political corruption cases in West Germany in the 1980s, Logue (1988: 261) wrote that the Scandinavian labour movements and governments “are virtually free of such embarrassments”. Nobody would award such a political certificate today. Today, frequent scandal reporting is the “new normal” in political journalism with a substantial increase in the mediation of personal behaviour scandals (Allern et al., 2012; Herkman, 2017a; Pollack et al., 2018).

However, during the final weeks before national elections, the heritage of the sacerdotal tradition is still strong in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, and the public service channels continue to serve as the most important arenas for political election debates. Such debates are traditionally organised by the large public service channels, but some of the commercial media houses also offer this format on their online sites nowadays. As a general rule, the norms of “balance” and “impartiality” in public service broadcasting indicate that all political parties represented in parliament should have the right to participate on par with other parties.

This sacerdotal tradition has – after the deregulation of broadcasting in the 1980s – been supplemented and combined with a more market-oriented, pragmatic editorial line. One example is staged, televised duels between prime minister candidates, a popular format that favours the leaders of the largest ruling government party and the largest opposition party, leading to a “presidentialisation” of the media coverage (Webb, 2007). However, just before a national election day, a debate between all party leaders is still an institutionalised “grand finale” in all four countries.

In these election periods, the national, regional, and local newspapers and their online sites try to mobilise citizens to vote and initiate polls, debates, and interviews as regular and important content elements (Allern, 2011a; Asp & Bjerling, 2014; Esaiasson & Håkansson, 2002, 2013). In Denmark, political journalism almost exclusively focuses on national-level politics, national actors, and the parliament. In Sweden, Norway, and Finland – which still have relatively strong local press and regional public service channels – the coverage of regional and local politics traditionally plays a somewhat greater role. However, a recent media study of the 2018 Swedish election campaign documented a dramatic change in media habits and communication patterns; the position of the local media was weakened, many local editorial offices closed, and social media played a more central role (Nord et al., 2019).

From an institutional perspective, these approaches represent changing priorities and changing news regimes, but old forms do not vanish when new forms develop. Political journalism still subscribes to the institutional myth of the news media as the fourth estate, independent of other power holders; this myth is strengthened by the established discourse and research on the news media’s importance for democracy (Aalberg & Curran, 2012). While journalists are no longer partisans – as political journalists were in the period of the party press – they are definitely actors and participants in politics, representing new types of political interpretation and interventionism (Allern & Blach-Ørsten, 2011; Reunanen & Koljonen, 2018). Thus, norms and ideals generally change slowly.

Nordic journalists were recently studied as part of a *Worlds of Journalism Study*, based on a large survey dataset; a telling result, and especially relevant for political journalism, was that Nordic journalists still share an ideal vision of

being watchdogs, critically monitoring and scrutinising those in power (Ahva et al., 2017). Finnish political journalists stand out as a coherent group with particularly uniform values. They also endorse the role of analytical independent watchdogs that keep their distance from audiences and commercialisation and are cautious in using controversial reporting practices (Väliverronen, 2018). The professional orientation of Nordic journalists matches well with the structural characteristics of the Nordic media system and the media welfare state (Syvertsen et al., 2014) and, according to Ahva and colleagues (2017: 609), “appears to clearly be linked to the characteristics of the political context and media system in which they work”.

The regular coverage of political institutions represents an influential historical tradition in both public service broadcasting and the printed press, and it also serves as an argument for a democratic media policy.

### Conclusion: Challenges in a hybrid media landscape

The conventional wisdom (or hypothesis) in today’s media landscape is that political journalism in its traditional formats and genres, disseminated by the legacy media organisations, will gradually wither away. Thus far, these prophecies have failed. One reason may be that such structural and institutional changes take time. Media habits have an institutionalised inertia that undermines both utopias and dystopias (Enroljas et al., 2013). Another basic factor is the historical lesson that the old media institutions are, in most cases, long-lived because of their ability to adapt to the challenges of a changing technological and economic environment (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b).

However, an important change the last decade is the conversion of traditional newspaper organisations into multiplatform media houses, offering their audiences a wide range of journalistic products, including printed newspapers, online news and feature stories, videos, and podcasts. A crucial question is linked to this business model: How can journalism be funded in a media world where the global tech companies yearly increase their share of the advertising market? One of the media industry’s most important answers to this question has been to establish online paywalls, especially combined subscriptions for printed and online products. According to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2019* (Newman et al., 2019), 34 per cent of the Norwegian population and 27 per cent of the Swedish population pay for online news, while this was the case for only 16 per cent of the population in Finland and 15 per cent in Denmark. However, even in Norway, which tops the Reuter Institute’s international list for payment for online news, the income (from audiences and advertisements) of the printed press was still as high as 74 per cent in 2018, while digital incomes of all kinds accounted for 26 per cent (Medietilsynet, 2019). The newspaper may be an endangered species, but

it is still – as a medium – the funding base for most of the journalism produced outside of the large, publicly funded public service institutions.

Concerning news, current affairs, and political journalism, the Nordic public service radio and television channels play an important role. When it comes to brand trust, they top the national media organisation lists (Newman et al., 2019). However, due to the growth of right-wing populism and a polarisation of the political climate, public service channels are currently experiencing challenges concerning political support for their funding and independence. An early warning signal was the 20 per cent funding cut for the main Danish public service provider, Danmarks Radio, by the right-wing government in 2018. The settlement reduces the staff by 375 jobs and reduces the number of television channels from six to three – the new contract also forbids the production of long, text-based news articles online (Schrøder & Ørsten, 2019). In Sweden, the new conservative bloc (comprised of the Sweden Democrats, the Moderates, and the Christian Democrats), launched attacks on the Swedish public service media during the autumn of 2019, arguing for a reduced financial base and a more limited programme mandate (Allern, 2019). These attacks continued in 2020, and have resulted in a more polarised public debate concerning media policy and the future of public service media.

In a complex, hybrid media system, traditional news media, online sites, and social media coexist and interact (Chadwick, 2013). Political actors use Facebook and Twitter messages as direct communication (and propaganda) tools to reach voters, but such messages are also sources for news and provide a basis for follow-up stories and comments in online news, printed newspapers, and broadcasting programmes. Legacy news organisations operate on several independent platforms and have developed their own web applications, but they also use social media as news disseminators. A study of Facebook news use during the 2017 national elections in Norway – comparing news disseminated by four leading legacy media organisations and three hyperpartisan, right-wing media outlets – found that, with a few exceptions, established legacy media dominated the most engaging news stories (Kalsnes & Larsson, 2019). Despite the public focus on social media platforms, the traditional media organisations (with public service broadcasters in the lead) still seem to remain the most important media for most voters (Asp & Bjerling, 2014; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017b; Jensen et al., 2016; Larsson & Skogerbø, 2018; Skogerbø & Krumsvik, 2014). In addition, there is also the old, direct, and verbal type of voter contacts (seldom studied by media-centred communication scholars) through door-knocking, house parties, street agitation, and traditional physical meetings. Summing up the experiences from the 2017 national election in Norway, the Conservative Party’s chief communication officer even characterised door-knocking and talking to ordinary people about the party’s policies as “the most important election campaign tool” (Solhaug, 2019: 33).

Therefore, as several of the chapters in this anthology describe, modern political campaigning and communication analyse, discuss, and are characterised by the use of a wide range of media and communication tools, including legacy media and the many social media networks. One of the challenges in the study of political journalism is to continue to analyse this dialectic between “old” and “new” types of political communication and political journalism with an open mind.

## References

- Aalberg, T., & Curran, J. (2012). Conclusion. In T. Aalberg, & J. Curran (Eds.), *How media inform democracy: A comparative approach* (pp. 189–200). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203803448>
- Ahva, L., Dalen, A. V., Hovden, J. F., Kolbeins, G. H., Nilsson, M. L., Skovsgaard, M., & Våliveronen, J. (2017). A welfare state of mind? Nordic journalists' conception of their role and autonomy in international context. *Journalism Studies*, 18(5), 595–613. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1249005>
- Albæk, E., Dalen, A. V., Jebri, N., & Vreese, C. D. (2014). *Political journalism in a comparative perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139567367>
- Allern, S. (1997). *Når kildene byr opp til dans [When the sources ask for a dance]*. Oslo: Pax.
- Allern, S. (2001). *Flokkdyr på Løvebakken? Søkelys på Stortingets presselosje og politikken medierammer [Journalists as herd animals? Searchlight on the press lobby in the Storting and the framing of politics]*. Oslo: Pax.
- Allern, S. (2002). Journalistic and commercial news values: News organisations as patrons of an institution and market actors. *Nordicom Review*, 23(1–2), 137–152. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0327>
- Allern, S. (2010). From party agitators to independent pundits: The changed historical roles of newspaper and television journalists in Norwegian election campaigns. *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook*, 8(1), 49–67. [https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.8.49\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.8.49_1)
- Allern, S. (2011a). *Fjernsynsvalgekampen: Program, deltakere og maktkamp 1961–2009 [The television election campaign: Programme, participants, and power struggle 1961–2009]*. Oslo: Pax.
- Allern, S. (2011b). PR, politics and democracy. *Central European Journal of Communication*, 4(6), 125–139.
- Allern, S. (2015). PR-byråene og politikken [The PR agencies and politics]. In Ø. Ihlen, E. Skogerbø, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon [Power, media, and politics: Norwegian political communication]* (pp. 118–130). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Allern, S. (2018). *Journalistikk og kildekritisk analyse [Journalism and source criticism analysis]*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Allern, S. (2019, November 26). Høyrepartiene i Sverige til felles angrep på allmennkringkastingen [The right-wing parties in Sweden unite in attacking public broadcasting]. *Uniforum*. <https://www.uniforum.uio.no/leserbrev/2019/hoyrepartiene-i-sverige-til-felles-angrep-pa-allme.html>
- Allern, S., & Blach-Ørsten, M. (2011). The news media as a political institution: A Scandinavian perspective. *Journalism Studies*, 12(1), 92–105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2010.511958>
- Allern, S., Kantola, A., Pollack, E., & Blach-Ørsten, M. (2012). Increased scandalization: Nordic political scandals 1980–2010. In S. Allern, & E. Pollack (Eds.), *Scandalous! The mediated construction of political scandals in four Nordic countries* (pp. 29–50). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Allern, S., & Pollack, E. (2016). Swedish advocacy think tanks as news sources and agenda-setters. *Politik*, 19(1), 61–76. <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v19i1.27395>

- Allern, S., & Pollack, E. (2018). *Svängdörrarnas förlovade land: Lobbyismens betydelse för klas-sambhällets eliter* [The promised land of revolving doors: The importance of lobbyism to the elites of society]. Stockholm: Katalys.
- Allern, S., & Pollack, E. (2020). The role of think tanks in the Swedish political landscape. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 43(3), 145–169. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12180>
- Asp, K. (2006). *Rättvisa nyhetsmedier: Partiskheten under 2006 års medievalsval* [Fair news media: Partiality during the 2006 media election campaign]. Arbetsrapport nr. 42, Institutionen för journalistik och masskommunikation [Work report no. 42, Department of Journalism, Media and Communication]. University of Gothenburg. [https://jmg.gu.se/digitalAssets/1284/1284256\\_nr42.pdf](https://jmg.gu.se/digitalAssets/1284/1284256_nr42.pdf)
- Asp, K., & Bjerling, J. (2014). *Mediekratin – mediernas makt och svenska val* [Mediocracy – the power of the media and Swedish elections]. Stockholm: Ekerlids förlag.
- Bjerke, P. (2011). *Journalistikkens vekst – og fall: Om journalistisk profesjonsmakt* [Journalism's growth – and fall: About professional journalistic power]. Kristiansand, Norway: IJ-forlaget.
- Bjerke, P. (2016). Norske tankesmier i mediene: En suksesshistorie [Norwegian think tanks in media: A success story]. *Politik*, 19(1), 43–60. <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v19i1.27394>
- Blach-Ørsten, M. (2014). The emergence of an increasingly competitive news regime in Denmark. In R. Kuhn, & R. K. Nielsen (Eds.), *Political journalism in transition: Western Europe in a comparative perspective* (pp. 93–110). London: I. B. Tauris.
- Blach-Ørsten, M., & Kristensen, N. N. (2016). Think tanks in Denmark – Media visibility and network relations. *Politik*, 19(1), 22–42. <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v19i1.27399>
- Blach-Ørsten, M., Willig, I., & Pedersen, L. H. (2017a). PR, lobbyism and democracy: Mapping the revolving door in Denmark from 1981 to 2015. *Nordicom Review*, 38(2), 19–32. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0405>
- Blach-Ørsten, M., Eberholst M. K., & Burkal, R. (2017b). From hybrid media system to hybrid-media politicians: Danish politicians and their cross-media presence in the 2015 national election campaign. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 14(4), 334–347. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2017.1369917>
- Blumler, J. G., Gurevitch, M., & Nossiter, T. (1989). The earnest vs. the determined: Election newsmaking at the BBC, 1987. In I. Crewe, & M. Harrop (Eds.), *Political communication: The general election campaign of 1987*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>
- Christensen, J., & Holst, C. (2020). How do advocacy think tanks relate to academic knowledge? The case of Norway. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 43(3), 223–239. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12184>
- Dalen, A. V., & Skovsgaard, M. (2010). Korrespondent bag 'Borgens' beskyttende mure: Den danske politiske journalist og kommercialiseringen [Correspondent behind "Borgens" protective walls: The Danish political journalist and the commercialisation]. *Politica*, 42(3), 294–309.
- Dindler, C. (2015). Negotiating political news: The two phases of off-the-record interaction. *Journalism*, 16(8), 1124–1140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/146488491455963>
- Djerf-Pierre, M. (2000). Squaring the circle: News in public service and commercial television in Sweden 1956–1999. *Journalism Studies*, 1(2), 239–260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700050028235>
- Enjolras, B., Karlsen, R., Steen-Johnsen, K., & Wollebæk, D. (2013). *Liker – liker ikke: Sosiale medier, samfunnsengasjement og offentlighet* [Like – not like: Social media, community engagement, and the public]. Oslo: Cappelen Damm.
- Ericson, R. V., Baranek, P. M., & Chan, J. B. L. (1989). *Negotiating control: A study of news sources*. Milton Keynes, UK: Open University Press.
- Esaïasson P., & Håkansson, N. (2002). *Besked i kväll!* (Rapport nr. 19, Stiftelsen Etermedierne i Sverige) [Message tonight! (Report no. 19, Broadcasting Media Foundation in Sweden)]. Värnamo, Sweden: Fälth & Hässler.
- Esaïasson, P., & Håkansson, N. (2013). Enter the professionals: Shifting logics of election broadcasts in Sweden. In M. Djerf-Pierre, & M. Ekström (Eds.), *Swedish broadcasting: Communicative ethos, genres and institutional change*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.



- Esser, F. (2013). Mediatization as a challenge: Media logic versus political logic. In K. Kriesi, D. Bochler, J. Matthes, S. Lavenex, M. Bühlmann, & F. Esser (Eds.), *Democracy in the age of globalization and mediatization: Challenge to democracy series* (pp. 155–176). London: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137299871\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137299871_7)
- Fenton, N. (2010). Drowning or waving? New media, journalism and democracy. In N. Fenton (Ed.), *New media, old news: Journalism & democracy in the digital age* (pp. 3–16). London: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446280010>
- Gandy, O. H. (1982). *Beyond agenda setting: Information subsidies and public policy*. Norwood, New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Company.
- Gans, H. (1980). *Deciding what's news*. London: Constable.
- Garsten, C., Rothstein, B., & Svallfors, S. (2015). *Makt utan mandat: De policyprofessionella i svensk politik [Power without mandate: The policy professionals in Swedish politics]*. Stockholm: Dialogos.
- Green-Pedersen, C., & Stubager, R. (2010). Medierna og den politiske dagsorden: En tango med fører [The media and the political agenda: A tango with a lead]. *Politica*, 42(3), 326–344.
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2001). What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited. *Journalism Studies*, 2(2), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700118449>
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2016). What is news? News values revisited (again). *Journalism Studies*, 18(12), 1470–1488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193>
- Heikkilä, H., & Kunelius, R. (2014). Journalists imagining the European public sphere. *Javnost – The Public*, 13(4), 63–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2006.11008925>
- Herkman, J. (2016). Construction of populism: Meanings given to populism in the Nordic press. *Nordicom Review*, 37(Special Issue), 147–161. <https://www.doi.org/10.1515/nor-2016-0029>
- Herkman, J. (2017a). Old patterns on new clothes? Populism and political scandals the Nordic countries. *Acta Sociologica*, 61(4), 341–355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699317737816>
- Herkman, J. (2017b). The life cycle model and press coverage of Nordic populist parties. *Journalism Studies*, 18(4), 430–448. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1066231>
- Hjarvard, S. (1999). *Tv-nyheder i konkurrence [TV news in competition]*. Fredriksberg, Denmark: Samfundslitteratur.
- Hopmann, D. N., de Vreese, C., & Albæk, E. (2011). Incumbency bonus in election news coverage explained: The logics of political power and the media market. *Journal of Communication*, 61(2), 264–282. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01540.x>
- Hopmann, D. N., Elmelund-Præstekær, C., Albæk, E., Vliegenthart, R., & de Vreese, C. (2012). Party media agenda-setting: How parties influence election news coverage. *Party Politics*, 18(2), 173–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068810380097>
- Ihlen, Ø., Allern, S., Thorbjørnsrud, K., & Waldahl, R. (2010). The world on television: Market driven, public service news. *Nordicom Review*, 31(2), 31–45. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0128>
- Ihlen, Ø., & Gullberg, A. T. (2015). Lobbyisme: Påvirkning av politikere og byråkrater [Lobbyism: The influence of politicians and bureaucrats]. In Ø. Ihlen, E. Skogerbø, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon [Power, media, and politics: Norwegian political communication]* (pp. 232–243). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Jensen, L. J., Hoff, J., & Klasttrup, L. (2016). *Internettet og folketingsvalget 2015 [Election to Folketinget 2015 and the Internet]*. Copenhagen: Danske Medier.
- Johansson, B., & Strömbäck, J. (2019). *Kampen om mediebildet: Nyhetsjournalistik i valrörelsen 2018 [The struggle for the media image: News journalism in the election campaign 2018]*. Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies.
- Jungar, A.-C., & Jupskås, A. R. (2014). Populist radical right parties in the Nordic region: A new and distinct party family? *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37(3), 215–238. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12024>
- Kalsnes, B., & Larsson, A. O. (2019, December 21). Facebook news use during the 2017 Norwegian elections – Assessing the influence of hyperpartisan news. *Journalism Practice*, 1–17. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1704426>
- Kantola, A. (2012). From gardeners to revolutionaries: The rise of the liquid ethics in political journalism. *Journalism*, 14(5), 606–626. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884912454504>

- Kantola, A. (2016a). Liquid journalism. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of digital journalism* (pp. 424–442). Los Angeles: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473957909>
- Kantola, A. (2016b). Cleaning rotten politics, selling exclusive liaisons: Public relations consultants as storytelling professionals between markets and politics. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 5(1), 33–52. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X15625713>
- Karlsen, R. (2010). Fear of the political consultant: Campaign professionals and technology in Norwegian electoral politics. *Party Politics*, 16(2), 193–214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809341055>
- Kelstrup, J. D. (2016a). *The politics of think tanks in Europe*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315688602>
- Kelstrup, J. D. (2016b). Tænketankes brug av dagbladene som et marked for politiske ideer i Danmark [The think tanks' use of newspapers as a market for political ideas in Denmark]. *Politik*, 19(1), 7–21. <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v19i1.27392>
- Kelstrup, J. D. (2018). *Tænketanke – nye aktører i dansk politik* [Think tanks – new actors in Danish politics]. Copenhagen: Djøf forlag.
- Kelstrup, J. D. (2020). Introduction to special issue: Think tanks in the Nordic countries. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 43(3), 129–144. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12179>
- Kelstrup, J. D., & Blach-Ørsten, M. (2020). Public and private think tank visibility in the Danish parliament and media. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 43(3), 170–186. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12181>
- Koljonen, K. (2013). The shift from high to liquid ideals: Making sense of journalism and its change through a multidimensional model. *Nordicom Review*, 34(Special Issue), 141–154. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2013-0110>
- Kristensen, N. N. (2004). *Journalister og kilder – slinger i valsen?* [Journalists and sources – unsteadiness in the waltz?] Aarhus: Ajour.
- Larsson, A. O., & Skogerbø, E. (2018). Out with the old, in with the new? Perceptions of social (and other) media by local and regional Norwegian politicians. *New Media & Society*, 20(1), 219–236. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816661549>
- Lasswell, H. D. (1936). *Politics: Who gets what, when, how*. New York: Whittlesey House.
- Logue, J. (1988). Conclusion: Appreciating scandal as a political art form, or, making an intellectual virtue of a political vice. In A. S. Markovits, & M. Silverstein (Eds.), *The politics of scandal: Power and progress in liberal democracies* (pp. 254–265). New York: Holmes and Meier.
- Lounasmeri, L. (2016). Think tank scene in Finland: Nothing spectacular? *Politik*, 19(1), 77–93. <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v19i1.27396>
- Lounasmeri, L. (2018). The emergence of PR consultants as part of the Finnish political communication elite. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, 26(4), 377–391. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2018.1436530>
- Lounasmeri, L. (2020). The Finnish think tank landscape – A mixture of consensualism and advocacy? *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 43(3), 187–206. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12182>
- Lund, A. B., Nord, L., & Roppen, J. (2009). Nye utfordringer for gamle medier: Skandinavisk public service i det 21. Århundrede [New challenges for old media: Scandinavian public service in the 21<sup>st</sup> century]. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Mathisen, B. R. (2013). *Gladsaker og suksesshistorier: En sosiologisk analyse av lokal næringslivs-journalistikk i spenning mellom lokalpatriotisme og granskningsoppdrag* [Joy and success stories: A sociological analysis of local business journalism in the tension between local patriotism and investigation missions] [Doctoral dissertation, University of Nordland, Bodo, Norway].
- Medietilsynet (2019). *Norsk medieøkonomi. Ein rapport om den økonomiske utviklinga i norske medieverksemder 2014-2018* [Norwegian media economy: A report on the financial development of Norwegian media companies]. Fredrikstad, Norway: Medietilsynet. [https://medietilsynet.no/globalassets/dokumenter/rapporter/2019/191122-okonomirapport\\_2014-2018\\_mt-total.pdf](https://medietilsynet.no/globalassets/dokumenter/rapporter/2019/191122-okonomirapport_2014-2018_mt-total.pdf)
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2019). *Reuters digital news report 2019*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/>

- Niemikari, R., Raunio, T., & Moring, T. (2019). Finland: Informal interdependence and occasional clashes. In K. M. Johansson, & G. Nygren (Eds.), *Close and distant: Political executive-media relations in four countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Nikunen, K. (2014). Losing my profession: Age, experience and expertise in the changing newsrooms. *Journalism*, 15(7), 868–888. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884913508610>
- Nord, L., & Stúr, E. (2009). *Tyckandets tid: Journalistik, kommentar, valrörelse [The epoch of the pundits: Journalism, commentaries, election campaigns]*. Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies.
- Nord, L., Enli, G., & Stúr, E. (2012). Pundits and political scandals: A study of political scandals in Norway and Sweden. In S. Allern, & E. Plack (Eds.), *Scandalous! The mediated construction of political scandals in Norway and Sweden* (pp. 87–102). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Nord, L., Nygren, G., & Volny, S. (2019, May 20). Skilda medievärldar splittrar de svenska valrörelserna [Different media worlds divide the Swedish electoral movement]. *Dagens Nyheter*. <https://www.dn.se/debatt/skilda-medievarldar-splittrar-de-svenska-valrorelserna/>
- Nygren, G., & Niemikari, R. (2019). Media logics as parts of the political toolkit. In K. M. Johansson, & G. Nygren (Eds.), *Close and distant: Political executive-media relations in four countries* (pp. 197–220). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Óscarsdóttir, S. (2020). Think tanks in Iceland. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 43(3), 207–222. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12183>
- Pedersen, O. K., Kjær, P., Horst, M., & Carlsen, E. M. (2000). *Politisk journalistik [Political journalism]*. Aarhus, Denmark: Ajour.
- Pollack, E., Allern, S., Kantola, A., & Ørsten, M. (2018). The new normal: Scandals as a standard feature of political life in Nordic countries. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 3087–3108. <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-72289>
- Reunanen, E., & Koljonen, K. (2018). Not partisans, but participants. *Journalism Studies*, 19(5), 726–744. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1204940>
- Ryfe, D. M. (2006). Guest editor's introduction: New institutionalism and the news. *Political Communication*, 23, 135–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600600728109>
- Sahlstrand, A. (2000). *De synliga: Nyhetsällor i svensk storstadspress [The visible: News sources in the Swedish metropolitan press]* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Stockholm, Sweden].
- Schlesinger, P. (1990). Rethinking the sociology of journalism: Source strategies and the limits of media-centrism. In M. Ferguson (Ed.), *Public communication: The new imperatives: Future directions for media research* (pp. 61–83). London: Sage.
- Schröder, K., & Ørsten, M. (2019). Denmark. In N. Newman, R. Fletcher, A. Kalogeropoulos, & R. K. Nielsen (Eds.), *Reuters digital news report 2019* (pp. 80–81). Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/>
- Schultz, I. (2007). Fra Partipresse over Omnibuspresse til Segmentpresse [From Party Press over Omnibus Press to Segment Press]. *Journalistica*, 2(5), 5–26. <https://tidsskrift.dk/journalistica/article/view/1807>
- Skogerbø, E., & Krumsvik, A. H. (2014). Newspapers, Facebook and Twitter. *Journalism Practice*, 9(3), 350–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.950471>
- Skovsgaard, M., & Dalen, A. V. (2013). Dodging the gate-keepers? Social media in the campaigning mix during the 2011 Danish elections. *Information, Communication & Society*, 16(5), 737–756. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2013.783876>
- Slaatta, T. (1999). *Europeanisation and the Norwegian news media: Political discourse and news production in the transnational field* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Oslo, Norway].
- Solhaug, K. (2019). *Mediemakt i bevegelse: En studie av NRK og Høyres bruk av Facebook i stortingsvalget 2017 [Media power in movement: A study of NRK and the Conservative Party's use of Facebook in the 2017 parliamentary election]* [Master's thesis, University of Oslo, Norway].
- Strömbäck, J. (2008). Four phases of mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(3), 228–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208319097>
- Strömbäck, J., & Esser, F. (2014). Mediatization of politics: Towards a theoretical framework. In F. Esser, & J. Strömbäck (Eds.), *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transforma-*

- tion of Western democracies* (pp. 3–28). London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137275844>
- Svallfors, S. (2016). Out of the golden cage: PR and the career opportunities of policy professionals. *Politics and Policy*, 44(1), 56–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12149>
- Svallfors, S., & Tyllström, A. (2017). *Lobbying for profits: Private companies and the privatization of the welfare state in Sweden* (Working paper 2017:1). Stockholm: Institute for Future Studies.
- Syvertsen, T., Enli, G., Mjøs, O. J., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- Sörbom, A. (2018). Från snack till organiserade nätverk: Om tankesmedjors arbete för att värva andra för sina idéer [From talk to organised networks: About the work of think tanks to enlist others for their ideas]. *Sociologisk Forskning*, 55(2–3), 365–387. <http://du.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1230224/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Tresch, A. (2009). Politicians in the media: Determinants of legislators' presence and prominence in Swiss newspapers. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14(1), 67–90. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208323266>
- Tyllström, A. (2013). *Legitimacy for sale: Constructing a market for PR consultancy* [Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University, Sweden].
- Van Aelst, P., Thesen, G., Walgrave, S., & Vliegthart, R. (2014). Mediatization and political agenda-setting: Changing issue priorities? In F. Esser, & J. Strömbäck (Eds.), *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies* (pp. 200–220). London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137275844>
- Väliveronen, J. (2018). More of the same or a different breed altogether? A national comparison of role perceptions and ethical stances among Finnish political journalist. *Nordicom Review*, 39(1), 51–66. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2018-0001>
- Webb, P. D. (2007). *The presidentialization of politics: A comparative study of modern democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/0199252017.001.0001>
- Ørsten, M. (2004). *Transnational politisk journalistik: Dansk EU-journalistik fra 1991–2001* [Transnational political journalism: Danish EU journalism from 1991–2001] [Doctoral dissertation, Roskilde University, Denmark].
- Østbye, H. (1997). Media in politics: Channels, arenas, actors, themes. In K. Strøm, & L. Svåsand (Eds.), *Challenges to political parties: The case of Norway* (pp. 215–228). Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14380>
- Østbye, H., & Aalberg, T. (2008). Media and politics in Norway. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

## Chapter 8

# Local political communication in a hybrid media system

Carl-Gustav Lindén, Lisbeth Morlandstø,  
& Gunnar Nygren

### Abstract

This chapter analyses the local media and local political conditions in the Nordic countries from the perspective of power. The rapid changes in the local media system described in this chapter have led to a redistribution of this power in the local community in different directions. The starting point for our analysis is the four variables defined by Hallin and Mancini (2004) to describe different media systems and to identify change in power and power relations. We find that local media structures are changing, with downsized newspapers and decreasing use of local newspapers while social media is becoming more prominent. Norway and Sweden try to balance decreasing commercial conditions with state support, while there is a strong regional public service in all Nordic countries. Political parallelism in the old sense of political power and control of newspapers has gone. Professional journalists have become only one group among many different producers of local media content, duly losing power over local agendas.

**Keywords:** local media, local journalism, Nordic countries, media system, hybrid media

## Introduction

In this chapter, we analyse the local media ecosystems and conditions for local political communication in the Nordic countries. We approach this topic from the perspective of power and the way in which changing local media also reflect or influence power relations in the local community. Local news often provides critical information on issues that people in the locality find important – schools, public health, housing, building, and planning. To this end, local media play an important role in empowering citizens as actors in the local community, serving a dual role as watchdogs in the locality as well as providing an arena for actors in local conflicts (Peterson & Carlberg, 1990; Weibull et al., 2018).

The quality of the media ecosystem is related to the power that is exerted to control the information flow in local communities. This power has at least

two dimensions: the power of different media platforms to influence local communities and the question of which actors have the power to influence the content of these local media platforms (Asp, 1986). Both of these power dimensions are important in analysing the role of different media platforms in local political communication.

The frame of reference for our study is the model used by Hallin and Mancini (2004) to analyse media systems, adapted to the local framework. In this context, identifying the changes in the power to influence local communities and media content is essential. However, we also acknowledge the change in the media ecosystem, such as the rising importance of social media, which Chadwick (2017) calls the “hybrid media system” – hence the use of the term “hybrid” in the title of this chapter. Chadwick (2017: 3) notes that “the rapid diffusion of new communication technologies creates a pressing need to rethink the complex and multifaceted forces that are reshaping the political communication environments”. Moreover, hybridity means that we do not need to make the either-or distinction, for instance, between “new” or “old” media, but treat them instead as parts of the media system (Nygren, 2018). Nonlinearity is thus an important characteristic of hybridity.

First, we identify the actors and institutions in the local media ecosystems. Second, we briefly explain the role of the state in relation to local media, and third, the degree of political parallelism in the local setting and local political journalism in the Nordic countries. Fourth, we go into the degree of professionalisation of local journalism. In all four perspectives, we also analyse how changes in local media impact power and power relations in local communities. After this broad presentation of the local media system in the Nordic countries, we discuss the central theories applied to analyse local media and political journalism and present some challenges and suggestions for research in the field. Lastly, we discuss what happens with regard to local political communication, using notions such as the fragmentation and hybridisation of the local media system.

## The local media ecosystems in the Nordic countries

A local media ecosystem is a concept encompassing all media actors and media institutions in a geographically defined area, including advertisers, news sources, and news consumers (Anderson, 2016). Local media are an important part of the media landscape (Napoli et al., 2015; Nielsen, 2015) and form a vital basis for political communication and dialogue. The same goes for the Nordic media systems, which are characterised by a decentralised press structure consisting of a great number of local and regional newspapers spread throughout the countries. Weibull (2005) notes that, for a long time, Finland, Norway, and Sweden

constituted the region with the highest level of newspaper circulation and the region where newspapers had the largest share of the advertising market. In the *World Press Trends 2017 Report* (WAN-IFRA, 2018), Finland, Norway, and Sweden are still ranked high in terms of printed newspaper circulation per 1,000 inhabitants. Moreover, when it comes to online news, the Nordic countries rank highest in the world, with Norway at number one with 42 per cent paying for online news during 2019, and Sweden second with 27 per cent. By way of comparison, the proportion paying for online news in the US was 20 per cent (Newman et al., 2020). According to the report, Norway and Finland also have the largest supply of local newspapers. In addition, all of the Nordic countries have strong public service broadcasting at the regional level and share a long democratic tradition characterised by stability of and confidence in political institutions. Taken together, this forms a Nordic “welfare state media model” based on strong commercial, local, national, and regional media in combination with public services (Syvertsen et al., 2014).

During the last decade, this stable situation has become more fragile while local media systems have simultaneously become more fragmented and more consolidated. Subscription-based newspapers have transformed into multiplatform publishing houses, but have at the same time become more centralised and downsized to adapt to the shrinking economy. Public service broadcasters have also developed multi-platform publishing, albeit affected by shrinking resources to a lesser extent, which has increased the conflicts between public service broadcasting and the commercial media (Grusell & Nord, 2012). In addition, most local forms of media – freesheets, hyperlocal online news, and small subscription-based papers – are growing. Besides traditional local media, social media platforms, mainly Facebook, have become the most frequently used sources for people when they want to stay updated on local news (Nygren, 2018; Olsen et al., 2018). Social media, especially Facebook groups, have developed into major platforms for local news and debate, building on participation and interactivity. However, platforms also absorb economic resources from traditional media, since the vast majority of digital ad revenues end up in the hands of Facebook and Google, also in the Nordic countries (Ohlsson & Facht, 2017).

Local media have tended to attract little attention from media research compared with national media. Media researchers have been criticised for focusing mostly on the largest media companies, the biggest media events, the most prominent media personalities, and the most visible journalists. Aldridge (2007) and Nielsen (2015) add that, despite being central and vital arenas for public debate, local media are ignored, not only in research, but also in professional debates. This lack of attention means that there is less awareness and knowledge about the formation of local and regional opinion and the role of local and regional media in democratic and political participation. Accord-

ing to Waschková Císařová (2017), this attitude is changing. In recent years, scholars have shown an expanding interest in local journalism both in Europe and in other parts of the world. Hess and Waller (2017) argue, for instance, that local media are resilient in a digital world and that their value has become clearer and more interesting. Nielsen (2015) argues that local newspapers are the keystone media in local societies and help people understand themselves as part of a community. A vital part of this reorientation is research on small hyperlocals, that is, new forms of local media such as community websites or online news startups not connected to legacy media (Lindén et al., 2019a; Nygren et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2015).

There are some recent examples of research on the local media structure in the Nordic countries, especially in Norway and Sweden (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2016, 2018, 2019a; Nygren et al., 2018). In Finland, local media and journalism are largely overlooked by researchers, with a few exceptions (Lindén, 2017; Ojajärvi, 2014; Ojajärvi & Valtonen, 2012). In 2017, the Danish School of Media and Journalism conducted a large study on the content, role, and importance of local and regional media in Denmark (Svith et al., 2017), supplementing historical narratives on the subject (Jørgensen, 2016; Søllinge, 2005), but aside from these studies, current research with a local focus in Denmark is minimal (Lund, 2018).

Even though the Nordic countries all have a decentralised media structure, some differences can be found. Finland, Norway, and Sweden have a much higher distribution of newspapers compared to Denmark. Norway and Finland have more than 200 newspapers and Sweden just over 150, while Denmark has only around 30 subscription-based newspapers. Most newspapers in Denmark, in turn, are daily newspapers, while many newspapers in the other Nordic countries are published only weekly or a few days per week. Norway is also distinguished by having most of the smallest newspapers, with low circulation and limited distribution.

Most of these daily and weekly newspapers in Finland, Norway, and Sweden are local, but differences emerge even here. Norway and Finland have had very stable structures in this respect (Finnish Newspapers Association, 2019; Høst, 2019). In Sweden, however, every other local newsroom has closed down since 2004. The number of local journalists decreased by 30–40 per cent (Nygren, 2018), while 35 municipalities were without any editorial presence in 2018 (Truedson, 2018). The backbone of the Finnish press system consists of regional papers (Björkroth & Grönlund, 2014), and “more than half of Finland’s paid-for newspapers are local weeklies” (Harrie, 2018: 24). However, in a media policy report for the Finnish government, Ala-Fossi and colleagues (2018) pointed to serious diversity risks at the local media level since many municipalities have no newspapers, and where there is a media presence, only one title exists.



The major difference compared to Denmark lies in the number of free newspapers. Almost all of the households in Denmark (82%) receive one (or more) free local weeklies once or twice a week. Some are pure advertising publications, whereas others constitute the only journalistic news channel in local areas, because all of the subscription-based media (newspapers, television, and radio) are regional, not local. Thus, with far fewer newspaper subscriptions in Denmark, free weeklies, television, and local radio have a more dominant role than in the other Nordic countries. Harrie (2018: 13–14) characterises this as a “continental feature, with television news dominating in another way than in Finland, Norway and Sweden”. This also applies locally, which may be exemplified by Nordjylland, the region of northern Denmark. In addition to the regional media company Nordjyske medier, which has local television and radio channels (they also publish daily and weekly newspapers and magazines), both the public service company – the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR) – and the commercial television channel TV2 have regional radio and television stations in Nordjylland. Regional television and radio stations are also important local media actors in Norway, Sweden, and Finland, but since the number of local newspaper subscriptions are relatively low in Denmark, radio and television play a far more dominant role.

What distinguishes Denmark, Finland, and Sweden from Norway is that a number of free newspapers have been established in recent years, in print as well as on the Internet – the so-called hyperlocals. Some of these have been established in areas that no longer have their own newspaper, but most have appeared in larger cities or suburbs where there are also several other traditional media present but where the population density is greater and the advertising revenue correspondingly better (Nygren et al., 2018). In Sweden, a doubling of free newspapers has been reported since 2000, with approximately 300 local free newspapers in 2016. Two-thirds of these are published weekly (Nygren, 2018). Denmark has approximately 260 free weeklies as well, most of which are published by the same companies that run the local subscription-based newspapers. This trend is not found to the same extent in Norway, where free newspapers have had less favourable conditions. At the end of 2017, only 13 free newspapers came out weekly in Norway, with most of them appearing in cities. In Finland, there is no clear trend, but in 2018, Sanoma decided to start publishing three new freesheets in the metropolitan region.

Newspaper markets in the Nordic countries have long been dominated by local and regional ownership and control (Gustafsson, 1996). This has changed during the last 10–15 years with the growth of large newspaper groups. In Norway, about 60 per cent of the newspaper market is owned by the three largest groups, while the rest are owned by other, often local players (Medietilsynet, 2020). In Sweden and Finland, the same development has occurred, with a few regional and national ownership groups in each country controlling most

of the local newspapers. Denmark has five major newspaper conglomerates publishing the majority of the local dailies and the local weeklies (The Agency for Culture and Palaces, 2018). The concentration of ownership gives media companies options to centralise production and standardise formats, administration, and IT development. Content is used across many titles (syndication) and newspapers have gradually become less local (Nygren & Nord, 2017). In other words, the power and control over media content has moved to the national level.

Media use has changed a great deal in recent years as well. The Nordic countries have high Internet usage compared to other countries. Local newspapers were generally late in developing their own online services. Many local newspapers were in a monopoly situation where it felt inappropriate to develop competing online editions for their own paper editions, and they have traditionally had a weaker position on the Internet compared to national newspapers (Harrie, 2018; Ottosen & Krumsvik, 2012). Local media companies are suffering from digital isolation; using relations between web pages, and the structure of hyperlinks, Sjøvaag and colleagues (2019) have shown that local newspapers in Scandinavia are largely disconnected from the digital ecology.

As online news consumption has passed print readership, local newspapers have been forced to rethink their business models. One important result has been the introduction of digital subscriptions and different forms of premium services behind so-called digital paywalls. Though online news in general has become a commodity with little value, local journalism is less resourced and has greater value for the community it serves (Goyanes, 2015).

In Norway, both Amedia, with 63 local titles, and Schibsted have recently been able to attract a substantial number of digital subscribers and are now at the forefront in the world (Lehtisaari et al., 2016). Norway has become something of a shining light, as 42 per cent of the population pays for online news (Newman et al., 2020), but research by Olsen and colleagues (2018) shows that media managers are still struggling to understand what content the audience really is prepared to pay for. The misalignment between the supply of content and perceived value is particularly prominent among customers that are young, have low income, and low interest in news.

### State impact on local media

In the 1960s and 1970s, all Nordic countries developed systems of state subsidies for newspapers. This was a result of the “democratic corporatist” model where news media were regarded as part of the “democratic infrastructure” in society. With this perspective, systems were introduced to support newspapers

in preserving diversity of opinion and to support daily newspapers without interfering with the independence of the news media (Picard, 2013).

In Norway, the maintenance of press subsidies is seen as absolutely crucial for supporting the large number of local media companies in the country, and in 2019, the government sought to increase press subsidies for local media (Ministry of Culture, 2019). In Finland, press subsidies were abolished as early as 2008, and media companies, including local ones, are expected to tackle the financial and existential crisis in the newspaper sector mainly by developing innovative content and business strategies, which has been a common response in other countries as well (Brüggemann et al., 2016). Instead of financial support for distribution and other functions, Finland has focused innovation support for the media sector through the state innovation agency Tekes Finland (now Business Finland). A general problem for media groups focusing on the local level is the lack of financial resources and the innovation culture needed to reinvent their business models (Krumsvik et al., 2013). A report addressing changes in media policy in Finland suggests that the most critical environment for the national media system is at the local level, where the lack of diversity, namely only one newspaper title or no media at all, is a threat to democracy and public debate (Ala-Fossi et al., 2018).

In Sweden, the government has gone in the same direction as in Norway, proposing increased support for local journalism and news media. The proposal, “Journalism in the whole country”, in early 2018 included a 20 per cent increase in press support and the introduction of a new kind of support for media to increase the local coverage in “blind spots”, as well as state support for media innovations (Ministry of Culture, 2018). It could be argued that this increasing support in Norway and Sweden helps local media to maintain power over media content.

The other facet of Nordic media policy has been strong public service broadcasting, also at the regional level. A major part of public service regional journalism in all Nordic countries is produced in a net of regional newsrooms, from ten regional offices in Denmark to 18 in Norway and 25 in Sweden. Still, public service is more regional than local, and most of the original news stories are produced by local newspapers. In Sweden, the ratio is one to ten when comparing the news production output in regional public service with that in local newspapers (Nygren & Schaerff Engelbrecht, 2018).

In recent years, public service media have been criticised by both commercial media and the political right (Olsen et al., 2018). In Denmark, media policy has undergone the most radical change from a Nordic and even a European perspective. In 2018, the government cut financial resources to balance the budget (Jensen, 2018), but according to DR, this will not influence key areas like news, nationally or locally.

## Political parallelism in the local media system

One of the features that previously characterised the northern European media systems was the close relationship between the media and political parties (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This party press system no longer exists, at least not in terms of ownership and direct control. The ties to political parties have long since been broken, even though we can still find media that are clearly sympathetic to and supportive of certain political directions. Moreover, and more generally, there is a broad consensus that the media still have a social mission to be watchdogs on behalf of the citizens in a society (Hanitzsch, 2011). The media are supposed to contribute to a functioning democracy – that is to say, there should be a focus on political processes, and citizens should be able to follow and participate in political activities and engage in political advocacy (Ihlen et al., 2015). This mission requires journalists and politicians to have close relations. The end of the party press, however, has weakened politicians' power over media content in favour of journalists.

The relationship between media and politics is obviously somewhat different in terms of expression in the various Nordic countries. Much of the research in Norway shows that local media are still an important arena for political communication. Engan (2016), who studied the role of local media in the Norwegian municipal and county elections in 2015, found that local and regional media still formed an important arena in the election campaign. He showed that local politicians, on the one hand, are critical of local media, considering them unable to adequately reflect the real political issues in communities. On the other hand, they regard them as important to be visible to the local public by getting their message across and being depicted in the local media. Engan (2015) has also interviewed local politicians in three different communities about their relations with their local newspaper. He found that, despite considerable dissatisfaction with local journalism, they consider the local newspaper to be one of the most important arenas of communication with their voters: “Politicians depend on the newspaper in order to reach out with the message and to profile both the party and themselves, either by giving interviews or by using the ‘opinion’ columns” (Engan, 2015: 152).

Other findings show that political issues are dominant in editorials and columns in regional newspapers in Norway (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2016, 2018). As much as 62 per cent of editorials and commentaries concern politics (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2016). In addition to focusing mainly on political issues, politicians themselves – local, regional, and national – make up 30 per cent of those who are active as commentators in the traditional media (Mathisen & Morlandstø, forthcoming), showing that the regional and local media arenas are considered important and relevant to politicians and political communication locally.

As shown by Svith and colleagues (2017), Danish local and regional media also cover politics. However, their study shows a mismatch between the political journalism that readers demand and the one that is actually practised. The study reveals that journalists believe it is important to convey political decisions in regional and local media but not the views of the political debate. However, citizens want journalism about what politicians think and how they act prior to decisions being made (Svith et al., 2017). This criticism resembles Engan's (2016) findings about his local political informants, namely dissatisfaction with local journalists' ability to understand what is relevant to cover.

Likewise in Sweden, local politics are important facets of traditional local media news coverage. But there is also a strong trend of the political system creating its own platforms for political communication when traditional media close the local newsrooms or decrease the coverage of local politics. Local and regional authorities hire former journalists to build their own media platforms online, and the number of local officials working with information often outnumber local journalists (Rehnberg & Grafström, 2019). Between 2004 and 2014, the number of local communicators more than doubled, and during the same period, the size of newsrooms in local media shrank by 30–40 per cent. In Gothenburg, for example, 145 communicators are employed by the city, far more than the number of reporters in the only local newspaper (Tenor & Nygren, 2017). Local communicators produce public service information but also politically related information. They also produce information subsidies for local media, and representatives of every other local municipality say that the downsized local newspaper often or very often publishes their press releases without any major changes (Tenor, 2017). In Denmark as well, we find more and more well-staffed information websites controlled by local authorities, presenting local news edited as journalism.

In Finland, the Association of Local and Regional Authorities has established its own newsrooms that produce online articles about what is going on at the local level. For instance, *Kommuntorget* was founded to compensate for the withdrawal of journalists from less inhabited areas. The journalists produce original content for the site, which also aggregates articles from local newspapers. The newsroom is still an experiment and only operates in the minority language Swedish, but there are plans for expansion. In Norway, *Kommunal Rapport*, established in 1987, is owned by the Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) but is an independent daily news website and weekly newspaper that covers municipal affairs. In this case, the audience includes politicians and executive officers of the local municipalities and counties of Norway, and its reporters have won several awards for journalism.

During elections, websites and Facebook pages of local political parties become more important as local political arenas, since they are used for campaigning and creating content for social media that is easily disseminated. In the

local elections in Sweden in 2018, these channels were equally or more important for voters under 30 compared with traditional media (Nord et al., 2019). This means that the power of traditional media as a political arena is diminishing; their role as gatekeepers becomes weaker when media content travels through the social media networks. The power of local authorities and local parties is strengthened and becomes more important in direct communication with citizens and voters at the expense of the traditional media. At the same time, research shows that for local politicians, Facebook and party websites are mostly a new platform for one-way communication during party campaigns, with dialogue being regarded as less important (Skogerbø & Krumsvik, 2015). However, local media still form an important platform where local political voices can be heard, at least in Norway (Sjøvaag, 2018).

### The degree of professionalisation in journalism

Journalism in the Nordic countries has been characterised by a high degree of professionalism, in national as well as in local media. The profession has a strong autonomy, upheld by professional organisations, professional education, and a professional norm of acting as independent watchdogs in relation to power (Ottosen, 2005; Wiik & Nygren, 2016). The strong public service media in all Nordic countries have made journalists adopt public service ideals in commercial media as well, and the common ethical standards are regulated in developed systems of self-regulation (Krogh, 2016). Local journalists must be just as professional as those working for larger media outlets, namely by maintaining the same distance and integrity in relation to sources and advertisers.

Journalism performs a dual role in society, serving as a critical watchdog on the one hand, and as a supporter of the area in which the media operate on the other – often denounced in Norway as “glue and loupe”. For local journalists, it may be easier to act as a patriot on behalf of the local community than to direct a critical gaze (Mathisen, 2013). Local journalists often face the dilemma of closeness. The advantages of being close to the community in which you operate may be difficult to reconcile with the need to maintain a critical distance when necessary. In addition, local media are often dependent on local support and local alliances in order to secure and legitimise their activities, and sometimes innovative changes, in order to fulfil their role as a critical voice (Morlandstø, 2018).

That said, there have been clear tendencies towards a deprofessionalisation of journalism in the last 15–20 years (Nygren, 2008). This does not point to a steadily declining level of professional quality, but rather, the borders of the profession have become less clear, and it is becoming more difficult to define journalism at the local level as well. Legacy newspapers are dominated by a

commercial-technical paradigm, and the focus has been moving from publishing towards economy (Andersson, 2014; Kunelius & Ruusunoksa, 2008). Professional organisations for journalists are also in decline with fewer members, and in Denmark, the union now represents all kinds of media workers, including public relations and advertising employees. In commercial media, local news has been downsized, for example in Sweden, where commercial TV4 discontinued all regional broadcasts in 2014 and local newsrooms were closed down (Nygren & Nord, 2017). Commercial local media also developed a new kind of paid content (native advertising, content marketing) far removed from any public service ideal. The same trend is visible in Norway: both national and regional news media are closing down district offices, which raises concerns over media shadows and blind spots in the news coverage (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2019b). The power of national and regional media as watchdogs in local and regional communities has been weakened.

In those parts of the local media ecosystem that are growing, deprofessionalisation is obvious. Content in the new hyperlocals is produced by many non-journalists, and the borders between journalism and business become blurred when the same people produce editorial content as well as ads. The ideal for many hyperlocals is more about promoting the local area than being a critical watchdog, and more about confirming a positive image of the local community than being a critical journalist (Leckner et al., 2017; Mathisen, 2014). Other actors in the local ecosystem are also producing content close to journalism, not only in the political sphere (see above). Actors such as the police, local organisations, and local commercial interests are building their own platforms for local communication. On the most important platform outside of legacy media, namely social media like Facebook, the content production is completely deprofessionalised. User-generated content in the local Facebook feed can be regarded as a democratic achievement, but nonetheless, there is no professional level regarding ethics and verification. Still, in Sweden, Facebook is used more than the local newspaper for staying updated on the local community (Nygren, 2018). Taken together, these trends point to the fact that an increasing share of the local mediated communication is produced by actors other than journalists. This indicates a change in the power over media content and the opportunity to influence local communities.

However, a Norwegian study on the working conditions of local journalists shows that although features of deprofessionalisation can be identified, journalists nevertheless express a strong sense of autonomy in their work. True, Lamark and Morlandstø (2019) found that the number of employees in the editorial staff have been reduced in recent years and that web-based platforms and tools have led to more deskwork. Yet, they found that they have the opportunity to make their own choices and to prioritise the journalism they believe is the most important for the local community. They also talk about managers who

encourage them to set their own priorities, even when they decide to pursue cases that require considerable time and resources. Hence, deprofessionalisation is definitely an issue, but there is also greater awareness of the responsibility that local journalists have in relation to their own work.

## Media content and the development of hybrid media systems

Local journalism has often been criticised for being “poor”, characterised by single-source journalism, lack of critical and investigative journalism, and many soft and sentimental news stories (Mathisen, 2010; Nielsen, 2015). With regard to the degree of critical and investigative journalism in local media, this criticism is probably justified. Both the Danish (Svith et al., 2017) and the Norwegian studies (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2019a) find little agenda-setting, critical, and investigative journalism in the regional and local media. In Norway, on average, only 5 per cent of the coverage can be called critically investigative, while in Denmark, less than 1 per cent is referred to as “labor intensive and focused journalism” (Svith et al., 2017: 44).

In Sweden as well, the share of independent or critical journalism in local newspapers is rather modest, according to a study from 2003. Only 9 per cent of all coverage by local municipalities fulfils the basic criteria for watchdog journalism, namely to be about power and politics and to have at least two independent sources and critical questions. But the study also shows that the watchdog function of local newspapers is larger than this, as it is also about providing publicity for local issues and scope for local debate. In addition, the existence of independent local media and the potential publicity regarding misuse of power and corruption is an important part of the critical function of local media (Nygren, 2003).

A recent Swedish study shows that the absence of local journalists leads to fewer community news stories and more crime stories. Institutional actors are also quoted more often when journalists are not present (Karlsson & Hellekant Rowe, 2019). A Danish study shows that as much as 82 per cent of the content deals with topics that meet a “vital information need” locally (crime and accidents, emergency situations, health, education, transport, environment and planning, finances, civil society, and politics) (Svith et al., 2017: 33). In Norway, this figure was found to be 67 per cent (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2019a).

The Norwegian study also found that politics is the second largest content category in local media after sports, and that most political content is found in the smallest newspapers. This means that the media themselves regard political issues as an important subject area to cover. Another study of political journalism in the Norwegian media, conducted by Sjøvaag (2018), found that local and



regional politicians are often heard in local and regional media. However, they do not seem to be seen as relevant sources in national media, which are more inclined to use national and international politicians as their sources (Sjøvaag, 2018). Sjøvaag's (2018: 17) conclusion is that "maintaining a local newspaper structure will be relevant in order to maintain platforms where local political voices can be expressed" and that this is what "ensures a critical control of political power in a decentralised political system, such as the one in Norway".

Nevertheless, we see a tendency for political debates that used to take place in local media arenas to gradually be moving to social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Nygren (2018) refers to an example from Sollefteå, Sweden. Plans to close parts of the hospital in the autumn of 2015 were leaked to the public. The opponents quickly established a Facebook group that soon had 15,000 members and where about 60 posts were published daily. The traditional media linked to this Facebook group in their reviews of the case and also used the group to find sources and tips for their own coverage. In a study of people's media use in two local communities in Norway, we can identify some of the same. Lie (2018) finds that local and social media are used for different purposes. Social media are clearly considered to be the most useful arena for quick information about local events or for creating community engagement, while local legal newspapers are considered the most appropriate arena for the mediation of local achievements and "victories" and for creating and nurturing a common local identity (Lie, 2018: 67).

Both Lie (2018) and Nygren (2018) show that a new local media system is emerging. Nygren (2018: 208) calls it a "hybrid media system", where new and old media do not replace each other but instead live side by side, which changes the conditions for all types of local media. In this local hybrid media system, Facebook and other social media platforms fulfil some of the functions that local media used to fill, like local gossip, news about family and friends, and information about events. Traditional media have to relate to this, and they use Facebook as a source for ideas, for interaction with audiences, and as a channel for "spreadable" news. Traditional media still produce most of the local news, but instead of the old form of distribution, news is now circulating in the local community in digital form and (as always) by word of mouth. A Danish study on news reporting during the past 20 years concluded that traditional media (newspapers, radio, and television) still account for most of the original journalism in Denmark and thus affect what decision-makers perceive as the common political agenda (Lund, 2018). At the same time, the Internet, with actors like Google, Facebook, and Twitter, is increasingly communicating a plethora of mostly unedited news and related debates, which naturally affects what is put on the political agenda.

Content analysis of the Danish regional and local media (Svith et al., 2017), however, shows that content on Facebook is, as in Sweden, more symbolic,

emotional, and entertainingly focused on items such as quizzes, competitions, and celebrities than the traditional media, which focus on more “solid” political issues such as the environment, transport, and the economy. We can argue that these political themes cover the “vital information needs” of their local inhabitants to a greater extent (Svith et al., 2017: 39). The study also shows that Facebook shares less local material and has fewer comments from citizens about local issues compared to the legal local media. Moreover, the study reveals that half of the articles in regional and local media in Denmark have a local perspective, and the smaller the medium, the more dominant the local perspective is (80%) (Svith et al., 2017). In Norway, 66 per cent of the articles in the regional and local media have a local perspective (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2019a). This implies that when the local media landscape changes and new media actors enter the stage, there is no guarantee that the new actors, such as Facebook, will be able to create an arena for the political communication that in fact takes place at the local level. On the contrary, social media like Facebook have no geographical connection at all – the networks are local and global at the same time.

Adding to the hybrid media system, we are also witnessing a fundamental change in journalism where advanced algorithms are entering the newsrooms, also in local media. These software systems are mainly used to analyse user behaviour and predict who will pay for news, but also for generating news texts from structured data. Companies such as United Robots and Newsworthy in Sweden are providing their customers with thousands of automatically generated texts on anything from sports and the weather to the property market and local crime. These texts are based on templates crafted by journalists but subsequently published without any editorial intervention. One of the customers is the newspaper corporation Bonnier Local News, which tries to compensate for the lack of local journalists with automated texts (Lindén et al., 2019b).

### Existing research and the need for new questions

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the amount of research on local media and political communication in the Nordic countries is not extensive. Theoretically, most of the research has a democratic and institutional perspective. The research in Norway is largely focused on local media in relation to local democracy (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2018), both with respect to how media platforms are available for local politicians to express their views (Sjøvaag, 2018) and with respect to citizens’ access to and participation in public debates (Mathisen & Morlandstø, 2016). We find much of the same in Danish research (Svith et al., 2017), but in Denmark, studies also reflect a

media-ecological perspective (Nielsen, 2015). Nielsen describes local media as the keystone media in a local political information environment. Local media is “the primary provider of a specific and important kind of information (news about local politics) and is a medium that enables other media to cover this aspect of the community” (Nielsen, 2015: 67). In other words, local keystone media are a vital part of the media ecosystem. Swedish research also reflects this media ecosystem perspective when studying local media (Nygren, 2018), particularly in relation to the increasing number of hyperlocals (Nygren et al., 2018) and the emergence of local media blind spots (Nygren & Schaeffer Engelbrecht, 2018). There are very few studies on local audiences in the Nordic countries (Engan, 2015; Lie, 2018; Lindén, 2017).

Several researchers argue that it is now necessary to ask completely new questions in journalism and media research – research that most often assumes a democracy and a normative perspective in the studies (Broersma & Peters, 2017; Nielsen, 2017; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2017). This view has probably also been the most common for researchers in the Nordic countries, even when researching local media. Broersma and Peters (2017) argue for new methodological measures to understand how the societal mission is changing and how journalism works in this new converged media landscape. They write that researchers should stop taking the ideal norms of journalistic work in society for granted, such as the media having a social mission to safeguard certain democratic values. A narrow focus on these standards can lead us to risk affirming adopted truths about the role of the media, without understanding how the media actually work. Instead, one should turn the focus of the research onto the actual practice and onto the audience. Researchers should be more concerned with how journalism is exercised in the newsroom and how the media are used by the public, rather than being fixated on idealised ideas about how the media *should* work (Broersma & Peters, 2017).

We agree that more perspectives are needed in media research, also in relation to local media. In order to broaden knowledge about local political communication, we need to gain a better understanding of how audiences experience the role of the media, and not only how the media themselves believe they perform this role (Meijer, 2013). In addition, we believe that it is important to study the relationship between legacy media and all the new media that compete in the local market. We know little about this relationship, especially locally. This applies to both social media and the new hyperlocals, which have both geographical and thematic impact areas. It will also be important to gain more knowledge about what it means for democracy that local authorities and politicians communicate more directly with citizens through social media, for instance. Finally, we need more comparative research, particularly research that juxtaposes different trends across various national, political, cultural, and institutional contexts.

## Conclusion: Fragmentation and redistribution of power

The starting point for our analysis of local political communication and the role of local media in the Nordic countries was the four variables defined by Hallin and Mancini (2004) to describe different media systems and to identify change in power and power relations. We also added the concept of hybridity (Chadwick, 2017), which reflects the changing nature of media systems, as social media plays an increasingly important part in sharing information at the local level. The results show rapid and extensive changes:

- Local media structures are changing, with downsized newspapers and decreasing use of local newspapers. At the same time, local professional journalists have lost their monopoly over the local public spheres, and new platforms are growing on social media as well as in different kinds of hyperlocal media outlets.
- States try to balance decreasing commercial conditions with state support in Norway and Sweden, and with a strong regional public service in all Nordic countries. This can only partly compensate for advertisements moving to Google and Facebook.
- Political parallelism in the old sense of political power and control of newspapers has gone. However, local municipalities and politics build increasing resources to influence media content. They still use local media in political communication but also offer new platforms outside traditional media for local news and local politics online and in social media.
- Content production in local media systems is deprofessionalised and taken care of by other actors producing local content for online and social media platforms. Professional journalists have become only one group among many different producers of local media content, duly losing power over local agendas.

The notion of fragmentation summarises the development. Before the Internet, the local newspaper represented the local public sphere (besides the local square and meeting places). Now this common local public sphere is divided along different lines – by age and generation, by social class and ethnicity, and by political lines and values. These different spheres are now found in local groups on Facebook, in local news producers outside traditional media, and in the feeds of every social media user. Traditional media still connect people across different local spheres to build a common public sphere in the local community, but this is an increasingly difficult task.

So what are the implications for the distribution of power in the local community? As noted in the introduction, the issue of who controls information

flows in the local community is a question of power. The rapid changes in the local media system described in this chapter have led to a redistribution of this power in the local community in different directions.

The power of traditional media is decreasing, their virtually monopolistic position in the local public arena is now history, and their resources for producing content are decreasing. Instead, some of this power has been transferred to citizens using social media platforms to connect, distribute, and discuss public issues. But power has also been shifted to global actors like Facebook, which determine the conditions for these platforms, for instance, by scripting the templates and determining the rules of engagement. Strong local actors such as local authorities and local politicians increase their influence over media content when newsrooms are downsized and the public relations departments of the actors grow. They also develop new platforms for communication directly with local citizens, bypassing traditional media. In addition, new hyperlocal and semi-professional media are growing where old traditional media are too weak or vanishing – freesheets and online news sites are becoming the main local news organisations in many areas.

Even if national authorities prioritise economic support for legacy local media and regional public services in some of the Nordic countries, we are witnessing a new media ecosystem that is very different from the old media system that we used to know. This development will have consequences for democracy, although it is perhaps too early to judge whether these consequences will be for better or for worse.

## References

- Ala-Fossi, M., Alén-Savikko, A., Grönlund, M., Haara, P., Hellman, H., Herkman, J., . . . Mykkänen, M. (2018). *Media- ja viestintäpolitiikan nykytila ja mittaaminen [The state of media and communications policy and how to measure it]*. Helsinki: Ministry of Transport and Communications.
- Aldridge, M. (2007). *Understanding the local media*. New York: Open University Press.
- Anderson, C. W. (2016). News ecosystems. In T. Witschge, C. W. Anderson, D. Domingo, & A. Hermida (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of digital journalism*. London: Sage.
- Andersson, U. (2014). *Organisationsteori för mediemedarbetare: Struktur, kultur, ledarskap och medarbetarskap i medieorganisationer [Organisational theory for media workers: Structure, culture, leadership, and media organisations]*. Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.
- Asp, K. (1986). *Mäktiga massmedier [Powerful mass media]*. Stockholm: Akademilitteratur.
- Björkroth, T., & Grönlund, M. (2014). The growth of leading regional newspapers. *Nordicom Review*, 35(1), 115–133. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2014-0008>
- Broersma, M., & Peters, C. (2017). Introduction: Towards a functional perspective on journalism's role and relevance. In C. Peters, & M. Broersma (Eds.), *Rethinking journalism again: Societal role and public relevance in a digital age* (pp. 1–17). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716244>
- Brüggemann, M., Humprecht, E., Nielsen, R. K., Karppinen, K., Cornia, A., & Esser, F. (2016). Framing the newspaper crisis: How debates on the state of the press are shaped in Finland, France, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom and United States. *Journalism Studies*, 17(5), 533–551. <https://www.doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1006871>

- Chadwick, A. (2017). *The hybrid media dystem: Politics and power* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>
- Engan, B. (2015). Perceived relevance of the trust in local media. In R. K. Nielsen (Ed.), *Local journalism: The decline of newspapers and the rise of digital media* (pp. 141–160). New York: I. B. Tauris.
- Engan, B. (2016). *Bindeledd og grensesnitt: Lokalavisen som formidler av stedlig identitet, institusjonell politikk og medborgerkultur* [Link and interface: The local newspaper as disseminator of local identity, institutional politics, and civic culture] [Doctoral thesis, Nord University, Bodø, Norway]. <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/2424852>
- Finnish Newspapers Association. (2019). Annual report 2018. <https://www.sanomalehdet.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Sanomalehtien-Liiton-Vuosikertomus-2018.pdf>
- Goyanes, M. (2015). The value of proximity: Examining the willingness to pay for online local news. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 1505–1522.
- Grusell, M., & Nord, L. (2012). *Inte för smalt, inte för brett: Spelet om framtidens public service* [Not too narrow, not too broad: The quest for future public service]. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Gustafsson, K-E. (1996). *Dagspressen i Norden – struktur och ekonomi* [Daily newspapers in Nordic countries – structure and economy]. Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hanitzsch, T. (2011). Populist disseminators, detached watchdogs, critical change agents and opportunist facilitators: Professional milieus, the journalistic field and autonomy in 18 countries. *International Communication Gazette*, 73(6), 477–494. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048511412279>
- Harrie, E. (Ed.) (2018). *Newspapers in the Nordic media landscape: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Hess, K., & Waller, L. (2017). *Local journalism in a digital world*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Høst, S. (2019). *Papiraviser og betalte nettaviser 2018: Statistikk og kommentarer* [Printed papers and paid online papers 2018: Statistics and comments]. Report no. 90. Volda, Norway: Volda University College.
- Ihlen, Ø., Skogerbø, E., & Allern, S. (2015). *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon* [Power, media, and politics: Norwegian political communication]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Jensen, L. B. (2018, September 18). Omfattende forandringer i DR [Extensive changes at DR]. DR. <https://www.dr.dk/presse/omfattende-forandringer-i-dr>
- Jørgensen, O. C. (2016). *Beretningen om de danske aviser 1992–2011* [The story of Danish newspapers 1992–2011]. Odense, Denmark: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Karlsson, M., & Hellekant Rowe, E. (2019). Local journalism when the journalists leave town: Probing the news gap that hyperlocal media are supposed to fill. *Nordicom Review*, 40(Special Issue 2), 15–29. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0025>
- Krumsvik, A. H., Skogerbø, E., & Storsul, T. (2013). Size, ownership and innovation in newspapers. In T. Storsul, & A. H. Krumsvik (Eds.), *Media innovations: A multidisciplinary study of change* (pp. 93–109). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Krogh T. V. (2016). *Medieetik: Framväxt, funktion och framtid* [Media ethics: Growth, function and future]. Lund, Sweden: Studentlitteratur.
- Kunelius, R., & Ruusunoksa, L. (2008). Mapping professional imagination: On the potential of professional culture in the newspapers of the future. *Journalism Studies*, 9(5), 662–678. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700802207581>
- Lamark, H., & Morlandstø, L. (2019). Snakker journalister fortsatt med folk? [Are journalists still talking with people?]. In P. Bjerke, B. K. Fonn, & R. B. Mathisen (Eds.), *Journalistikk – profesjon i endring* [Journalism – a profession undergoing change]. Oslo: Orkana Akademisk Forlag.
- Leckner, S., Tenor, C., & Nygren, G. (2017). What about the hyperlocals? The drivers, organization and economy of independent news media in Sweden. *Journalism Practice*, 13(1), 68–89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1392254>

- Lehtisaari, K., Grönlund, M., Villi, M., & Lindén, C. (2016). *Uutismedian uudet liiketoimintamallit pohjoismaissa* [New business models for media in the Nordic countries]. Helsinki: Viestinnän tutkimuskeskus CRC, University of Helsinki.
- Lie, M. P. (2018). Lokalavisen og Facebook – en studie av medier og lokaltilhørighet [Local newspaper and Facebook – a study of media and local affiliation]. In B. R. Mathisen, & L. Morlandstø (Eds.), *Lokale medier – samfunnsrolle, offentlighet og opinionsdanning* [Local media – role in society, publicity and opinion formation] (pp. 132–150). Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Lindén, C-G. (2017). Media building community: Audience engagement in a micro-nation. In L. Waschková Císařová (Ed.), *Voice of the locality: Local media and local audience* (pp. 133–154). Brno, Czech Republic: Masaryk University Press.
- Lindén, C-G., Hujanen, J., & Lehtisaari, K. (2019a). Hyperlocal media in the Nordic region. *Nordicom Review*, 40(Special Issue 2), 3–13. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0024>
- Lindén, C-G., Tuulonen, H., Bäck, A., Diakopoulos, N., Granroth-Wilding, M., Haapanen, L., Leppänen, L., Melin, M., Moring, T., Munezero, M., Sirén-Heikel, S., Södergård, C., & Toivonen, H. (2019b). *News automation: The rewards, risks and realities of 'machine journalism'*. WAN-IFRA Report. <http://www.wan-ifra.org/reports/2019/03/08/news-automation-the-rewards-risks-and-realities-of-machine-journalism>
- Lund, A. B. (2018). Den redigerende magt: Centrifugering af dansk politik [The redactional power: Centrifugation of Danish politics]. *Økonomi & Politik*, 91(1), 75–85.
- Mathisen, B. R. (2010). *Lokaljournalistik: Blind patriotisme eller kritisk korrektiv?* [Local journalism: Blind patriotism or critical corrective?] Oslo: IJ-forlaget/Cappelen Damm.
- Mathisen, B. R. (2013). Gladsaker og suksesshistorier: En sosiologisk analyse av lokal næringslivsjournalstikk i spenningen mellom lokalpatriotisme og granskningsoppdraget [Positive news and success stories: A sociological study of local business journalism in the tension between local patriotism and critical journalism]. [Doctoral thesis, Nord University, Bodø, Norway]. <http://hdl.handle.net/11250/139942>
- Mathisen, B. R. (2014). Fra partipresse til lokalisme – norsk lokaljournalistikk og lokale kampsaker [From party press to localism – Norwegian local journalism and local struggles]. *Pressehistorisk Tidsskrift*, 21. Oslo: Norsk Pressehistorisk forening.
- Mathisen, B. R., & Morlandstø, L. (2016). *Kommentaren – en sjanger i endring* [The commentary – a changing genre]. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Mathisen, B. R., & Morlandstø, L. (2018). *Lokale medier – samfunnsrolle, offentlighet og opinionsdanning* [Local media – Societal mission, public sphere and opinion making]. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Mathisen, B. R., & Morlandstø, L. (2019a). *Blindsoner og mangfold: Lokaljournalistikken i Norge* [Blind zones and diversity: Local journalism in Norway]. Oslo: Orkana Forlag.
- Mathisen, B. R., & Morlandstø, L. (2019b). Covering regional blind spots: Commentary journalism in the regional public sphere. *Nordicom Review*, 40(1), 75–90. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0004>
- Mathisen, B. R., & Morlandstø, L. (Forthcoming). Audience participation in the mediated Arctic public sphere. *Journalism*.
- Medietilsynet. (2020). *Mediemangfoldsregnskapet 2020* [The media diversity accounts 2020]. [https://medietilsynet.no/globalassets/publikasjoner/2020/mediemangfoldsregnskapet-2020/200224\\_mediemangfoldsregnskapet\\_avsendermangfold-2.pdf](https://medietilsynet.no/globalassets/publikasjoner/2020/mediemangfoldsregnskapet-2020/200224_mediemangfoldsregnskapet_avsendermangfold-2.pdf)
- Meijer, I. C. (2013). Valuable journalism: A search for quality from the vantage point of the user. *Journalism*, 14(6), 754–770. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884912455899>
- Ministry of Culture. (2018). *Journalistik i hela landet* [Journalism in the whole country]. Regeringens proposition 2017/18:154 [Government bill 2017/18:154]. <https://www.regeringen.se/494483/contentassets/baa13743e288436d97171803ba680e60/journalistik-i-hela-landet-prop.-201718154.pdf>
- Ministry of Culture. (2019). *Mangfold og armlengds avstand: Mediepolitikk for ei ny tid* [Diversity and arm's length: Media politics for a new era]. Meldingar til Stortinget 17 (2018–2019) [Report to the Storting 17 (2018–2019)]. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-17-20182019/id2638833/>

- Morlandstø, L. (2018). Innovation and value creation in local media. *The Journal of Media Innovations*, 5(1), 17–30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5617/jomi.4350>
- Napoli, P. M., Stonbely, S., McCollough, K., & Renninger, B. (2015). *Assessing the health of local journalism ecosystems: A comparative analysis of three New Jersey communities* [A report prepared for the Democracy Fund, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation]. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University.
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Schulz, A., Andi, S., & Nielsen, R. K. (2020). *Reuters Institute digital News report 2020*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org>
- Nielsen, R. K. (Ed.). (2015). *Local journalism: The decline of newspapers and the rise of digital media*. New York: I B Tauris.
- Nielsen, R. K. (2017). News media, search machines and social networking sites as varieties of online gatekeepers. In C. Peters, & M. Broersma (Eds.), *Rethinking journalism again: Societal role and public relevance in a digital age* (pp. 81–96). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716244>
- Nord, L., Nygren, G., & Volny, S. (2019). *Medierna och lokalvalen 2018: Gamla aktörer på nya arenor* [Media and the local elections 2018: Old actors in new arenas]. Stockholm: Södertörn University.
- Nygren, G. (2003). *Granskning med förbinders: Lokaltidningarnas granskning i fyra kommuner* [Scrutiny with obstacles: The local newspapers' investigation in four municipalities]. Demokratiinstitutets rapportserie nr 4 [The Democracy Institute's report series no. 4]. Sundsvall, Sweden: Demokratiinstitutet.
- Nygren, G. (2008). *Yrke på glid – om journalistrollens deprofessionalisering* [A profession on the slide – deprofessionalism in the journalist's role]. Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies.
- Nygren, G. (2018). En komplicerad lokal medieekologi: Facebook den nya lokala offentligheten? [A complicated local media ecology: Facebook as the new public sphere]. In U. Andersson, A. Carlander, E. Lindgren, & M. Oskarson (Ed.), *Sprickor i fasaden* [Cracks in the facade] (pp. 195–212). Gothenburg: SOM Institute, University of Gothenburg.
- Nygren, G., Leckner, S., & Tenor, C. (2018). Hyperlocals and legacy media: Media ecologies in transition. *Nordic Review*, 39(1), 33–49. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0419>
- Nygren, G., & Nord, K. O. (2017). Färre nyhetsproducenter – men fler nyheter i nätverkens flöden [Fewer news producers – but more news in the feeds]. In L. Truedson (Ed.), *Mediestudiers årsbok – tillståndet för journalistiken 2016/2017* [Media studies yearbook – the state of journalism 2016/2017] (pp. 32–73). Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies. <https://mediestudier.se/publikationer/mediestudiers-arsbok-20162017/>
- Nygren, G., & Schærff Engelbrecht, N. (2018). Vita fläckar och medieskuggor – stora skillnader i mediernas kommunbevakning [White spots or media shadows – large differences in the media's coverage of municipalities]. In L. Truedson (Ed.), *Mediestudiers årsbok – tillståndet för journalistiken 2017/2018* [Media studies yearbook – the state of journalism 2017/2018] (pp. 22–53). Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies. [https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Mediestudier\\_arsbok\\_2018\\_webb.pdf](https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Mediestudier_arsbok_2018_webb.pdf)
- Ohlsson, J., & Facht, U. (2017). *Ad wars: Digital challenges for ad-financed news media in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Ojajarvi, S. (2014). *Suomalainen paikallislehti: Perhealbumista journalismin uudistajaksi?* [The Finnish local newspaper: From family album to reforming journalism?] Helsinki: University of Helsinki.
- Ojajarvi, S., & Valtonen, S. (2012). Newspaper and television as local and community media – assessments by industry experts. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 9(2), 129–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2012.11073548>
- Olsen, R., Solvoll, M., & Gran, A.-B. (2018). *Digitalisering av lokal mediebruk* [Digitalisation of local media use]. Oslo: BI Centre for Creative Industries.
- Ottosen, R. (2005). *I journalistikkens grenseland: Journalistrollen mellom marked og idealer* [In the borderland of journalism: The role of the journalist between market and ideals]. Oslo: IJ-forlaget.



- Ottosen, R., & Krumsvik, A. H. (2012). Digital challenges on the Norwegian media scene. *Nordicom Review*, 33(2), 43–55. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2013-0013>
- Peterson, O., and Carlberg, I. (1990). *Makten över tanken [Power over thought]*. Stockholm: Carlsson.
- Picard, R. (2013). State support for news: Why subsidies? Why now? What kinds? In P. Murschetz (Ed.), *State aid for newspapers* (pp. 49–57). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer.
- Rehnberg, H., & Grafström, M. (2019). Public organisations as news producers: An odd species in the local media landscape. *Nordicom Review*, 40(Special Issue 2), 85–100. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0028>.
- Sjøvaag, H. (2018). Journalistikkens attraksjon til makten: Politisk kildemangfold i norske nyhetsmedier [Journalism's attraction to power: Political source diversity in Norwegian news media]. *Norsk Medietidsskrift*, 25(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.0805-9535-2018-02-02>
- Sjøvaag, H., Stavelin, E., Karlsson, M., & Kammer, A. (2019). The hyperlinked Scandinavian news ecology: The unequal terms forged by the structural properties of digitalisation. *Digital Journalism*, 7(4), 507–531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1454335>
- Skogerbö, E., & Krumsvik, A. (2015). Newspapers, Facebook and Twitter: Intermedial agenda setting in local election campaigns. *Journalism Practice*, 9(3), 350–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2014.950471>
- Svith, F., Jacobsen, P. F., Rasmussen, S.K., Jensen, J. L., & Andersen, H. T. (2017). *Mediernes udvikling i Danmark: Lokal- og regionalmediers indhold, rolle og betydning i lokalområder [The evolution of media in Denmark: Local and regional media's content, role and importance in local areas]*. Aarhus, Denmark: Danish School of Media and Journalism.
- Syvrtsen, T., Mjøs, O. J., Enli, G. S., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- Søllinge, J. D. (2005). *Lokalpressen: Danmarks lokale ugeaviser og distriktsblade 1850–2003 [Local newspapers: Denmark's local weeklies and district newspapers 1850–2003]*. Aarhus, Denmark: Statsbiblioteket.
- Tenor, C. (2017). Kommunerna om tillståndet för den lokala journalistiken [The condition of local journalism in municipalities]. In L. Truedson (Ed.), *Mediestudiers årsbok – tillståndet för journalistiken 2017/2018 [Media studies yearbook – the state of journalism 2017/2018]* (pp. 54–92). Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies. [https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Mediestudier\\_arsbok\\_2018\\_webb.pdf](https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Mediestudier_arsbok_2018_webb.pdf)
- Tenor, C., & Nygren, G. (2017). Local public communication filling the gap for a vanishing local media. In L. Waschková Císařová (Ed.), *Voice of the locality: Local media and local audience* (pp. 215–237). Brno, Czech Republic: Masaryk University Press.
- The Agency for Culture and Palaces. (2018). *Mediernes udvikling i Danmark 2018 [Media development in Denmark 2018]*. <https://mediernesudvikling.slks.dk/2018/>
- Truedson, L. (Ed.). (2018). *Mediestudiers årsbok – tillståndet för journalistiken 2017/2018 [Media studies yearbook – the state of journalism 2017/2018]*. Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies. [https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Mediestudier\\_arsbok\\_2018\\_webb.pdf](https://mediestudier.se/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Mediestudier_arsbok_2018_webb.pdf)
- Wahl-Jørgensen, K. (2017). Is there a 'post-modern' turn in journalism? In C. Peters, & M. Broersma (Eds.), *Rethinking journalism again: Societal role and public relevance in a digital age* (pp. 97–111). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716244>
- WAN-IFRA (World Association of News Publishers). (2018). *World Press Trends 2017*. <https://www.wan-ifra.org/reports/2017/10/10/world-press-trends-2017>
- Waschková Císařová, L. (Ed.). (2017). *Voice of the locality: Local media and local audience*. Brno, Czech Republic: Masaryk University Press.
- Weibull, L. (2005). Sverige i tidningsvärlden [Sweden in the world of newspapers]. In A. Bergström, I. Wadbring, & L. Weibull (Eds.), *Nypressat: Ett kvartsekel med svenska dagtidningsläsare [Newly printed: A quarter of a century with Swedish newspaper readers]* (pp. 19–48). Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg.

- Weibull, L. Wadbring, I., & Ohlsson, J. (2018). *Det svenska medielandskapet: Traditionella och sociala medier i samspel och konkurrens* [The Swedish media landscape: Traditional and social media in interaction and competition]. Stockholm: Liber.
- Wiik, J., & Nygren, G. (2016, April 7). Den journalistiska professionen i nätverkssamhället [The profession of journalism in the network society]. In Novak, A. (special investigator), *Människorna, medierna och marknaden: Medieutredningens forskningsantologi om en demokrati i förändring* [The people, the media and the market: The Media Inquiry's research anthology on a changing democracy] (SOU 2016:30) (pp. 261–282). Stockholm: Statens offentliga utredningar. <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2016/04/sou-201630/>
- Williams, A., Harte, D., & Turner, J. (2015). The value of UK hyperlocal community news. *Digital Journalism*, 3(5), 680–703. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.965932>

## Chapter 9

# Cultural communication as political communication

Nete Nørgaard Kristensen & Anna Roosvall

### Abstract

This chapter makes the argument that issues related to the cultural public sphere should be considered part of the political communication circuit. Cultural journalism in the Nordic context is a central case in point. On the side of arts, popular culture, and lifestyle, Nordic cultural journalism at times includes reporting and debate about sociocultural and politically saturated issues such as climate change, migration, terrorism, freedom of speech, identity politics, and gender inequalities. The chapter highlights three theoretical approaches, intersecting with the field of political communication, which have been of particular importance in Nordic scholarship about cultural journalism: public sphere theory, the politics of recognition, and the sociology of (cultural) journalism. The media coverage and debates about #metoo in Danish and Swedish cultural journalism in late 2017 serve to illustrate the arguments about the political in cultural journalism and reveals its quantitative salience as well as its qualitative specificities.

**Keywords:** cultural debate, cultural journalism, public sphere, politics of recognition, #metoo

### Introduction

Issues related to the cultural public sphere, including media and news content about arts and culture, are often infused with political dimensions. The perspectives and agents involved may differ from those typically associated with political communication, but to neglect them as part of the field would be to miss out on important aspects of the current political communication landscape. In this chapter, we pay particular attention to the political dimensions of what is often referred to as “cultural journalism” (i.e., institutionalised news media’s reporting of and debates about cultural issues, trends, and artefacts), as one example of culturally saturated media content with political communication perspectives and potentialities. On the side of arts, popular

culture, and lifestyle, cultural journalism may include reporting and debate on climate change, migration, terrorism, freedom of speech, identity politics, and gender inequalities. The latter has been especially salient in the recent coverage of the #metoo movement.

The Nordic region is particularly relevant when studying the political in cultural journalism. This is partly because the cultural journalism tradition trumps the more limited arts journalism tradition in this context, and partly because culture is an important pillar of the Nordic media model (e.g., Syvertsen et al., 2014). More specifically, media subsidy structures and the public service media ethos emphasise arts and culture as topics of priority (Kristensen & Riegert, 2017).<sup>1</sup>

We highlight three theoretical approaches of particular importance in the Nordic context to the study of cultural journalism, which intersect with the field of political communication: public sphere theory, the politics of recognition, and the sociology of (cultural) journalism. In addition to outlining the overall contours of these macro- and meso-level theories, we point to some of the empirical research produced within these frameworks in the Nordic region. We argue that this research points to the importance of paying more attention to the cultural dimensions of the political, but that it also confirms the challenges in much existing research of recognising the cultural *as* political. We aim to make the case that if political communication scholars acknowledge the political potentials of cultural journalism, it will make the field better equipped to discuss political communication in all its guises and thereby achieve a fuller understanding of the political as well as communication, and specifically of how they intersect. When assessing political communication in one of its guises, it is important to know what it can be in other guises.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to emphasising the particular Nordic aspects of the field and the Nordic contribution to international research, we aim to elaborate in this chapter on some of the differences between the Nordic countries, both in terms of theoretical approaches and empirical realities. In addition to constituting a review of an often-neglected part of the field and a theoretically anchored argumentation for why it is crucial to start taking it seriously, the chapter also contains empirical elements to illustrate our points, including previous studies on cultural coverage in the wake of terrorist attacks (Hellman et al., 2017; Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Riegert & Widholm, 2019) as well as a new study on #metoo reporting in cultural journalism in the Nordic context. These empirical studies illustrate both the quantitative salience of cultural journalism as political communication and the qualitative differences it constitutes compared to other types of journalism, not least political journalism.

### Three key theoretical perspectives

We draw on three approaches in the literature about the cultural dimensions of political communication that are of international significance in cultural journalism scholarship, and which have a prominent position in Nordic research. Somewhat crudely segmented, public sphere perspectives appear as particularly prominent in a Norwegian context, while Swedish research focuses more on democracy aspects, globalisation, and attitudes towards sameness and difference. In Denmark and Finland, sociological approaches are key, emphasising the role of cultural journalism and the news media in society, the organisation of the cultural newsroom, and a changing professional ethos.

#### *Public sphere perspectives*

Both sociologists and media scholars, also beyond the Nordic context, have proposed terms such as “the aesthetic public sphere” (e.g., Roberge, 2011), “the cultural public sphere” (e.g., McGuigan, 2005), and “cultural citizenship” (e.g., van Zoonen, 2005), and urged a “cultural turn in citizenship studies” (Dahlgren, 2006) to highlight the importance of moving beyond the political public sphere when studying media, citizenship, politics, and society. In the Nordic context, the works of Gripsrud (e.g., 2008, 2017) and Dahlgren (e.g., 2006) have been central. These concepts surfaced in the early 2000s, as various media and genres increasingly blurred the boundaries of the public and the private, and the political and the personal (e.g., Dahlgren, 2006). They have come even more to the forefront in the past decade as digital media technologies have offered new fora for public discussion and engaged new types of voices in mediated public debates. This has contested established notions of authority and expertise, distinctions between rational and emotional discourse, and distinctions between reasoning and argumentation, not only about politics, but also about lifeworld matters and cultural issues (e.g., Kristensen & From, 2015; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019). Much political communication research has been increasingly critical of these changes as the public sphere has disrupted (for an overview, see, e.g., Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018). Cultural and affective turns in parts of political communication research have also directed attention to the aesthetic or cultural public sphere, emphasizing, however, the political importance of the cultural, critical, emotional, and subjective (Kristensen, 2019; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2019).

As in much political communication research, scholarly debates about the cultural or aesthetic public sphere take their point of departure in and criticise the Habermasian perspective on deliberative democracy – that is, the idea, crudely put, that decisions are made collectively, based on rational, equal, and impartial argumentation among citizens in the public sphere. This democratic ideal stipulates that the best argument ultimately wins, which, subsequently,

creates peace and consensus (Gutman & Thompson, 2009). The emphasis on argumentation points to the importance of media and communication. A key critique of Habermas's (1989: 30) outline of the public sphere is, however, that it distinguishes relatively sharply between "the public sphere in the political realm" and "the public sphere in the world of letters". Both are placed between the state and civil society as sites of public discussion, though discussions of a quite different nature and with a clear hierarchy between the two.

A first main argument in the literature criticising this division is that the boundaries of the political public sphere and the literary public sphere are in fact quite blurred. Roberge (2011) argues that culture should not be perceived as demarcated from the political but as an integrated and equal part. The public sphere is cultural *per se* – the cultural is part of the political and vice versa. For the same reasons, the literature distances itself from the hierarchising made between the sphere of public affairs and the sphere of letters (e.g., Jacobs, 2012). Habermas labelled the literary public sphere a pre-form "precursor" or "training ground" (1989: 29) of the political public sphere, as "it constituted certain principles, procedures for debate that were later taken over by the political public sphere" (Gripsrud, 2017: 183). While this points to the importance of the literary public sphere, it still suggests a hierarchy. This hierarchy has long been upheld by sociologists, political scientists, and media and journalism scholars, as most attention has been devoted to the political public sphere, the media as a political public sphere, and political journalism. This hierarchy has also been upheld in the newsrooms, with political journalists and hard news ranking higher than cultural journalists and soft news, as we shall return to (e.g., Kristensen & From, 2015; Schultz, 2007).

A second key argument is that all types of culture have the potential to critically engage people, make them reflect upon their lives, and influence their actions and interactions: "Cultural production are windows, so to speak, through which critical views can penetrate the routine of everyday life", Roberge (2011: 439) argues. Similarly, Gripsrud (2017: 183) points to the importance of the cultural public sphere as "a space for reflection and discussion" about human relations, emotions, and human existence, or in other words, issues of importance to the "development of subjectivity and self-understanding". While these arguments mainly refer to how individuals navigate the world, they also allude to the political potentialities of this lifeworld navigation. Accordingly, the literature argues for applying a broad conceptualisation of culture. Gripsrud (2008: 203) points to Habermas's own naming of the literary public sphere as somewhat narrow and perhaps also misrepresentative, as he referred to not only literature but to various cultural fields, including music and theatre. For that reason, Gripsrud suggests expanding the notion of the literary public sphere to the cultural public sphere. Similarly, McGuigan (2005: 429) argues that topics such as celebrity, sports, and scandal today "may be viewed as trivial distractions

from the great questions of the day or, perhaps on the other hand, as representing deeper cultural concerns”, pointing to a much broader conceptualisation of culture, encompassing also more intimate or private aspects, not mainly aesthetic ones. While early Nordic cultural journalism research often echoed Habermas’s argument about the decline of the public sphere, seeing cultural journalism becoming increasingly interested in popular culture and consumption rather than engaging cultural *citizens* (Bech-Karlsen, 1991; Lund, 2005), recent contributions have applied more inclusive approaches (e.g., Knapskog & Larsen, 2008; Kristensen & From, 2015).

A third commonality is the use of mediated cultural critique or criticism as a central case in point of the blurred boundaries of the cultural and the political public sphere. Roberge (2011: 448) argues that “criticism is always normative and interrogative, always tries to define culture through a political lens and conversely, politics through a cultural lens”. Similarly, Jacobs (2012: 232) argues,

aesthetic publics provide a space for commentary about important matters of common concern. In other words, spaces of cultural criticism link a discussion of entertainment media to a broader discussion about society, politics, and public life, and they do so within the same organizational spaces – the media – that organize the more privileged and “serious” public debates.

In the digital media landscape, cultural criticism exemplifies the inclusiveness of the cultural public sphere. At one end of the spectrum, it encompasses expertise-based cultural debates and reasoning by intellectuals, academics, and cultural journalists. At the other end, it includes micro-celebrities, influencers, and ordinary consumers expressing cultural opinions and subjective, experienced-based tastes on social media (Kristensen & From, 2015). As shown by Danish research into cultural journalism and criticism, these voices and discourses are all part of the cultural public sphere today (e.g., Kristensen & From, 2015; Kristensen et al., 2018).

When engaging with the political dimensions of cultural journalism, models of democracy beyond the deliberative have also been highlighted, among them “agonistic democracy” (e.g., Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Riegert et al., 2015). Agonistic democracy resembles deliberative democracy in that it conceives of argument as key, but it stresses the importance of confrontation rather than consensus (Mouffe, 2013). The goal is not to end up in peace and consensus, but to keep arguing in what Mouffe (2013) terms a “conflictual consensus” mode, where what you agree on is that democracy should prevail, not what methods are best suited to achieve the most preferable form. Agonism is not the same as antagonism; agonism includes respect for the opponent and does not create enemy-images (Chambers, 2001). Cultural journalism studies, especially from Sweden, have concluded that agonistic democracy seems to correspond well with the approach of cultural journalism in covering societal issues (e.g.,

Riegert & Roosvall, 2017). In an investigation of Danish and Swedish opinion pieces in relation to two terror attacks in 2015, cultural journalism appeared less deliberative and less antagonistic than traditional political journalism, instead being agonistic (i.e., embracing conflict but not employing enemy-like polarisation) (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017). Likewise, an interview study with Swedish cultural journalism editors found that the *raison d'être* for cultural journalism, especially in the press, was permeated by a conflictual approach, situated within a democratic rationale (Riegert et al., 2018). These studies show that cultural journalism is inherently political. Following Mouffe (2005), we make in this regard a distinction between “politics” (i.e., an institutionalised and traditional political practice), and “the political” (i.e., the more ideological side, played out in numerous societal venues, providing ideological alternatives where pluralism and agonism play substantial roles). Mouffe (2005) argues that artistic practices have the potential to unsettle ideological hegemony in a “post-political” condition, where conformism, moralism, and universalism may otherwise repress the political agonism necessary for meaningful democracy. This is relevant for cultural journalism in two ways: cultural journalism includes reviews, debates, and reflection of artistic practices, and cultural journalism’s debates and literary essays constitute such practices themselves (Riegert et al., 2015).

### *The politics of recognition*

A second theoretical strand relating to cultural dimensions of political communication draws on approaches to recognition (e.g., Fraser, 2008). This is specifically relevant to cultural journalism scholarship studying globalisation concerning identity and status in relation to both immigration and ethnicity in the domestic realm and approaches to the world outside of the domestic realm. Such research has to a large degree been done in Sweden, where cultural journalism has been a crucial arena for public discussion about identity politics. According to the Swedish digital media archive Retriever, the term “identity politics” first appeared in the cultural pages (*Dagens Nyheter* in 1993). Furthermore, the most circulated and read articles in Sweden have, in recent years, often been cultural debate articles, addressing issues of Swedishness, ethnicity, and racism with a justice perspective (Riegert et al., 2018).

Identity politics saw its heyday in the late twentieth century and can broadly be understood as struggles for justice and the right to maintain or cultivate group uniqueness by minority groups in majoritarian contexts – a politics of recognition of groups (Fraser, 2000, 2008). In addition to recognition, redistribution (of economic means) and representation (in political bodies) are interconnected major strategies towards justice and rights (Fraser, 2008). Fraser (2000) also distinguishes between two models under the recognition approach: the identity model and the status model. The identity model stresses



identities to the extent that they may become reified (Fraser, 2000). The risk is that focus moves from promoting equality to valorising difference (Fraser, 2008). Reification of identities is a staple of news media representations, particularly in output, making sharp distinctions between “us” and “them” (Roosvall, 2014). The status model, in turn, stipulates that what acquires recognition is not just group identity but “the status of individual group members as full partners in social interaction” (Fraser, 2000: 113). Thus, Fraser suggests that the status model avoids the pitfalls of the identity model, which are displacement of redistribution struggles, maldistribution of means, reification of people, and misrecognition (negative recognition) of people (Fraser, 2000, 2008). While the identity model contains crucial insights regarding racism and sexism (Fraser, 2000), recognition should no longer be reduced to a question of identity but must become a question of social status. The status model tackles subordination by “establishing the misrecognized party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest” (Fraser, 2000: 113). The status model is more rarely evoked in news media output (Roosvall, 2014). However, as we shall return to, this is exactly what the #metoo movement seems to have been aiming to do: establishing the misrecognised party as a full member of society, capable of participating on a par with the rest. The status model furthermore aims to “de-institutionalize patterns of cultural value that impede parity of participation and to replace them with patterns that foster it” (Fraser, 2000: 114–115). Such de-institutionalisation of patterns could take place in and through the news media, where identity construction to a large degree takes place (Roosvall, 2014). Here, news media can constitute an arena for direct identity politics performed by activists and groups via, for instance, manifestos and statements on op-ed pages, or in cultural opinion sections, such as those published in relation to the hashtag #metoo.

In Sweden, 49 groups, occupational and others, had published testimonial manifestos in the beginning of February 2018 (Schwartz, 2018), only three months after a story broke about abuse in the Hollywood industry, triggering the movement. At the same time, news media can function as a forum for more indirect identity politics, a representational identity politics (Roosvall, 2014), as constituted through the totality of the #metoo coverage. As we shall return to, the very existence of the #metoo reporting broke previous patterns of silence, which had existed despite at least partial knowledge. Exercising rights does not just include the actions of activists in society – what is done via communication devices and channels in reporting on these actions is also a way of exercising rights (Butler, 2011). In studies of political communication, it is important to be attentive to if or when such extra- and intra-media versions of exercising rights might clash or converge. Cultural journalism and mediated cultural debates constitute important sites for analysing this, as they potentially include different types of voices than those typically heard

in political journalism and communication (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Roosvall & Widholm, 2018).

Appiah (2018) highlights that we live with the legacies of ways of thinking about identity concerning, for instance, nationality and ethnicity, formed during the nineteenth century, which now have to be rethought. Fraser (2008) similarly suggests a rethinking of the American feminist movement, detailing geographical shifts in feminist energies to transformations in views on gender justice since the 1970s, and broader shifts in political discourse in post-war capitalism. Her aim is to reinvigorate theory as well as practice of the feminist imagination and, in the end, reinvent the feminist project for a globalising world. In the analysis of the #metoo news media coverage below, we will mainly relate to the last two of three phases of feminism that Fraser discusses: its intersection with identity politics during the 1990s and its more recent transformation into a movement increasingly characterised by transnationalism, which is a geographical scale that significant parts of cultural journalism embrace much more than general news and op-ed material do (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Roosvall & Widholm, 2018).

### *The sociology of (cultural) journalism*

A third Nordic approach to the study of the cultural dimensions of political communication takes its point of departure in the sociology of news and journalism. The sociology of news has been central in Western media studies since the 1970s, when research attention shifted from individual news makers' choices and predispositions to extra-media influences, such as political economy and technological change and intra-media or organisational structures (e.g., Gans, 1980; Schudson, 2005). With the emergence of journalism studies as a more distinct research field in the early 2000s, this sociological turn was further cemented (e.g., Steensen & Ahva, 2015). A key trait of this often empirically grounded research is that it typically focuses on news and journalism more broadly, not on cultural journalism more specifically. One reason is that sociological debates about news and journalism are closely connected to some of the abovementioned normative ideals about democracy, as news media and journalism are seen as key to an informed citizenry and as an important arena for the public reasoning about issues of political and sociocultural significance. The sociology of cultural journalism concerns the role that cultural journalism plays in society and what influences the practising of this role. Since the early 2010s, Nordic scholars have taken an interest in the study of the particular normative standards and practices of cultural journalists and the organisation of the cultural newsroom. Several of these studies point to cultural journalists often being split between obeying traditional journalistic values, such as objectivity and autonomy, and following their own professional paths, borrowing from

more aesthetic and narrative modes of communication. In the following, we highlight some of the studies and their empirical contributions to substantiate this argument.

In terms of normative role conceptions, survey data across the Nordic region show that, compared to other beat journalists, the watchdog role is of less importance to cultural journalists – for example, in Denmark and Sweden (Kristensen & Riegert, 2017) – but this does not imply that political roles of a broader nature are absent. A Swedish interview study, for example, shows that cultural editors see it “as their job to question the status quo, to challenge all power, expose injustices and authoritarian regimes in any form” (Riegert et al., 2015: 782). Furthermore, comparative research on a more global scale shows that telling stories and promoting tolerance, such as more humanistic types of political engagement, is more important to cultural journalists around the globe than to other types of journalists (Hovden & Kristensen, 2018).

These role conceptions link to the norms and values as well as organisational frameworks that influence the daily practices of cultural journalists. Drawing on the Finnish context, Hellman and Jaakkola (2012) argue that cultural journalists follow an aesthetic paradigm, adhering more to the norms and values of arts and culture than to those of Western journalism. Focusing on the Norwegian context, Hovden and Knapskog (2015: 807) show that this puts them in a position of being “doubly dominated”, by both the field of journalism and the field of cultural production, as they are considered to lack cultural and symbolic capital in both domains. This is one explanation as to why their work is, as mentioned, often considered of less importance in informing citizens, in stimulating debate of political and societal significance, and thus in serving democracy. This again links to the type of issues covered in journalism, including by cultural journalists.

Internationally, scholars have criticised journalism, more broadly, for turning its attention from hard to soft news (e.g., Plasser, 2005) and thus for neglecting the societal role of journalism. This is often viewed as a sign of tabloidisation or commercialisation (e.g., Jóhannsdóttir, 2018). Others have questioned this theoretical distinction, as the boundaries between what constitutes hard and soft news are vague (Reinemann et al., 2012). Cultural journalism exemplifies this. Parts of cultural journalism engages in traditional cultural reporting of cultural politics and day-to-day events in the cultural field by means of sources and news genres, that is, applying approaches known from news journalism and hard news. Some scholars argue that such approaches have in fact become more prevalent in cultural journalism, speaking of a “newsification” or “journalistication” of cultural journalism, also in the Nordic context (e.g., Hellman & Jaakkola, 2012; Sarrimo, 2017). But other parts of cultural journalism engage in arts, culture, and lifeworld issues by means of more interpretive and narrative genres and of distinct journalistic voices, that is, apply professional approaches

of a quite different epistemic nature than the ones typically associated with hard news or political reporting (e.g., Kristensen, 2019). Of key importance in the context of political communication research is that by applying such approaches cultural journalism may provide alternative perspectives, or “a cultural filter” (e.g., Riegert et al., 2015), including alternative as well as less polarised perspectives, not only on cultural issues but also on politicised, culturally saturated topics such as nationality, ethnicity, and gender (e.g., Roosvall & Widholm, 2018) or politically motivated violence, such as terror attacks (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017; Riegert & Widholm, 2019). In the Nordic – and especially Swedish – context, cultural journalism appears to stand out as particularly engaged in such political dimensions of the cultural (Hellman et al., 2017; Purhonen et al., 2019).

For these reasons – in other words, reasons pertaining to the roles that cultural journalism plays in society and to the ways in which cultural journalists practise these roles – they have been labelled “journalists with a difference” (e.g., Forde, 2003; Hovden & Kristensen, 2018). However, such distinctions do not void cultural journalism of political dimensions, which becomes even more apparent when looking at the actors involved and given voice in cultural journalism.

### Actors and sources in cultural journalism

Proximity to sources and objects of reporting is a characteristic that makes cultural journalism stand out in relation to other types of journalism (e.g., Jaakkola, 2015). Moreover, part of cultural journalism is viewed as “churnalism”, because it relies on the cultural industries’ information subsidies with only limited editorial effort (Kristensen, 2018). For these reasons, cultural journalists are often criticised for not conforming to normative ideals such as autonomy and distance.

It is important to note, however, that closeness to sources in cultural journalism does not concern sources from the political elite, but mainly involves cultural producers – that is, it does not necessarily imply a failure to take a critical distance to political elites. Such elites play a relatively marginal role in the reporting, however. A Danish study of printed and web-based cultural journalism shows that approximately one in two sources are from the cultural industries – artists, cultural personas, industry people, and so on. Journalists or pundits from the media industry, as well as experts, are also given a voice; however, this is rarely the case for politicians and officials (Kristensen, 2016). Similarly, a Swedish study of cultural journalism in newspapers and on public service radio reveals that only 3 per cent of actors were politicians, whereas journalists, authors, artists, musicians, and academics were featured much more frequently (Roosvall & Widholm, 2018). This is in contrast to the

otherwise prominent inclusion of state actors (often politicians) in journalism, which generally interplays with the application of national and international geographical scales. Swedish cultural journalism is, however, concluded to be inherently transnational, drawing on the transnational geographical scale in at least two of three articles or segments during the examined years from the mid-1980s to the mid-2010s (Roosvall & Widholm, 2018).

In addition, a comparative Danish-Swedish study of the editorial and cultural debates in connection with terror attacks in France and Denmark in 2015 showed that voice was often given to people from the cultural public sphere. It also showed that the Swedish cultural pages were more political, in Mouffe's (2005) terms, than the Danish ones: opinion pieces regarding the attacks were more commonly discussed in the Swedish cultural pages compared with the Danish newspapers, where the discussion took place more on the general op-ed pages (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017). This is connected to the fact that in the Swedish material, "cultural personas" (authors, critics) were more common than in the Danish material (Kristensen & Roosvall, 2017). The same study concluded that reference points used in the cultural articles were more cultural, drawing on novels, history, authors, and the like. Though this is not surprising, it is significant, since it makes political issues come out differently in the way they are discussed by those contributing to (or, in some cases, even dictating) the discussion.

In continuation, cultural journalists are sometimes seen as competitors to artists and cultural producers, as they constitute cultural actors, producers, opinion makers, and sources themselves (Knapskog & Larsen, 2008). By extension, parts of cultural journalism do not include sources in the reporting at all. A Danish study shows that two in three cultural stories do not quote sources, though platform differences are significant with less sources in printed stories compared to online stories (Kristensen, 2016). One explanation is genre use, as key genres are reviews, essays, analyses, and so on, which do not comprise sources in the traditional sense. This suggests that, when covering explicitly political and broader societal issues that do not concern cultural products as such (e.g., the staging of plays, exhibitions of paintings, musical concerts, publications of books, etc.), cultural journalists may not be close to sources at all. In fact, the opposite is more likely to be the case. In cultural coverage and debates of, for instance, immigration policy, freedom of speech, or terror attacks, cultural journalists seem to be independent of sources, also in the sense that general journalism is ideally independent in terms of "distance to external constraints, in particular sources" (Jaakkola, 2015: 99). And perhaps even more so, given the fact that they do not attend political press conferences or intermingle with politicians and the like on a regular basis, as is the case for many political journalists in the Nordic context, often working from within the parliament as part of the press gallery. In fact, in the Nordic countries,

cultural journalism has been known for autonomy, as the cultural news desk in some major newspapers has traditionally been autonomous from the owners and the editor-in-chief, serving under its own editor only. While this autonomy has gradually been abandoned on a formal level, it still impacts the spirit of cultural journalism, which may take a different stand than the editorial pages in societal debates (Hellmann & Jaakkola, 2012; Riegert & Roosvall, 2017).

## Intersections of cultural and political communication – the case of #metoo

We now turn to the media coverage in Sweden and Denmark of the #metoo case, as it exemplifies political dimensions of cultural reporting, constitutes an example of politics of recognition, and is illustrative of some of the differences between Nordic countries in their engagement with political-cultural issues (see also Askanus & Møller Hartley, 2019; Pollack, 2019; Pollack et al., 2018).

The study is based on the print edition of the Danish national newspapers *Politiken* and *Jyllands-Posten* and the Swedish national newspapers *Aftonbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter*, which are of a relatively comparable nature, covering more left-leaning and liberal-right-leaning parts of the media spectrum. Using the search term “metoo”, we studied the initial framing and debates from 17 October 2017 to 31 December 2017. This covered the period immediately after Alyssa Milano (re-)introduced the hashtag #metoo on 15 October 2017, which was a follow-up of the *The New York Times*’ investigative reporting from early October 2017 that exposed the Harvey Weinstein scandal. The two Swedish newspapers published 710 articles (522 in *Dagens Nyheter* and 188 in *Aftonbladet*), whereas the Danish newspapers published only 194 articles (123 in *Politiken* and 71 in *Jyllands-Posten*). Studies by Askanus and Møller Hartley (2019) and Pollack and colleagues (2018) confirm the relatively limited reporting in Denmark, compared with Sweden.<sup>3</sup> In both countries, the cultural pages dominate the #metoo coverage, though least so in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* (see Table 9.1).

Moreover, the cultural pages seem to drive and instigate a lot of other coverage, as exemplified by the investigative reporting on the Swedish Academy and “The Cultural Profile” [“Kulturprofilen”], published in *Dagens Nyheter*’s cultural section. This set off much interest in the Swedish news sections and also appeared in the Danish coverage (cultural and other sections). Testimonial manifestos published in the cultural sections in Sweden set off publication of manifestos in the sports and news sections (65 manifestos in all; see Pollack, 2019), again followed by news stories, including local reporting on local politicians being dethroned due to sexual misconduct (“Stockholm news” section in *Dagens Nyheter*; see also Pollack et al., 2018).

**Table 9.1** Sectioning of #metoo stories (per cent)

	Culture section	Debate section	Weekend supplements	National news section	International news section	Other section (e.g., sports, business)
<b>Sweden</b>	38	15	4	25	2	15
Dagens Nyheter	38	15	5	21	3	19
Aftonbladet	39	18	1	38	1	3
<b>Denmark</b>	41	28	10	9	9	3
Politiken	47	28	11	8	5	1
Jyllands-Posten	30	28	10	10	17	6

*Comments:* In the case of *Aftonbladet*, the separate section “entertainment”, which brings more pop-culture and tabloid-type stories about the cultural industries, is included in the cultural section category, as entertainment stories are included in the cultural sections of the other newspapers investigated, which do not have separate entertainment sections. The number of coded items were 522 (*Dagens Nyheter*), 188 (*Aftonbladet*), 123 (*Politiken*), and 71 (*Jyllands-Posten*).

In their study of the #metoo coverage in four Danish and four Swedish newspapers during the last two weeks of October 2017, Askanius and Møller Hartley (2019) show that in Denmark, the case was most prominent in the debate sections, while being covered more as traditional news and editorials in Sweden. Another difference was that there was more focus on the individual in Denmark, in contrast to the focus on structure in Sweden, although individual focus dominated overall. Their findings do not specify the role of culture sections, however. While the significance of news in the Swedish material is clear in our study too (see Table 9.1), the cultural section still trumps the news section as well as the debate section. The dominance of the cultural and debate pages, as well as the migration of the #metoo issue back and forth between the diverse newspaper sections, suggests the agenda-setting power of cultural issues as well as cultural sections. Moreover, the specificities of the coverage in these sections shine additional, much needed light on the issue of individual versus structure, noted as a significant distinction in the cited Nordic #metoo studies, or, as we discuss it, identity versus status (see also below).

Agonistic democracy approaches could be detected in the manifestos and investigative reporting that drove much of the coverage. They brought conflict and injustice to the fore, challenging traditional practices in the workplace and society. “Meeting someone halfway” and seeking consensus was not prioritised; instead, claims were rather unconditional. Furthermore, in both deliberative and agonistic approaches to democracy, debate and discussion are key, whether of a rational or conflictual consensus-oriented nature. Similar to Askanius and Møller Hartley (2019), our study finds that debate and opinion pieces were given much space, which we, in view of public sphere theory and the mentioned approaches to democracy, interpret as signalling the importance of the subject

(see Table 9.2). “Views” genres included not only editorials and debate pieces, but also columns or commentary published in diverse sections, and reviews and essays published in the cultural sections.

**Table 9.2** Overall distributions between news, “views”, and front page references (per cent)

	News stories	Views	Front page references
<b>Sweden</b>	51	38	11
Dagens Nyheter	51	34	14
Aftonbladet	51	48	1
<b>Denmark</b>	46	52	3
Politiken	41	57	2
Jyllands-Posten	53	42	4

*Comments:* The number of coded items were 522 (*Dagens Nyheter*), 188 (*Aftonbladet*), 123 (*Politiken*), and 71 (*Jyllands-Posten*).

As mentioned, the #metoo testimonial manifestos given space in the cultural sections focused on women’s status rather than identity; they concerned women’s rights to equal roles, positions, and possibilities across sectors and industries. This could consist of simply being able to take the bus at night, not being seen as an object, being acknowledged for professional skills, or in other words, being able – as women – to take part in society on a par with men, as stipulated in the status model (Fraser, 2000). Without this focus on demands and claims to equal rights, and to equal status, the testimonies as such, with their accounts of sexual abuse, may have become objectifying and reifying, as often happens when women and their bodies are in focus (Roosvall, 2005).

A few salient articles exemplify a focus on status, also in the newspapers’ own production of media content. A particularly significant Swedish piece is the long investigative reportage by Matilda Gustavsson in *Dagens Nyheter* on 17 November, containing interviews with 18 women who had been sexually abused by “The Cultural Profile”, a person married to a member of the Swedish Academy and with much influence over the cultural scene in Stockholm (Gustavsson, 2017). The women are often quoted directly, thus embodying a power position in the discourse. Quotes focus on shame as being collective rather than individual (and not pertaining to the women), thus underlining status rather than identity. The roles and experiences of women are discussed, not their feminine identities. Body and sex(ual abuse) are continuously referred to, but in a power-critical manner, and they are not used as illustration or sole characteristics; the women’s positions as artists and the like are simultaneously highlighted. The women are actors in the article, not objects, and aspects of legal processes are included, which ultimately expresses an agonistic,



conflictual perspective without becoming enemy-focused or antagonistic. In *Aftonbladet*, where culture and entertainment are separated into different sections, an overview reading reveals, however, that in the entertainment pages, which are of a tabloid-like nature, focus is on individuals and men, specifically men who have been accused. A prevalent focus on the individual is also noted in previous studies of the #metoo movement across the Nordic countries (Askanius & Møller Hartley, 2019; Pollack et al., 2018). Such a focus on individuals and men does not seem to emphasise recognition of status as much as the traditional cultural reporting, but more in-depth studies are needed to examine this further.

A look to one of the most salient pieces in the Danish reporting, an extensive cultural article in *Politiken* (Wind-Friis et al., 2017), reveals a focus on agonism and status rather than identity, like Matilda Gustavsson's article in *Dagens Nyheter*. This long investigative piece focuses on misconduct by a key film producer at the Danish production company Zentropa. It is a reflexive article, critical towards previous journalistic reporting about the given film producer and company. It calls into question earlier objectifying practices and media images, thus criticising reification of identity – a risk with the application of the identity model – not only in the film industry but in the media industry as well. The article includes many direct quotes by both women and men, giving voice to some victims. At the same time, it calls out members of the press, letting them answer critical questions about their previous lack of action, despite their long knowledge, at least partly, about the misconduct. A forefronted conclusion is that a series of singular examples of abuse were not enough for the journalists to act; examples from other countries – the initial reportage from the US, and also testimonies from Sweden – seem to have been needed. This indicates the benefits, and necessity, of a transnationalisation of the women's movement, as suggested by Fraser (2008) in her critique of the too nationally confined women's movement in the US.

Despite the necessary transnationalisation alluded to in the Zentropa article, events in other parts of the world, except for the US, is not a key focus overall, especially not in the Swedish material. Issues regarding the Danish context appear only seven times (1%) in the Swedish data, and issues regarding the Swedish context appear 11 times in the Danish material (6%). When other parts of the world do appear, national specificity tends to be highlighted, not only in the news and the political opinion sections (such articles are found in *Dagens Nyheter* on 3 December and 25 November 2017 and in *Politiken* on 3 November 2017), but also on the cultural pages (one example is from *Dagens Nyheter* on 27 October 2017). This indicates a state-territorial framing and that the transnationalisation of the women's movement, argued for by Fraser (2008), is not yet realised, neither as it is accounted for in the media, nor in the scopes of the testimonial manifestos. The transnational characteristics of cultural journalism in Sweden that have been

identified previously (Roosvall & Widholm, 2018) do thus not materialise here.

This specific knowledge of the cultural journalism field, as part of the political communication field, indicates that there is something specific to the #metoo reporting, which – together with the general spread over diverse sections, especially in the Swedish material – suggests that it has taken on a merged form of cultural-political coverage. In other words, culture affects news and political coverage and opinion, and news and political opinion affects cultural coverage and opinion. Understanding the specificities of sections of journalism, and the specificities of the cultural public sphere, facilitates a valid analysis and a clearer picture of what is going on in our societies.

The critical aftermath of the #metoo movement, specifically the criticism towards how the media (mis-)handled specific cases and thus severely harmed persons who were named, contains further – and deeply tragic – evidence of the societal impact of cultural journalism. Based on their reporting on Benny Fredriksson, CEO of Kulturhuset Stadsteatern (the Stockholm City Theatre, one of the two main theatre institutions in Stockholm), who committed suicide after a series of critical articles about him connected to #metoo, *Aftonbladet* was convicted by The Press Council [Pressens Opinionsnämnd], resulting in the newspaper having to publish a statement of the decision and to pay a fee. The conviction underlined that the severity of the harm done towards Fredriksson was exacerbated by the fact that it was published not only in the news section “but also in the editorial and cultural pages [translated]” (*Aftonbladet*, 2019).

## Conclusion

This chapter has pointed to the cultural dimensions of the political and the political dimensions of the cultural as an emerging research strand within the study of political communication. We have especially focused on the political dimensions of cultural journalism as an area with political communication perspectives and potentialities. We have highlighted three theoretical approaches particularly important in existing Nordic research and have demonstrated that even within these strands, especially those dealing with public sphere theory and the sociology of journalism, it remains a challenge to recognise the cultural as political, including the political potentialities of cultural coverage and debate. Or put differently, it remains a challenge for cultural journalism studies to be accepted as an important aspect of the political communication circuit and thus as a research field with (also) political dimensions. We have made the case that acknowledging these dimensions potentially makes us better equipped to discuss political communication in all its guises and variations and thereby to achieve a fuller, more well-informed understanding of the political as well as

communication and, specifically, how they connect.

To exemplify this, we have, in addition to drawing on previous studies of cultural journalism, provided a mapping of, and brief qualitative look into, the coverage of #metoo in Danish and Swedish newspapers in the autumn of 2017. This analysis demonstrates that cultural journalism may be a key arena for and driver of political coverage and opinion. Moreover, it indicates that knowledge of the field of cultural journalism as a form of political communication is necessary to be able to make valid conclusions about – in this case – the presence of (inter-)national framing, which in general news and political opinion are staple, but in cultural journalism is more of a rarity. The case of #metoo has also exemplified the inclusiveness of cultural journalism today. This coverage involved a continuum from politically saturated stories, investigative reporting, and cultural editors calling for action, at one end of the spectrum, setting agendas also for other parts of journalism. But it also included more traditional news stories about the evolvment of #metoo in various countries (applying national rather than transnational perspectives) and debate articles engaging critically and supportively with the topic, thus serving as a forum for conflictual consensus. At the other end of the spectrum, the coverage also involved entertainment and gossipy stories. All of these stories add to the picture of this complex matter and point to cultural journalism as an area of research that deserves more attention in a world of increasing media hybridisation, both in terms of content and genres, and in a media landscape characterised by increasing attempts to stand out in the multitude of accessible media material, not least in the field of political communication.

## Notes

1. One example is that, across public service broadcasters in the Nordic countries, culture is highlighted as key areas of commitment. This is evident in the annual public service reports from key public service providers, such as Sveriges Television (SVT, Sweden), Norsk Rikskringkasting (NRK, Norway) and Danmarks Radio (DR, Denmark).
2. The study of the political dimensions of cultural journalism presented here are not to be confused with scholarly debates about political communication cultures (e.g., Pfetsch, 2004; Esser & Pfetsch, 2017) or journalism cultures (Hanitzsch et al., 2011). These approaches study and compare the actions, norms, and attitudes of actors associated with the political public sphere within different political and media systems but pay little attention to the study of the political dimensions of cultural journalism and the actions and attitudes of agents contributing to this type of journalism.
3. Pollack and colleagues (2018) find extensive coverage in Norway and coverage in Finland somewhere in between.

## References

- Aftonbladet. (2019, March 11). Aftonbladet fälls för publicering om Stadsteaterns förre chef [Aftonbladet condemned for publishing on the former chief executive of Statsteratern]. *Aftonbladet*. <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/xRGeJG/aftonbladet-falls-for-publicering-om-stadsteaterns-forre-chef>
- Appiah, K. A. (2018). *The lies that bind: Rethinking identity*. New York: Liveright.

- Askanius, T., & Møller Hartley, J. (2019). Framing gender justice: A comparative analysis of the media coverage of #metoo in Denmark and Sweden. *Nordicom Review*, 40(2), 19–36. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0022>
- Bech-Karlsen, J. (1991). *Kulturjournalistikk: Avkobling eller tillkobling? [Cultural journalism: Attachment or detachment?]* Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Bennett, L., & Pfetsch, B. (2018). Rethinking political communication in a time of disrupted public spheres. *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 243–253. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqx017>
- Butler, J. (2011, September). *Bodies in alliance and the politics of the streets*. European Institute for Progressive Cultural Politics. <http://www.eipcp.net/transversal/1011/butler/en>
- Chambers, S. A. (2001). Language and politics: Agonistic discourse in The West Wing. *CTheory*. [http://ctheory.net/ctheory\\_wp/language-and-politics-agonistic-discourse-in-the-west-wing/](http://ctheory.net/ctheory_wp/language-and-politics-agonistic-discourse-in-the-west-wing/)
- Dahlgren, P. (2006). Doing citizenship: The cultural origins of civic agency in the public sphere. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 9(5), 267–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549406066073>
- Esser, F., & Pfetsch, B. (2017). Political communication. In D. Caramani (Ed.), *Comparative politics* (4th ed.) (pp. 327–344). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/hepl/9780198737421.003.0021>
- Forde, E. (2003). Journalists with a difference: Producing music journalism. In S. Cottle (Ed.), *Media organization and production* (pp. 113–130). London: Sage.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, 3(May–June), 107–120.
- Fraser, N. (2008). *Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalizing world*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gans, H. J. (1980). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek and Time*. New York: Vintage.
- Gutman, A., & Thompson, D. (2009). *Why deliberative democracy?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gripsrud, J. (2008). The cultural dimension of democracy. In I. Bondebjerg, & P. Madsen (Eds.), *Media, democracy and European culture* (pp. 197–214). Bristol: Intellect Books.
- Gripsrud, J. (2017). The cultural, the political and the functions of cultural journalism: In digital times. In N. N. Kristensen, & K. Riegert (Eds.), *Cultural journalism in the Nordic countries* (pp. 181–194). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Gustavsson, M. (2017, November 22). 18 kvinnor: Kulturprofil har utsatt oss för övergrepp [18 women: A cultural profile has exposed us to abuse]. *Dagens Nyheter*. <https://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/18-kvinnor-kulturprofil-har-utsatt-oss-for-overgrepp/>
- Habermas, J. (1989). *The structural transformation of the public sphere: An inquiry into a category of bourgeois society*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hanitzsch, T., Hanusch, F., Mellado, C., Anikina, M., Berganza, R., Cangoz, I., ... Yuen, E. K. W. (2011). Mapping journalism cultures across nations: A comparative study of 18 countries. *Journalism Studies*, 12(3), 273–293. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2010.512502>
- Hellman, H., & Jaakkola, M. (2012). From aesthetes to reporters: The paradigm shift in Finland. *Journalism*, 13(6), 783–801. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911431382>
- Hellman, H., Jaakkola, M., & Salokangas, R. (2017). From culture wars to combat games: The differentiation and development of culture departments in Finland. In N. N. Kristensen, & K. Riegert (Eds.), *Cultural journalism in the Nordic countries* (pp. 30–49). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Hovden, J. F., & Knapskog, K. A. (2015). Doubly dominated: Cultural journalists in the fields of journalism and culture. *Journalism Practice*, 9(6), 791–810. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1052214>
- Hovden, J. F., & Kristensen, N. N. (2018, August 16). The cultural journalist around the globe: A comparative study of characteristics, role perceptions, and perceived influences. *Journalism*, 1–20. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918791224>
- Jaakkola, M. (2015). *The contested autonomy of arts and journalism: Change and continuity of the dual professionalism of cultural journalism* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Tampere, Finland]. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-44-9849-7>

- Jacobs, R. N. (2012). Entertainment media and the aesthetic public sphere. In J. C. Alexander, R. N. Jacobs, & P. Smith (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of cultural sociology* (pp. 318–338). New York: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxford-hb/9780195377767.013.12>
- Jóhannsdóttir, V. (2018, April 29). Commercialization of the Icelandic press: An analysis of hard and soft news in major print and online media in Iceland in times of change. *Journalism*, 1–17. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918768494>
- Knapskog, K. A., & Larsen, L. O. (Eds.). (2008). *Kulturjournalistikk: Pressen og den kulturelle offentlighed*. [Cultural journalism: The press and the cultural public sphere]. Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press.
- Kristensen, N. N. (2016). Kulturjournalistikkens dagsordener og dagsordensættere på tværs af platforme [The agendas and agenda-setters of cultural journalism across platforms]. In I. Willig, & M. Blach-Ørsten (Eds.), *Den fælles dagsorden og alle de andre* [The mutual agenda and all the others] (pp. 243–261). Frederiksberg, Denmark: Samfundslitteratur.
- Kristensen, N. N. (2018). Churnalism, cultural (inter)mediation and sourcing in cultural journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 19(14), 2168–2186. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1330666>
- Kristensen N. N. (2019). Cultural journalism – Journalism about culture. *Sociology Compass*, 13(6), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12701>
- Kristensen, N. N., & From, U. (2015). From ivory tower to cross-media personas: The heterogeneous cultural critic in the media. *Journalism Practice*, 9(6), 853–871. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1051370>
- Kristensen, N. N., Haastrup, H. K., & Holdgaard, N. (2018). Cultural critique: Re-negotiating cultural authority in digital media culture. *Mediekultur*, 65, 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v34i65.111265>
- Kristensen, N. N., & Riegert, K. (Eds.). (2017). *Cultural journalism in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Kristensen, N. N., & Roosvall, A. (2017). Editorial and cultural debates in Danish and Swedish newspapers: Understanding the terror attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in early 2015. In N. N. Kristensen, & K. Riegert (Eds.), *Cultural journalism in the Nordic countries* (pp. 135–158). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Lund, C. W. (2005). *Kritikk og kommers: Kulturdekningen i skandinavisk dagspresse* [Critique and business: The cultural coverage in the Scandinavian press]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- McGuigan, J. (2005). The cultural public sphere. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 8(4), 427–443. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549405057827>
- Mouffe, C. (2005). *On the political*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203870112>
- Mouffe, C. (2013). *Agonistics: Thinking the world politically*. London: Verso.
- Pfetsch, B. (2004). From political culture to political communication culture: A theoretical approach to comparative analysis. In F. Esser, & B. Pfetsch (Eds.), *Comparing political communication theories: Cases and challenges* (pp. 344–366). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606991>
- Plasser, F. (2005). From hard to soft news standards? How political journalists in different media systems evaluate the shifting quality of news. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10(2), 47–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1081180X05277746>
- Pollack, E. (2019). Sweden and the #metoo movement. *Interactions: Studies in Communication & Culture*, 10(3), 185–200. [https://doi.org/10.1386/isc.10.3.185\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/isc.10.3.185_1)
- Pollack, E., Allern, S., Kantola, A., & Ørsten, M. (2018). The new normal: Scandals as a standard feature of political life in Nordic countries. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 3087–3108. <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-72289>
- Purhonen, S., Heikkilä, R., Hazir, I. K., Lauronen, T., Rodríguez, C. J. F., & Gronow, J. (2018). *Enter culture, exit arts? The transformation of cultural hierarchies in European newspaper culture sections, 1960–2010*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315183404>
- Reinemann, C., Stanyer, J., Scherr, S., & Legnante, G. (2012). Hard and soft news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 221–239. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911427803>

- Riegert, K., & Roosvall, A. (2017). Cultural journalism as a contribution to democratic discourse in Sweden. In N. N. Kristensen, & K. Riegert (Eds.), *Cultural journalism in the Nordic countries* (pp. 89–108). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Riegert, K., Roosvall, A., & Widholm, A. (2015). The political in cultural journalism: Fragmented interpretative communities in the digital age. *Journalism Practice*, 9(6), 773–790. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1051358>
- Riegert, K., Roosvall, A., & Widholm, A. (2018). Cultural Journalism. *Oxford research encyclopedia of communication*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.796>
- Riegert, K., & Widholm, A. (2019). The difference culture makes: Comparing Swedish news and cultural journalism on the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris. *Nordicom Review*, 40(2), 3–18. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0009>
- Roberge, J. (2011). The aesthetic public sphere and the transformation of criticism. *Social Semiotics*, 21(3), 435–453. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2011.564393>
- Roosvall, A. (2005). *Utrikesjournalistikens antropologi: Etnicitet kön och nationalitet i svenska tidningar* [Anthropology of foreign journalism: Ethnicity of gender and nationality in Swedish newspapers]. Stockholm: JMK.
- Roosvall, A. (2014). The identity politics of world news. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 17(1), 55–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877912464369>
- Roosvall, A., & Widholm, A. (2018). The transnationalism of cultural journalism in Sweden: Outlooks and introspection in the global era. *International Journal of Communication*, 12, 1431–1451.
- Sarrimo, C. (2017). The press crisis and its impact on Swedish arts journalism. *Journalism*, 18(6), 664–679. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884915625629>
- Schudson, M. (2005). Four approaches to the sociology of news. In J. Curran, & M. Gurevitch (Eds.), *Mass media and society* (4th ed.) (pp. 172–197). London: Hodder Arnold.
- Schultz, I. (2007). The journalistic gut feeling. *Journalism Practice*, 1(2), 190–207.
- Schwartz, E. (2018, February 5). Här är alla metoo-upprop [Here are all the metoo announcements]. *Fria Tidningen*. <http://www.fria.nu/artikel/132419>
- Steenen, S., & Ahva, L. (2015). Theories of journalism in a digital age: An exploration and introduction. *Digital Journalism*, 3(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2014.927984>
- Syvrtsen, T., Enli, G., Mjøs, O. J., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- Van Zoonen, L. (2005). *Entertaining the citizen: When politics and popular culture converge*. Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Wahl-Jørgensen, K. (2019). *Emotions, media and politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Wind-Friis, L., Bech-Danielsen, A., & Stockmann, C. (2017, November 18). Selvransagende avisskribent: Zentropasagen er et gigantisk wakeuppall til hele mediebranchen [Self-critical newspaper journalist: The Zentropa case is a gigantic wakeup call for the whole business]. *Politiken*. <https://politiken.dk/kultur/art6212028/Selvransagende-avisskribent-Zentropasagen-er-et-gigantisk-wakeupcall-til-hele-mediebranchen>

## Chapter 10

# Indigenous political communication in the Nordic countries

Eva Josefsen & Eli Skogerbø

### Abstract

A study of political communication will not be complete without taking into account the differences in experiences regarding the lack of recognition and experiences of oppression between indigenous citizens and citizens belonging to the ethnic majority. This chapter reviews the status of Nordic indigenous political communication and compares political institutions, actors, and conditions. Most attention is paid to Sámi political and media institutions in Norway and Sweden, as we have most data available from these settings, although some examples from Finland and Greenland are included, too. The overview shows similarities resulting from colonisation and assimilation, but also major differences between the main institutions, Sámi parliaments, party systems, and media institutions owing to different state policies. In conclusion, we point to the challenges for research on indigenous political communication in the Nordic countries.

**Keywords:** Sámi, indigenous, political communication, media, journalism

## Introduction

Across the world, indigenous peoples are reclaiming cultural and political influence after having suffered decades and centuries of colonisation, assimilation, and repression. The Nordic countries form no exception to this (Berg-Nordlie et al., 2015). Sweden and Denmark are among the oldest states in Europe, with a past as colonial powers that includes rule of territories historically populated by indigenous peoples and many linguistic, cultural, and ethnic minorities, both on other continents and in the home region. Within the Danish state, the Kalaallit peoples of Greenland are recognised as indigenous, and the Sámi have a similar status in Finland, Norway, and Sweden. The traditional Sámi living area includes Russia, but the premises for political communication in Russia differ extensively from the Nordic countries; thus, the situation in Russia is not included here. As in other parts of the world, indigenous peoples in the

Nordic countries were, at the height of the colonial period and far into the twentieth century, systematically repressed with the aim of erasing indigenous languages, cultures, and ways of life (Bryld, 2010; Eidheim, 1999). A study of political communication will not be complete without taking into account the differences in experiences regarding the lack of recognition and experiences of oppression between indigenous citizens and citizens belonging to the ethnic majority. We must acknowledge that collective experiences have had permanent consequences for contemporary political communication practices. One such consequence is marginalisation and lack of knowledge about the indigenous peoples in the majority population. Another consequence is silence among members of the minority groups (Kovach, 2009). For decades, individuals and families have stayed silent about traumatic experiences, family histories, and experienced injustice in both the local and national environment (Labba, 2020). A third consequence very important for political communication is the loss of indigenous languages and oppression of the use of mother tongues. There are many examples and much documentation. Suffice it here to refer to Hyltenstam (1999), who maintains that assimilation and rejection, rather than recognition of linguistic diversity, were traits of Swedish nationalism and nation-building. Such experiences continue to shape the climate and conditions for indigenous political communication even today (Mörkenstam, 2019).

Taking these basic facts as starting points, conditions for political communication for the Nordic indigenous peoples cannot be regarded as similar to those of the majority populations. This is to some extent recognised by the states. In Norway, following similar initiatives as Canada, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was set up in 2018 with the mandate to uncover past injustices towards the Sámi and other minority groups and suggest tools for reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> The government of Greenland unilaterally established a reconciliation commission in 2013; however, the Danish state did not see a need for participation (Thisted, 2017).

Even in a region once famous for its “passion for equality” (Graubard, 1986) and recently discussed as the next “supermodel” for successful government (The Economist, 2013), the examples above illustrate that colonial and postcolonial structures still matter for political communication. In the Nordic countries, parallel to experiences of indigenous peoples all over the world, minorities were silenced and excluded and expected to “die out” or disappear as the majority populations of the new and old Nordic states consolidated their state-formation processes (Elenius, 2002; Junka-Aikio, 2016). Further, indigenous political claims on the Nordic states have been met with what Mörkenstam (2019) has termed “organised hypocrisy”: Indigenous rights and claims for self-determination are, on the one hand, supported internationally and to some degree included in national constitutions and legislation, and on the other, often disregarded or rejected as industries (e.g., mining or energy



production) are allowed to extract resources on indigenous lands. The most well-known of these claims, the unsuccessful protests against damming the Alta-Kautokeino river in Norway in 1979–1981, led to recognition of Sámi demands for increased influence and establishment of the Sámi Parliament in 1989, followed a few years later by the Sámi Parliament in Sweden (1993) and in Finland (1997)<sup>2</sup> (Josefsen et al., 2016).

Unfortunately, in this chapter we do not provide a comparison with the Kalaallit-Greenlandic situation, not because the case is irrelevant but because we do not have the knowledge and competence needed to do so. On the contrary, the relevance is striking as there are many similarities between Sámi and Greenlandic colonial and contemporary political history, journalism, and media structures, as Hussain (2017, 2018), Ravn-Højgaard (2019), and Ravn-Højgaard and colleagues (2018) have shown in their recent studies. For this study, with the exception of mentioning some of the overarching institutional differences between the Greenlandic-Danish and other Nordic countries' solutions to self-government, we restrict the overview and comparison to the situation of the Sámi, and mainly to the conditions and structures for political communication in Norway and Sweden, with only some examples pertaining to Finland. We examine, first, who and which the central Sámi actors and institutions for Sámi political communication are; that is, the political actors and institutions and the media institutions and actors. In this part, we draw attention to the rather striking empirical differences between these two, otherwise quite similar, Nordic countries. Second, we discuss central approaches and theories that are applied to analyse Sámi political communication. In conclusion, we draw attention to some of the main challenges for research on indigenous political communication.

### Political institutions and actors

With a few local exceptions, the Sámi live as minorities in rural and urban localities alongside non-Sámi people within and outside of their traditional homeland, Sápmi (see Figure 10.1).

Public registration of ethnicity is prohibited in Sweden and Norway, while in Finland the definition of who is Sámi is highly controversial. This has resulted in absent and deficient demographic data on the Sámi population. Most sources estimate that 40,000–60,000 Sámi reside in Norway; 20,000–40,000 in Sweden; 7,000–8,000 in Finland; and 2,000 in Russia. However, the figures vary and are highly inexact (Lehtola, 2004; Pettersen, 2014).

At the state level, the political systems in which Sámi political communication take place are quite similar (with the exception of Russia): Finland, Norway, and Sweden are small Nordic welfare democracies displaying characteristics

**Figure 10.1** Sápmi, the traditional homelands of the indigenous Sámi people

*Comments:* Shown in blue, Sápmi spans the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.

*Source:* Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 3.0)

of social equality, comprehensive public services, and inclusion (see Chapters 2–7). The Sámi have a constitutional position as an indigenous people in all three Nordic countries, but the measures for political influence towards the national governments and the scope of self-determination differ, as does their status in terms of international law. Whereas all the Nordic countries have adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007), only Norway and Denmark have ratified the ILO C169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989). The differences in the states' adoption of international law are regarded as essential for understanding and explaining the differences in power for the Sámi (Josefsen et al., 2016; Mörkenstam, 2019). State borders also differentiate when it comes to institutionalisation of indigenous politics and, accordingly, the political structures enabling political inclusion, participation, and self-determination vary. There are significant power asymmetries between the Sámi and the national institutions and actors in both countries, most importantly the prerequisite for self-determination, namely autonomy. None of the states have granted the Sámi people territorial

autonomy. The institutional differences in indigenous representation and self-determination between Norway and Sweden can be explained by references to past colonial practices and present state policies. Not neglecting the fact that in both countries long-term assimilation processes had similar effects on both sides of the border, we also find striking dissimilarities. One of those is the differences between the two Sámi parliaments.

### The Sámi parliaments

The Sámi parliaments are elected by and amongst Sámi voters in each country and are institutions for indigenous representation voicing demands for increased political self-determination; however, they do not have identical powers. In Norway and Sweden, the Sámi parliaments share similarities in their dual functions of being both administrative and representative assemblies, but they are different in terms of autonomy and hierarchical ties to the state, as we outline below.

In Norway, the Sámi Parliament met for the first time in 1989, established by an amendment of the Norwegian constitution and empowered by the Sámi Act (Sameloven, 1987). The Act states that the Sámi Parliament decides independently what matters it considers relevant to discuss and consult with the Norwegian state or parliament. In 2020, the Sámi Parliament had 39 members elected from seven constituencies. Election periods were four years, and election day and periods coincide with those of the Norwegian parliament (see also Chapter 5, Skogerbø & Karlsen). The constituencies are not limited to the historical Sámi homelands but cover the entire country. They vary in geographical size and population with most voters concentrated in the northernmost constituencies. The election system is proportional and dynamic to the degree that the number of mandates for each constituency is revised every four years according to changes in registered voters within each constituency.

The representatives are elected from a variety of lists and parties, most of them small and returning few mandates. Some of the parties that seek representation at the local and national levels of Norwegian government (see Chapter 11, Hopman & Karlsen) also run for representation in the Sámi Parliament. The largest of these is the Labour Party, which has a couple of times managed to form a governing coalition led by a Sámi Labour president. Others – explicitly Sámi organisations and parties – run only for election to the Sámi Parliament. The dominant one, the Norwegian Saami Association (NSR), has led majority coalitions in most periods since 1989, also after the 2017 election. Even the Progress Party, which has as its main Sámi political issue to abolish the Sámi Parliament, has returned representatives in several elections (Josefsen et al., 2017a). The Sámi party system in Norway is thus different from the Swedish

one in that so-called Norwegian parties run in the Sámi Parliament election. Further, there have been continuous cooperation and consultation between the Sámi Parliament and the Norwegian government and parliament to include Sámi rights in Norwegian law. Important examples are the Education Act (1998), the Planning and Building Act (Plan- og bygningsloven, 2008), and the Finnmark Act (2005). Still, despite protective measures being set up by international and national law on indigenous rights and resistance from the Sámi Parliament, there seems to be an increase in industrial exploitation projects of natural resources in Sámi traditional living areas.

In Sweden, the Sámi were historically categorised in two groups: those who were reindeer herders and those who were not – a policy termed “the category split” (Saglie et al., 2020). The first group were allocated specific rights to reindeer husbandry and defined as Sámi, the second group were considered non-Sámi and subjected to assimilation (Lantto & Mörkenstam, 2008). For centuries, this policy split the Sámi population, and it remains a dividing line in Sámi politics (Nilsson et al., 2016). This has a bearing on the Sámi Parliament in two ways: first, it is the main dividing line between parties returning representatives; and second, the Sámi Parliament is one of two Sámi political power centres, the other one being the Sámi reindeer herding communities (discussed more below).

The Sámi Parliament in Sweden is organised partly as a democratically representative body and partly as a state government agency for Sámi issues (Lawrence & Mörkenstam, 2016). This double purpose creates less autonomy for the parliament as it limits the formal and informal opportunities to be regarded as an equal and autonomous party or to explore and voice Sámi interests towards the Swedish parliament and government. Concerning the election system, the four-year intervals of the Sámi parliamentary elections are not parallel to those of the Swedish parliament as elections are held at different dates and years. In 2020, one constituency covered the entire country, but parties may present several lists of candidates. Representatives in the Sámi Parliament so far have been elected from parties unique to Sámi politics. The parties have been mostly small and reflected the historical divisions in Sámi politics with few similarities with the parties represented in other decision-making bodies in Sweden (see Chapter 6, Nord & Grusell). In the 2017 election, the Party for Hunting and Fishing Sámi returned the largest number of mandates, however, after the election, the Swedish Sámi Association formed a majority coalition consisting of several parties.

The Sámi parliaments in Norway and Sweden are founded on similar legal provisions, yet there are substantial differences between the two. The role of the Sámi Parliament in Sweden as a government agency makes it subordinate to the state, a role that is impossible to combine with being an independent voice for Sámi interests. In Norway, the Sámi Parliament has formal political

autonomy but limited economic resources and at best variable influence over decisions concerning Sámi interests and exploitation of traditional lands. Other differences relate to the party and election systems.

Mörkenstam (2019) argues that the restricted power and voice of the Sámi Parliament in Sweden is the main reason why the courts have become important political actors for resolving Sámi rights issues. Several Sámi groups, specifically reindeer herding communities (“sameby” in Swedish), have taken the Swedish state to court to contest both land and cultural rights. A reindeer herding community is an economic and administrative entity and a reindeer pasture district, and they make up a political structure parallel to the Sámi Parliament. In 2019, there were 51 Sámi reindeer herding communities in Sweden.

Within each community there may be several enterprises consisting of several reindeer owners. Every reindeer herding community has a board that is responsible for managing reindeer husbandry within its own geographical area. According to the Reindeer Husbandry Act (Rennäringslag, 1971), only those who are members of a reindeer herding community have the right to live by reindeer herding, and the members make up approximately 10 per cent of the Sámis in Sweden. Temporarily culminating with the Girjas Case, in which the High Court in 2020 ruled in favour of the reindeer herding community Girjas for holding the right to manage hunting and fishing resources within its lands, there are several court cases pending in which reindeer herding communities contest rights to land and water. In this context, it should be stated that the Sámi living areas in Sweden have for decades, if not centuries, been major sources of hydroelectric power, minerals, and other natural resources.

Politics is not only policy formation but a question of networking and extracting windows of opportunity. In addition to the differences between the Sámi parliaments, the Sámi party systems in Norway and Sweden are not similar. As already mentioned, in Sweden, the category split defined reindeer herders as Sámi and all others as Swedes, and it is still the most significant political cleavage among voters and parties. The parties represented in the Sámi Parliament in Sweden are all to some extent related to this conflict and not to the left-right axis that is central to Swedish politics in general (Saglie et al., 2020; see also Nord & Grusell, Chapter 6). Unlike the Sámi Parliament in Norway, until 2020, only Sámi parties have run for Sami Parliament elections in Sweden. Sámi parties claim to be political workshops of their own without any strings or obligations towards Swedish party policies formed by non-Sámi party members and leaderships.

In contrast, in Norway, where the category split does not apply – as historically, all Sámis were subjected to racist and assimilationist state policies – a mix of parties have been represented in the Sámi Parliament. Some of the Norwegian parties that run for election in local, regional, and national decision-making bodies also seek representation in the Sámi Parliament, whereas other

organisations are unique to Sámi politics. The degree of support or resistance to Sámi self-determination is the main political cleavage in Sámi politics in Norway (Saglie et al., 2020). The Progress Party's voters are the strongest against, and the voters for the Norwegian Saami Association are the strongest in favour, of Sámi self-determination (Saglie et al., 2020). This mixed-party system, with both Sámi and Norwegian parties, provides Sámi politicians with gateways into the Norwegian decision-making system on all levels. It does not guarantee acceptance for Sámi views and interests, but it secures that Sámi politics will in one way or another be part of the party's policy. For example, the Progress Party would abolish the Sámi Parliament, and have for years promoted this view both in the Norwegian and Sámi parliaments. Other parties with more positive approaches to Sámi rights and politics have included it in the party structure. The Labour Party has established a separate Sámi party group within the national party structure and integrated Sámi politics into election programmes for national and many regional and local elections. As pointed out above, these differences between Norway and Sweden can only be explained by reference to the two states' former segregationist and assimilationist policies. The historic experiences of Sámis in the two countries were different and had lasting effects on the political institutions. Research has also shown that there are huge differences in trust in state authorities between Sámi citizens in Norway and Sweden (Nilsson & Möller, 2017).

In short, the differences between the Sámi political institutions and Sámi political actors in Norway and Sweden are much larger than the differences between the national and local governments in the two neighbouring countries. To illustrate, the Norwegian and Swedish parliaments are similar representative and decision-making bodies; the national, regional, and local election systems show mainly similarities; the party systems are similar, if not identical; and the left-right conflict is the main dividing line in both Norwegian and Swedish politics (see Chapters 1–6). In contrast, the Sámi political systems in the two countries are similar only in name: the two Sámi parliaments have different powers; the election systems are different; the party systems share few similarities; and as mentioned above, the main conflicts are substantially different. Conclusions drawn by researchers on Sámi politics in Norway and Sweden point to the same: while studies in Norway have, for example, emphasised that the Sámi Parliament has to some extent influenced Norwegian state policies; that Sámi voters express relatively high trust in Sámi and Norwegian political and media institutions (Josefsen & Skogerbø, forthcoming); and even point to a hint of routinisation in Sámi politics (Josefsen, 2015), research in Sweden points to marginalisation (Mörkenstam et al., 2016) and a low degree of trust (Nilsson & Möller, 2017).

Mörkenstam (2019) highlights the decoupling of values laid down in international law and concrete political actions regarding the exploitation of

traditional Sámi land and the displacement of Sámi industries in Sweden. In Norway, there are numerous examples of the same (Sámi Parliament, 2018), including resource exploitation projects such as mining and wind turbines, which the Sámi Parliament in Norway argues are in violation of both Norwegian and international law (Sámi Parliament, 2020a, 2020b). Such issues are usually on top of the Sámi political agenda, yet only rarely reach the headlines of Norwegian and Swedish news media.

### Media institutions and Sámi political journalism

Sámi political parties, politicians, organisations, and other actors communicate with Sámi voters through many different channels, personally and mediated (Josefsen et al., 2017b). Sámi issues and politics are reported by journalists (Skogerbø et al., 2019), talked about among friends and family, and discussed and distributed by social media such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and the like (Lindgren & Cocq, 2016). Popular culture plays a major – and it seems, increasingly important – role also for indigenous political communication: music has always been a channel for voicing interest (e.g., Mari Boine, Sofia Jannok); and increasingly so is television drama (*Midnight Sun*, *Thin Ice*); gameshows and competitions (e.g., *Muihte Mu*, *Eurovision Song Contest*) (Sand, 2019); documentaries; talk shows (e.g., *Mu Jiena*); film (e.g., prize-winning *Sámi Blood*, 2017); and many other forms of popular culture (DuBois & Cocq, 2019). Sámi journalism is performed both within and across state and institutional borders. The status as indigenous peoples entails certain rights when it comes to media access and representation, such as subsidies to media institutions that practise indigenous journalism allowing for storytelling and news reporting from a Sámi perspective as opposed to being reported about from the outside. In the Nordic countries, public service broadcasters have for decades had indigenous (for our purposes, Sámi) newsrooms, thus providing a test case for the practice of indigenous journalism (Plaut, 2014). Generally, the news media's reporting and production of political news are important for Sámi political parties, organisations, and citizens.

The institutional frameworks for indigenous journalism follow from the diverging policies of each state. First, across the Nordic countries, public broadcasters have indigenous journalism either as part of their remit or, in the case of Kalaallit Nunaata Radioa Greenlandic Broadcasting (KNR), as a main objective to make programmes for the Greenlandic population. The Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish public broadcasters all have Sámi divisions – YLE Sápmi, NRK Sápmi, and Sameradion & SVT Sápmi, respectively. The Sámi public broadcasters thus have unique positions, with nationwide coverage and the potential to reach most Sámi citizens. They broadcast daily in multiple languages (several

Sámi languages, Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish) through radio, television, the Internet, mobile apps, and social media. They produce programmes and content in a variety of genres, among them news and political journalism, such as the 15-minute television news programme *Ođđasat* that have been (and in 2020 still was) co-produced by NRK Sápmi, SVT Sápmi, and YLE Sápmi five days a week since 2003. *Ođđasat* broadcasts to Finland, Sweden, and Norway in Sámi languages and is subtitled in the majority languages.

Another factor rarely touched upon in studies on indigenous journalism is the relationship between journalism as a practice carried out by professional news media, such as the Sámi editorial teams within the public broadcasters, and civic journalism. Social and digital media offer cheap, accessible, and easily available platforms for communication and are of increasing importance for the development of journalism, as information sources and as arenas for political communication. Indeed, the most recent studies of Sámi parliamentary elections show that Facebook is a relatively much used – but not trusted – source by the voters in the Sámi Parliament elections (Josefsen et al., 2017b). The more specific characteristics of Sámi media structures and institutions in Norway and Sweden are outlined below.

In Norway, two daily Sámi newspapers are supported through the press subsidy system. One, *Ságat*, is published mainly in Norwegian, and the other, *Ávvir*, in North Sámi. Both have consistent and extensive political journalism (Josefsen & Skogerbø, 2013). From 2017, a weekly news magazine, *Sámi Magasiidna*, has also been published in North Sámi in print and online. Further, two local newspapers are subsidised for producing news in South Sámi and Lule Sámi.

The public service broadcasting remit is articulated slightly differently in Norway and Sweden. In Norway, NRK is a state-owned corporation with a license to broadcast that is legally enshrined. The remit is comprehensive and specified in five main points: strengthen democracy; provide universally accessible programmes; strengthen the Norwegian and Sámi languages, identity, and culture; strive for quality and innovation; and be non-commercial.

NRK Sápmi defines itself as an indigenous broadcaster, realised through active international cooperation to increase and develop programme exchange, creation, and development with other indigenous stations around the world. There are a number of district offices in various parts of Sápmi and one in the capital Oslo. North Sámi is the primary language of radio broadcasts, with permanent and recurring inserts in South Sámi, Lule Sámi, and Norwegian. Unlike many other indigenous broadcasters that must serve a linguistically diverse indigenous audience (e.g., Hafsteinsson & Bredin, 2010), NRK Sápmi uses Sámi both as the primary broadcasting language and a working language.

Studies have shown that Sámi political issues were marginalised in nationwide political news during the same period in which the Sámi newsroom grew (Ijäs, 2012), indicating that more extensive Sámi political journalism does



not necessarily provide access to the national public sphere (Eide & Nikunen, 2011; Eide & Simonsen, 2007). Coverage of the Sámi Parliament elections have posed dilemmas for NRK Sápmi – namely, to what extent the Sámi language should be used in the reporting on the election and whether using Sámi should be prioritised over the objective of reaching all Sámi voters (Skogerbø et al., 2017). Over the years, the combination of languages and multi-platform and multi-media programme productions seemingly have eased or resolved much of the tension between universality and use of Sámi languages, observable in online and programme formats where languages are mixed (e.g., the NRK Sápmi news website, the slow-TV production *Giddajohitin*, 2017).

In Sweden, concerning print media, no Sámi daily or weekly news media exists; however, the magazine *Samefolket*<sup>3</sup> in 2020 had seven issues per year and reports extensively on Sámi culture and politics, mainly in Swedish. In northern Sweden, studies have found some coverage of Sámi politics in local newspapers (Gottardis, 2016; Mörkenstam et al., 2012), and over the past few years there seems to be an increasing number of reports on Sámi land rights issues also in national media, such as *Svenska Dagbladet*'s series of articles in 2018 and 2019 (Svenska Dagbladet, 2019).

Public service broadcasting is organised in three independent companies owned by a managing foundation (Förvaltningsstiftelsen, 2018): SVT, SR, and Sveriges Utbildningsradio. They are obliged to produce and broadcast universally accessible programmes for the public. SR's and SVT's remits include the provision of a multifaceted and broad programme offering with a particular responsibility for the Swedish language and must provide content in the national minority languages of Sámi, Finnish, Meänkieli, Romani chib, and Yiddish. Sameradion & SVT Sápmi belongs to SR and SVT, respectively, and is the largest and most important Sámi news producer in Sweden. The two editorial teams were merged into one in 2014, producing Sámi journalism and other programmes on radio, television, and the Internet. Sameradion had its main editorial team in Kiruna and employees in several localities including the capital, Stockholm, and was broadcasting in several Sámi dialects and Swedish. A comparative study of election coverage in NRK Sápmi and Sameradion & SVT Sápmi revealed that the objective of universal reach made Swedish the main language for election coverage, as more Sámi voters would understand the majority language (Skogerbø et al., 2019).

A striking difference between the two public service institutions is the positions they occupied in the organisational structure of their respective parent companies (Skogerbø et al., 2017). While NRK Sápmi in 2020 was a department under the immediate responsibility of the CEO of NRK, Sameradion & SVT Sápmi was a subdivision placed much lower in the organisation. NRK Sápmi and Sameradion & SVT Sápmi both heavily emphasised their responsibility to practise political journalism from the inside, but there were considerable differ-

ences in the resources set up for journalistic production and in the production outcome, measured in hours of television and radio broadcasts. The editorial teams in Sweden were not only much smaller but also divided between two companies, and accordingly initially had fewer opportunities to draw attention to the Sámi community. The marked difference in resources adds to explaining the differences between them. By far, NRK Sápmi had more journalists and resources to provide multilingual content, whereas their Swedish sister organisation had to choose.

As reported by Skogerbø and colleagues (2019), the fact that Sámi stories were rarely told by mainstream, nationwide media was the very motivation for doing Sámi political journalism. The public broadcasters had the most extensive coverage of Sámi politics and, in Sweden, were the only media that reported Sámi news on a daily basis. The situation was somewhat different in Norway, as Sámi and, to some extent, local newspapers in northern Norway, reported regularly on Sámi politics and elections. Both Sámi editorial teams described their practices as indigenous journalism, while they highlighted and emphasised different dimensions. On both sides of the border, they were acutely aware of their position as the main producers of Sámi political journalism and the main mediated public spaces for Sámi politics.

Owing to the differences between the two countries' electoral systems, the frameworks within which the two teams produced Sámi political journalism also differed. NRK Sápmi must report two election campaigns simultaneously, as the elections for the Norwegian parliament and the Sámi Parliament are held on the same day. Therefore, journalists had an opportunity to connect the two campaigns and, for example, confront parliamentarian candidates for the Norwegian parliament with questions about Sámi issues, thereby giving voters information about the power relations between the Norwegian and the Sámi parliaments. In Sweden, the election period for the Sámi Parliament did not run concurrently with that of any other governing body, and the journalists did not have the same opportunities to establish connections between different levels of decision-making.

Sámi journalism is constrained not only by limited resources, immense distances, and scattered audiences, but also by the institutional frameworks of the two countries: differences in politics towards the Sámi; different status of the Sámi as an indigenous people; different powers of the Sámi Parliament; different election and party systems; and different media institutions. As such, indigenous journalism challenges the Nordic public service broadcasting remit: it tells the story of a divided people across borders, where indigenous journalists must operate within the constraints of both national public service institutions and separate political systems (Marklin & Husband, 2013; Skogerbø et al., 2019).

## Other political actors

We have so far mainly discussed the “usual suspects” in political communication: governments, parties, media institutions and journalism, and voters, in addition to Sámi reindeer herder communities in Sweden. There are, however, many other cultural and social organisations that make up Sámi civil society and contribute to Sámi political communication. Significantly, three transnational actors need mentioning: the publicly funded Sámi University College; the Sámi Council, which is a non-governmental organisation (NGO); and the Sámi Parliaments’ cooperative body, the Sámi Parliamentary Council. These are important actors safeguarding and articulating a transboundary Sámi community and identity. Moreover, the Sámi have for decades had prominent positions internationally, in particular in the UN. In 2020, the UN Forum for Indigenous Peoples and EMRIP, the expert panel, were headed by two Sámi women from Finland and Norway, respectively. Further, on the national, regional, and local level, Sámi language and culture centres, museums, companies, organisations, and organised Sámi interest groups debate a variety of Sámi issues, forward support and demands, formulate strategies, and implement policies. The total number of Sámi civic organisations and institutions is nevertheless quite low, and there is limited independent civic mobilisation outside the Sámi parliament system and the election canal (Selle & Strømsnes, 2015), both in concrete numbers and compared to the civic society at large in the two countries.

## Approaches to analysing Sámi political communication

Many studies show that indigenous peoples are poorly and often stereotypically represented in the majority media, and the coverage of Sámi cultural and political issues has been no exception to this. In the Nordic countries, as elsewhere, there is a long history of marginalisation of ethnic minorities in the nation-wide media (Eide & Simonsen, 2007; Horsti & Hultén, 2011; Skogerbø, 2000). In Nordic research on Sámi political communication, methods, theories, and perspectives from political science, sociology, and other social sciences have been applied, as have approaches from critical and postcolonial studies.

A main approach can be categorised as election studies, as they have been and continue to be carried out in Norway and Sweden. The first Sámi Parliament election study was carried out in Norway in 2009 (Josefsen & Saglie, 2011). In the aftermath of the Sámi Parliament elections in Norway and Sweden in 2013, the research was extended to a comparative study (Josefsen et al., 2017a; Nilsson et al., 2016). The most recent study includes only the Sámi parliamentary election in Norway in 2017 (Berg-Nordlie et al., Forthcoming). With a starting point in a survey study of Sámi voters, extended analyses of

election coverage and practices of journalism, the Sámi election studies have provided insights into Sámi voters' preferences and behaviour, issue salience, political trust, Sámi political news and voters' information sources, and the significance of election systems. Prior to the election projects, a few studies had looked at the development of Sámi politics, power, and influence (Bjerkli & Selle, 2003; Broderstad, 1999, 2001, 2008), and the number of studies also addressing issues of political communication grew over the years (Bjerkli & Selle, 2015). Further, as Sámi political institutions have increasingly been researched, more aspects of political participation and exercise of citizenship have been addressed (Broderstad, 2008; Selle et al., 2015; Semb, 2012), as have the conditions for political communication and political journalism (Skogerbø et al., 2015). The role and influence of the Sámi Parliaments as established political institutions within the Norwegian and Swedish governance systems have been studied by several authors (Falch & Selle, 2018; Falch et al., 2016; Josefsen, 2014; Josefsen et al., 2016; Lawrence & Mörkenstam, 2016; Mörkenstam et al., 2012).

As indigenous and postcolonial perspectives gain ground internationally, they increasingly influence the discussion of Sámi political influence and self-determination (Broderstad, 2014; Kuokkanen, 2009; Lawrence & Mörkenstam, 2016; Minde et al., 2008) as well as studies of Sámi media and journalism (DuBois & Cocq, 2019; Skogerbø et al., 2019), of Sámi journalism (Pietikäinen, 2003; Pietikäinen & Dlaske, 2013; Pietikäinen & Luostarinen, 1997), and of public discourse in Finland (Junka-Aikio, 2016). Plaut (2017) recently found that Sámi journalism should indeed be considered transnational journalism, as it seeks to identify and foster a common sense of identity and nation-building across state borders. To this, we would add cultivating cultural and political images and forging ties across territories, in addition to state-building, which are functions that, for instance, Ravn-Højgaard (2019) foresees for the media in Greenland. This line of thought emphasises indigenous media as instruments for advocacy and cultural revitalisation. Empirically, this trend is rooted in the practices and ideological conviction often expressed by indigenous media producers, which has been quoted in the studies above and also contested. Tara Ross (2017) argues, for instance, that media consumers have many more reasons for using media than ethnicity. The essentialism implicit in the focus on ethnic media may lead to overlooking audiences, and equally important is the fact that ethnic media are often under-resourced and cannot provide their audiences with a full-scale media menu, as Moring (2007) has highlighted. Hokowithu and Devadas (2013), on the other hand, reject the notion that indigenous journalism should be conceptualised as a practice and institution distinct from other forms of journalism or as having inherently emancipatory characteristics.

## Conclusion and challenges for future indigenous political communication research

Researching Sámi politics and political communication faces many challenges, of which four are particularly important: recruitment of indigenous researchers; lack of a strong transborder research community; linguistically, culturally, and empirically demanding projects; and integration of postcolonial theories and indigenous studies with political communication frameworks. The points below are made on the basis of our experience with research into Sámi political communication, but we assume that they are equally relevant for research on Kalaallit and Greenlandic political communication.

### *Recruitment of indigenous researchers*

The preface to Veli-Pekka Lehtola's (2004: 5) book on the Sámi people states that "the Sámi are the most studied people in Europe", pointing to the fact that indigenous peoples have been studied as objects of interest for non-indigenous researchers with limited inside knowledge of culture and communication forms. Indigenous peoples' historical experiences of research have been marked by abuse, prejudice, ridicule, arrogance, domination, and even racism (Kovach, 2009). It has not been uncommon for indigenous peoples not to have recognised themselves in the research results and findings (Smith, 1999). In our view, research will always improve by bringing in both outside and inside perspectives and experiences when it concerns indigenous peoples, but we still find examples of where this is not the case. This is also a challenge for political communication research in the Nordic countries.

### *Lack of a strong transborder research community*

Further, one of the most important constraints for Sámi political communication research is the lack of a strong transborder research community on indigenous politics and communication. This chapter, for instance, draws heavily on research done within the framework of the Sámi Parliament Election Projects, yet even these have only once managed to attract funding for a comparative study between Norway and Sweden, and none have included Finland and Russia. Further, whereas there is recruitment to and funding of Sámi research projects in Norway, there are far fewer opportunities for long-term funding, recruitment, and cooperation.

### *Linguistically, culturally, and empirically demanding projects*

Studying Sámi political communication cannot be done without having teams of researchers who, in addition to being well-versed in media and political

communication studies, jointly know Sámi culture and society, have mastered several methods, and know a number of different languages – of which at least one (preferably more) must be a Sámi language, one (preferably more) a Nordic language, and obviously one must be English in order to internationalise, understand, and interpret data across local and transborder contexts. Such teams exist, but are rare and also rarely funded for long periods of time.

### *Integration of postcolonial theories and indigenous studies with political communication frameworks*

As the analyses above show, researching indigenous political communication and indigenous political journalism highlights the need to include indigenous perspectives into mainstream theories on national political systems. Sámi politics and political communication cannot only – neither within or across the borders that divide Sápmi – be analysed with reference to the election and party systems of the nation-states, of which there is an abundant existing literature within the Nordic countries. The Sámi political and media systems simply do not comply; neither do our theories on political journalism and election coverage catch the postcolonial legacy. For example, Sámi elections do not draw massive media attention (Allern, 2011), they are not mediatised (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014), and Sámi top politicians hardly control high media capital (Davis, 2010). Rather, we cannot understand the patterns of political communication without having a theoretical framework that integrates indigenous, postcolonial perspectives with theories on political communication, participation, and representation.

### Notes

1. Sannhets- og forsoningskommisjonen [Truth and reconciliation commission]: <https://uit.no/kommisjonen>
2. The Sámi Parliament in Finland was established by the Sámi Act in 1997. It substituted the former Sámi Delegation [Saamelaisvaltuuskunta] that was established in Finland as early as 1973, a popularly elected advisory body. The Sámi delegation was important for the later demands for Sámi representative bodies in both Norway and Sweden.
3. <http://samefolket.se>

### References

- Allern, S. (2011). *Fjernsynsvalekampen: Program, deltakere og maktkamp 1961–2009* [The television election campaign: Program, participants, and power struggle 1961–2009]. Oslo: Pax.
- Berg-Nordlie, M., Pettersen, T., & Saglie, J. (Eds.). (Forthcoming). *Sametingsvalgboka 2017* [The Sámi parliamentary elections book 2017] [working title]. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademiske.
- Berg-Nordlie, M., Saglie, J., & Sullivan, A. (Eds.). (2015). *Indigenous politics: Institutions, representation, mobilisation*. Colchester, UK: ECPR Press.
- Bjerkli, B., & Selle, P. (2003). Samisk offentlighet og makt [Sámi public sphere and power]. In B. Bjerkli, & P. Selle (Eds.), *Samer, makt og demokrati* [Sámis, power, and democracy]. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.

- Bjerkli, B., & Selle, P. (Eds.) (2015). *Samepolitikkenes utvikling* [The development of Sámi politics]. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Broderstad, E. G. (1999). Samepolitikk: Selvbestemmelse og medbestemmelse [Sámi politics: Self-determination and co-determination]. In E. G. Broerstad, A. Schanche, & V. Stordahl (Eds.), *Makt, demokrati og politikk: Bilder fra den samiske erfaringen* [Power, democracy, and politics: Pictures from the Sámi experience] (pp. 1–30). Oslo: Makt- og demokratiutredningen 1998–2003.
- Broderstad, E. G. (2001). Political autonomy and integration of authority: The understanding of Saami self-determination. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 8(2), 151–175. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718110120908385>
- Broderstad, E. G. (2008). *The bridge-building role of political procedures: Indigenous rights and citizenship rights within and across the borders of the nation-state* [Doctoral dissertation, The Arctic University of Norway].
- Broderstad, E. G. (2014). Implementing indigenous self-determination: The case of the Sámi in Norway. In M. Woons, & K. Leuven (Eds.), *Restoring indigenous self-determination: Theoretical and practical approaches*. Bristol: E-International Relations.
- Bryld, T. (2010). *I den beste mening* [In the best sense]. Copenhagen: Gyldendal. C169 – Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention. (1989). [https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:C169](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169)
- Davis, A. (2010). *Political communication and social theory*. Hoboken: Taylor & Francis.
- DuBois, T. A., & Cocq, C. (2019). *Sámi media and indigenous agency in the Arctic north: New directions in Scandinavian studies*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Eide, E., & Nikunen, K. (2011). *Media in motion: Cultural complexity and migration in the Nordic region*. Farnham, UK: Ashgate.
- Eide, E., & Simonsen, A. H. (2007). *Mistenkelige utlendinger: Minoriteter i norsk presse gjennom hundre år* [Suspicious foreigners: Minorities in the Norwegian press for a hundred years]. Kristiansand, Norway: Høyskoleforlaget.
- Eidheim, H. (1999). *Samer og nordmenn: Temaer i jus, historie og sosialantropologi* [Sámi and Norwegians: Themes in law, history, and social anthropology]. Oslo: Cappelen.
- Elenius, L. (2002). A place in the memory of nation: Minority policy towards the Finnish speakers in Sweden and Norway. *Acta Borealia*, 19(2), 103–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/080038302321117542>
- Esser, F., & Strömbäck, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Falch, T., & Selle, P. (2018). *Sametinget: Institusjonalisering av en ny samepolitikk* [The Sámi Parliament: Institutionalisation of a new Sámi policy]. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Falch, T., Selle, P., & Strømsnes, K. (2016). The Sámi: 25 years of indigenous authority in Norway. *Ethnopolitics*, 15(1), 125–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2015.1101846>
- Förvaltningsstiftelsen. (2018). Radio og TV i allmänhetens tjänst – public service [Radio and television in the public service]. <http://www.forvaltningsstiftelsen.se/publics.html>
- Gottardis, A. (2016). Politikområden, partier och politiska företrädare: En studie av nyhetsbevakningen av sametingsvalet 2013 i tryckt media [Policy areas, parties, and political representatives: A study of the news coverage of the Sámi parliamentary elections 2013 in print media]. In R. Nilsson, S. Dahlberg, & U. Mörkenstam (Eds.), *Sametingsval: Väljare, partier och media* [The Sámi parliamentary elections: Voters, parties, and the media] (pp. 269–287). Stockholm: Santérus.
- Graubard, S. R. (1986). *Norden: The passion for equality (Scandinavian library)*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press.
- Hafsteinsson, S. B., & Bredin, M. (Eds.). (2010). *Indigenous screen cultures in Canada*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.
- Hokowithu, B., & Devadas, V. (Eds.). (2013). *The fourth eye: Māori media in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Horsti, K., & Hultén, G. (2011). Directing diversity: Managing cultural diversity media policies in Finnish and Swedish public service broadcasting. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 14(2), 209–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877910382180>

- Hussain, N. (2017). Bourdieu in Greenland: Elaborating the field dependencies of post-colonial journalism. In S. Tosoni, N. Carpenter, M. F. Murru, R. Kilborn, L. Kramp, R. Kunelius, A. McNicholas, T. Olsson, & P. Prullmann-Vengerfeldt (Eds.), *Present scenarios of media production and engagement* (pp. 123–135). Bremen, Germany: Edition Lumière. <http://www.researchingcommunication.eu/SuSobook2016.pdf>
- Hussain, N. (2018). *Journalistik i små samfund: Et studie af journalistisk praksis på grønlandske nyhedsmedier* [Journalism in small communities: A study of journalistic practices in Greenlandic news media] [Doctoral dissertation, Roskilde University, Denmark].
- Hyltenstam, K. (Ed.). (1999). *Sveriges sju inhemska språk – ett minoritetsperspektiv* [Sweden's seven domestic languages – a minority perspective]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Ijäs, A. J. (2012). *Samer i to norske nyhetsmedier: En undersøkelse av saker med samisk hovedfokus i Nordlys og Dagsrevyen i perioden 1970–2000* [Sámi in two Norwegian news media: An investigation of cases with a Sámi main focus in Nordlys and Dagsrevyen in the period 1970–2000]. Guovdageaidnu [Kautokeino]: Sámi allaskuvla.
- Josefsen, E. (2014). *Selvbestemmelse og samstyring – En studie av Sametingets plass i politiske prosesser i Norge* [Self-determination and co-management – A study of the Sámi Parliament's place in political processes in Norway] [Doctoral dissertation, The Arctic University of Norway].
- Josefsen, E. (2015). Samepolitikken og kommunene [Sámi politics and the municipalities]. In B. Bjerkli, & P. Selle (Eds.), *Samepolitikken utvikling* [The development of Sámi politics] (pp. 171–197). Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Josefsen, E., Mörkenstam, U., & Nilsson, R. (2016). The Nordic Sámediggi and the limits to indigenous self-determination. *Gáldu Cála – Journal Of Indigenous Peoples Right*, 1, 6–46.
- Josefsen, E., Mörkenstam, U., Nilsson, R., & Saglie, J. (Eds.). (2017a). *Ett folk, ulike valg: Sametingsvalg i Norge og Sverige* [One people, different choices: Sámi parliamentary elections in Norway and Sweden]. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Josefsen, E., & Saglie, J. (Eds.). (2011). *Sametingsvalg: Velgere, partier, medier* [Sámi parliamentary elections: Voters, parties, media]. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag.
- Josefsen, E., & Skogerbø, E. (2013). An indigenous public sphere? The media and the 2009 Sámediggi election campaign. *Arctic Review on Law and Politics*, 4(1), 62–89.
- Josefsen, E., Skogerbø, E., & Sjøenden Vestli, E. K. (2017b). Valgdekningen i de samiske allmennkringkasterne og velgernes informasjonskilder [Election coverage in the Sámi public broadcasters and the voters' sources of information]. In E. Josefsen, U. Mörkenstam, R. Nilsson, & J. Saglie (Eds.), *Ett folk, ulike valg: Sametingsvalg i Norge og Sverige* [One people, different choices: Sámi parliamentary elections in Norway and Sweden]. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Josefsen, E., & Skogerbø, E. (Forthcoming). Velgernes informasjonskilder, medier og mediebruk [Voters' sources of information, media, and media use]. In M. Berg-Nordlie, T. Pettersen, & J. Saglie (Eds.), *Sametingsvalgboka 2017* [The Sámi parliamentary elections book 2017] [working title]. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademiske.
- Junka-Aikio, L. (2016). Can the Sámi speak now? *Cultural Studies*, 30(2), 205–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2014.978803>
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kuokkanen, R. 2009. Achievements of indigenous self-determination: The case of Sami parliaments in Finland and Norway. In J. M. Beier (Ed.), *Indigenous diplomacies* (pp. 97–114). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Labba, E. A. (2020). *Herrarna satte oss bit: Om tvångsförflyttningarna i Sverige* [The masters put us here: About the forced relocations in Sweden]. Stockholm: Norstedts.
- Lantto, P., & Mörkenstam, U. (2008). Sami rights and Sami challenges: The modernisation process and the Swedish Sami movement, 1886–2006. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 33(1), 26–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468750701431222>
- Lawrence, R., & Mörkenstam, U. (2016). Indigenous self-determination through a government agency? The impossible task of the Swedish Sámediggi. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 23(1), 105–127. <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718115-02301004>



- Lehtola, V.-P. (2004). *The Sámi people: Traditions in transition*. Fairbanks: The University of Alaska Press.
- Lindgren, S., & Cocq, C. (2016). Turning the inside out: Social media and the broadcasting of indigenous discourse. *European Journal of Communication*, 32(2), 131–150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323116674112>
- Marklin, L., & Husband, C. (2013). Contemporary dynamics of Sámi media in the Nordic states. *Media International Australia*, 149(1), 70–81.
- Minde, H., Gaski, H., Jentoft, S., & Midré, G. (2008). *Indigenous peoples: Self-determination, knowledge, indigeneity*. Delft, Netherlands: Eburon.
- Moring, T. (2007). Functional completeness in minority language media. In M. Cormack, & N. Hourigan (Eds.), *Minority language media: Concepts, critiques and case studies* (pp. 17–33). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Mörkenstam, U. (2019). Organised hypocrisy? The implementation of the international indigenous rights regime in Sweden. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 23(10), 1718–1741. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2019.1629907>
- Mörkenstam, U., Dahlberg, S., Bergh, J., & Saglie, J. (2016). Valdeltagande, skiljelinjer och legitimitet: En jämförelse med Norge [Election, dividing lines, and legitimacy: A comparison to Norway]. In R. Nilsson, S. Dahlberg, & U. Mörkenstam (Eds.), *Sametingsval: Väljare, partier och media [The Sámi parliamentary elections: Voters, parties, and the media]*. Stockholm: Santérus förlag.
- Mörkenstam, U., Gottardis, A., Roth, I. H. (2012). *The Swedish Sámi Parliament: A challenged recognition?* Florence: The European University Institute, Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies.
- Nilsson, R., Dahlberg, S., & Mörkenstam, U. (Eds.). (2016). *Sametingsval: Valdeltagande, representation och media [Sámi parliamentary elections: Electoral participation, representation, and the media]*. Stockholm: Santerus.
- Nilsson, R., & Möller, T. (2017). Tillit och förtroende bland sametingsväljarna i Norge och Sverige [Trust and confidence among Sámi voters in Norway and Sweden]. In E. Josefsen, U. Mörkenstam, R. Nilsson, & J. Saglie (Eds.), *Ett folk, ulike valg: Sametingsvalg i Norge og Sverige [One people, different choices: Sámi parliamentary elections in Norway and Sweden]*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Pettersen, T. (2014). *Sámi ethnicity as a variable: Premises and implications for population-based studies on health and living conditions in Norway* [Doctoral dissertation, The Arctic University of Norway].
- Pietikäinen, S. (2003). Indigenous identity in print: Representations of the Sami in news discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 14(5), 581–609. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09579265030145003>
- Pietikäinen, S., & Dlaske, K. (2013). Cutting across media spaces and boundaries: The case of a hybrid, indigenous Sámi TV comedy. *Sociolinguistica*, 27(1), 87–100.
- Pietikäinen, S., & Luostarinen, H. (1997). Minorities in Finnish publicity. *Nordicom Information*, 19(4), 19–31.
- Plan- og bygningsloven. (2008). Lov om planlegging og byggesaksbehandling [Act relating to planning and construction case processing] (LOV-2008-06-27-71). <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/2008-06-27-71?q=plan%20byggningsloven>
- Plaut, S. (2014). Nation-building, not “resistance radio”: Self determination, the state & Saami media. *Nordicom Review*, 35(1), 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2014-0006>
- Plaut, S. (2017). Reshaping the borders of journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 11(1), 1–32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1092391>
- Ravn-Højgaard, S. (2019). Medier og selvstændighed i Grønland. *Politik*, 22(1). <https://doi.org/10.7146/politik.v22i1.114841>
- Ravn-Højgaard, S., Willig, I., Simonsen, M., Paulsen, N., & Hussain, N. (2018). *Tusagassiuitit 2018: En kortlægning af de grønlandske medier [Tusagassiuitit 2018: A survey of the Greenlandic media]*. Nuuk: Ilisimatusarfik.
- Rennäringslag. (1971). Rennäringslag [Reindeer husbandry team] 1971: 437. [https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/rennaringslag-1971437\\_sfs-1971-437](https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/rennaringslag-1971437_sfs-1971-437)

- Ross, T. (2017). Rethinking journalism and culture. *Journalism Studies*, 18(12), 1559–1575. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1146626>
- Saglie, J., Mörkenstam, U., & Bergh, J. (2020). Political cleavages in indigenous representation: The case of the Norwegian and Swedish Sámediggi. *Nationalism & Ethnic Politics*, 26(2), 105–125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13537113.2020.1754555>
- Sameloven. (1987). Lov om Sametinget og andre samiske rettsforhold [Act relating to the Sámi Parliament and other Sámi legal matters] (LOV-1987-06-12-56). <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NL/lov/1987-06-12-56>
- Sámi Parliament. (2018). *The Sámi Parliament's ILO Report 2018: For the period 1 June 2013 up to and including May 2018*. [https://sametinget.no/\\_f/p1/iebb46d91-4857-4029-be0f-dfc947558f32/the-sami-parliament-ilo-report.pdf](https://sametinget.no/_f/p1/iebb46d91-4857-4029-be0f-dfc947558f32/the-sami-parliament-ilo-report.pdf)
- Sámi Parliament. (2020a). Oppstart av Nussir-gruven bryter norsk lov [The start-up of the Nussir mine violates Norwegian law]. <https://sametinget.no/saernieh/oppstart-av-nussir-gruven-bryter-norsk-lov.8073.aspx>
- Sámi Parliament. (2020b). Tolererer ikke vindindustriens ødeleggelse av reindriftsareal [Does not tolerate the wind industry's destruction of reindeer husbandry land]. <https://sametinget.no/adasa/tolererer-ikke-vindindustriens-odeleggelse-av-reindriftsareal.7349.aspx>
- Sand, S. A. (2019, June 21). Indigenous television for the majority: Analyzing NRK Sapmi's Muite Mu (Remember Me). *Television & New Media*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476419857203>
- Selle, P., Semb, A. J., Strømsnes, K., & Dyrnes Nordø, Å. (2015). *Den samiske medborgeren [The Sámi citizen]*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- Selle, P., & Strømsnes, K. (2015). Sivilsamfunnet og Sametinget som “støvsuger” [Civil society and the Sámi Parliament as a “vacuum cleaner”]. In B. Bjerkli, & P. Selle (Eds.), *Samepolitikkens utvikling [The development of Sámi politics]* (pp. 274–308). Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Semb, A. J. (2012). From ‘Norwegian citizens’ via ‘citizens plus’ to ‘dual political membership’? Status, aspirations, and challenges ahead. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 35(9), 1654–1672. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2011.604131>
- Skogerbø, E. (2000). Konflikt eller kuriositet? Om representasjon av den samiske minoriteten i majoritetsmedier i Norge [Conflict or curiosity? About the representation of the Sámi minority in majority media in Norway]. *Nordicom Information*, 22(3/4), 65–75.
- Skogerbø, E., Josefsen, E., & Ní Bhroin, N. (2015). Samepolitikk på dagsordenen [Sámi politics on the agenda]. In B. Bjerkli, & P. Selle (Eds.), *Samepolitikkens utvikling [The development of Sámi politics]*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk.
- Skogerbø, E., Josefsen, E., & Fjellström, A.-M. (2017). Samisk allmennkringkasting – samfunnsopdrag og urfolksjournalistikk [Sámi public service broadcasting – social mission and indigenous journalism]. In E. Josefsen, U. Mörkenstam, R. Nilsson, & J. Saglie (Eds.), *Ett folk, ulike valg: Sametingsvalg i Norge og Sverige [One people, different choices: Sámi parliamentary elections in Norway and Sweden]*. Oslo: Gyldendal Akademiske.
- Skogerbø, E., Josefsen, E., & Fjellström, A.-M. (2019). Indigenous political journalism in the Norwegian and Swedish public service broadcasters. *Journalism Studies*, 20(7), 991–1008. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1477550>
- Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London: Zed Books.
- Svenska Dagbladet. (2019, May). *Striden om Sameland*. <https://www.svd.se/om/striden-om-sameland>
- The Economist. (2013). The next supermodel: Politicians from both right and left could learn from the Nordic countries. <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2013/02/02/the-next-supermodel>
- The Education Act. (1998). Act relating to primary and secondary education and training (LOV-1998-07-17-61). <https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/1998-07-17-61?q=education%20act>
- The Finnmark Act. (2005). Act relating to legal relations and management of land and natural resources in Finnmark (LOV-2005-06-17-85). [https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2005-06-17-85/KAPITTEL\\_1#KAPITTEL\\_1](https://lovdata.no/dokument/NLE/lov/2005-06-17-85/KAPITTEL_1#KAPITTEL_1)

- Thisted, K. (2017). The Greenlandic Reconciliation Commission: Ethnonationalism, Arctic resources, and post-colonial identity. In L.-A. Körber, S. MacKenzie, & A. Westerståhl Stenport (Eds), *Arctic environmental modernities: From the age of polar exploration to the era of the anthropocene*. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-39116-8>
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. (2007). [https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf)



## Chapter 11

# Elections and political communication in the Nordic countries

David Nicolas Hopmann & Rune Karlsen

### Abstract

This chapter is a review of the main features of elections and the related political communication and campaigning in the Nordic countries. The focus is on national election campaigns in Norway, Sweden, mainland Finland, and mainland Denmark, with occasional references to Iceland and to other types of election campaigns. The first part of the chapter begins with a discussion of the rules and regulations governing elections across the Nordics. This discussion is followed by a review of the rules and regulations governing election campaign communication. The second part of this chapter presents the research programmes of voters and voting behaviour in the Nordic countries, as well as research programmes on election campaign communication. The goal of this second part is not to provide a detailed overview of past findings, but to reveal crucial similarities and differences with respect to elections and political communication across the Nordic countries.

**Keywords:** political communication, election campaigns, electoral rules, turnout, voting behaviour

## Introduction

The Nordic countries, and even more so the three Scandinavian countries, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, are often seen as belonging to one family with roughly similar political and media systems (Knutsen, 2017; Syvertsen et al., 2014). They are often grouped together or provide the basis for comparative research employing a most-similar systems design. Indeed, in many respects these countries are alike. For instance, all Nordic countries have multi-party systems, strong public service broadcasting, and high electoral turnout – at least compared to other countries. In this vein, the Nordic “five party model” has, for example, been given much attention in political science (e.g., Knutsen, 2017), and the concept of the “media welfare state” suggests that the Nordic

---

Hopmann, D. N., & Karlsen, R. (2021). Elections and political communication in the Nordic countries. In E. Skogerbø, Ø. Ihlen, N. N. Kristensen, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Power, communication, and politics in the Nordic countries* (pp. 219–240). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299-11>

countries constitute a distinctive group of countries with respect to their media landscapes (Syvertsen et al., 2014; see also Skogerbø et al., Chapter 1).

When taking a closer look at the Nordic countries, in particular in the context of election campaigns, several major differences emerge, however. For instance, rules for calling national elections vary as much as theoretically possible, from very strict to very liberal. Also, the electoral systems differ in the extent to which voting is personalised. In Finland and Sweden, paid political advertising is allowed on television, unlike in Norway and Denmark. Moreover, some of these differences across countries have been linked to the differences in political communication and campaigning found across the Nordic countries.

In this chapter, we review the main features of elections and the related political communication and campaigning in the Nordic countries. While doing this, we focus on Norway, Sweden, mainland Finland, and mainland Denmark, and we focus on national election campaigns in these countries, with occasional references to Iceland and to other types of election campaigns (e.g., presidential, European, regional, and local). The chapter is divided into two parts. First, we begin by discussing the rules and regulations governing elections across the Nordics. We then move to a review of the rules and regulations governing election campaign communication. In the second part, we turn our attention to the research programmes of voters and voting behaviour in the Nordic countries, after which we present research programmes on election campaign communication and discuss the general findings in recent trends in electoral campaigning. The goal of this second part is to take stock of the research programmes themselves, not to provide a detailed overview of their past findings. However, the presentation reveals crucial similarities and differences with respect to elections and political communication across the Nordic countries.

## Electoral rules and regulations in the Nordics

The rules and regulations on elections form the basis for how election campaigns are run. Different rules and regulations create different incentives for politicians, political parties, and other actors, and they define what is allowed and what is prohibited. We begin with the questions of who is allowed to run in elections at various political levels: passive voting regulations.

Denmark, Finland, and Sweden are – unlike Norway and Iceland – members of the European Union (EU). Denmark was the first of the Nordic countries to join (1973), while Finland and Sweden joined much later, in 1995. EU membership entails participation in the elections for the European Parliament, which, since 1979, have been held every fifth year. As shown in Table 11.1, the basic rules for who is allowed to run in these elections are similar across countries. Different from other types of elections, however, is the requirement that candidates must

be nominated by political parties (in Finland, also by constituency associations of at least 2,000 members). Denmark is in the somewhat exceptional situation in which its Atlantic territories – Greenland and the Faroe Islands – are not members of the EU, unlike mainland Denmark. Greenland was in fact a member of the European Community initially, but left in 1985 following a referendum held in 1982 (for an overview of election campaigns, voting rules, and results in Greenland, see, e.g., Ackrén & Lindström, 2012). As a consequence, residents of Greenland and the Faroe Islands do not participate in EU elections.

**Table 11.1** *Running in elections in the Nordic countries*

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
<b>EU</b>	Danish citizens residing in the EU, EU citizens residing in Denmark, at least 18 years old, resident, and nominated by a political party (excluding residents of Greenland and the Faroe Islands)	Finnish citizens, EU citizens residing in Finland, at least 18 years old, and nominated by a political party or constituency association	n.a.	Swedish citizens, EU citizens residing in Sweden, at least 18 years old, and nominated by a political party
<b>Presidential</b>	n.a.	Born Finnish citizen (§54 Constitution)	n.a.	n.a.
<b>National parliament</b>	Danish citizens, at least 18 years old, resident	Finnish citizens, at least 18 years old, and nominated by a political party or constituency association	Norwegian citizens, and at least 18 years old in the election year	Swedish citizens, at least 18 years old, nominated by a political party
<b>Regional</b>	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, at least 18 years old, and regional resident	n.a.	Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, and at least 18 years old in the election year, and regional resident	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, at least 18 years old, nominated by a political party, and regional resident
<b>Local</b>	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, at least 18 years old, and local resident	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 2 years residency, at least 18 years old, local resident, and nominated by a party or constituency association	Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, and at least 18 years old in the election year, and local resident	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, at least 18 years old, nominated by a political party, and local resident

*Source:* Compiled by the authors based on various sources

Another exception in a Nordic context is that Finland is not a constitutional monarchy. The head of state is an elected president, as is the case in Iceland.

Moreover, the Finnish constitutional rules for running in presidential elections are outstanding in the sense that they require candidates to be born Finnish citizens (Ministry of Justice, Finland, 2019: §54). This rule is equivalent to a similar requirement in the US where candidates running for president have to be born American citizens. There are no similar citizenship-at-birth requirements for running in any other election in the Nordics, including the presidential elections in Iceland (whose constitution requires a candidate to be at least 35 years old, however, see Government of Iceland, 2018: Article 4).

When it comes to who is allowed to run for the national parliament, rules are similar across Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Most importantly, candidates must be citizens and at least 18 years old. Finland and Sweden effectively require candidates to be nominated by political parties (or, in Finland, an association of at least 100 members), while in Denmark, an individual candidate would not need more than 150 signatures from eligible voters (a party needs a certain fraction of prior votes, effectively around 20,000 signatures). Notice also that in Finland, Sweden, and Norway, voters holding certain positions in public duty are not allowed to run in some elections or to combine certain electoral offices. For instance, the Swedish national election law does not allow members of a national parliament to become members of the European Parliament. To mention another example, persons “holding military office” are not allowed to become members of the Finnish parliament (Article 27 of the Constitution).

The rules on running in regional and local elections are an example of an area where the Nordic countries treat citizens of other Nordic countries almost equivalent to their own citizens (most important in this respect is the right to free settlement and an extended entitlement to welfare across the Nordics, compared to third-country citizens). Both local and other Nordic citizens of at least 18 years are allowed to run in regional and local elections, with minor exceptions across the countries. For instance, in Denmark, at least 25 signatures (in the larger cities 50 or 150 signatures) are needed for individual candidates. In the three EU member states, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, EU citizens are also allowed to run. On top of that, other foreign citizens with at least three years (or in Finland, two years) of residency are allowed to run.

Who is eligible to run for office, or passive voting regulations, is only one side of the coin. The other side is who is eligible to vote for a candidate or party running: active voting regulations. As one would expect, passive and active voting rights largely go hand in hand, which is evident from the overview presented in Table 11.2. That is, if you are allowed to run for office, you are also allowed to vote. There are some exceptions or extensions, however. For instance, in European elections, as is the case all over the EU, residents holding a passport from an EU country other than the one they reside in can choose in which country they want to cast their vote (i.e., in their country of



**Table 11.2** *Voting across Nordic countries*

	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden
<b>EU</b>	Danish citizens residing in the EU, EU citizens residing in Denmark, and at least 18 years old (excluding residents of Greenland and the Faroe Islands)	Finnish citizens, EU citizens residing in Finland, and at least 18 years old	n.a.	Swedish citizens, EU citizens residing in Sweden, and at least 18 years old
<b>Presidential</b>	n.a.	Finnish citizens at least 18 years old	n.a.	n.a.
<b>National parliament</b>	Danish citizens, at least 18 years old, and resident (with short-term exceptions)	Finnish citizens, at least 18 years old	Norwegian citizens, and at least 18 years old in the election year	Swedish citizens, and at least 18 years old
<b>National referendum</b>	Danish citizens, at least 18 years old, and resident (with short-term exceptions)	Finnish citizens, at least 18 years old	Norwegian citizens, and at least 18 years old in the election year	Swedish citizens, and at least 18 years old (it is possible for the parliament to expand the right to vote, so the referendum includes EU and Nordic [Norway and Iceland] citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, at least 18 years old)
<b>Regional</b>	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, at least 18 years old, and regional resident	n.a.	Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, and at least 18 years old in the election year, and regional resident (Norwegians abroad: also prior residents)	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, at least 18 years old, and regional resident
<b>Local</b>	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, at least 18 years old, and local resident	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 2 years residency, at least 18 years old, and local resident	Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, and at least 18 years old in the election year, and local resident (Norwegians abroad: also prior residents)	EU and Nordic citizens + foreigners with > 3 years residency, at least 18 years old, and local resident

*Source:* Compiled by the authors based on various sources

residence or in the country of citizenship). In Finnish presidential elections, there is no requirement for Finnish citizenship at birth, unlike the requirement for running for office. In national parliament elections and national referendums, Danish citizens are generally only allowed to vote if they reside in the country, unlike Finland, Norway, and Sweden, which allow citizens living abroad to participate. In regional and local elections, eligibility is also tied to residing regionally or locally.

Another important difference across countries is who voters can vote for. In Denmark, Norway, and Sweden voters vote for a party, but can also give a preference vote to their preferred candidate on the party list – in Finland, a vote is cast for a candidate. However, the right to vote for a specific candidate (rather than a party) may in practice have no consequences. For instance, in Norwegian national elections, more than half of a party's voters have to express a will to change the candidate list defined by a political party in order for the preference votes to alter the candidate list. There is never a case that such a high proportion of voters want to change the party list and, hence, in practice, preferential votes in Norway have no consequence.

Parties in Denmark can run in various ways. Whether, and how, preference votes alter who of a party's candidates are elected depends on the way parties decide to run (Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior, Denmark, 2020). Casting a preference vote (rather than a party vote) can therefore be without any consequences in Denmark, too. The ballot paper design reveals how parties run. Though most voters arguably have no idea under what rules their preferred party runs, some parties run with candidate lists that can be changed by voters. As a consequence, party candidates face an additional competition in the election campaign – they not only have to convince voters to vote for their party, they also have to compete against their fellow party members running on the same candidate list. Hence, electoral rules, and the rules on preference votes in particular, seem to affect styles of campaigning in the Nordic countries. Candidates running for parliamentary elections in Norway, where preference votes do not influence the candidates' order on the list, have a party-centred campaign style (e.g., Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2015). Candidates in Finland, where voters vote for candidates, have a more individualised style (e.g., Karvonen, 2014; Moring, 2008). Candidates in Finland need to attract attention on their own candidacy in the campaign to compete with candidates from their own party. Indeed, the consequences of the competition for preference votes are not to be underestimated. For instance, in Denmark, the more preference votes parties attract (proportionally), the larger their overall support seems to be (Thomsen & Elklit, 2007; Thomsen & Sloth, 2013).

That aside, previous research has refuted the commonly held belief that the media – which tend to focus on individual politicians – in general, and television in particular, drives preferential versus party voting, at least in the 2009 Danish

local elections. Rather, (some) media seem to provide information conducive to voting for specific candidates, instead of parties (Elmelund-Præstekær & Hopmann, 2012).

### Nordic election campaigns: Rules and regulations

Another area where differences between the Nordic countries are larger than likely expected are national election campaigns. An overview is provided in Table 11.3. In Norway, national elections are held on the second Monday of September every fourth year. This date is a fixed date that cannot be changed. Dissolving the parliament, which in other countries would result in early elections, is not possible – this option does not exist in the Norwegian constitution. The opposite to this strict Norwegian corset is found in Denmark. While the Danish constitution requires national elections to be held every fourth year, there is rarely ever four years between two national elections. The minister has the right to call an election whenever they wish to do so. Normally, elections are called three weeks in advance, resulting in a short and intense election campaign. Between these two extremes, we find Finland and Sweden, with the latter most likely having the most notable election framework. In Sweden, early elections can be called, which most recently occurred in 2014. However, these early elections do not alter the election calendar, which has elections every fourth year – the following national elections are not postponed. Logically, early elections are called “extra” elections [extra val] in Sweden, as they are held in addition to the fixed national elections. To what extent these very different approaches lead to different dynamics in the election campaigns is difficult to assess (see below).

There is another striking difference across the Nordic countries: whether different types of elections are held simultaneously. However, this difference in formal setup apparently cannot be linked to major differences in how election campaigns are run across the Nordic countries. Since 1970, Swedish local and regional elections are always held on the same day as national parliamentary elections. This approach has triggered substantial debate on the pros and cons of holding elections simultaneously. While a spontaneous assumption may be that local politics has less good conditions and may be overshadowed by national politics when holding joint election days, Swedish reality paints a much more complex picture (Håkansson et al., 2001). Both media coverage and voting behaviour are to a substantial extent “local”. At the end of the day, the attractiveness of holding elections jointly is a question of what kind of democratic ideal one favours (Oscarsson, 2001).

In other countries, it is possible but not common to hold different elections simultaneously. In 1996, this happened in Finland when the first-ever European

**Table 11.3** National parliamentary election campaigns

	Denmark (Folketinget)	Finland (Eduskunta/ Riksdagen)	Norway (Stortinget)	Sweden (Riksdagen)
<b>Frequency of campaigns</b>	At least every four years, called at the discretion of the prime minister.	Every four years.	Every four years, always the second Monday in September.	Every four years.
<b>Early elections</b>	The prime minister can call an election at their own discretion.	Early elections can be called by the president, upon motivation by the prime minister and after consultation with the parliament.	No early election can be called.	The government and the parliament (by a vote of no confidence against the prime minister) can call an extra election, not cancelling the originally planned election.
<b>Duration of campaigns</b>	Elections are called approx. 3 weeks in advance, initiating the official election campaign. On election day, campaigning close to polling stations is prohibited.	No official regulation.	By tradition, the four to five weeks after the school summer holiday and election day.	No official regulation. Election posters are allowed from five weeks before election day.
<b>Simultaneous elections</b>	Possible, but rarely the case (e.g., in 2001). Regional and local elections are held simultaneously.	Elections are held separately (with the 1996 European Parliament and municipal elections as an exception).	Possible, but rarely the case (e.g., in case of municipality mergers). Regional and local elections are held simultaneously.	National parliamentary elections take place simultaneously with regional and local elections.
<b>Regulations on campaign communication</b>	Political advertising by parties on television is not allowed, advertising with political messages is explicitly prohibited during the election campaign.	No specific regulation of election campaign coverage.	Political advertising on television is not allowed (other media are not regulated).	Political advertising on commercial television allowed.

Source: Compiled by the authors based on various sources

Parliament elections in Finland were held simultaneously with municipal elections (Ankar, 1997). In all subsequent Finnish European Parliament elections, turnout has been lower. In 2001, Danish local, regional, and national elections were held simultaneously. To mention an example of an “overshadowed” election, in 2009, a referendum on the Danish Act of Succession referendum

[tronfølgeloven] was held simultaneously with the European Parliament elections. With the substance of the referendum barely contested, the referendum received limited attention resulting in a low turnout of 58 per cent only. Because of this low turnout, the referendum nearly failed – at least 40 per cent of all eligible voters have to approve of a change to the constitutional laws in order for it to pass. Beyond these examples, however, it is not common to hold different elections simultaneously outside of Sweden.

Finally, communication during election campaigns is regulated in various ways. Most visibly, politicians and parties are not free to set up election posters as they please. For instance, in Sweden, election posters are allowed during the five weeks up to election day. In Denmark, the time period is roughly the same (depending on the weekday the election is held), but in most cases the day from which posters are technically allowed will be before the day election day is actually announced. Hence, from the moment the prime minister calls an election, posters are allowed.

In Denmark and Norway, political advertising on television is, at the time of writing, prohibited. Danish rules go as far as prohibiting any sort of explicitly sponsored political message during election campaigns, precluding, for instance, interest organisations such as trade unions or business associations from buying airtime. In Sweden, political advertising on commercial television (with TV 4 virtually having a monopoly) came with the transition to a digital broadcast system and had its breakthrough with the European 2009 and Swedish 2010 election campaigns, but is seen rather sceptically by Swedish voters (Johansson, 2017). Finland has no specific regulation at the time of writing; political advertising on television emerged in the early 1990s for which substantial proportions of campaign budgets are allocated today – though it is highly debated whether it has the desired effects, if any (Moring, 2017). Remaining bans on political advertising on television are not uncontested, however. In the 2009 Norwegian parliament elections, several local television stations aired paid political advertisements, while other stations offered to air political advertisements free of charge (OSCE, 2009).

Can these differences be linked to differences in how campaigns are run across the Nordic countries? On the one hand, the answer may be affirmative. As Moring (2017: 250) noted in his review, Finland appears to be the country with the most liberal media regulations and, as a consequence, the “biggest differences are seen in the party and candidate campaign budgets and organization of campaigns”. Yet, on the other hand, Moring (2017: 250) also noted that the “most important campaign media are still the candidate debates and current affairs broadcasts on television”. One reason for this balanced conclusion may be that Finnish parties, unlike parties in other countries outside of the Nordics, act cautiously and tend to refrain from negative campaigning.

## Campaign focus in electoral research: Background

For a long time, research questions regarding the campaign and communication processes were not part of the research agenda in electoral research, in general as well as in the Nordic countries. When the first election study was carried out in the US in 1940, the campaign was expected to be decisive for the outcome of the election (Lazarsfeld et al., 1969). Based on the successful use of propaganda by the totalitarian states in the 1930s, the mass media was thought to be all-powerful (e.g., Asp, 1986; McQuail, 1994). Much to the researchers' surprise, the study unveiled great stability in the campaign – very little seemed to happen. Indeed, Lazarsfeld's (1944) first article from the Erie County study was called "The Election is over", and the first sentence in the article read: "In an important sense, modern presidential campaigns are over before they begin". Rather than reporting on the campaign effects, the Columbia group laid the basis for the sociological approach in voter research. The minimal effects model of campaigns became the generally accepted view, and consequently, campaigns did not receive much attention for decades (Holtz-Bacha, 2004; Schmitt-Beck, 2007).

The sociological approach introduced by Lazarsfeld and colleagues (1969) was supplemented by the socio-psychological approach of the Michigan group (Campbell et al., 1969).<sup>1</sup> The so-called Michigan model soon came to dominate electoral research in the US. In Europe, this model was rivalled by the Lipset and Rokkan (1967) model, which was developed through macro-sociological studies of political cleavages (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Rokkan & Valen, 1964).<sup>2</sup> In addition, Downs' (1957) proximity model, developed within the rational choice tradition, has been influential in electoral research. It assumes that voters and parties are rational and motivated by self-interest and that voters will vote for the candidate closest to their own position (for reviews of models in electoral research, see Evans, 2003; Listhaug, 1989).

An important backdrop for the renewed interest in election campaigns was the weakening of ties between parties and voters. Moreover, theoretical advances in communication research – most importantly, the agenda-setting approach (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), the refinement of agenda-setting through the concepts of priming and framing (Iyengar, 1991; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987),<sup>3</sup> as well as Noelle-Neumann's (1973, 1980) work on the "Spiral of Silence" – contributed to the return of the concept of powerful media. Combined with the emergence of television, particularly the observation that the new medium most likely contributed to Kennedy's win in the 1960 presidential campaign, this resulted in communication studies increasingly focusing on the influence of the media for vote choice (Holtz-Bacha, 2004).

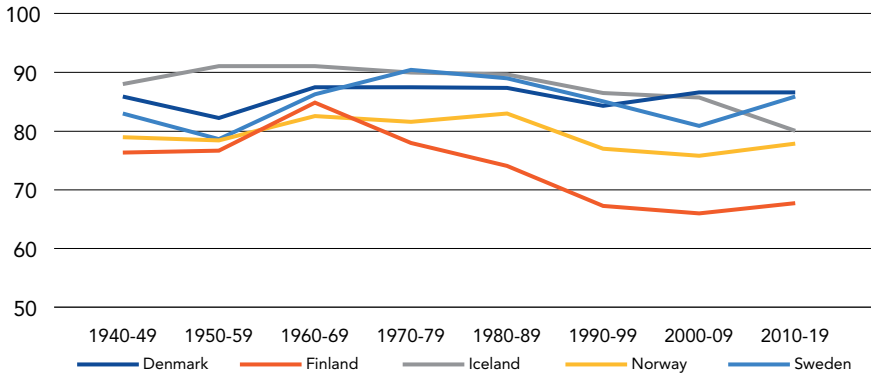
## Nordic research programmes on voters

The Nordic countries, and Norway and Sweden in particular, have a long tradition of research on voters. Sweden has the second longest running election study programme in the world, second only to the US. The Swedish National Election Studies Program was established in 1954 by Jörgen Westerståhl and Bo Särilvik. Indeed, Westerståhl was influenced by the above-mentioned leading American electoral researchers (Lazarsfeld at Columbia and Campbell at Michigan) when he established the election study programme at the University of Gothenburg (Holmberg, 2010). Ever since, Sweden has carried out voter surveys in relation to national elections.

Norway also has a long tradition for electoral research. Like in Sweden, electoral research in Norway was influenced by electoral research in the US. In 1957, the first election study was carried out under the leadership of Stein Rokkan and Henry Valen at the Institute for Social Research in Oslo, and the Norwegian National Election Studies project has been located there ever since. There has been a voter survey at every national election since 1957 (except for the 1961 election). The first election study in Denmark was in 1971, led by Ole Borre and colleagues (Andersen et al., 1999). The organisation of electoral research in Denmark has nevertheless been somewhat more ad hoc than in Sweden and Norway, and the research group behind it has consisted of a consortium of researchers from Aarhus, Aalborg, and Copenhagen. Finland and Iceland have a shorter history of election studies; the first one, for both countries, is from 1983 (Bengtsson et al., 2014). After 2003, there has been a study in relation to each parliamentary election.<sup>4</sup>

All the Nordic election programmes publish comprehensive volumes on voting and voters related to national elections (e.g., Aardal & Bergh, 2019; Hansen & Stubager, 2017; Oscarsson & Holmberg, 2013, 2016). The Nordic voter – the Danish, Finnish, Icelandic, Norwegian, and Swedish voter combined – is most thoroughly investigated by Bengtsson and colleagues (2014). While most comparative research emphasises the similarities between the Nordic countries, the Nordic voter book highlights the differences between them when it comes to electoral behaviour. For example, though they share comparably high turnout rates at national elections (Figure 11.1), there are increasing differences between the Nordic countries. Turnout has been consistently very high in Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden, with turnout rates between 85 and 90 per cent. Norway has followed closely with turnout somewhat beneath 80 per cent. Finland has seen the steepest decrease in turnout and has had below 70 per cent participation at national elections since the 1990s.

**Figure 11.1** Voter turnouts in national elections (per cent)



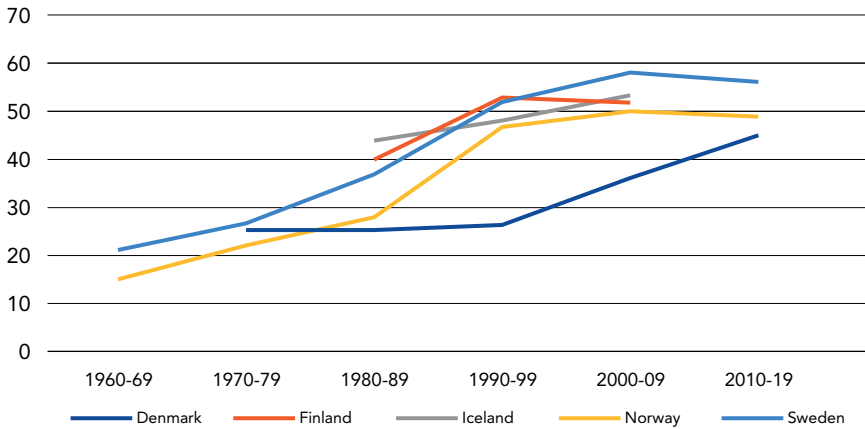
Source: International IDEA, 2020

As in most established democracies, there has been a weakening of the ties between parties and voters in the Nordic countries. An essential result of this development is the increasing numbers of voters deciding what party to vote for during campaigns. Figure 11.2 reports the proportion of the electorate postponing their vote choice until the campaign. As mentioned, Norway and Sweden have data on voter behaviour back to the 1960s, and during that decade, only 15 per cent in Norway and 21 per cent in Sweden decided during the campaign. From the 1970s through the 2000s, the proportion deciding during the campaign increased considerably. Today, about half the electorate decide (or, more precisely, report that they decide) during the campaign in all the Nordic countries. But there are differences between them. The share is the highest in Sweden: In the first decade after the turn of the century, almost 60 per cent decided during the campaign. Finland, Iceland, and Norway also reached high levels in the 1990s and have seen rather stable proportions since then. In Denmark, the increase has been significantly slower and did not approach the Swedish, Finnish, Icelandic, and Norwegian situation until recently.

The development described in Figure 11.2 gives the impression of quite unstable Nordic electorates. Recent studies using panels – repeated surveys throughout the campaign – moderate this impression somewhat: about half of the late deciders hold on to the same party throughout the campaign (e.g., Haugsgjerd et al., 2019).

The weakening ties between voters and parties and the increasing number of voters deciding during the campaign have contributed to more focus on the effect of the election campaign for vote choice. However, electoral research shows that stable factors, like socioeconomic factors and political values and attitudes, primarily drive vote choice. In 2005, Sweden even had rather strong class voting (Bengtsson et al., 2014). How can stable factors explain changing



**Figure 11.2** Proportion of voters who decided what party to vote for during the campaign (per cent)

*Comment:* The proportion deciding during the campaign is added per decade and divided by number of elections.

*Source:* Bengtsson et al., 2014; figures kindly provided by Kasper Møller Hansen

party preferences? One reason for this is most likely that such stable factors are decisive in the voter's calculation of which parties they may consider voting for, constituting their party or consideration set. Campaign factors can influence the choice between the parties in the consideration set (Karlsen & Aardal, 2016; Oscarsson & Rosema, 2019).

## Nordic research programmes on campaign communication

Research on campaign communication has become increasingly important in the Nordic countries.<sup>5</sup> Again, Sweden has the most comprehensive research programme. Already in relation to the 1979 national election, Kent Asp established a research programme on media content during election campaigns at the University of Gothenburg (see Asp, 1986). Ever since, at every national election, the Swedish media campaigns have been documented and studied, contributing with essential knowledge about political journalism and the nature of campaign coverage (Johansson & Strömbäck, 2019). A couple of decades later, Strömbäck and colleagues established a second research programme on media campaign coverage at Mid Sweden University, focusing more on mediatisation issues. For the 2018 election, the two research programmes merged (Johansson & Strömbäck, 2019). Another research effort in Sweden worth mentioning is the studies on election posters, with a database now covering several thousand posters from the past 100 years (Håkansson et al., 2017).

Although the other Nordic countries do not have similar longitudinal research programmes on media coverage of election campaigns, campaign media coverage is given ample scholarly attention. To mention some examples, in Denmark, Albæk and colleagues (2010) studied Danish television campaign coverage from 1994 to 2007. They focused on political bias in election coverage. Elmelund-Præstekær and Mølgaard-Svensson (2014) studied negativity in Danish election campaigns during 1994–2011, including how negative media coverage of parties is. Green-Pedersen and colleagues (2017) studied media coverage of issues and actors in the period of 1984–2003 (see also Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010). In Norway, the first comprehensive study of media content during campaigns was carried out in 2001, as part of a project that studied party messages, media coverage, and voter reactions (Aardal et al., 2004). In addition, Sigurd Allern (2011) studied campaign television debate shows from 1961 to 2009. In Finland, Carlson (2017) reviewed prior studies of election posters and presented a longitudinal study with a particular focus on the depiction of children. In addition, a series of studies focusing on campaign media, particularly political advertising on television as well as the Internet later on, have been carried out in all elections since 1992.

One central question is to what extent campaign coverage is mediated (see also Skogerbø et al., Chapter 1). Norwegian and Swedish findings tend to answer this question affirmatively (e.g., Jenssen & Aalberg, 2007; Johansson & Strömbäck, 2019). This finding entails that political coverage is based on news media logic and not political logic; media coverage is shaped by the format, resources, norms, and values of the news media, and their need to obtain the audiences' attention (e.g., Asp, 1986). Central to this concept is the focus on so-called game frames, or horse-race journalism. Rather than focusing on the political issues and political differences between parties, much attention is given to the political game as a contest to be won. For example, according to a study of the Norwegian 2001 campaign, 60 per cent of the campaign coverage included a game frame (Waldahl & Narud, 2004). This finding is similar to results reported from Denmark (Pedersen, 2014). Moreover, Danish media appear to increasingly emphasise negative messages from political parties (Elmelund-Præstekær & Mølgaard-Svensson, 2014). At the same time, other Danish results have highlighted the prevailing importance of a political logic for news media coverage (Hopmann et al., 2011).

Overall, the studies find less support for election campaign coverage being politically biased. The longitudinal Swedish studies show that in a campaign, media coverage indeed favours some parties and disfavors others. However, the favoured and disfavoured parties differ from one campaign to the next (Asp & Bjerling, 2014). These findings resonate well with studies from other Nordic countries (e.g., Albæk et al., 2010).

Another important finding across established democracies is that political parties have professionalised their electoral campaigning (e.g., Farrell & Webb, 2000; Plasser & Plasser, 2002), so too in the Nordic countries (Guðmundsson, 2014; Karlsen & Narud, 2004; Kosiara-Pedersen, 2011; Tenscher et al., 2012). Political parties obviously strive for the best possible media coverage during electoral campaigns, which becomes all the more important the more volatile voting behaviour becomes (see above). In part, the professionalisation of campaigns entails that parties integrate sophisticated practices and new technology in their campaign strategy (e.g., Tenscher et al., 2012), and in part, it describes how an increasing number of professionals are involved in the campaigning effort (Farrell & Webb, 2000; Karlsen, 2010).

An important condition for this professionalisation of campaigns in the Nordic countries is the steep increase in state funding of political parties (e.g., Koß, 2011). For example, the total state subventions to Norwegian parties increased from NOK 62 million in 1970 to NOK 515 million in 2012 (adjusted for inflation, based on 2012) (E. Allern et al., 2016). It was not until 1987 that Danish political parties received state funding, and with the so-called Olsen plan in 1995 – named after Erling Olsen, who served as the speaker of the parliament in 1994–1998 – the funding of Danish political parties was increased substantially (Elmelund-Præstekær & Hopmann, 2008). The idea behind the plan was to increase the resources of the parliament vis-à-vis the government and the EU. With increased funding, the parties also had the resources to professionalise their campaigning (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2011). One central source of inspiration in the 1990s and early 2000s was Tony Blair’s campaign strategies in the UK, but also presidential campaigns in the US. In the years to follow, “spin” and “spin doctors” became central in the vocabulary of every political pundit. Anders Fogh Rasmussen became prime minister in 2001 following, by Danish standards, a highly choreographed electoral campaign (Elmelund-Præstekær & Hopmann, 2008). Yet, despite campaigns being planned and prepared more professionally today – such as systematically testing campaign messages before fielding them – and despite many new technological remedies now being used in Danish campaigns, we also saw a re-emergence of the most ordinary approaches to campaigning in the past years, such as ringing doorbells (Kosiara-Pedersen, 2011).

The literature on the professionalisation of campaigning has highlighted that campaigns increasingly become “permanent” (Blumenthal, 1982), in other words, that the difference between routine and campaign periods increasingly become blurred. It is plausible to assume that this is particularly the case in Denmark, given that the date for the next election is not scheduled, unlike the other Nordic countries (see above). To what extent this actually is the case is obviously difficult to establish. In Norway and Sweden, it has traditionally been

distinguished between the short campaign – the four to five weeks leading up to the election, and the long campaign – up to a year (or more) before the election (Esaiaasson, 1990; Karlsen & Narud, 2004). However, in Sweden, with fixed election dates, a transition to permanent campaigning is being discussed (Nord, 2013). More generally, Sweden, where state subsidies for political parties were introduced in the 1960s, is another example of a country where over time more resources are being used on campaigning and where campaigning has become more professional. Yet, there seem to be rather stable differences between parties – larger parties run more professional campaigns (Strömbäck, 2015). Moreover, compared to parties in the UK or the US, Swedish parties must be considered less professional, still. Reasons for this include still (comparatively) fewer resources seen, declining membership, and policy focus (Strömbäck, 2015).

In Finland as well, permanent campaigning is discussed in relation to the professionalisation of campaigning (Tenscher & Mykkänen, 2014). Overall, Finland has witnessed increasing professionalisation of electoral campaigning in recent national and European campaigns, yet substantial differences between parties remain, as Tenscher and Mykkänen (2014) noted in their work. Their analyses also reveal that Finnish parties are still less professional than their German counterparts with respect to campaign strategies. A similar tendency is found in Norway, where parties are increasingly utilising new practices offered by new technologies, and in-house campaign professionals, party employees, have strong influence on campaign strategies (Karlsen, 2010; Karlsen & Narud, 2004; Karlsen & Saglie, 2017). Research results from Iceland also document an increasing professionalisation of political communication, where training politicians on how to use the media as well as shielding politicians from the media have also emerged as important trends (Guðmundsson, 2014 ; see also Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, Chapter 3).

In short, it is safe to conclude that electoral campaigning has professionalised across the Nordic countries. However, to the best of our knowledge, no comparative and diachronic investigation of electoral campaigning across the Nordic countries is available. Some of the studies cited above discuss more than one country, such as Finland and Sweden (Tenscher et al., 2012) or Iceland and Norway (Guðmundsson, 2014), but we lack a systematic understanding of the changes in campaign communication within the Nordic countries with data gathered in the same fashion across the Nordic countries enabling us to understand the differences and similarities over time and space.

## Conclusion

How similar are the Nordic countries with respect to elections and political communication, after all? On the one hand, the preceding discussions may

leave the impression that the Nordic countries are rather dissimilar. Election dates are set in the most different ways one may think of. Electoral systems vary substantially across the Nordic countries, with some countries, for instance, having European elections, while other countries or territories do not. Finland and Iceland have presidential elections, unlike the constitutional monarchies of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. While voting in all Nordic countries can be personalised, whether this has an effect on who is elected varies greatly. And we find huge variation in the extent and continuity in research programmes on electoral behaviour and campaign communication.

Yet, on the other hand, we find many similarities across the Nordic countries, as one may expect. Even where paid television advertising is allowed, it is used cautiously, unlike what we see in many other countries. Turnout in national elections is high, and the trend towards deciding late whom to vote for shows a high correlation across most of the Nordic countries. Providing Nordic citizens with special voting rights within the Nordic countries stresses the similarities across the Nordic countries. Some of these similarities speak to the distinctiveness of the Nordic countries (such as the stable and high turnout) and some are found elsewhere as well (such as the trend toward deciding late whom to vote for). Hence, scholars interested in making the argument that the structures defined by electoral setups and campaign regulations are less important for how election campaigns are conducted can certainly find supportive arguments when studying the Nordic countries more closely. This raises the question of what other factors explain the similarities across the Nordic countries, such as cultural background and media systems, which are addressed in the introductory chapter of this anthology.

In their analysis of the “media welfare state”, Syvertsen and colleagues (2014: 128) conclude that the Nordic countries have a lot in common with other (developed) Western countries, but they have the most in common with their Nordic neighbours: “To the degree that one can speak at all of regional media and communications structures, Nordic media constitute a distinct entity”. Based on the above review, we are hesitant to support such a bold notion when discussing elections and political communication in the Nordic countries. A “Nordic” model of political communication has been discussed, but – to the best of our knowledge – not yet fully developed (Guðmundsson, 2014). There are substantial differences with respect to the rules governing elections and their campaigns. When it comes to styles of campaigning, the Norwegian party-centred campaign, on the one hand, and the Finnish individualised campaign, on the other, might constitute the two extremes in a Western European context. The electoral campaigning of candidates and political parties changes over time and has become more professional, as it has in many countries. In fact, sources for inspiration regarding new campaign techniques are often countries outside of the Nordics, and not primarily immediate Nordic neighbours. This is

not to say that we are witnessing an Americanisation of elections and political communication in the Nordic countries (e.g., de Vreese et al., 2017). Rather, in line with an analysis of campaigning during the 2009 European elections in the two German-speaking countries Austria and Germany and the Nordic countries Finland and Sweden (Tenscher et al., 2012), the central take-away appears to be that differences in the political communication between political parties are much larger than between countries.

## Notes

1. Socio-demographic factors introduced by Lazarsfeld and his group are central to the key concept in the Michigan model: party identification. Hence, one approach did not replace the other. See Converse (2006) for an interesting historical account of the development of the Michigan model and the fusion of the social structure and the socio-psychological perspective.
2. This model is also referred to as the “Rokkan and Valen model” as it was first developed through explorative studies of Norwegian electoral politics. It was later developed into a more general model by Rokkan.
3. For an overview, see, for example, Semetko (2007).
4. See [https://www.vaalitutkimus.fi/en/vaalitutkimus\\_suomessa.html](https://www.vaalitutkimus.fi/en/vaalitutkimus_suomessa.html)
5. In addition, in recent years, studies of election campaign content have increasingly focused on social media (see Nord & Grusell, Chapter 6).

## References

- Aardal, B., & Bergh, J. (Eds). (2019). *Valg og valgkamp [Election and election campaigning]*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- Aardal, B., Krogstad, A., & Narud, H. M. (2004). *I valgkampens hete – Strategisk kommunikasjon og politisk usikkerhet [In the heat of the election campaign – Strategic communication and political uncertainty]*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Ackrén, M., & Lindström, B. (2012). Autonomy development, irredentism and secessionism in a Nordic context. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 50(4), 494–511. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2012.729732>
- Albæk, E., Hopmann, D. N., & de Vreese, C. H. (2010). *Kunsten at holde balancen: Dækningen af folketingsvalgkampen i tv-nyhederne på DR1 og TV2 1994–2007 [The art of keeping the balance: Coverage of parliamentary elections in the TV news on DR1 and TV2 1994–2007]*. Odense, Denmark: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Allern, E., Heidar, K., & Karlsen, R. (2016). *After the mass party: Continuity and change in political parties and representation in Norway*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.
- Allern, S. (2011). *Fjernsynsvalgkampen: Program, deltakere og maktkamp 1961–2009 [Television election campaign: Programme, participants and power struggle 1961–2009]*. Oslo: Pax.
- Anckar, D. (1997). The Finnish European election of 1996. *Electoral Studies*, 16(2), 262–266.
- Andersen, J. L., Borre, O., Andersen, J. G., & Nielsen, H. J. (1999). Appendix 3: Det Danske valgprojekt 1971–1999 [Appendix 3: The Danish election project 1971–1999]. *Vælgere med omtanke – en analyse af folketingsvalget 1998 [Voters with care – an analysis of the 1998 parliamentary elections]*. Aarhus, Denmark: Systime Academic.
- Asp, K. (1986). *Måktiga massmedier – Studier i politisk opinionsbildning [Powerful mass media – Studies in political opinion formation]*. Stockholm: Förlaget Akademilittertur.

---

## Acknowledgements

For commenting on and providing input to earlier versions of this chapter, we are grateful to Dennis Andersson, Bernt Aardal, Maria Bäck, Rasmus Tue Pedersen, the editors, and the reviewer.

- Asp, K., & Bjerling, J. (2014). *Mediekratin – mediernas makt i svenska val* [Media craft – the power of the media in Swedish elections]. Stockholm: Ekerlids.
- Bengtsson, Å., Hansen, K. M., Harðarson, Ó. Þ., Narud, H. M., & Oscarsson, H. (2014). *The Nordic voter: Myths of exceptionalism*. Colchester: ECPR Press.
- Blumenthal, S. (1982). *The permanent campaign*. Boston: Beacon.
- Campbell, A., Converse, P. E., Miller, W. E., & Stokes, D. E. (1969). *The American voter*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Carlson, T. (2017). Election posters in Finland: Cueing emotions with visual imagery. In C. Holtz-Bacha, & B. Johansson (Eds.), *Election posters around the globe: Political campaigning in the public space* (pp. 115–137). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32498-2\\_7](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32498-2_7)
- Converse, P. E. (2006). Researching electoral politics. *American Political Science Review*, 100(4), 605–612. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27644389>
- de Vreese, C., Esser, F., & Hopmann, D. N. (Eds.). (2017). *Comparing political journalism*. Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315622286>
- Downs, A. (1957). *An economic theory of democracy*. Boston: Addison-Wesley.
- Elmelund-Præstekær, C., & Hopmann, D. N. (2008). *Teflon og bullshit? Ti myter om politik, journalistik og valgkampe* [Teflon and bullshit? Ten myths about politics, journalism and election campaigns]. Odense, Denmark: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Elmelund-Præstekær, C., & Hopmann, D. N. (2012). Does television personalise voting behaviour? Studying the effects of media exposure on voting for candidates or parties. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 35(2), 117–140. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2011.00284.x>
- Elmelund-Præstekær, C., & Mølgaard-Svensson, H. (2014). Negative and personalized campaign rhetoric: Party communication and media coverage of Danish parliamentary elections 1994–2011. *World Political Science*, 10(2), 365–384. <https://www.doi.org/10.1515/wpsr-2014-0018>
- Esaiaasson, P. (1990). *Svenska valkampanjer 1866–1988* [Swedish election campaigns 1866–1988]. Stockholm: Allmänna.
- Evans, J. (2003). *Voters & voting: An introduction*. London: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446216798>
- Farrell, D., & Webb, P. (2000). Political parties as campaign organizations. In R. Dalton, & M. Wattenberg (Eds.), *Parties without partisans: Political change in advanced industrial democracies* (pp. 102–129). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/0199253099.001.0001>
- Government of Iceland. (2018, January 19). *Constitution of the Republic of Iceland* [Translation from Icelandic]. <https://www.government.is/publications/legislation/lex/2018/01/19/Constitution-of-the-Republic-of-Iceland-No.-33-17-June-1944-as-amended-30-May-1984-31-May-1991-28-June-1995-and-24-June-1999/>
- Green-Pedersen, C., Mortensen, P. B., & Thesen, G. (2017). The incumbency bonus revisited: Causes and consequences of media dominance. *British Journal of Political Science*, 47(1), 131–148. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123415000022>
- Green-Pedersen, C., & Stubager, R. (2010). The political conditionality of mass media influence: When do parties follow mass media attention? *British Journal of Political Science*, 40(3), 663–677. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40930604>
- Guðmundsson, B. (2014). New realities of political communications in Iceland and Norway. *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*, 9(1), 1–22.
- Håkansson, N., Johansson, B., & Vigsø, O. (2017). From propaganda to image building: Four phases of Swedish election poster history. In C. Holtz-Bacha, & B. Johansson (Eds.), *Election posters around the globe: Political campaigning in the public space* (pp. 319–337). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32498-2>
- Hansen, K. M., & Stubager, R. (Eds.). (2017). *Oprør fra udkanten – Folketingsvalget 2015* [Uprising from the outskirts – Parliamentary elections 2015]. Copenhagen: Djøf.
- Haugsgjerd, A., Karlsen, R., & Aalberg, T. (2019). Velgere i valgkamp: Øker politiske forskjeller? [Voters in election campaigns: Are political differences increasing?] In B. Aardal, & J. Bergh (Eds.), *Valg og valgkamp* [Election and election campaigning]. Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk.

- Holmberg, S. (2010). Det göteborgska valforskningsprogrammet [The Gothenburg election research programme]. *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 112(5), 375–395. <https://journals.lub.lu.se/st/article/view/8284/7413>
- Holtz-Bacha, C. (2004). Political campaign communication: Conditional convergence of modern media elections. In F. Esser, & B. Pfetsch (Eds.), *Comparing political communication theories, cases, and challenges*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606991>
- Hopmann, D. N., Albæk, E., & de Vreese, C. H. (2011). Incumbency bonus in election news coverage explained: The logics of the political system and the media market. *Journal of Communication*, 61, 264–282. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2011.01540.x>
- Håkansson, N., Johansson, B., Johansson, F., Kjellgren, H., Oscarsson, H., & Szücs, S. (Eds.). (2001). *Skilda valdagar och vårval?* [SOU 2001:65]. Stockholm: Prime Minister's Office. <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2001/01/sou-200165/>
- International IDEA. (2020). *International IDEA supporting democracy worldwide*. International IDEA Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance. <https://www.idea.int>
- Iyengar, S. (1991). *Is anyone responsible? How television frames political issues*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. (1987). *News that matters: Television and American opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jenssen, A. T., & Aalberg, T. (2007). *Den medialiserte politikken [The medialisated politics]*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Johansson, B. (2017). Sweden: Ten years with television advertising. In C. Holtz-Bacha, & M. R. Just (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of political advertising* (pp. 269–278). Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694504>
- Johansson, B., & Strömbäck, J. (2019). *Kampen og mediebildens – nyhetsjournalistik i valrörelsen 2018 [The campaign and the media image – news journalism in the election campaign 2018]*. Stockholm: Ekerlids.
- Karlsen, R. (2010). Fear of the political consultant: Campaign professionals and new technology in Norwegian electoral politics. *Party Politics*, 16(2), 193–214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068809341055>
- Karlsen, R., & Aardal, B. (2016). Political values count but issue ownership decides? How stable and dynamic factors influence party set and vote choice in multiparty systems. *International Political Science Review*, 37(2), 261–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512114558456>
- Karlsen, R., & Narud, H. M. (2004). Organisering av valgkamp – “moderne” eller “tradisjonell”? [Organising the election campaign – “modern” or “traditional”?]. In B. Aardal, A. Krogstad, & H. M. Narud (Eds.), *I valgkampens hete – Strategisk kommunikasjon og politisk usikkerhet [In the heat of the election campaign – Strategic communication and political uncertainty]*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Karlsen, R., & Saglie, J. (2017). Party bureaucrats, independent professionals, or politicians? A study of party employees. *West European Politics*, 40(6), 1331–1351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2017.1290403>
- Karlsen, R., & Skogerbø, E. (2015). Candidate campaigning in parliamentary systems: Individualized vs. localized campaigning. *Party Politics*, 21(3), 428–439. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068813487103>
- Karvonen, L. (2014). *Parties, governments and voters in Finland: Politics under fundamental societal transformation*. Colchester, England: ECPR Press.
- Knutsen, O. (2017). *Nordic models in political science: Challenged, but still viable*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Kosiara-Pedersen, K. (2011). Folketingsvalgkampagner i forandring [Parliamentary election campaigns are changing]. *Økonomi og Politik*, 84(3), 34–46.
- Koß, M. (2011). *The politics of party funding: State funding to political parties and party competition in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199572755.001.0001>
- Lazarsfeld, P. F. (1944). The election is over. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 8(3), 317–330.



- Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1969). *The people's choice – How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign* (3rd ed.). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Lipset, M. S., & Rokkan, S. (1967). Cleavage structures, party systems and voter alignments: An introduction. In M. S. Lipset, & S. Rokkan (Eds.), *Party systems and voter alignments*. New York: Free Press.
- Listhaug, O. (1989). Gamle og nye modeller i valforskning: Eit oversyn [Old and new models in election research: An overview]. *Norwegian Journal for Social Research*, 30, 339–360.
- McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>
- McQuail, D. (1994). *Mass communication theory* (3rd ed.). London: Sage.
- Ministry of Justice, Finland. (2019, June 13). The constitution of Finland [Translation from Finnish]. <https://finlex.fi/en/laki/kaannokset/1999/en19990731>
- Ministry of Social Affairs and the Interior, Denmark. (2020). Opstillingsformer til folketingsvalg [Forms of parliamentary elections]. Retrieved March 30, 2020, from <https://valg.sim.dk/valg/folketingsvalg/opstillingsformer-til-folketingsvalg/>
- Moring, T. (2008). Media and politics in Finland. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Moring, T. (2017). Audiovisual political advertising in Finland. In C. Holtz-Bacha, & M. R. Just (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of political advertising* (pp. 240–252). Oxon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694504>
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1973). Return to the concept of the powerful media. *Studies of Broadcasting*, 9, 67–112.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1980). *Die Schweigespirale [The spiral of silence]*. Munich: Riper.
- Nord, L. (2013). Jakten på den perfekta kampanjen – professionaliseringen av de svenska partierna [The pursuit of the perfect campaign – the professionalisation of the Swedish parties]. In J. Strömbäck, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Kampen om opinionen: Politisk kommunikation under svenska valrörelser [The battle for public opinion: Political communication during Swedish electoral movements]* (pp. 35–63). Stockholm: SNS.
- Oscarsson, H. (2001, January). Skilda valdagar och vårval? – En sammanfattning [Different election days and spring elections? – A summary]. In N. Håkansson, B. Johansson, F. Johansson, H. Kjellgren, H. Oscarsson, & S. Szücs (Eds.), *Skilda valdagar och vårval? [SOU 2001:65]* (pp. 241–250). Stockholm: Prime Minister's Office. <https://www.regeringen.se/rattsliga-dokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2001/01/sou-200165/>
- Oscarsson, H., & Holmberg, S. (2013). *Nya svenska väljare [New Swedish voters]*. Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik.
- Oscarsson, H., & Holmberg, S. (2016). *Svenska väljare [Swedish voters]*. Stockholm: Wolters Kluwer.
- Oscarsson, H., & Rosema, M. (2019). Consideration set models of electoral choice: Theory, method, and application. *Electoral Studies*, 57, 256–262. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2018.08.003>
- OSCE. (2009). *Norway: Parliamentary elections 14 September 2009 – OSCE/ODIHR election assessment mission report*. Warsaw: Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/norway/40529?download=true>
- Pedersen, R. T. (2014). News media framing of negative campaigning. *Mass Communication and Society*, 17(6), 898–919. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2013.858749>
- Plasser, F., & Plasser, G. (2002). *Global political campaigning: A worldwide analysis of campaign professionals and their practices*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger.
- Rokkan, S., & Valen, H. (1964). Regional contrasts in Norwegian politics. In E. Allardt, & Y. Littunen (Eds.), *Cleavages, ideology and party systems*. Helsinki: Westmarck Society.
- Schmitt-Beck, R. (2007). New modes of campaigning. In R. Dalton, & H.-D. Klingemann (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political behavior* (pp. 744–764). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270125.003.0040>
- Semerko, H. (2007). Political communication. In R. Dalton, & H.-D. Klingemann (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political behavior* (pp. 123–143). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199270125.003.0007>

- Strömbäck, J. (2015). Swedish election campaigns. In J. Pierre (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of Swedish politics* (pp. 275–293). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199665679.013.16>
- Syvertsen, T., Mjøs, O. J., Moe, H., & Enli, G. S. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- Tenscher, J., & Mykkänen, J. (2014). Two levels of campaigning: An empirical test of the party-centred theory of professionalisation. *Political Studies*, 62(1), 20–41. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12104>
- Tenscher, J., Mykkänen, J., & Moring, T. (2012). Modes of professional campaigning: A four-country comparison in the European parliamentary elections, 2009. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 17(2), 145–168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161211433839>
- Thomsen, S. R., & Elklit, J. (2007). Hvad betyder de personlige stemmer for partiernes tilslutning? [What do the personal voices mean for the parties joining?]. In J. G. Andersen, J. Andersen, O. Borre, K. M. Hansen, & H. J. Nielsen (Eds.), *Det nye politiske landskab: Folketingsvalget 2005 i perspektiv* [*The new political landscape: The 2005 parliamentary elections in perspective*] (pp. 307–334). Aarhus: Academica.
- Thomsen, S. R., & Sloth, E. G. (2013). Valgsystem, personlige stemmer og partivalg [Electoral system, personal votes and party elections]. In J. Elklit, & U. Kjær (Eds.), *KV09 – Analyser af kommunalvalget 2009* [*Analyses of the 2009 municipality election*] (pp. 199–225). Odense, Denmark: University Press of Southern Denmark.
- Waldahl, R., & Narud, H. M. (2004). Den korte valgkampen [The short election campaign]. In B. Aardal, A. Krogstad, & H. M. Narud (Eds.), *I valgkampens hete – Strategisk kommunikasjon og politisk usikkerhet* [*In the heat of the election campaign – Strategic communication and political uncertainty*]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

## Chapter 12

# Populism and media and communication studies in the Nordic countries

Juha Herkman & Ann-Cathrine Jungar

### Abstract

This chapter introduces the developments of and research on political actors called populist in the Nordic countries. The focus is on contemporary populist right-wing parties – the Sweden Democrats, the Danish People’s Party, the Finns Party, and the Norwegian Progress Party – though we discuss the history of Nordic populist parties on a more general level as well. Nordic research on populism has for the most part adopted political scientific, ideational, and empirical perspectives lacking genuine theoretical considerations. However, contextual differences can be found, and sociological and cultural approaches to studying populism have been promoted of late. The perspective on populism in media and communication studies has concentrated especially on the political communication of populist actors and the relationship between the media and populism. The future challenges for Nordic populism studies are linked to changing media and political environments, requiring a new look at their relationship.

**Keywords:** populism, radical right-wing parties, Nordic countries, party system, media

## Introduction

Populism is difficult to define, being described as a slippery or chameleonic concept (Canovan, 2005; Taggart, 2000). Therefore, how populism and research on it are addressed in the Nordic countries depends on how populism is defined. If populism is understood, for example, in a Laclaudian (2005) sense as “a political logic” where a segment of the population identifies itself with “the people” as a total political agent antagonistically confronted by a hegemonic power bloc, then populism has been a common process in Nordic politics since the late nineteenth century. However, populism in the Nordic region is commonly approached from a political scientific and empirical perspective and associated with political parties challenging domestic party systems and

more traditional mass parties. Therefore, populism in the Nordic countries is currently manifesting itself as so-called new populism, that is, in the form of populist radical-right political parties – which have been emerging in the late twentieth century in many European countries.

New populism has been characterised as anti-establishment protest movements criticising bureaucratised states and the alleged corruption of established elites and parties (Taggart, 2000). Several scholars have connected it to nationalism and to a “nativist ideology” consisting of anti-immigration policies, xenophobia, and the racism of extreme or radical right-wing movements (see Mudde, 2007; Rydgren, 2004). Such sentiments are often combined with a general criticism of the European Union as a political project restricting national sovereignty.

In this chapter, we provide a comparative review of the developments of political populism and its relationship to media and communication studies in the Nordic countries. Starting with a short historical introduction of political actors called “populists” in the Nordic countries, we then focus on Nordic research on populism that has applied especially to political sciences, media and communication studies, sociology, and cultural studies. After the research review, we then discuss the similarities and differences between populism in the different Nordic countries, while also explaining in part the variation in research approaches used in the Nordic region. We conclude by briefly reflecting on the challenges that populism research currently faces in the Nordic countries.

## Populist actors in the Nordic countries

Historically, populism in the Nordic countries has been connected to particular political parties, mainly to the Finnish Rural Party (1959–1995), the Finns Party (1995–), the Danish Progress Party (1972–), the Danish People’s Party (1995–), the Norwegian Progress Party (1973–), New Democracy (1991–2000) in Sweden, the Sweden Democrats (1988–), and the Best Party (2009–2014) in Iceland. In addition, a populist style has been linked to individual politicians mainly representing the parties listed above. Populism has also been connected to other minor movements, and some mainstream political players have occasionally been called populists.

Jungar (2017) has identified three waves of Nordic populist movements. First, the “agrarian populist” wave was seen in the late 1950s in Finland, with the establishment of the Finnish Rural Party. The second wave appeared in the early 1970s in Denmark and Norway, during which anti-taxation protest parties were electorally successful. The third wave emerged in the late 1980s, when the nationalist and nativist Sweden Democrats was launched and populist parties in Finland, Denmark, and Norway began to adopt anti-immigration policies

as an important part of their agenda. Jungar (2017) calls this last wave “new populism”, even if some other scholars do not associate the term self-evidently with extreme nationalism or anti-immigration policies.

*The first wave:  
Agrarian populism of the Finnish Rural Party*

The Finnish Rural Party [Suomen Maaseudun Puolue] (SMP) was established in 1959 when its founder Veikko Vennamo separated with his followers from the Agrarian Party [Maalaisliitto], the predecessor to today’s Centre Party [Suomen Keskusta]. The party was popular, especially among small farmers suffering from the effects of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation policies. It combined anti-establishment appeals with leftist socioeconomic policies and conservative values. The party was somewhat popular in local elections in the 1960s, but enjoyed heavy success in the 1970 parliamentary elections, in which it gained 18 members of parliament (MPs) by promoting a strong anti-elite approach while appealing to “the pure people”.

SMP experienced internal conflicts during the 1970s, but it made an electoral comeback in the 1983 parliamentary elections, receiving 10 per cent of the vote (17 MPs), and was invited to take part in the government. SMP had previously not been considered a party with governmental credibility due to its criticism of Finland’s specific foreign policy relations with the Soviet Union. After the death of the long-serving President Urho Kekkonen in 1983, who had personified a friendly relationship between Finland and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, SMP was rehabilitated. Moreover, Pekka Vennamo, the far less antagonistic and provocative son of Veikko, had been elected party leader, which paved the way to governmental incumbency. Assuming governmental responsibility resulted, though, both in petty internal disagreements and electoral decline. SMP went bankrupt after the 1995 parliamentary elections, in which the party won only one seat.

*The second wave:  
Anti-taxation protests in Denmark and in Norway*

The second Nordic wave of populism was economically liberal in nature. The Danish and Norwegian progress parties were critical of the growth of the tax-based welfare states. The Danish Progress Party [Fremskridspartiet] was established in 1972 and received 15 per cent of the vote in the 1973 parliamentary elections (Jungar, 2017). The party was strongly personified by its popular leader, the lawyer Mogens Glistrup, whose provocative and folkish style differentiated him from other politicians. The party gained its best result in the first parliamentary elections in 1973, with 28 seats in parliament, by adopting

a strong anti-taxation protest agenda seemingly reflecting the “voice of ordinary people”. However, the party’s organisation remained loose and centred on its leader, contributing to a continuous decline in support. Glistrup also used nationalist and anti-Islamic rhetoric, especially during the 1980s, though the issue of anti-immigration only became more salient in the 1990s with the Danish People’s Party [Dansk Folkeparti] (DF) (Bächler & Hopmann, 2017). In the 1998 parliamentary elections, the Progress Party won only four seats, and in 2001 it lost all of them. After that, the party for the most part lost its significance in the Danish political field.

In Norway, Anders Lange’s anti-taxation movement was established in 1973. The party received 5 per cent of the vote that same year in the parliamentary election, but after Lange’s sudden death in 1974, the leader-centric protest movement encountered difficulties (E. H. Allern, 2013). The party changed its name to the Progress Party [Fremskrittspartiet] (FrP) and its longstanding leader, Carl I. Hagen (1978–2006), began invoking a strong neoliberal ideology. Basically, FrP is the only political party called populist in Norway, even though intellectually driven, anti-establishment, and anti-EU movements were titled Populist Work Groups in the early 1970s (Jupskås et al., 2017). During the 1980s, FrP started to promote anti-immigration approaches and its popularity began to increase (Andersen & Bjørklund, 2000). In the 1989 parliamentary elections, FrP experienced a parliamentary breakthrough and gained 13 per cent of the vote and 22 seats in parliament.

### *The third wave: Nativism and the anti-immigration approach take over*

Sweden was described for years as a European exception with no right-wing populist parties having successfully gained a seat in parliament (Rydgren, 2002). The anti-establishment and economically liberal New Democracy Party [Ny Demokrati] was elected to parliament for one term between 1991 and 1994, but it was not before 2010, with the rise of Sweden Democrats [Sverigedemokraterna] (SD), that a nationalist party gained seats in the Swedish parliament (Strömbäck et al., 2017).

SD was formed already in 1988, but with its background in neo-Nazi movements, the party remained marginal and was excluded from collaboration with other political parties and mainstream media (Baas, 2014). The first party leader, Anders Klarström (1992–1995), had a background in neo-Nazism, but soon thereafter the new party leader, Mikael Jansson (1995–2005), started to distance the party from its extremist legacy. The current party leader, Jimmie Åkesson (2005–), has continued to transform SD by building up a nationwide party organisation and taking distance from its past. Over 100 members have been expelled, and the Sweden Democratic Youth organisation was dissolved

in 2015 with the aim of developing a more electorally attractive party with governing potential.

Even though social conservatism was added as a second ideological pillar to nationalism in the party programme of 2011, anti-immigration is the most salient issue for SD voters. SD gained almost 13 per cent of the vote in the 2014 parliamentary elections, and in the 2018 elections the party received 17.5 per cent of the vote, making it the third largest party in the country. However, SD still remains isolated because no other party is prepared to collaborate with it in government. Nevertheless, the political parties have taken different stances towards SD after the 2018 elections. The process of forming a government was complicated and put a (temporary) end to the two-bloc dynamics in Swedish politics. In 2019, the party leaders of the Christian Democratic Party and the Conservative Party met with SD and announced that they would cooperate in policies where they have shared interests, such as immigration, criminal policies, and nuclear power.

DF was established in 1995 by former members of the Progress Party who were dissatisfied with the weak organisation of their party. Pia Kjærsgaard was elected as the first party leader of DF. Her aim was to establish an anti-immigration and EU-sceptic political party that would be able to influence policy-making by building up an efficient and centralised party organisation. In the parliamentary elections of 1995, the party received 7.4 per cent of the vote, and DF acted as a support party to centre-right coalition governments from 2001 to 2011. From this position, DF was able to influence immigration policies. The party succeeded in growing its electoral support, which varied between 12 and 14 per cent in Denmark's parliamentary elections during the 2000s. In the 2015 parliamentary election, the party received 21.1 per cent of the vote and was the second largest party after the Social Democrats. Pia Kjærsgaard stepped aside after the 2011 election and was replaced by the new leader, Kristian Thulesen Dahl, who also was a founding member of DF.

With Thulesen Dahl, DF continued to primarily focus on nationalist and nativist approaches confronting “the Danish people” with respect to immigrants – especially Muslims – and the European Union (see Bächler & Hopmann, 2017). The party also adopted a more centrist socioeconomic position. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the electoral growth of DF came to a halt: DF received only 8.7 per cent of the vote and lost 21 seats. The mainstream parties both to the right and the left had adopted the immigration and migration policies of DF, and the Social Democrats, in particular, were successful in taking votes away from DF. Moreover, in the 2019 election, DF faced competition from two even more extreme parties – the New Right [Nye Borgerlige] and Hard Line [Stram Kurs].

The Finns Party, previously the True Finns [Perussuomalaiset] (PS) was likewise established in 1995 as a successor party to SMP. The long-standing

leader of the party, Timo Soini (1997–2017), was the last party secretary of SMP, carrying forward the original populist spirit of an agrarian “heartland” (Taggart, 2000). However, PS became electorally more popular only after Soini started to flirt with nationalist and nativist agitators, such as the late MP Tony Halme and party’s current leader, Jussi Halla-aho, who came to be known as a leading anti-immigration figure through his blog writings during the 2000s. PS enjoyed success in the 2008 local elections, but in “big bang” parliamentary elections of 2011, the party surprised everyone by receiving 19.1 per cent of the vote (Arter, 2012).

PS refused offers to join the government and remained in opposition, securing 17.7 per cent of popular support in the 2015 elections. However, after the 2015 elections, PS opted to participate in the conservative right-wing government. At the 2017 party conference, PS split when Jussi Halla-aho and his followers were elected as party leaders. Since then, PS has continued in opposition as a clearly radical right-wing party, whereas Soini and his followers remained in government, forming the new Blue Reform Party [Sininen tulevaisuus]. In the 2019 Finnish parliamentary elections, the Blue Reform Party did not receive any parliamentary seats. In turn, PS became the second largest parliamentary party, with 17.5 per cent of the vote, only 0.2 per cent less than the Social Democratic Party. In party polls taken in autumn 2019, PS showed a support rate of more than 24 per cent, making it the largest party in Finland.

In Norway, FrP was the most successful in the 2009 parliamentary elections, in which the party received almost 23 per cent of the vote with its new leader, Siv Jensen (2006–). According to opinion polls, support for the party topped 30 per cent in 2008, but the terrorist attacks perpetrated by Anders Behring Breivik in Oslo and on Utøya Island in the summer of 2011 had dampening effects on anti-immigrant rhetoric in the country (Figenschou & Beyer, 2014). However, even if it then lost some of its popularity, FrP remained the third largest party in 2013 and joined a minority government together with the Conservative Party [Høyre], supported by the Liberal Party [Venstre] and the Christian People’s Party [Kristelig Folkeparti]. The government reformed after the parliamentary elections of 2017, and the support parties were included as partners in the new government.

However, the internal level of conflict increased within government after the broadening of the governmental base, and FrP left the cabinet in January 2020. FrP could not accept the decision of the other three coalition parties to bring back to Norway a 29-year-old Norwegian woman with Pakistani background and her sick child – who had lived in the ISIS-controlled area of Syria – from the al-Hol detention camp. FrP perceived that it had been unsuccessful in obtaining support for tougher immigration and integration policies, such as the restriction of immigrants and family reunification. Support for FrP had dropped in the opinion polls and, now once again removed from governmental responsibility,



FrP could fight the 2021 election campaign as an opposition party. As such, with its 45-year lifespan and seven years in government, FrP has been the most long-lived successful populist party in the Nordic countries.

### Contemporary Nordic populism: Part of the radical right-wing-party family

Discussion about populism in the contemporary Nordic context is generally in reference to four nationally successful right-wing populist parties (see Table 12.1). Historically, the Nordic populist parties have ideologically converged and are today part of the Nordic, as well as the European, radical-right-party family (Jungar & Jupskås, 2014). They increasingly cooperate bilaterally and transnationally: SD, PS, and DF are members of the same party groups in the Nordic Council (Nordic Freedom), whereas they are currently divided in the European Parliament. Until the European elections of 2019, the parties were members of the Europe of Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). After the 2019 elections, SD remained in the ECR, whereas PS and DF joined the more radical Identity and Democracy group, which also includes the Lega (Italy), the National Rassemblement (France), and the Austrian Freedom Party. FrP refrains from collaborating with the other Nordic populist parties, as they are perceived as being too extreme. Instead, the party has had bilateral contacts with the Liberal Party in Denmark and the Republican Party in the US.

Iceland has not experienced right-wing populist movements similar to the other Nordic countries. Even if Iceland can be linked to similar media and political systems as Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland, the remarkably smaller size of the media market, its geographic location, and particular political tradition make Iceland somehow a different case than the other Nordic “democratic corporatist” countries (Hardarson, 2008; see also Ólafsson & Jóhannsdóttir, Chapter 3). However, just as populism in different forms surges in popularity in response to political and other types of crises, Icelandic populism has been connected especially to the collapse of the banking sector in 2008, which shocked the whole country. During the crisis, comedian Jón Gnarr strongly attacked Icelandic politicians and banks and won the local Reykjavik elections in 2010 as head of the satirically named Best Party [Besti flokkurinn]. Gnarr served as mayor of Reykjavik from 2010 to 2014, but his populism cannot be associated with that of radical right-wing parties in the other Nordic countries – it has rather been compared to the Italian comedian Giuseppe “Beppe” Grillo and the early Five Star Movement [Movimento 5 Stelle] with its strong demands for direct democracy (Boyer, 2013). The Progressive Party has also been called a representative of “softer version” of populism for its explicitly nationalist communication style after the 2008 crisis (Bergmann, 2015).

**Table 12.1** Contemporary right-wing populist parties in Nordic parliaments

	<b>Year established</b>	<b>First parliament representation</b>	<b>Party leaders</b>	<b>Last election results</b>	<b>Government/ opposition</b>
Norwegian Progress Party (FrP)	1973 (as Anders Lange's anti-taxation party)	1973 Votes: 5% Seats: 4	Siv Jensen (2006–) Carl I. Hagen (1978–2006)	(2017) Votes: 15.2% Seats: 27	Government (2013–2020)
Danish People's Party (DF)	1995 (1972 as Danish Progress Party)	1998 Votes: 7.4% Seats: 13	Kristian Thulesen Dahl (2012–) Pia Kjaersgaard (1995–2012)	(2019) Votes: 8.7% Seats: 16	Support party 2001–2011 and 2015–2019
Finns Party (PS)	1995 (1959 as Finnish Rural Party)	1995 Votes: 1% Seats: 1	Jussi Halla-aho (2017–) Timo Soini (1996–2017)	(2019) Votes: 17.5% Seats: 39	Opposition, government (2015–2017)
Sweden Democrats (SD)	1988	2010 Votes: 5.7% Seats: 20	Jimmie Åkesson (2005–) Mikael Jansson (1995–2005)	(2018) Votes: 17.5% Seats: 62	Opposition, cordon sanitaire

Source: Compiled by the authors

## Research on populism in the Nordic countries

A literature review on populism research in the four Nordic countries was carried out as part of a large-scale, COST-funded project (European Cooperation in Science and Technology), in which a communication perspective on populism was emphasised (Aalberg et al., 2017). The studies covered the period until 2015, and much has happened since then. However, the main arguments crystallised in the literature review are still valid for this chapter.

First, even though some theoretical efforts to conceptualise and define populism have appeared in the Nordic context (e.g., Jupskås, 2013), the majority of populism research has been empirical. As the authors of previous studies remind us, the Nordic definitions of populism vary from popular discourse's irresponsible vote-seeking strategies to more nuanced discussions of populism as ideology or style. However, in all countries, the definitions of populism rely most often on those proposed by key scholars of the topic, namely Cas Mudde, Paul Taggart, and Margaret Canovan (Jupskås et al., 2017). The definition of populism with perhaps the most widespread support among current Nordic populism researchers is presented by Mudde (2007: 23):

A thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.

However, the definition is often supplemented by the ideas of "heartland" (Taggart, 2000) – the nostalgic yearning for an idealised (national) past – and populism as a non-liberal "shadow of democracy" (Canovan, 1999). Likewise, Moffitt's (2017) ideas of populism as a political style have recently been applied by Nordic scholars.

Second, most of the research has been connected to the Nordic populist political parties discussed in the previous section. Thus, contemporary Nordic right-wing populist parties and their predecessors have been studied, for example, as part of election studies to find out how these parties can be defined ideologically in contrast to other parties, why these parties have been supported, and who votes for them (e.g., E. H. Allern, 2013; Jupskås, 2013; Klages, 2003; Rydgren, 2004; Widfeldt, 2008). In regard to these themes, comparative analyses between two or more countries have also been conducted (e.g., Jungar, 2017; Jungar & Jupskås, 2014; Rydgren, 2010; Widfeldt, 2014). During the early 2000s, Swedish researchers focused particularly on the "exceptionality of Sweden" in European party politics because no radical right-wing populist party had received many votes before the electoral success of SD in 2010 (Rydgren, 2002; see also Strömbäck et al., 2017).

Most of the above empirical studies can be categorised as an “ideational approach to populism” (Mudde, 2017). The main point behind the ideational approach is that populism is linked to ideologies or a “set of ideas”. With the ideational approach, populism is seen as a Manichean angle in relation to the political world, equating Good with “the will of the pure people” and Evil with a conspiring elite. According to the ideational approach, populism also stands in opposition to pluralism by emphasising the unity of the majority (Mudde, 2017).

The question of normativity is perhaps the most crucial issue separating different populism studies in the Nordic countries from each other. As already mentioned, much of the research treats populism rather neutrally as an empirical research subject, but some scholars take a more critical stance towards populism, seeing it as a negative phenomenon and even as a threat to democracy (see Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Some of the studies do not provide a definition for populism, but instead treat it as a commonplace idea referring to irresponsible vote-seeking strategies or even openly xenophobic rhetoric, while others identify populism with extreme right-wing movements and with historical connections to the totalitarian Nazi and Fascist regimes (see Müller, 2016). These kinds of approaches are common in popular scientific and politically-laden analyses (e.g., Baas, 2014) as well as in some academic studies (e.g., Pyrhönen, 2015). Such a normative perspective can be explained by the fact that contemporary populist parties in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Norway represent radical right-wing populism with exclusive anti-immigration attitudes, and populism in general is often associated with these attitudes.

Another specialty in the Nordic research on populism is an emphasis on Laclau’s (2005) populism theory among a group of Finnish scholars (e.g., Kovalainen et al., 2018; Palonen, 2009). As discussed in the beginning of the chapter, Laclau (2005) defines populism ontologically as a discursive process of political reasoning by which a group of people identifies as “the people” – as a total political agent – and antagonistically confronts other groups of the population, such as “the elite”. In this sense, Laclau’s definition is rather reminiscent of, for example, Mudde’s (2007) definition of populism and has also been linked to the ideational approach. However, what makes the Laclaudian tradition different from ideational approaches is its background in neo-Marxian radical democracy theory with strong normative emphases. Laclau developed together with Mouffe a theory of radical democracy in the late 1970s and early 1980s in which they associated progressive societal movements with populist discursive identification and signification processes (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Therefore, for Laclau and Mouffe, populism represents a positive possibility for societal change, political mobilisation, and challenging hegemonic power – even if Mouffe (2005) has also concerned herself with the negative effects of exclusive right-wing populism in the European political field.

## Media and communication studies' perspectives on populism

When it comes to the communication dimension of populism, the COST-project mentioned above emphasised such an approach and included almost all European countries in addition to the Nordic region (see Aalberg et al., 2017). Essential in the communication approach to populism is the fact that populism is understood as a specific type of communication rather than as particular movements, ideologies, or political actors. As such, almost all political agents can employ populist political communication, in which the main characteristics are people-centrism and an anti-elite appeal or discrimination against out-groups, such as immigrants or sexual and ethnic minorities (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). The empirical analyses of the COST-project have in particular included the Nordic countries Denmark, Norway, and Sweden (Reinemann et al., 2019).

Even though the communication perspective on populism as a specific and systematic approach is rather recent, several scholars have been studying the populist style of political communication in the Nordic countries for some time (e.g., Hatakka et al., 2017; Hellström & Hervik, 2014; Ylä-Anttila, 2017). Most of these studies have concentrated on the populist political communication of the new right-wing parties defined in the previous section. Some of the studies focus especially on the populist style and rhetoric of the populist right-wing party leaders (e.g., Klages, 2003; Niemi, 2013). However, current communication studies are increasingly focusing on the social media and online communication strategies of populist actors (e.g., Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2015).

Another important group of communication studies has specialised in the relationship between journalism – or “the media” – and populism. Extensive content analyses of the media attention given to the Nordic populist parties have been carried out especially in Sweden (Ljunggren & Nordstrand, 2010) and in Finland (Pernaa & Railo, 2012) after the groundbreaking election success of SD and PS in the early 2010s. Also, more theoretical and general approaches have been taken to the relationship between the media and populism (e.g., Andersson, 2010; Niemi & Houni, 2018). Herkman (2017) compared the media attention given to all four Nordic right-wing populist parties from the perspective of the so-called life-cycle model, in which the developments of the populist parties and resulting media attention are categorised via different life phases.

A common claim has been that populist politicians and leaders are charismatic, or at least expressive, in their communication style compared to other politicians. Indeed, some scholars have demonstrated the expressive power of, for example, the late leader of the Danish Progress Party, Mogens Glistrup (Klages, 2003), and the former leader of the Finns Party, Timo Soini (Niemi, 2013) – although, as Bächler and Hopmann (2017) argue, much of these discussions illustrate the populist communication style linked to the Nordic populist

parties in general rather than rely on systematic analysis. Instead, much of the communication analysis of the Nordic populist actors focuses more on their content or agenda than on their style. Especially in Denmark and Sweden, research has demonstrated how right-wing populist actors have concentrated on issues related to immigration and have had remarkable agenda-setting power in these debates (e.g., Hellström & Hervik, 2014; Rydgren, 2010). Some studies have also been carried out on gender (e.g., Norocel, 2013), demonstrating a general trend towards identity and morality-based framings in populist communication (e.g., Vigsø, 2012).

Expressive, morality-based communication is highly effective because it emphasises emotional public debates connected to populist actors. Wodak (2015: 19–20) uses the phrase “right-wing populist *perpetuum mobile*” to describe the tendency of these actors to use continuous provocations, such as insults and exaggerations, to gain public attention in the mainstream media. Analyses of the late leader of the Austrian Freedom Party, Jörg Haider, and Donald Trump prove the success of this kind of communication strategy in practice (e.g., Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017; Wodak, 2015). The number of public scandals linked to right-wing populist parties, especially in Finland and Sweden, also increased remarkably during the early 2010s, indicating the provocativeness of the Nordic populist communication style (Herkman, 2018). It seems that public scandals even contribute to the success of the movements because their supporters interpret scandals as “witch hunts” carried out by political and media elites.

Paradoxically, it seems that public scandals linked to FrP and PS have not decreased when these parties have become serious players in the governing cabinets, which can be explained by a “double-speech strategy” in which the leading figures of the parties appear to take a constructive approach and behave decently, whereas other party members appeal to the radical supporters with provocative and even insulting statements (e.g., Hatakka et al., 2017).

A common strategy of populist actors has also been to play the role of underdog in relation to the mainstream media by claiming that they receive, at least compared to other political parties, less and overly distorted media attention (Mazzoleni, 2008). However, the quantitative mappings of media coverage during the election campaigns demonstrate that the amount of media attention given to the Nordic right-wing populist parties has been relatively high (e.g., Ljunggren & Nordstrand, 2010; Pernaa & Railo, 2012), with the media quite often critically discussing the nationalist and nativist approaches promoted by these parties (Herkman, 2016).

There is some evidence that the popular press has been more positive towards domestic populist parties than the so-called prestige media (Herkman, 2017; Klages, 2003). In Norway, the commercial broadcaster has been seen as more populist and sympathetic to FrP than the public service broadcaster (Jupskås et

al., 2017). However, there are clear differences between the Nordic countries; Sweden has differed especially with almost exclusive critical media attention being focused on the domestic populist party SD, whereas in Denmark, Norway, and Finland, positive attention has also been promoted (Hellström & Hervik, 2014; Herkman, 2017).

As the liberal journalistic media tends to be critical of nationalism and the nativism promoted by the radical right-wing populist parties, social media has become a fruitful platform for their community formation and independent communication (Krämer, 2017). Several studies on the online communication of right-wing populist actors in the Nordic countries have found examples of more radical rhetoric (Hatakka, 2019; Sakki & Pettersson, 2016), direct appeals to the people (Niemi, 2013), and different platform strategies compared to mainstream parties (Larson & Kalsnes, 2014). However, the Nordic right-wing populist parties' online communication usually becomes more mainstream when they turn popular (cf. Karlsen & Skogerbø, 2015). In contrast, Hatakka's (2019) study demonstrates the tendency to polarisation and the strengthening of extreme voices in populist online communication. There is clearly still a need for further analyses of online communication linked to Nordic populist parties.

### Similarities between Nordic populist parties

The Nordic countries are typical representatives of consensual multiparty democracies based on the welfare state model. This may partly explain why populist parties have been successful for a long time in these political systems; the consensual establishment can easily be labelled a "corrupt elite" by populists. Even if some country-specific differences can be found, the Nordic countries have been characterised as examples of the so-called democratic corporatist model of political and media systems, in which a reliance on corporative consensual decision-making is scrutinised by a highly professional and autonomous commercial media accompanied by strong public service broadcasting (Strömbäck et al., 2008). Populism in the Nordic countries is generally not seen as offensive in style as in Southern and Eastern European countries, where politics is traditionally more confrontational. For example, according to the European Social Survey, the supporters of the Nordic populist parties are quite different than the supporters of extremist populist movements elsewhere, because the former support a democratic society and want to be integrated within it (Mesežnikov et al., 2008).

However, as the Nordic populist parties did not garner greater success until they began to intensively criticise immigration in the 1990s and especially the twenty-first century, they are not that different from other successful European right-wing populist parties belonging to the same radical right-wing-party fam-

ily. They combine authoritarian policies – anti-immigration, traditional family values, and demands for stricter policies on crime – with socioeconomic centrist positions, such as tax-based redistribution of wealth, welfare chauvinism, a state-regulated market, and protectionism (Jungar & Jupskås, 2014). Immigration and law and order are the most important issues for all four parties. For SD and PS, social and moral issues outrank economic policies, and in the case of DF they are roughly equal. FrP is the only party for which economic issues are significantly more important than social and moral policies, although still not as salient as immigration and law and order (Bakker et al., 2012).

In all four countries, some of the most radical members of the right-wing populist parties have also faced public scandals and even court cases for making racist or discriminatory statements (see Herkman, 2018). In general, the rhetoric promoted by these parties on, for example, immigration, does not differ from the rhetoric of other European populist right-wing players to the extent that it would be possible to agree that the parties are quite different. The whole Nordic system has obviously turned towards the liberal model with more market-driven media and polarised political communication than before, making provocative political communication increasingly more normal (Herkman, 2009; Ohlson, 2015). Let us also not forget the changes that digitalisation and the spread of social media have had on the Nordic media systems as well, making populist political communication more accessible and salient than before. In practice, the populist parties have also become more similar over the years, whereas the populist parties in Norway, Denmark, and Finland have turned from traditional anti-elite protest movements into nativist right-wing parties, and SD, for its part, has changed from a neo-Nazi extreme right-wing movement into a radical right-wing populist party (Jungar, 2017).

## Contextual differences in Nordic populism

In spite of the systemic, policy, and organisational similarities, there are differences between the populist political parties in the Nordic countries deriving from their different histories and particular political and cultural contexts. Since DF and FrP gained established positions in their domestic party systems earlier than PS and SD, they have somehow been normalised and become mainstream, whereas PS and especially SD are still particularities or anomalies in their political fields (Herkman, 2017). This applies especially to their parliamentary status and the media attention they receive.

The parliamentary experiences have also differed for the four Nordic parties. FrP joined a centre-right government 40 years after its formation, and in 2013, its experience with governing has been positive both in terms of policy and votes. FrP has been able to influence policy-making and has not experienced



any major incumbency effect in terms of its electoral support in government until recently. The governmental experience of PS has been quite different. PS joined a centre-right government after the parliamentary elections of 2015. As the party had to compromise on immigration, bailouts to euro-zone countries, and cutbacks in welfare provisions, its electoral support decreased rapidly, and the party split when Jussi Halla-aho was elected as party leader in 2017. The cordon sanitaire that was put on PS in 2017 has remained. However, such isolation was no obstacle to PS's success in the 2019 parliamentary elections. The fact that PS's party organisation remained intact after the split, that the party maintained its economic resources, and that it could benefit from being in the opposition are obvious explanations for its electoral fortunes.

When DF was formed in 1995 as a splinter of the Danish Progress Party, the main ambition of the party leader, Pia Kjærsgaard, was to form a well-organised party that could influence policy-making. Between 2001–2011 and 2015–2019, DF acted as a support party to centre-right minority governments. This parliamentary position allowed the party to influence Danish immigration and migration policies, which transformed radically during this period – without experiencing the electoral costs of governmental incumbency. This was the case until the latest parliamentary elections of 2019, in which DF suffered an electoral setback due to both increased competition from the mainstream parties that have adapted to the immigration policies of the DF and from the new, more extreme parties.

SD has been met with an isolationist strategy, a so-called cordon sanitaire, since it made its parliamentary breakthrough in 2010. Its historic origins in extremism and radical immigration policies have been the motivations for the refusal to negotiate with SD. However, with the continued electoral growth of the party and the resulting blackmailing position of SD, the process of forming a government has become quite complicated in Sweden: neither the left-green coalition nor the centre-right alliance control a proper majority anymore. However, the isolationist strategy has not prevented the electoral growth of SD nor the indirect influence of SD on agenda-setting or other political players increasingly adapting to SD's immigration policies. These kinds of contextual differences also explain the different levels of media attention that the four Nordic populist parties receive, because political publicity is inherently linked to such party parameters as government opposition positions and minister offices.

Contextual differences also partly explain the different stances of the domestic populist players in public political communication. Even if several public com-motions have been linked to DF, SD, and PS, Herkman's (2018) study shows that between 2005–2015 only one of those affairs turned into a national scandal with longstanding and wide-ranging media attention in Denmark, whereas in Sweden and Finland they resulted in several large national scandals. Herkman (2018) explains the result by the differences in political cultures, in which the

Danish context is seen as more tolerant of nativist provocations than, for example, the Swedish or Finnish contexts. Several studies have demonstrated that so-called media populism (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2014), in which the Danish media bolsters the confrontation between ordinary citizens and the political elite and uses us-against-them appeals, has been common in Denmark (see Bächler & Hopmann, 2017). Another reason for the greater tolerance and normalisation of anti-immigration rhetoric in Denmark compared to the other Nordic countries may reside in the legacy of the Muhammad cartoon crisis, which was a decisive and repoliticising event for Danish political communication in 2005–2006 (Esmark & Ørsten, 2008).

The overall analysis of political scandals in the Nordic region also reveals that Sweden has been more fertile soil for scandals compared to other Nordic countries during the 2000s, indicating less tolerance for misconduct in political culture and a more aggressive media (S. Allern et al., 2012). However, at the same time, Swedish political communication has been called “politics friendly”, meaning that it focuses rather seriously on daily politics (Strömbäck & Nord, 2008: 118). This has anchored the Swedish media to the political cordon sanitaire against the SD and can be seen in comparative studies, illustrating that DF, FrP, and PS are more similar to other political parties than SD in terms of the media attention they receive (Hellström & Hervik, 2014; Herkman, 2017).

Norway differs from other Nordic countries in the sense that even if most Norwegian scholars tend to agree that FrP can be categorised as a populist party (Jupskås et al., 2017), the term populism has not been connected as eagerly to the party, and populism has often been located somewhere other than Norway (Herkman, 2016). The long history of FrP and its participation in government have gradually normalised the party, making it more reminiscent of traditional conservative right-wing movements than its Nordic counterparts – even if FrP’s strong emphasis on a nativist anti-immigration approach clearly connects it to the populist radical right-wing-party family and to other contemporary populist parties in the Nordic countries (see Jungar & Jupskås, 2014). Some analyses have indicated that the nationalist-patriotic appeals to the people might be more common in the Norwegian party system than in other Nordic countries (Jupskås, 2013), thus making a populist communication style perhaps more legitimate in Norway than in other Nordic countries.

### Conclusion: Challenges in populism research

The success of right-wing populist movements indicates in part the radical challenges to and changes in the formerly rather enduring party systems of the Nordic countries (Arter, 2012). It is important to be sensitive to these transformations

by approaching them through multiple theoretical perspectives involving both institutional and cultural dimensions. Acknowledging at least three challenges is essential for the future understanding of and research on Nordic populism: 1) the ambiguities in definitions of populism, 2) the normative challenges caused by populism, and 3) the changing media environment.

One of the biggest challenges in populism research in general is the ambiguity in the very definition of populism, which contributes to difficulties in operationalisations of empirical research design. Therefore, scholars debate which political actors should be called populist and by what means. The debate on whether FrP is a populist party or not indicates this problem in the Nordic context, where right-wing populist parties have gained a rather established position and started to become normal players in their political field. Furthermore, there are scholars who claim that many of the right-wing radical parties currently called populist should rather be called nationalist – at least from a Laclaudian perspective (Stavrakakis et al., 2017). This also applies to the Nordic region, where traditional anti-elitist populism has been transformed into ethno-nationalist efforts to exclude outgroups such as immigrants. Therefore, there is also still a clear need for context-sensitive theorisations on populism in Nordic academia.

Secondly, the question of normativity in populism research derives from the challenge, and even threat, that the right-wing populist parties obviously pose to liberal-democratic values such as equality, basic human rights, and especially minority rights, making many scholars critical of (radical-right) populism in general and the associated political parties in particular (see Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). However, this may lead to one-dimensional interpretations and self-evident results in the research. Thus, more reflection is also needed regarding normative assumptions linked to populism in the Nordic context. The communication approach to populism may serve as one way out of these challenges (Aalberg et al., 2017), but combining it with ideational and cultural approaches may also create a new understanding of normative approaches to Nordic populism in the future (e.g., Hatakka, 2019).

Finally, the simultaneous rapid transformation of the media and communication environment renders the relationship between populism and the media even more complicated, demanding of scholars new skills to empirically study and theoretically understand populist communication in the contemporary “hybrid media system” (Chadwick, 2013). The changes in the media environment have helped populist movements enjoy more success and become more mainstream or normalised in their political field. Furthermore, all these changes together may transform the overall political climate and culture in ways that will have more devastating consequences for Nordic political life than we can perhaps imagine today.

## References

- Aalberg, T., Esser, F., Reinemann, C., Strömbäck, J., & De Vreese, C. (Eds.). (2017). *Populist political communication in Europe*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623016>
- Allern, E. H. (2013). The contemporary relationship of 'New Left' and 'New Right' parties with interest groups: Exceptional or mainstream? The case of Norway's Socialist Left and Progress Party. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 36(1), 67–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2012.00297.x>
- Allern, S., Kantola, A., Pollack E., & Blach-Ørsten, M. (2012). Increased scandalization: Nordic political scandals 1980–2010. In S. Allern, & E. Pollack (Eds.), *Scandalous! The mediated construction of political scandals in four Nordic countries* (pp. 29–50). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Andersen, J. G., & Bjørklund, T. (2000). Radical right-wing populism in Scandinavia: From tax-revolt to neo-liberalism and xenophobia. In P. Hainsworth (Ed.), *The politics of extreme right: From the margins to the mainstream* (pp. 193–223). London: Pinter.
- Andersson, C. (2010). Populism och journalistik – stadigt sällskap eller tillfällig bekantskap? [Populism and journalism – a stable relationship or an affair?]. *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 112(3), 271–278. <https://journals.lub.lu.se/st/article/view/8219/7355>
- Arter, D. (2012). 'Big bang' elections and party system change in Scandinavia: Farewell to the 'enduring party system'? *Parliamentary Affairs*, 65(4), 822–844. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsr050>
- Baas, D. (2014). *Bevara Sverige svenskt: Ett reportage om Sverigedemokraterna* [Keep Sweden Swedish: Report on Sweden Democrats]. Stockholm: Bonnier.
- Bakker, R., De Vries, C., Edwards, E., Hooghe, L., Jolly, S., Marks, G., ... Vachudova, M. (2012). Measuring party positions in Europe: The Chapel Hill expert survey trend file, 1999–2010. *Party Politics*, 21(1), 143–152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068812462931>
- Bergmann, E. (2015). Populism in Iceland: Has the Progressive Party turned populist? *Icelandic Review of Politics and Administration*, 11(1), 33–54. <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.11815/127>
- Boyer, D. (2013). Simply the best: Parody and political sincerity in Iceland. *American Ethnologist*, 40(2), 276–287. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12020>
- Bächler, C. M., & Hopmann, D. N. (2017). Denmark: The rise of Danish People's Party. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. De Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 29–41). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623016>
- Canovan, M. (1999). Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy. *Political Studies*, 47(1), 2–16. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.00184>
- Canovan, M. (2005). *The people*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>
- Esmark, A., & Ørsten, M. (2008). Media and politics in Denmark. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 25–43). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Figenschou, T. U., & Beyer, A. (2014). The limits of the debate: How Oslo terror shook the Norwegian immigration debate. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19(4), 430–452. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161214542954>
- Groshek, J., & Koc-Michalska, M. (2017). Helping populism win? Social media use, filter bubbles, and support for populist presidential candidates in the 2016 US election campaign. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(9), 1389–1407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1329334>
- Hardarson, Ó. T. (2008). Media and politics in Iceland. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 63–82). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Hatakka, N. (2019). *Populism in the hybrid media system: populist radical right online counter-publics interacting with journalism, party politics, and citizen activism*. Turku, Finland: University of Turku. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-29-7793-2>
- Hatakka, N., Niemi, M. K., & Välimäki, M. (2017). Confrontational yet submissive: Calculated ambivalence and populist parties' strategies of responding to racism accusations in the media. *Discourse & Society*, 28(3), 262–280. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926516687406>

- Hellström, A., & Hervik, P. (2014). Feeding the beast: Nourishing nativist appeals in Sweden and in Denmark. *International Migration & Integration*, 15(3), 449–467. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-013-0293-5>
- Herkman, J. (2009). The structural transformation of the democratic corporatist model: The case of Finland. *Javnost – The Public*, 16(4), 73–90. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2009.11009015>
- Herkman, J. (2016). Construction of populism: Meanings given to populism in the Nordic press. *Nordicom Review*, 37(Special Issue), 147–161. [https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/kapitel-pdf/10.1515\\_nor-2016-0029.pdf](https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/kapitel-pdf/10.1515_nor-2016-0029.pdf)
- Herkman, J. (2017). The life cycle model and press coverage of Nordic populist parties. *Journalism Studies*, 18(4), 430–448. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2015.1066231>
- Herkman, J. (2018). Old patterns on new clothes? Populism and political scandals in the Nordic countries. *Acta Sociologica*, 61(4), 341–355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001699317737816>
- Jagers, J., & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research*, 46(3), 319–345. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00690.x>
- Jungar, A.-C. (2017). *Populism i Norden: Från marginalen mot den politiska mittfåran* [Populism in the Nordic countries: From the margin to the political middle ground]. Helsinki: Tank-esmedjan Agenda.
- Jungar, A.-C., & Jupskås, A. R. (2014). Populist radical right parties in the Nordic region: A new and distinct party family? *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37(3), 215–238. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12024>
- Jupskås, A. R. (2013). In the name of the people! Contemporary populism(s) in Scandinavia. In S. Gherghina, S. Mişcoiu, & S. Soare (Eds.), *Contemporary populism: A controversial concept and its diverse forms* (pp. 258–293). Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Jupskås, A. R., Ivarsflaten, E., Kalsnes, B., & Aalberg, T. (2017). Norway: Populism from anti-tax movement to government party. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, J., & C. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 54–67). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623016>
- Karlsen, R., & Skogerbø, E. (2015). Candidate campaigning in parliamentary systems: Individualized vs. localized campaigning. *Party Politics*, 21(3), 428–439. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068813487103>
- Klages, E. P. (2003). Populisme eller hvad: Fremskridtspartiet og Dansk Folkeparti som reaktioner på politics as usual [Populism or something else: Progress Party and Danish People's Party as reactions against politics as usual]. *Politica: Tidsskrift for Politisk Videnskab*, 35(4), 402–412.
- Kovala, U., Palonen, E., Ruotsalainen, M., & Saresma, T. (Eds.). (2018). *Populism on the loose*. Jyväskylä, Finland: Jyväskylän yliopisto.
- Krämer, B. (2017). Populist online practices: The function of the Internet in right-wing populism. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(9), 1293–1309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2017.1328520>
- Laclau, E. (2005). *On populist reason*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, E., & Mouffe, C. (1985). *Hegemony & socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.
- Larson, A. O., & Kalsnes, B. (2014). 'Of course we are on Facebook': Use and non-use of social media among Swedish and Norwegian politicians. *European Journal of Communication*, 29(6), 653–667. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323114531383>
- Ljunggren, S.-B., & Nordstrand, J. (2010). *Sverigedemokraterna och medierna: Valet 2010 och den mediala målkonflikten* [Sweden Democrats and the media: 2010 elections and the conflict of media interests]. Stockholm: Timbro medieinstitut.
- Mazzoleni, G. (2008). Populism and the media. In D. Albertazzi, & D. McDonnell (Eds.), *Twenty-first century populism: The spectre of Western European democracy* (pp. 49–64). Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9780230592100>
- Mazzoleni, G. (2014). Mediatization and political populism. In F. Esser, & J. Strömbäck (Eds.), *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of western democracies* (pp. 42–56). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137275844>

- Mesežnikov, G., Gyárfásova, O., & Smilov, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Populist politics and liberal democracy in Central and Eastern Europe* [Working paper]. Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs. [http://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs/publikacie/subory/Populist\\_politics.pdf](http://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs/publikacie/subory/Populist_politics.pdf)
- Moffitt, B. (2017). *The global rise of populism: Performance, political style, and representation*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. <http://www.sup.org/books/title?id=25175>
- Mouffe, C. (2005). The 'end of politics' and the challenge of right-wing populism. In F. Panizza (Ed.), *Populism in the mirror of democracy* (pp. 50–71). London: Verso.
- Mudde, C. (2007). *Populist radical right parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037>
- Mudde, C. (2017). Populism: An ideational approach. In C. R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. O. Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of populism* (pp. 27–47). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.001.0001>
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2012). Populism and (liberal) democracy: A framework for analysis. In C. Mudde, & C. R. Kaltwasser (Eds.), *Populism in Europe and Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy?* (pp. 1–26). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139152365>
- Müller, J.-W. (2016). *What is populism?* Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.
- Niemi, M. K. (2013). The True Finns identity politics and populist leadership on the threshold of the party's electoral triumph. *Javnost – The Public*, 20(3), 77–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2013.11009121>
- Niemi, M. K., & Houni, T. (Eds.). (2018). *Media ja populismi: Työkaluja kriittiseen journalismiin* [Media and populism: Tools for critical journalism]. Tampere: Vastapaino.
- Norocel, O. C. (2013). Konstruktionen av högerradikala maskuliniteter i Sverige: En feministisk analys [Construction of radical right-wing masculinities in Sweden: A feminist analysis]. *Arkiv, Tidskrift för samhällsanalys*, 2, 45–67. <http://dx.doi.org/10.13068/2000-6217.2.2>
- Ohlson, J. (2015). *The Nordic media market*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Palonen, E. (2009). Political polarisation and populism in contemporary Hungary. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 62(2), 318–334. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsn048>
- Pernaa, V., & Railo, E. (Eds.). (2012). *Jytty: Eduskuntavaalien 2011 mediajulkisuus* [Big Bang elections: Media and the 2011 national election]. Turku, Finland: Turun yliopisto/Kirja-Aurora.
- Pyrhönen, N. (2015). *The true colors of Finnish welfare nationalism: Consolidation of neo-populist advocacy as a resonant collective identity through mobilization of exclusionary narratives of blue-and-white solidarity*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki. <http://hdl.handle.net/10138/232329>
- Reinemann, C., Stanyer, J., Aalberg, T., Esser, F., & De Vreese, C. (Eds.). (2019). *Communicating populism: Comparing actor perceptions, media coverage, and effects on citizens in Europe*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429402067>
- Rydgren, J. (2002). Radical right populism in Sweden: Still a failure, but for how long? *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 25(1), 27–56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.00062>
- Rydgren, J. (2004). Explaining the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties: The case of Denmark. *West European Politics*, 27(3), 474–502. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0140238042000228103>
- Rydgren, J. (2010). Radical right-wing populism in Denmark and Sweden: Explaining party system change and stability. *The SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 30(1), 57–71. <https://www.doi.org/10.1353/sais.0.0070>
- Sakki, I., & Pettersson, K. (2016). Discursive construction of otherness in populist radical right political blogs. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 46(2), 156–170. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2142>
- Stavarakakis, Y., Katsambekis, G., Nikisianis, N., Kioukliolis, A., & Siomos, T. (2017). Extreme right-wing populism in Europe: Revisiting a reified association. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 14(4), 420–439. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2017.1309325>
- Strömbäck, J., Jungar, A.-C., & Dahlberg, S. (2017). Sweden: No more a European exception. In T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck, & C. de Vreese (Eds.), *Populist political communication in Europe* (pp. 68–81). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315623016>
- Strömbäck, J., & Nord, L. W. (2008). Media and politics in Sweden. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 103–121). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

- Strömbäck, J., Ørsten, M., & Aalberg, T. (Eds.). (2008). *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Taggart, P. (2000). *Populism*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Vigsø, O. (2012). Moralpolitik og marketing: Dansk Folkepartis brug af pressemeddelelser [Moral politics and marketing: The Danish People's Party's use of press releases]. *Mediekultur*, 28(52), 153–172. <https://doi.org/10.7146/mediekultur.v28i52.4317>
- Widfeldt, A. (2008). Party change as a necessity – the case of the Sweden Democrats. *Representation*, 44(3), 265–276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344890802237031>
- Widfeldt, A. (2014). *Extreme right parties in Scandinavia*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203403334>
- Wodak, R. (2015). *The politics of fear: What populist right-wing discourses mean?* London: Sage.
- Ylä-Anttila, T. (2017). *The populist toolkit: Finnish populism in action 2007–2016*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.





## Chapter 13

# Right-wing alternative media in the Scandinavian political communication landscape

Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk & Silje Nygaard

### Abstract

The competition to set the public agenda has become increasingly tough. In this chapter, we explore the role of right-wing alternative media. This kind of news provider constitutes a relatively modest, but distinct, actor in the Scandinavian political communication landscape. Several sites have managed to gain attention through successful social media strategies and controversial reporting, often focusing on topics like immigration, crime, and Islam. In this chapter, we outline how alternative media are conceptualised and theorised in the literature, and how the boundaries between professional and alternative media are drawn and negotiated. Pointing to studies conducted in a Nordic context, we outline key characteristics of the right-wing alternative media scene in Scandinavia. From a research perspective, we argue that there are notable challenges associated with research on right-wing alternative media which are particularly related to fluidity, moving targets, and methodological limitations.

**Keywords:** alternative media, right-wing, boundaries, immigration, ethics

### Introduction

Criticised and contested by some, celebrated and consumed by others, the rise of what has been termed “right-wing media” (Benkler et al., 2018) or “right-wing alternative media” (Holt, 2020) has caused public debates in both Nordic and Western contexts. Critics emphasise the populist, low-quality, sensationalist, and sometimes hateful content found on some of these sites, fearing that they contribute to increased polarisation, distrust, and racism in society. Supporters, on the other hand, argue that such media provide original perspectives and new voices on key issues – like crime, immigration, and Islam – that are not covered by the mainstream press (Nygaard, 2020).

While right-wing alternative media may be a relatively small phenomenon in comparison to the scope and impact of established media, such actors have

managed to exert increasing influence on the public agenda in hybrid digital media systems through active social media strategies and controversial reporting (Chadwick, 2013; Larsson, 2019; Sandberg & Ihlebæk, 2019). We argue that exploring this phenomenon is important, because it informs the discussion on how the boundaries between professionals and amateurs, and legitimate and deviant actors have become increasingly difficult to discern in the current political communication environment, and how fierce the competition for attention and authority has become.

In this chapter, we particularly focus on right-wing alternative media that engages in the production of news, including current affairs, commentaries, and analyses (Harcup, 2005; Harcup & O’Neill, 2001). We first outline how alternative media have been conceptualised and theorised in the literature. Further, we address how the boundaries between the professional and the alternative have been drawn and point out the key actors central to the process of creating such boundaries. We use theoretical dimensions to look more closely at the right-wing alternative media scene in the Scandinavian region and describe key features of selected sites. Finally, we discuss the notable challenges in the field, particularly those relating to conceptual fluidity, moving targets, and methodological limitations.

## Right-wing alternative media – theoretical approaches

There has been a remarkable proliferation of content producers in today’s high-choice online media environment, blurring the lines between what we understand as professional and amateur production, and between producers and consumers (Bruns, 2005). The drastic transformation of who can produce and distribute content represents, on the one hand, a form of democratisation, as the agenda-setting power of the mainstream media is challenged. On the other hand, concerns have deepened about the impact of partisan and alternative news providers, as well as disinformation and “fake news” (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Benkler et al., 2018; Kalsnes, 2019; Leung & Lee, 2014; Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Tandoc et al., 2018). As Holt (2020) points out, the latter should in general not be used to describe right-wing alternative media. Even though misleading content might occur on some sites, it is more often a case of partisan news rather than content that is made up to intentionally mislead the audiences. Essentially, the fundamental questions at stake are: Who sets the agenda in an increasingly hybrid and complex media sphere? And, which actors are conceived as reliable or trustworthy by particular user groups?

The term “alternative media” signifies producers of content that represent something different from the established media. A core question is what constitutes the quality of being “alternative” (Atton, 2002a). It must be stressed from

the start that such distinctions are not easily drawn; it requires approaching the question as continuous boundary-work in the field of news production (Carlson, 2015, 2017; Singer, 2015; Witschge et al., 2018). Several authors stress that it is not a matter of either-or; rather, it is possible to approach mainstream–alternative as a continuum (Harcup, 2005; Holt et al., 2019).

Traditionally, academic interest in alternative media was concerned primarily with initiatives that arose from left-wing activism taking the form of amateur production of magazines, newspapers, films, documentaries, and radio programmes (Atkinson, 2008; Atton, 2002a; Atton, 2002b; Downing, 2001; Fuchs, 2010). Spurred by anti-globalist or anti-capitalist positions, alternative media criticised the traditional media for being elitist, hierarchically organised, and removed from the people – participatory grassroots initiatives were encouraged and applauded. Inspired by social movement theories, studies of alternative media focused on key concepts, such as citizen empowerment, participation and inclusion, and social change (Atton, 2002a; Fuchs, 2010; Haas, 2004). Atkinson and Berg (2012: 520) described alternative media as a form of “resistance performance” and pointed out that “activist organisations utilize alternative media to build worldviews concerning power, to construct strategies for resistance against such power, and to coordinate with other organizations”. Alternative media, from this perspective, should ideally function as a counter-sphere and challenge the mainstream media with their intimate ties to political and economic elites. Haas’s (2004: 115) definition of alternative media also builds on this approach: “Media devoted to providing representations of issues and events which oppose those offered in the mainstream media and to advocating social and political reform”.

In the last decade, online alternative media initiatives have been increasingly identified as coming from right-wing to far-right and extreme positions (Atton, 2006; Benkler et al., 2018; Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019; Haanshuus & Ihlebæk, 2019; Heft et al., 2020; Holt, 2020; Padovani, 2016). Describing alternative media as “right-wing” or “far-right” alludes to certain shared ideological ideas reflecting the political field, even though alternative media sites may not have direct political ties (Heft et al., 2020). Scholars have pointed out nationalism and authoritarianism as central denominators that are commonly shared by actors placed on the right-wing of the political scale, as well as a conservative stance on sociocultural matters (Jungar & Jupskås, 2014; Rydgren, 2018). More extreme far-right positions also include outright racism, xenophobia, fascism, anti-Semitism, and anti-democratic sentiments (Carter, 2018; Mudde, 1995). Studies on what has been characterised as right-wing alternative media sites emphasise similar traits. In particular, a shared and distinct anti-systemness, as well as profound scepticism, or even hostility, towards immigrants, Muslims, left-wing elites, and the mainstream media, is common (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019; Heft et al., 2020; Holt, 2020). As some of the outlets tend to foster

cultural divisions, racism, and hate, scholars have disagreed on whether the radical and extreme far-right initiatives should be termed “alternative” at all, taking into account the traditional focus on inclusion and democratisation (Atton, 2006).

To overcome the obstacles related to different ideological stances in alternative media, Holt and colleagues (2019: 863) propose a non-normative relational understanding of alternative media and suggest that “alternative news media represent a proclaimed and/or (self) perceived corrective, opposing the overall tendency of public discourse emanating from what is perceived as the dominant mainstream media in a given system”. Essential in this definition is that “alternativeness” is a strategic label used predominantly by the actors in question to signalise a position. However, the authors also argue that the label can be applied by others, including audiences, researchers, politicians, or competitors. For the definition to have any analytical value, then, it is necessary to clearly outline from which position the label “alternative” is used and why. As a form of self-positioning, a prerequisite is that alternative media are critical of the mainstream media and of professional journalism’s methods and set out to present an alternative. From an empirical point of view, the self-ascribed role can be identified in the way the sites write about themselves, or through interviews and public statements. In addition, Holt and colleagues (2019) argue that different forms of “alternativeness” can be studied on a micro, meso, or macro level. On a macro level, they state that the boundaries between alternative or professional can be analysed by investigating elements such as inclusion versus exclusion in press support systems, adherence to institutionalised press ethics, and membership in professional organisations. On a meso level, they suggest looking at organisations, for instance, by studying the size, structure, and business model of the sites and their particular production practices. On a micro level, the authors recommend studying the people involved by scrutinising their professional background and motivations for taking part, as well as looking at the content produced. Holt and colleagues (2019) further argue that these dimensions are not mutually constitutive and that multiple combinations of alternativeness across these dimensions are possible. Thus, a weakness of the approach is that it does not consider how to compare the different dimensions against each other, a point we will discuss in the conclusion. To assign alternatives to their proper places on the ideological left- to right-wing scale requires specific markers characteristic for right-wing or left-wing positions (Heft et al., 2020).

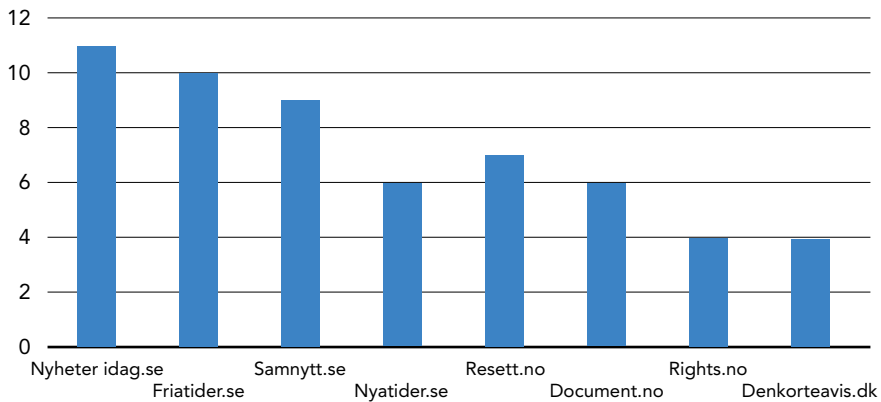
In the following, we explore key characteristics of right-wing alternative sites in a Scandinavian context and outline findings from the relatively few studies that have been conducted. We begin by referring to the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2019), which provides comparative data on readership of what they term “other online news brands”. The

survey is helpful because it demonstrates how widespread the phenomenon is in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, and also identifies key actors that have managed to attract an audience. It is worth mentioning that due to the low barrier of entry into the online environment, new alternative news initiatives emerge and disappear quickly. To achieve a full overview of all actors in the field is thus difficult.

## Readership and trust

There are more Swedish right-wing alternative news sites included in the survey than Norwegian or Danish (see Figure 13.1) (Newman et al., 2019). This may indicate that the phenomenon is more widespread in Sweden than in the other two countries, in line with findings of other studies (Holt, 2020). The survey also shows that more people reported having heard of the Swedish sites and they have a higher number of site visitors compared to Norwegian and Danish sites (see the report for details). The reason for this disparity is difficult to know, but it may be related to the wider political and cultural context of immigration (a point to be covered in more detail in the conclusion).

**Figure 13.1** Readership of key alternative news sites in Scandinavia (per cent)



*Comment:* The figures show reading on a weekly basis.

*Source:* Newman et al., 2019

Figure 13.1 shows that 11 per cent of Swedes reported that they had used *Nyheter Idag*, 10 per cent reported using *Fria Tider*, 9 per cent *Samhällsnytt*, and 6 per cent *Nya Tider*. In Norway, the study showed that 7 per cent reported weekly use of *Resett*, while the use of *Document* (6%) and *Human Rights Service* (4%) is somewhat lower. In Denmark, which has the lowest presence of right-wing-leaning alternative media, 4 per cent reported weekly use of *Den Korte Avis*.

The survey further gauged brand trust. Respondents were asked how trustworthy they considered the news received from a specific brand. A 0-point score was counted for the option “not at all trustworthy”, ranging up to 10 points for “completely trustworthy”. In all three countries, the alternative media sites included in the survey scored significantly lower than legacy news media sites among respondents who reported that they had heard of the brand. Those who had heard of the Swedish alternative media outlets scored their trustworthiness from 4.10 (*Fria Tider*) to 5.06 (*Nyheter Idag*) in contrast to the public service broadcaster SVT, which scored 6.59 points. The Norwegian outlet *Document* scored 4.70 and *Resett* 4.35, while the Norwegian public service broadcaster NRK, scored 7.50 points. The Danish outlet *Den Korte Avis* scored 4.64 in comparison to Danmarks Radio’s 7.68 (Newman et al., 2019). Observing trust scores given by those who routinely use the brand, the scores are clearly much higher and the differentiation between alternative and legacy news sites is much lower (for more details, see Newman et al., 2019). This reflects that stronger processes of polarisation are at play when using alternative media than when using established media.

Currently, reasons for using and engaging with alternative media in a Nordic context is to a large degree unexplored, however, international studies have indicated that political affiliation and attitudes towards immigration play a part (Ihlebak & Holter, 2020; Schulze, 2020). Some studies point out that audiences of alternative media tend to be active on social media, and consequently, alternative media sites gain relatively high scores on social media engagement (Larsson, 2019; Sandberg & Ihlebak, 2019). In a notable study conducted by Noppari and colleagues (2019), the authors suggest three profiles of right-wing alternative media users in Finland: system sceptics, agenda critics, and the casually discontent. System sceptics are characterised by a “broad systemic-level suspicion” and mistrust of elites, including journalists, who are viewed as a tool the powerful use to maintain power and repress opponents (Noppari, 2019: 29). Agenda critics share a hostile view of media elites whom they believe have a political agenda that leads to biased reporting, and that alternative media are needed to ensure diversity. They seek more dialogue and a more legitimate position in public discussions. The casually discontent think some individual journalists cause bias; this group consumes alternative news mostly to gain additional information, as well as for fun and entertainment (Noppari et al., 2019). In sum, the authors found that users of alternative media “made active, affective, and conscious choices to consume and engage with material that contradicts the agenda and views of the dominant public sphere and promoted strong ideological stances expressed via populist address” (Noppari et al., 2019: 33). They conclude that more attention should be given to the manner in which media trust and mistrust are negotiated among different user groups, and how distrust is used by some alternative media sites to mobilise particular groups of citizens.

## Self-ascribed role

As outlined above, a key element in identifying right-wing alternative media is to first explore how they position themselves as an alternative, and in addition analyse ideological markers on specific sites to illuminate left-wing to right-wing positions (Heft et al., 2020; Holt et al., 2019). Empirically, this can be done through conducting interviews with those involved or through content analysis of their websites, more specifically how they describe themselves in the “about us” section or the content they produce. Also, it is possible to investigate ideological features by investigating the use of topical tags or by investigating what they write about and how it is framed. In the context of this chapter, which focuses on right-wing media, common topical tags could for instance be “immigration”, “crime”, or “media criticism” (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2018; Holt, 2016a; Sandberg & Ihlebæk, 2019).

Examining more closely the motivations stated on a selection of sites in each country in Scandinavia (see Table 13.1) reveals that the general tendency in all three Scandinavian countries is for such media actors to place themselves in opposition to – or as an alternative to – mainstream sources. In other words, most sites self-declare that they want to be an alternative in one way or the other – emphasising that they represent something different. However, this can be expressed in different ways and to different degrees.

*Fria Tider* stands out, as it does not disclose any information about its motivation. However, they have a revealing slogan connected to their subscription service, and their founder, Widar Nord, has previously argued that a principal motivation is to represent a “counterpart to the established Swedish media”, and that their strategy is to “watch what the established media do, and then do the opposite” [translated] (Nord, 2012: para. 5). Looking more into ideological features, and in particular key characteristics important to the political right, such as anti-elitism, immigration, Islam, and crime, only two outlets refer to immigration in their motivations – Norwegian *Human Rights Service* and Danish *Den Korte Avis*. The same pattern is also visible in the use of topical tags featured on the site. Looking more closely at the news published on their front pages makes it clear that many sites write extensively about immigration and crime. However, to be able to identify the actors more specifically on a right-wing to far-right scale, a more comprehensive analysis of content, frames, angles, language, and pictures is needed. This points to the importance of combining different approaches when identifying ideological positions of alternative media.

Currently, few studies have explored the motives of Scandinavian right-wing alternative media sites through interviews. An exception is the nation-specific interview study conducted by Holt (2016a). The study shows that a common motivation for editors and writers is to enlighten the Swedish public on matters they perceive as problematic and even dangerous consequences of immigration.

**Table 13.1** *Self-ascribed roles of selected right-wing alternative media outlets*

	Motivation	Topical tags
<b>Norway</b>		
Document	To challenge the consensus-driven “established media” and to provide independent information as “the voice of freedom and reason that breaks free from the echo chamber and noise”.	foreign affairs, culture
Human Rights Service	“To collect documentation, information, and analysis to shed light on different sides in the field of immigration and integration”.	immigration, Islam, crime, women and equality, politics, statistics, free speech
Resett	“To work for democracy and freedom of speech [, ...] to be critical towards the power and fight for those who are not easily heard. This implies to criticize and be an alternative to the established media”.	foreign affairs, culture and satire, lifestyle, sports, economy
<b>Sweden</b>		
Fria Tider	Slogan: “Give the Swedish media the finger”.	economy, science, culture, law and order, domestic and foreign affairs, politics, media, EU, investigative
Nyheter Idag	To “report news on politics, gossip, social media and foreign news [...] based on libertarian principles”.	Sweden, politics, economy, world, culture, sports
Samhällsnytt	To “specialize in the areas where the established media exhibit omissions”.	domestic affairs, foreign affairs, culture, science
<b>Denmark</b>		
Den Korte Avis	“To provide a wide range of topics to their readers, including politics, economy, immigration and integration, health, social conditions, culture and foreign policy”. These topics will be covered in a “short, clear and sharp form”.	politics, crime, immigration, humans
NewSpeak Networks	To be “an independent media outlet without any hidden agendas”.	Does not use tags
24NYT	To “contribute to open up public debate that is hermetically closed in a cultural radical echo chamber”.	crime, Denmark, international

Source: Quotes taken from the “about us” section or equivalent on each website



Holt's informants claimed that mainstream media outlets are "politically correct", and that they conceal and distort negative cultural and societal aspects related to the immigration issue and to Islam. A recurring point raised in the interviews was that many alternative media actors had experienced having their op-eds and letters to editors refused by mainstream media editors, and that their postings in the comment sections of mainstream online newspapers were often removed. Thus, they created an alternative platform for the voices and viewpoints that were not represented in the mainstream media. Further, some alternative media actors admitted that they are mainly commercially motivated and that they see market potential in publishing alternative perspectives on the immigration issue. Interestingly, while the term "alternative media" has been, to some degree, adopted as a trademark by alternative media outlets, Holt (2016a) also describes a tendency to dissociate from the alternative media label to avoid being lumped with far-right outlets, such as neo-Nazi Nordfront.

## Content

Another approach to explore the "alternativeness" of right-wing alternative media is to look at the content they produce and how it is presented (Holt, 2020). Professional journalism is characterised by a shared understanding of values and ethics, for instance by striving for impartial reporting (Deuze, 2005). Previous content analysis has found that while alternative sites often mimic the aesthetics of established online newspapers, they frequently blur objective news reporting with commentaries and opinions (Kenix, 2013; Wickenden & Atton, 2005). Also, even though alternative media in general share a deep mistrust of the mainstream media, research suggests that they often depend heavily on content from the established media, which they reframe and decontextualise by making small amendments (Ekman, 2018; Haanshuus & Ihlebæk, 2019; Haller & Holt, 2018; Krzyzanowski & Ledin, 2017).

There are few comparative content analyses of right-wing alternative media conducted in a Scandinavian context. A study by Nygaard (2019) compares the Norwegian alternative media outlet *Document*, Swedish *Fria Tider*, and Danish *Den Korte Avis*, and illuminates differences among the three outlets concerning how subjective they allow themselves to be in their news reporting. Although all three alternative media attempts to convince their audiences that Scandinavian societies have become unsafe, linking immigration to increased crime rates, they use quite different strategies to convey this message. The Swedish and Danish outlets represent opposite extremes: The former address the public mainly through a descriptive news-genre style, while the latter promote their perspectives on immigration dogmatically through opinions. The Norwegian case falls somewhere in between. Nygaard (2019) concludes that it seemed

important for the Swedish and Norwegian outlets to borrow credibility from the mainstream media by giving the appearance of objectivity through using a descriptive news-genre style.

Some national studies have also analysed the content of right-wing alternative media sites. A study by Holt (2016b) compares the content and style of Swedish alternative media with professional mainstream media. He found variations in the following key points: first, results suggested a much narrower topical scope in alternative media outlets, focusing on issues such as politics, social issues, crime, war, and conflicts; second, the alternative media articles were characterised by a considerably more negative tone and more critical perspectives. Another nation-specific study conducted by Figenschou and Ihlebæk (2019) showed that media criticism is a common feature in Norwegian alternative news sites. They qualitatively analysed how journalistic authority was questioned and challenged in a variety of far-right alternative media outlets, ranging from right-wing to far-right extremist sites. In the study, the authors found that common forms of media criticism across extremist and moderate sites are claims that journalists are lazy, stupid, and biased, and that they mislead audiences about the threats of immigration, a finding that mirrors Holt's studies. While the sites in question engage frequently in media criticism, self-criticism was non-existent. In their study, Figenschou and Ihlebæk (2019) identify five positions used to ascribe authority to themselves as media critics: the insider position points to experience in the professional journalism field that some alternative journalists have; the expert position builds factual legitimacy by referring to extensive statistics and facts about immigration; the victim position attributes the source of their knowledge to personal and negative experiences with professional journalism; the citizen position is used to legitimise the claim that professional journalists have become too removed from ordinary people; and the activist position points to experiences of direct physical confrontation with professional journalists – a view promoted by extreme actors. The study indicates that the strategy of alternative media actors is to frame their media criticism from multitude angles.

## Organisational features

Another dimension of illuminating differences between professional and alternative media is to consider organisational features. A media organisation “creates, modifies, produces, and distributes content to many receivers” (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Legacy media organisations are owned predominantly by large national or transnational media houses, and their aim is twofold: to generate profits for their owners through particular business models, and to fulfil democratic goals by promoting an informed citizenry, functioning as the fourth estate. Established media organisations are traditionally structured hierarchically,

independent from political interference, and characterised by specific editorial practices and journalistic routines founded on a set of ethics and values. In this regard, media organisations function as an important arena in which journalists become socialised into a “shared journalistic ideology” (Deuze, 2005; Hovden et al., 2016). Alternative media organisations are often run by activists, organised according to non-hierarchical participatory principles, and dependent on voluntary work and alternative funding models (Atton, 2002a; Hamilton, 2000). Their aim can be commercially oriented, but the rise of left-wing alternative media in the 1980s was largely motivated by the need to break with the commercial logic of the news media that, they argued, favoured elitist and capitalist interests. It is again necessary to stress that, due to the digital transformation, established media organisations have restructured their organisational models, and new online natives have successfully entered the market. Thus, it is useful to take into account a more hybrid understanding of what a media organisation is, identifying both similarities and differences across a mainstream–alternative continuum (Atton, 2002b; Harcup, 2005; Kenix, 2013).

Among the leading outlets in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, there are huge differences with regard to organisational features in the amount of information available on their online sites (see Table 13.2). Generally, Danish outlets disclose fewer staff members, and apparently there are more fluid dynamics in the Danish sphere because the outlets have a shorter lifespan than Norwegian and Swedish outlets. *Den Korte Avis*, considered the only well-established outlet, discloses only two staff members, while the leading actors in Norway and Sweden disclose up to ten staff members.

Regarding funding of alternative media outlets, the overview suggests that advertising, user donations, and subscriptions, or a combination of these, are the most common. This illustrates how alternative media seem to adopt the commercial logics of the legacy media, pointing to the blurry boundaries between the two. In Norway and Denmark, however, left-wing activists have repeatedly warned corporations not to advertise on such outlets via Twitter, which has led a substantial number of corporations to boycott the outlets. Thus, alternative business models, such as user donations, are necessary. Furthermore, the Norwegian outlet *Human Rights Service*, established in 2001 as a think tank to improve integration and to promote universal democratic rights, stands out by receiving direct government subsidies annually since 2005 to promote integration. As the outlet is regarded as a key actor within the right-wing alternative media sphere in recent years, retaining these government subsidies is highly controversial and regularly debated in the public sphere. Despite this controversy, one of its editors was a regular columnist for the Oslo-based broad-sheet *Aftenposten* for several years, underscoring the blurry boundaries between mainstream and alternative media (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2019).

**Table 13.2** Organisational features of selected right-wing alternative media

	Established	Staff members disclosed	Business model
<b>Norway</b>			
Document	2003	10+	Advertising and user donations
Human Rights Service	2001	2	State support and user donations
Resett	2017	10	Advertising, subscriptions, and user donations
<b>Sweden</b>			
Fria Tider	2009	–	Advertising and subscriptions
Nyheter Idag	2014	7	Advertising and subscriptions
Samhällsnytt	2017	9+	Advertising and user donations
<b>Denmark</b>			
Den Korte Avis	2012	2	Advertising and user donations
NewSpeak Networks	2015	–	Advertising and user donations
24NYT	2017	1	Advertising and user donations

As mentioned above, scholarly literature highlights “deprofessionalisation”, that is, that people involved in alternative media practices are more often than not amateurs with little or no professional journalism training (Hamilton, 2000). Among the Swedish alternative media outlets, this holds true, as it seems that most people involved do not have experience in professional journalism. In Norway and Denmark, however, some key actors behind or employed by *Document*, *Human Rights Service*, *Resett*, *Den Korte Avis*, *NewSpeak Networks*, and *24NYT* have wide experience in professional journalism, including in leading national news organisations, such as Norwegian *VG* and *TV 2*, and Danish *Jyllands-Posten* and *Ekstrabladet*. The married couple behind Danish *Den Korte Avis*, Karen Jespersen and Ralf Pittelkow, both have professional backgrounds in mainstream media and as high-profile social democratic politicians. Jespersen has even served as a minister for both the Social Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. This illustrates the aforementioned blurring of boundaries – some professional journalists do indeed choose to work for alternative sites, but there is currently no research that has elucidated this phenomenon properly, nor its consequences for journalistic practices in the Scandinavian context.

Another point for discussion is that Swedish alternative media representatives often have dubious reputations concerning independence, as many of them have various connections to the right-wing populist party, the Sweden Democrats (Herkman & Jungar, Chapter 12). For instance, the domain names for both *Nyheter Idag* and *Avpixlat*, the predecessor to *Samhällsnytt*, were originally registered by then member of parliament for the Sweden Democrats, Kent Ekeröth. Ekeröth is widely known for his involvement in the “iron pipe scandal” in 2010, in which three top politicians representing the party armed themselves with iron pipes from a construction site while committing a verbal racial attack on a comedian (Expressen, 2012). Ekeröth’s involvement in these outlets has been the subject of controversy and repeated mainstream media attention. However, *Nyheter Idag*’s website states that the outlet does not have direct ties to any political organisations. Because any connection to the Sweden Democrats is perceived as highly controversial in Sweden, at least among its opponents, due to its roots in fascism, it is likely that these connections contribute to the constantly recurring portrayals of Swedish alternative media outlets as ideological deviants in the Swedish mainstream media. In Denmark, *Den Korte Avis* does not appear to have affiliations to any political party, while the founder of *NewSpeak Networks* and *24NYT*, Jeppe Juhl, has links to the Danish radical right party, the New Right, although in May 2019, Juhl claimed that he is no longer involved with these outlets (Andersen, 2019).

### Relations with professional media organisations and press ethics

Yet another approach to exploring alternative media is to look at the media system and how the boundaries are set through institutional mechanisms (Skogerbø et al., Chapter 1). As pointed out by several scholars, the Nordic media model is characterised by strong press organisations, institutionalised self-regulation, editorial freedom, a high level of journalistic professionalism and autonomy, generous press support systems, and cultural policies (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Jensen, 2016; Nord, 2008; Ohlsson, 2015; Syvertsen et al., 2014). Following a media system approach, it is possible to pinpoint certain key actors that play important parts in defining and maintaining the boundaries of journalism at the institutional level: media politicians or bureaucrats who play a role in defining who should be eligible for press support; press organisations, such as unions for journalists or associations for editors or media businesses; and the regulatory boards administering complaints brought against breaches of institutionalised ethical codes. Focusing on the latter, a key feature of Nordic media is the self-regulation system, whereby the press polices the press. This implies that professional journalism as an institution has agreed on a set of

rules that the entire profession accepts (Syvertsen et al., 2014). In Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, the role of the media councils is to determine whether a complaint is justified and, if so, to sanction the publication in question by having it publish the media council's statement (Syvertsen et al., 2014) and make a public apology in order to restore public trust. In Norway, The Code of Ethics of the Norwegian Press is enforced by The Press Complaints Council, funded by the main press organisations, and complaints can be made against members of the umbrella organisation, The Norwegian Press Association. In Sweden, The Code of Ethics for Press, Radio and Television is enforced by The Press Ombudsman. Newspapers, magazines, and online publications that are part of The Swedish Media Publishers' Association, The Magazine Publishers' Association, or alternately, online media that have applied for membership in The Ethical Press System, are included in the voluntary system. In Denmark, The Danish Press Council enforces The Press Ethical Rules that are part of The Media Liability Act. In a Scandinavian context, we posit that membership in professional organisations and inclusion in the self-regulatory system represent an important boundary-marker in the media field.

Looking at some right-wing alternative media sites in each country, we find that some abide by the ethics rules but most do not. It is, of course, important to note that professing loyalty to a Code of Ethics and abiding by it in everyday practice is not necessarily the same thing. More studies are needed to address how ethics are perceived and internalised by alternative news organisations. In Sweden, *Nyheter Idag* is registered with the self-regulatory system of the Swedish press and thus have agreed to abide by the ethical codes of conduct, while *Sambällsnytt*, *Fria Tider*, and *Nya Tider* have not. In Denmark, none of the key alternative media actors are registered with Pressenævnet, the institution that deals with complaints concerning mainstream media's adherence to the ethical codes of conduct. In Norway, a public debate arose concerning who should be included in the self-regulatory system. Before March 2018, a Norwegian news outlet that stated its adherence to the ethical guidelines was included in the system; however, The Norwegian Press Association changed their statutes so only members of professional media organisations associated with the Norwegian Press Association – and who, in effect, contributed financially to the self-regulatory system – could be included. This alteration was done to protect the credibility of the media institutions, editors, and journalists who commit to the ethical guidelines (The Norwegian Press Association, 2019). By changing the self-regulatory system, the Norwegian Press Association effectively managed to strengthen the boundaries on an institutional level. Following this change, however, two editors of right-wing alternative media outlets applied to become members of the Association of Norwegian Editors, which would automatically lead to their inclusion in the self-regulatory system. In June 2018, the editor of *Document*, Hans Rustad, was accepted as a member. In contrast, the editor

of *Resett*, Helge Lurås, was denied membership twice. The decision was based on three aspects: the fact that *Resett* had offered a source substantial money to share a story about a young man's sexual encounter with a female politician; a lack of moderation in the comment section; and their ongoing campaign and calls for boycotts against mainstream media outlets. The case is interesting because it points to how boundaries are drawn and negotiated, but also the fluidity in the field where alternative actors can move towards – or potentially also further away from – the mainstream.

Finally, exploring mainstream media reactions to right-wing alternative media can help enhance our understanding of the boundaries between the two. Although research on this matter is still scarce, Nygaard (2020) has demonstrated through a content analysis how Norwegian, Swedish, and Danish mainstream news organizations tend to portray right-wing alternative media as journalistically and ideologically deviant in order to protect the boundaries of professional journalism as well as the limits of acceptable public debate from actors they deem illegitimate. As the distance between mainstream and alternative media is also dependent on mainstream media reactions to their emergence, more research on the mainstream/alternative continuum should take the mainstream media as a starting point.

### Conclusion: Challenges for research on alternative media

In this chapter, we have explored the role of right-wing alternative media, arguing that such news providers constitute a relatively modest, but nevertheless distinct, actor in the Scandinavian political communication landscape. Statistics indicate that the phenomenon is more widespread in Sweden than in Norway and Denmark. The exact reasons for this remain unclear, but the political and cultural context point to some possible explanations. Because immigration is recognised as a driving force for right-wing alternative media, it is relevant that policies towards immigration and integration differ historically in the three countries. Sweden was first in Scandinavia to become a destination for immigrants and has generally been the most liberal, in terms of access and integration (Brochmann et al., 2012). The populist right-wing party, the Sweden Democrats, is highly critical of immigration and has long been excluded from coalitions through a political cordon sanitaire, while in the other two countries, similar parties take a more prominent role (Wettstein et al., 2018). In this regard, Brochmann and colleagues (2012) argue that a critical public debate on the challenges and problems relating to immigration and multiculturalism has been less present in Sweden. This may have opened a market for right-wing alternative media that focuses more vocally and provocatively on the negative aspects of immigration (Holt, 2016a). Heft and colleagues (2020) further

suggest that the lower supply of alternative media in Denmark may be related to the Danish mainstream media context, which is favourable to right-wing actors, in the sense that it allows politically incorrect issues and positions to a greater extent. One must of course be cautious when speculating about cause and effect, especially when comparative studies are scarce. There is a danger of reducing complex matters to simplified conclusions, and more research is needed to explore how political, social, and cultural dimensions influence the role and impact of right-wing alternative media in the Nordic sphere.

We have pointed to certain difficulties in terms of how to conceptualise alternative media actors. Holt and colleagues (2019) suggest a relational and non-normative definition, which is helpful in separating alternative media from the left-wing social movements' perspective. They emphasise the need to look into how alternative media describe and position themselves in opposition to the mainstream, but also how "alternative" can be used as a label by others – even though this is less developed in their framework. In addition, they suggest that "the alternativeness" can be studied analytically on micro, meso, and macro levels by looking at content, practices, organisational features, and relations to professional media organisations and press ethics. Heft and colleagues (2020) furthermore argue that in order to categorise alternative sites as coming from a right-wing to a far-right ideological position, it is necessary to identify ideological markers in their motivations, use of topical tags, and how they frame their stories.

Inspired by these perspectives, we explored a selection of right-wing alternative media in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. We looked at their self-ascribed roles and ideological positions, as well as referring to studies that characterise the content, organisational features, and their relation to institutionalised press ethics. We argue that although many right-wing media sites clearly position themselves as being in opposition – or an alternative – to mainstream media, this is expressed and framed in different ways and to different degrees. Further, we argue that it can be difficult to place such actors on the right-wing to far-right scale without conducting in-depth interview studies or systematic content analysis. Empirical evidence from the Swedish context shows that people involved in alternative media tend to dissociate from the "immigration-critical alternative media" label to avoid being confused with far-right outlets (Holt, 2016a). Thus, there are indications of an ongoing adaptation process, as the distinction between mainstream and alternative media is increasingly difficult to discern.

Another dimension of alternativeness is in its organisational features. In this chapter, we show that the selected sites are dependent predominantly on volunteer work and alternative business models. This varies if the people involved come from professional or activist backgrounds; most alternative media organisations consist of a mix of the two. Some actors in Norwegian and Danish alternative media have extensive experience in professional journalism, including in leading national news institutions. A Norwegian study shows that this



insider knowledge is used to criticise the way professional journalists conduct their jobs (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2018). Our findings point out the complex and fluid relationship between right-wing alternative media sites and professional organisations, press ethics, and the self-regulatory system. We posit that this dimension affords a very strong boundary marker of professionalism in the Nordic media system and consequently should be emphasised when categorising alternative media. Our overview shows that most right-wing alternative media do not adhere to professional ethical codes, which is not surprising based on their self-ascribed role as standing in opposition and serving as media critics. However, some sites do claim adherence to professional norms.

Using a multi-level approach to study alternative media, it is necessary to clarify how different dimensions should be weighed against each other. To illustrate, the Norwegian site *Document*, established in 2003, which clearly positions itself as an alternative to the mainstream press, is nevertheless a member of the Association of Norwegian Editors and part of the press ethics system. They have what seems to be a stable number of writers, some with a background in professional journalism. There has not been a systematic, long-term analysis of the content they produce; however, a study by Nygaard (2019) suggests that *Document* sometimes mixes news and views. This somewhat paradoxical situation points to the need for future research to shed light on how the different dimensions of alternativeness is given value in order to function as a reliable analytical tool, and also on what level comparative research should be conducted (see Heft et al., 2020). It also points to the necessity of being aware of methodological and analytical challenges when studying a moving target with imprecise boundaries.

Finally, a point for discussion is that the distance between mainstream and alternative media depends not only on how alternative outlets describe themselves but also on how they are perceived and received by the mainstream media and broader public sphere. To better understand how boundaries are constructed and challenged in the media field, future research should investigate how and by whom such distinctions are drawn and when they change. Certain social actors, especially news media professionals and academics, have been the ones who define what is news and journalism and what is not. As the journalistic field increasingly must play by the rules of the technological field, it is pertinent to ask who decides where the centre and the periphery of the profession are (Tandoc, 2019). Our findings show that audiences of alternative media tend to actively engage on social media and, consequently, news and views from alternative media gain relatively high scores on social media engagement when compared to mainstream online newspapers. If legacy media organizations are losing ground to social media platforms, it is equally important to understand how the audience understand the boundaries between professional journalism and new digital entrants to the profession, such as alternative media, because it is not at all certain that legacy media sources occupies a central position in audiences everyday news consumption.

## References

- Andersen, S. (2019, May 8). Nye Borgerlige – spidskandidat anholdt og sigtet af politiet: “Der skal åbenbart slås ned på islam-kritikere” [The New Right – candidate charged by the police: “Islam-critics must obviously be cracked down on”]. *Berlingske*. <https://www.berlingske.dk/samfund/nye-borgerlige-spidskandidat-anholdt-og-sigtet-af-politiet-der-skal>
- Atkinson, J. D., & Berg, S. (2012). Narrow mobilization and Tea Party activism: A study of right-leaning alternative media. *Communication Studies*, 63(5), 519–535. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2011.649442>
- Atkinson, J. D. (2008). Towards a model of interactivity in alternative media: A multilevel analysis of audiences and producers in a new social movement network. *Mass Communication and Society*, 11(3), 227–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205430801919705>
- Atton, C. (2002a). *Alternative Media*. London: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446220153>
- Atton, C. (2002b). News cultures and new social movements: Radical journalism and the mainstream media. *Journalism Studies*, 3(4), 491–505. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670022000019209>
- Atton, C. (2006). Far-right media on the Internet: Culture, discourse and power. *New Media & Society*, 8(4), 573–587. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444806065653>
- Atton, C., & Hamilton, J. (2008). *Alternative Journalism*. London: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446216163>
- Bakir, V., & McStay, A. (2018). Fake news and the economy of emotions. *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), 154–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1345645>
- Benkler, Y., Faris, R., & Roberts, H. (2018). *Network propaganda manipulation, disinformation, and radicalization in American politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190923624.001.0001>
- Brochmann, G., Hagelund, A., Borevi, K., Jönsson, H., & Petersen, K. (2012). *Immigration policy and the Scandinavian welfare state, 1945–2010*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137015167>
- Bruns, A. (2005). *Gatewatching: Collaborative online news production*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Carlson, M. (2015). Introduction: The many boundaries of journalism. In M. Carlson, & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism: Professionalism, practices and participation* (pp. 1–19). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315727684>
- Carlson, M. (2017). *Journalistic authority: Legitimizing news in the digital era*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Carter E. (2018). Right-wing extremism/radicalism: Reconstructing the concept. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 23(2), 157–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569317.2018.1451227>
- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>
- Deuze, M. (2005). What is journalism? Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered. *Journalism*, 6(4), 442–464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884905056815>
- Downing, J. (2001). *Radical media: Rebellious communication and social movements*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452204994>
- Ekman, M. (2018). Anti-refugee mobilization in social media: The case of soldiers of Odin. *Social Media + Society*, (January–March). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118764431>
- Ekman, M. (2019). Anti-immigrant sentiments and mobilization on the Internet. In K. Smets, K. Leurs, M. Georgiou, S. Witterborn, & R. Gajjala (Eds.), *Sage handbook of media and migration* (pp. 551–562). London: Sage.
- Expressen. (2012, November 14). SD-toppens attack: “Skit i den lilla horan” [The top Sweden Democrat politician’s attack: “Ignore that little whore”]. <https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/sd-toppens-attack-skit-i-den-lilla-horan/>
- Figenschou, T. U., & Ihlebæk, K. A. (2019). Challenging journalistic authority. *Journalism Studies*, 20(9), 1221–1237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1500868>
- Fuchs, C. (2010). Alternative media as critical media. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 13(2), 173–192. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1368431010362294>
- Haanshuss, B., & Ihlebæk, K. A. (2019, August 22–23). *News about Jews: Deconstructing antisemitic propaganda in extreme right online media* [Conference presentation]. NordMedia, Malmö, Sweden.

13. RIGHT-WING ALTERNATIVE MEDIA IN THE SCANDINAVIAN  
POLITICAL COMMUNICATION LANDSCAPE

- Haas, T. (2004). Research note: Alternative media, public journalism and the pursuit of democratization. *Journalism Studies*, 5(1), 115–121. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670032000174783>
- Haller, A., & Holt, K. (2018). Paradoxical populism: How PEGIDA relates to mainstream and alternative media. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(12), 1665–1680. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1449882>
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hamilton, J. (2000). Alternative media: Conceptual difficulties, critical possibilities. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 24(4), 357–378. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859900024004002>
- Harcup, T. (2005). “I’m doing this to change the world”: Journalism in alternative and mainstream media. *Journalism Studies*, 6(3), 361–374. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700500132016>
- Harcup, T., & O’Neill, D. (2001). What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited. *Journalism Studies*, 2(2), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700118449>
- Heft, A., Mayerhöffer, E., Reinhardt, S., & Knüpfer, C. (2020). Beyond Breitbart: Comparing right-wing digital news infrastructures in six Western democracies. *Policy and Internet*, 12(1), 20–45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi.3.219>
- Holt, K. (2016a). «Alternativmedier»? En intervjustudie om mediekritik och mediemisstro. [“Alternative media”? An interview study about media criticism and media distrust]. In L. Truedson (Ed.), *Migrationen i medierna – men det får en väl inte prata om?* [Migration in the media – but one must not talk about it] (pp. 113–150). Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies.
- Holt, K. (2016b). Skilda Verkligheter? “Internets Undervegetation” vs “PK-Maffian” [Different realities? “Internet warriors” vs “the politically correct”]. In L. Truedson (Ed.), *Migrationen i Medierna – Men Det Får en Väl Inte Prata Om* [Migration in the media – but one must not talk about it ] (pp. 150–173). Stockholm: The Institute for Media Studies.
- Holt, K. (2018). Alternative media and the notion of anti-systemness: Towards an analytical framework. *Media and Communication*, 6, 49–57. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i4.1467>
- Holt, K. (2020). *Right-Wing Alternative Media*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429454691>
- Holt, K., Figenschou, T. U., & Frischlich, L. (2019). Key dimensions of alternative news media. *Digital Journalism*, 7(7), 860–869. <http://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1625715>
- Hovden, J. F., Nygren, G., & Zilliacus-Tikkanen, H. (Eds.) (2016). *Becoming a journalist: Journalism education in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Jensen, K. B. (Ed.). (2016). *Dansk mediehistorie, bind 1–4* [Danish media history, volume 1–4]. Fredriksberg, Denmark: Samfundslitteratur.
- Jungar, A. C., & Jupskås, A. R. (2014). Populist radical right parties in the Nordic region: A new and distinct party family? *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37(3), 215–238. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12024>
- Kalsnes, B (2019). *Falske nyheter- løgn, desinformasjon og propaganda i den digitale offentligheten*. Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk.
- Kenix, L. J. (2013). A converging image? *Journalism Studies*, 14(6), 835–856. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2012.754239>
- Kryzanowski, M., & Ledin, P. (2017). Uncivility on the web: Populism in/and the borderline discourses of exclusion. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), 566–581. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.17028.krz>
- Larsson, A. O. (2019). News use as amplification – Norwegian national, regional and hyperpartisan media on Facebook. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 96(3), 721–741. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699019831439>
- Leung, D., & Lee, F. (2014). Cultivating an active online counterpublic: Examining usage and political impact of Internet alternative media. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19(3), 340–359. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161214530787>
- Marwick, A., & Lewis, R. (2017). *Media manipulation and disinformation online*. <https://datasociety.net/output/media-manipulation-and-disinfo-online/>
- Mudde, C. (1995). Right-wing extremism analyzed: A comparative analysis of the ideologies of three alleged right-wing extremist parties (NPD, NDP, CP’86). *European Journal of Political Research*, 27(2), 203–224. <https://doi.org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1995.tb00636.x>

- Noppari, E., Hiltunen, I., & Ahva, L. (2019). User profiles for populist counter-media websites in Finland. *Journal of Alternative and Community Media*, 4(1), 23–37.
- Nord, L. (2008). Comparing Nordic media systems: North between west and east? *Central European Journal of Communication*, 15(1), 95–110.
- Nord, W. (2012). Folkpartist spred lögner om Fria Tider [People's Party politician lied about Fria Tider]. *Fria Tider*. <https://www.friatider.se/folkpartist-spred-logner-om-fria-tider>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., & Kleis Nielsen, R. (2019). *Reuters Institute digital news report*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/>
- Nygaard, S. (2019). The appearance of objectivity: How immigration-critical alternative media report the news. *Journalism Practice*, 13(10), 1147–1163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1577697>
- Nygaard, S. (2020). Boundary work: Intermedia agenda-setting between right-wing alternative media and professional journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 21(6), 766–782. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2020.1722731>
- Ohlsson, J. (2015). *The Nordic media market 2015*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Padovani, C. (2016). The media of the ultra-right: Discourse and audience activism online. *Journal of Language and Politics*, 15(4), 399–421. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jlp.15.4.02pad>
- Rydgren, J., (Ed.) (2018). *The Oxford handbook of the radical right*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190274559.001.0001>
- Sandberg, L., & Ihlebæk, K. A. (2019). Exploring the link between right-wing alternative media and social media during the Swedish 2018 election. *Statsvetenskaplig Tidsskrift*, 12(3), 421–440.
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Reese, S. (2014). *Mediating the message in the 21st century: A media sociology perspective* (3rd ed.). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203930434>
- Singer, J. B. (2015). Out of bounds: Professional norms as boundary markers. In M. Carlson, & S. C. Lewis (Eds.), *Boundaries of journalism: Professionalism, practices and participation* (pp. 21–37). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315727684>
- Schulze, H. (2020). Who uses right-wing alternative online media? An exploration of audience characteristics. *Politics and Governance*, 8(3), 6–19. <https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v8i3.2925>
- Syvrtsen, T., Enli, G., Mjøs, O., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital age*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- Tandoc, E. C. Jr. (2019). Journalism at the periphery. *Media and Communication*, 7(4), 138–143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17645/mac.v7i4.2626>
- Tandoc, E., Zheng, W. L., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining “fake news”. *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>
- The Norwegian Press Association. (2019, January 14). Tre viktige debatter og én endring [Three important debates and one change]. *Norsk Presseforbund* [blog]. <https://presse.no/blogg/tre-viktige-debatter-og-en-endring/>
- Wettstein, M., Esser, F., Schulz, A., Wirz, D., & Wirth, W. (2018). News media as gatekeepers, critics, and initiators of populist communication: How journalists in ten countries deal with the populist challenge. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 23(4), 476–495. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161218785979>
- Wickenden, E., & Atton, C. (2005). Sourcing routines and representation in alternative journalism: A case study approach. *Journalism Studies*, 6(3), 347–359. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700500132008>
- Witschge, T. A., Anderson, C. W., Domingo, D., & Hermida, A. (2018). Dealing with the mess (we made): Unraveling hybridity, normativity, and complexity in journalism studies. *Journalism*, 20(5), 651–659. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884918760669>

---

© 2020 Nordicom and respective authors. This is an Open Access work licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public licence (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of the licence, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

# Scandinavian political journalism in a time of fake news and disinformation

Bente Kalsnes, Kajsa Falasca, & Aske Kammer

## Abstract

Focusing on fake news, disinformation, and misinformation, this chapter addresses how the main actors in the political communication process (politicians, news media, and citizens) deal with the increasingly complex information environment in Scandinavia. In this chapter, we examine how politicians apply the term “fake news” in relation to both news media and political opponents. Additionally, we address how the news media deal with the challenge of fake news and disinformation, typically through verification and fact-checking. Lastly, we examine how citizens relate to fake news, employing data from the *Reuters Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2018) from the three Scandinavian countries: Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. This study demonstrates that we need new methods for digital source criticism, verification, and media literacy in an information environment suited to the information manipulation of text, icons, images, and video.

**Keywords:** fake news, disinformation, social media, political journalism, political communication

## Introduction

In April 2018, a seemingly mundane and perhaps even trivial event took place when the employment of Sólrún Rasmussen as a high-school teacher in Copenhagen ended. However, her marriage to Danish prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen – and in particular his participation as an assessor in a meeting with the principal of the school – made the event interesting to the news media. The Danish tabloid *Ekstra Bladet* covered the meeting, indicating that she had been fired and questioning whether the prime minister had mixed his private and professional roles (Østergaard & Mathiessen, 2018). In an exchange on Twitter, the prime minister took the issue with the news coverage in a noteworthy fashion:

My good friends at Ekstrabladet continue to surprise me with stories about my family and me. Had no idea my wife had been fired... #FakeNews #dkpol [translated]. (Rasmussen, 2018)

The tweet is interesting for two reasons. First, it created more confusion about what actually happened; no one was any wiser from reading the tweet, and the subsequent conversation on the social medium only made the fog around the course of events denser. Second, and most importantly in the context of this chapter, the prime minister used the hashtag #FakeNews, and in doing so, questioned the trustworthiness of the newspaper's coverage. This is particularly interesting since, in the Danish system, the prime minister also acts as the minister of the press. By using this hashtag, he joined ranks of those who dismiss unfavourable news coverage with a passing reference to how the content of the news media cannot be accepted at face value. "Fake news" is a central discursive marker in today's complicated relationship between politicians, news media, and citizens in Western democracies, and it is one that comes with a challenge to the foundation of democratic societies.

"Fake news" was the Collins Dictionary's 2017 Word of the Year. With a conceptual framework from discourse theory, the term has been called "a floating signifier" through which different discursive elements are "being mobilised as part of political struggles to hegemonise social reality" (Farkas & Schou, 2018: 299), and politicians around the world use it to describe news organisations whose coverage they find disagreeable. Politicians have appropriated the term as a weapon against the fourth estate and as an excuse to limit or censor free speech. Most famously, American president Donald Trump frequently labels media outlets such as CNN or *The New York Times* as offering fake news, criticising the watchdog function of the media in liberal democracy. As of 2 January 2020, Trump had tweeted 648 times about fake news in his 1,078 days as president, making it his third-most tweeted term, according to the online Trump Twitter Archive (2020).

While the related but distinct phenomena of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation are not new in and of themselves, one can argue that their urgency has increased in the digital communication environment. Digital technology has democratised the means of producing media content, and the Internet has connected its users to a potential mass audience, with great promise for public participation and emancipatory politics (Jenkins, 2006). The digital age, however, also provides new tools and infrastructure for the production, distribution, and amplification of falsehood in the public sphere. The algorithmic sorting in search engines, social media, and personalised media means that content that attracts and maintains audience attention will self-perpetuatingly propagate in and beyond sub-publics (Dijck et al., 2018). The consequence is that the content users engage with stands a good chance of proliferating online because it feeds into the psychological mechanisms of a confirmation

bias, where there is a tendency to search for, favour, and recall information affirming one's prior beliefs.

Focusing on fake news, disinformation, and misinformation, we address in this chapter how the main actors in the political communication process (politicians, news media, and citizens) deal with the increasingly complex information environment in Scandinavia. The Nordic region has been characterised by high social trust, also when it comes to news media, and particularly radio and television stations (Syvertsen et al., 2014). This has been expressed through some of the highest levels of trust in the world, high media literacy, and high voter turnout in the Nordic countries (Strömbäck et al., 2008). Nevertheless, various forms of manipulated and even entirely fake information in the digital public sphere add to an erosion of the common grounds by creating confusion and uncertainty about basic facts (Ipsos, 2017). We identify in this chapter how the main actors involved with fake news and political journalism – politicians, news media, and citizens – are dealing with public spheres polluted with manipulated and fake information in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. In order to establish a theoretical baseline for our discussion, the chapter first outlines the terms fake news, disinformation, and misinformation.

Second, we examine how politicians apply the term fake news, in relation to both news media and political opponents. Reviewing some examples from the Scandinavian countries, we discuss how political actors have dealt with the term as well as with the challenges raised by manipulated information. We look at examples of politicians accusing others (i.e., political opponents or news media) of producing fake news and politicians who are victims of fake news.

Third, we address how the news media deals with the challenges of fake news and disinformation, typically through verification and fact-checking. New media actors, often called “alternative media” or “hyperpartisan media” (Kalsnes & Larsson, 2019), are challenging the mainstream media's news values and ethics, often accusing mainstream media of being the “lying media” (Figenschou & Ihlebæk, 2018: 6). Alternative or hyperpartisan media are also active in the three Scandinavian countries under scrutiny here.

Fourth, we examine how citizens relate to fake news, employing data from *Reuters Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2018) from the three Scandinavian countries. While politicians and the media often talk about fake news in terms of Russian propaganda or for-profit fabrications by Macedonian teenagers, it is clear that the concerns of citizens are very different, relating to different kinds of deceptions largely perpetrated by journalists, politicians, and advertisers. The Reuters data from the Scandinavian countries allow us to consider whether there are any clear empirical differences between the countries, in either attitude and experience with manipulated information, or trust towards different media outlets.

## The Scandinavian situation

Even though the debate about fake news, disinformation, and misinformation has mainly focused on the US and Russia, the three communicative phenomena are also present in Scandinavia: in Sweden, a local politician from the Swedish Social Democratic Party spread fake news aimed at Muslim voters about the Moderate Party and the Sweden Democrats (Lindquist, 2018); in Denmark, Mette Thiesen from the New Right has been accused of spreading fake news about “armed sharia guards” in Copenhagen (Shah, 2018); and in Norway, the national representative from the Progress Party, Mazyar Keshvari, accused *Aftenposten*, one of Norway’s biggest newspapers, of producing fake news (Mæland, 2017). By suggesting that news cannot be trusted and by labelling it as fake news, politicians deliberately undermine trust in journalism and news outlets, one of the core institutions in democratic nations based on free speech and a free press. By misappropriating the credibility of news, fake news might also undermine the legitimacy of journalism, especially in social media, where the actual source of information is often removed, or at least perceived only from a distance.

The news media, on the other side, have responded with increased scrutiny and fact-checking initiatives, not only of politicians’ claims (Graves, 2016), but also of viral content on social media. In August 2018, more than 150 fact-checking projects around the world were registered by Duke Reporters’ Lab (n.d.) at Duke University, the most comprehensive database for global fact-checking organisations. Five of these projects are based in Scandinavia: Faktisk (Norway), Faktisk (Sweden), Viralgranskaren (Sweden), Detektor (Denmark), and TjekDet (Denmark).

With Nordic countries being some of the most digitised countries in the world (Eurostat, 2019a), Nordic citizens have access to a digital marketplace of ideas characterised by vast amounts of information of all qualities. The Internet and social media platforms have enabled a digital public sphere that is more open and democratised than ever before. Nevertheless, as 30–40 per cent of Nordic citizens access news weekly on Facebook (Newman et al., 2018), they are also vulnerable to the spread of false and manipulated information. Social media platforms are “rigged to reward those who can manipulate human emotion and cognition to trigger the algorithms that pick winners and losers” (Silverman, 2017). Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are also identified as places where people most frequently see false and manipulated information (Medietilsynet, 2017).

We will now establish a theoretical baseline for our discussion by outlining how we apply the term fake news and associated terms such as disinformation and misinformation. To give an overview of how the term fake news has been applied – within both the research literature and among political actors – we will differentiate between what we here call a theoretical approach and an



empirical approach. The theoretical approach addresses how the term fake news has been defined and applied in the research literature, and the empirical approach addresses how political actors have used the term in “the real world”, often with strategic intentions. As these approaches do not necessarily align, we have divided them into two separate parts.

### Theoretical approach:

#### Defining fake news, disinformation, and misinformation

Discussing the different phenomena that are used under the umbrella term of fake news, we draw a distinction between fake news, disinformation, and misinformation (alongside other studies, see, e.g., Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Fake news has been defined as “articles based on false information packaged to look like real news to deceive readers either for financial or ideological gain” (Tandoc et al., 2018: 674). Along the same lines, fake news has also been described as “information that has been deliberately fabricated and disseminated with the intention to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts” (McGonagle, 2017: 203).

Fake news was previously applied as a term in the research literature to describe news parody or news satire such as *Rokokoposten* in Denmark or The Daily Show in the US (see, e.g., Russell, 2011), as well as native advertising, propaganda, manipulation, and fabrication (Tandoc et al., 2017). To distinguish the terms, researchers suggest differentiating between the degrees of falseness and the intention to deceive (Tandoc et al., 2017; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). While both news satire and content marketing have a high degree of facticity, the intention to deceive is different. News satire does not intend to deceive, and the audience normally knows that they are watching comedy (it should be noted that some people have problems differentiating between news satire and real news, according to Garret et al., 2019). Content marketing, on the other hand, looks like news but is actually advertisement, and the potential for deception is high.

We will also include the appearance of news as a way to differentiate between various types of problematic information. Fake news cannot be distinguished by its form alone, which has caused major concerns for news outlets in general, and for political news in particular, since it can undermine the trust in these outlets as independent institutions of society. Several of the most shared false stories in the American presidential election of 2016 appeared as news stories, but were completely false (Silverman & Alexander, 2016). The most shared fake story, “Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement”, was originally published by a site called WTOE 5 News, and later copied by the now-defunct site called Ending the Fed. On other occasions, fake news is presented by fake organisations, such as Norsk Naturinformatikk

[Norwegian Nature Informatics], which was exposed by the Norwegian fact-checker Faktisk for producing a completely false story about the threat of giant jellyfish on the Norwegian coast (Skipshamn, 2018).

Recently, fake news has been described as “completely or partly false information, (often) appearing as news, and typically expressed as textual, visual or graphical content with an intention to mislead or confuse users” (Kalsnes, 2018: 6). It should be noted that the theoretical and rather prescriptive definitions mentioned above are rather different from the way that many have used the term fake news in reality, particularly political actors (to which we will soon return). The ambiguity of the term fake news has resulted in the rejection of the term altogether by many scholars, who have argued that it is inadequate and misleading to explain the complexity of the situation (Wardle & Derekshan, 2017).

The European Union report from the independent high-level expert group on fake news and online disinformation suggests using the term disinformation, which can be defined as “false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit” (HLEG, 2018: 10). Disinformation is a fairly new term which first appeared in an English dictionary in the 1980s on the basis of the Russian word “dezinformatsiya” (Taylor, 2016). According to a defector from the Romanian secret police, Ion Mihai Pacepa, after World War II, Joseph Stalin constructed the word – defined in the Great Soviet Encyclopaedia in 1952 as the “dissemination (in the press, on the radio, etc.) of false reports intended to mislead public opinion” – and suggested that the Soviet Union was the target of such tactics from the West (Taylor, 2016). Disinformation is clearly similar to propaganda, which is defined as “the deliberate, systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behavior to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist” (Jowett & O’Donell, 2012: 7). Examples of such disinformation in the Scandinavian countries include the creation of “cloaked Facebook pages”; that is, Facebook pages that imitate “the identity of a political opponent in order to spark hateful and aggressive reactions” (Farkas et al., 2018: 1850).

Misinformation, in contrast to disinformation, is understood as “misleading or inaccurate information shared by people who do not recognise it as such” (HLEG, 2018: 10). The intention to deceive is what distinguishes disinformation from misinformation (even if it can be difficult to analytically draw such a distinction, since intention is a notoriously slippery phenomenon in terms of empirical research).

To examine how these phenomena have been covered in the research literature, this chapter uses the terms fake news, disinformation, and misinformation to differentiate between various kinds of problematic information. Table 14.1 provides an overview of the definitions, differences, and similarities between the three concepts.

**Table 14.1** *Characteristics of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation*

	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Intention</b>	<b>Facticity</b>	<b>Appearance</b>
<b>Fake news</b>	“Articles based on false information packaged to look like real news to deceive readers either for financial or ideological gain” (Tandoc et al, 2018: 674).	Deception	False information appearing as facts	Resembles news
<b>Disinformation</b>	“False, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit” (HLEG, 2018: 10).	Deception	False information appearing as facts	Can take many forms, including the appearance of news
<b>Misinformation</b>	“Misleading or inaccurate information shared by people who do not recognize it as such” (HLEG, 2018: 10). False information appearing as facts	Mistake	False information appearing as facts	Can take many forms, including the appearance of news

What is common for the three terms is that they challenge trust in information and, in this context, trust in news. Trust is often understood as “the confidence that a partner will not exploit the vulnerabilities of the other” (Gulati et al., 2000: 209), and trust is closely connected to news, since reporting is based on witnesses of accounts where most people are not present (Kalsnes & Krumsvik, 2019). The delivery of trustworthy information is at the core of the democratic objective of the news, constituting the very foundation of its claim to be an institution of democracy. Another more mundane but nonetheless important reason why media studies and the industry alike consider trust a central issue is that previous research has found that media trust is an important factor in news attention decisions (Williams, 2012); media users will probably pay more attention to news sources they deem credible than those they are sceptical of. Similarly, distrust in media can lead to inattention and the non-consumption of news (Kiouisis, 2001). We will return to this issue in greater detail later, but first, we examine the different ways the term fake news has been applied by Scandinavian politicians, as the use of the term by politicians has been of particular concern, since in several countries they have used it to target political opponents or media outlets they dislike.

## Empirical approach: Political actors' use of the term fake news

Politicians in several countries have used the term fake news to target political opponents or media outlets they dislike, and in authoritarian countries in particular, we often see draconian laws being introduced with extremely unclear definitions of what fake news means (Newman et al., 2018). Politicians in some countries are also attempting to seize this opportunity to undermine or control the media. American news users in particular are concerned about the use of the term fake news (e.g., by politicians) to discredit news media; no less than 53 per cent of the respondents in the 2018 Reuters report expressed concern about this type of behaviour (Newman et al., 2018). Concern is lower in Norway and Denmark, but still substantial. Here, 27 per cent of Norwegians (Moe & Sakariassen, 2018) and 29 per cent of Danes (Schröder et al., 2018) are concerned about the use of the term (e.g., by politicians) to discredit news media. The lower level of concern is probably to some extent the result of the higher degree of trust in society and its institutions found in these countries.

The reason we will look more closely into the way Scandinavian politicians apply the term fake news is that they have a unique position in society in general, but particularly in relation to news media – both journalists and politicians are engaged in the “negotiation of newsworthiness” (Cook, 1998: 90). The close but complex relationship between journalists and politicians is typical in many countries, including those in Scandinavia (Aelst & Aalberg, 2011). The relationship between politicians and journalists is characterised by mutual dependence:

The relationship between sources and journalists resembles a dance, for sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources. Although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading. (Gans, 1980: 116)

Several studies have examined the relationship between news media consumption and political trust (e.g., Avery, 2009), and a longitudinal study from Sweden found a positive link between news media use and political trust (Strömbäck et al., 2016); thus, the mediation of politics is closely connected to the trust in those performing the politics. Fake news is therefore a challenge for both political and media institutions. One question is, however, how politicians use the term. It should be noted that the term fake news is used in a different way in this section about political actors, compared to the more theoretical definition introduced in the first part of the chapter. As mentioned earlier, this discrepancy between the theoretical definition and the “real world usage” is part of the characteristics and the challenge of the term – also in the way the term is applied in the news media. Building on a framework developed by

Kalsnes (2019: 89–94), we focus on four ways that fake news has been applied by Scandinavian politicians.

### *Politicians accusing political opponents of fake news*

In 2018, the Danish politician Mattias Tesfaye from the Social Democratic Party accused the Danish author Carsten Jensen of spreading fake news. Jensen wrote an op-ed in the Swedish newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*, where he warned Swedish politicians and voters against following the Danes and capitulating to the right-wing Sweden Democrats. Jensen also argued that Denmark had become a country that would not accept foreigners. In an interview with the Danish newspaper *Ekstra Bladet*, Tesfaye asserted, “that is fake news! That is not something you can say as an accepted truth. There has never before been as many foreigners in Denmark as now [translated]” (Mortensen, 2018: para. 7–8).

### *Politicians accusing media of producing fake news*

In Norway, the national representative from the Progress Party, Mazyar Keshvari, accused the national daily *Aftenposten* of producing fake news in a story about immigration policy (Mæland, 2017). He argued in an op-ed that “people, thanks to social media, have woken up and revealed the news media’s systematic attempts to create opinions, attitudes, and reactions on false premises [translated]” (Keshvari, 2017: para. 15). Keshvari argued that media systematically, “through framing, speculation, comments and by selectively choosing information, create a false impression among readers [translated]” (para. 10).

### *Politicians as victims of fake news*

The Swedish government took serious precautions to protect the Swedish national election in 2018 from fake news and disinformation, mainly from Russia (Schori, 2018). Talks with established media and social media platforms took place before the election to fight and hinder the flow of fake news during the election campaign. It was particularly important to detect disinformation and increase the security around Swedish digital infrastructures. Leading up to the 2019 national election, Danish voters were warned about potential fake social media profiles of Danish politicians (Runge, 2019), a problem that had also been warned against in Norway in relation to the 2019 local election (Proactima, 2019). On a European level, both Denmark and Sweden also participate in and contribute to the European Union’s East StratCom Task Force, which is a strategic initiative formed in 2015 to counter Russian disinformation activities in Eastern Europe.

*Politicians warning against using the term fake news*

In 2017, former Norwegian Minister of Culture from the Conservative Party, Linda Cathrine Hofstad Helleland, warned other politicians against using the term fake news on news items or organisations they did not like. “One should be very careful to define fake news based on a dislike of the the premise or the framing of a story [translated]”, the minister said, arguing that politicians had a particular responsibility to choose their words carefully (Slydal-Jensen, 2017: para. 7–8).

## The news media

Just as administrative systems across the Scandinavian countries have taken steps to improve digital security, the media sector has implemented a number of initiatives to counter fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. On the basis of both a high level of education (Eurostat, 2019b) and the existence of strong public service media, the Scandinavian countries might be expected to be more resistant to the influence of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation than many other countries. Despite this, however, the discussion about fake news has not gone unnoticed by the media sector, which has responded through a number of strategic and editorial initiatives. Some of these initiatives aim at debunking false information while others are directed at increasing awareness of the value of high-quality information and improving levels of media literacy.

*Fact-checking*

At the activist end of the spectrum, the last decade has witnessed the rise of dedicated fact-checking formats. These fact-checkers are distinguished from traditional journalism in that they investigate claims that are already in the public domain rather than, as traditional journalistic procedure would do, before the claims are made public (Graves, 2016). As one columnist put it, the fact-checkers are “referee[s] in the mudslinging contest” of public political discussion (Poniewozik, 2012: para. 4), as they pass verdicts on the veracity of claims.

The underlying epistemological orientation of the wave of fact-checking initiatives resembles what Hammersley (1992) calls “subtle realism”: while accepting the premise that knowledge is socially constructed and communicated through the choices of involved actors, subtle realism insists on an underlying existence of objective facts that should not be subject to individual interpretations or social discussion. In this way, fact-checkers do not challenge the ontological premise that what is in the media is the result of human agency in the form of selection and framing, but rather insist that some things are true and others are not. In relation to this, an international study found that a sample

of mostly Norwegian journalists was ambivalent to such fact-checkers; on the one hand, fact-checking was considered a useful tool for improving quality in reporting, but on the other hand, there were reservations against relying on a single source to assess factuality (Brandtzaeg et al., 2018).

Fact-checking arrived in Scandinavia in 2005, when *Dagbladet* launched Faktasjekken. It was, however, not until the early 2010s that the movement accelerated as numerous fact-checkers emerged across Scandinavia, reflecting a broader international trend gaining momentum with, in particular, the success of the Pulitzer Prize winner PolitiFact. Table 14.2 provides an overview of the historical development and types of fact-checkers in Scandinavia.

**Table 14.2** *Fact-checkers in Scandinavia*

	Medium	Years	Organisation
<b>Norway</b>			
Faktasjekk	online	2005–2009	Dagbladet
Faktasjekk	online	2009–2013	Bergens Tidende
Faktisk.no	online	2017–	Dagbladet, VG, NRK, TV2 + Amedia, Polaris
Detektor	television	2017–2017	NRK
<b>Sweden</b>			
Faktakollen	online	2010–2010	SvD
Lögndetektorn	online	2010–2010	Aftonbladet
Detektor	radio	2012–2012	Sveriges Radio
Viralgranskaren	online	2014–	Metro
Faktisk.se	online	2018–2018	DN SR, SVT, SvD, KIT
#livekollen	online	2015–2015	SVT
<b>Denmark</b>			
Detektor	television	2011–	DR
Detektor	radio	2011–2014	DR
Tjek Det	online	2016–	Mandag Morgen

While these fact-checking initiatives share an ambition to separate fact from falsehood, their units of analysis differ; some control the truthfulness of selected claims in news items (e.g., the Norwegian Faktisk.no); some fact-check claims that “go viral” on social media (e.g., the Swedish Viralgranskaren); and some subject specific claims from policy-makers to scrutiny (e.g., the Danish edition of Detektor). The latter is the most prevalent and also the one that most explicitly connects the emergence of fact-checkers with the institutions of politics.

Many of these fact-checkers obviously predate the current discussion of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation that followed the Brexit referendum and the 2016 American presidential election, but they nonetheless share the ambition of sorting facts from falsehood. As Table 14.2 also shows, many of these initiatives exist within the context of legacy media organisations – which leads us to the question of how these organisations have dealt with the current issues of communicative pollution in the public sphere.

### *Legacy media*

While fact-checkers constitute tangible initiatives to separate facts from falsehood, the editorial legacy media has also used the fake-news crisis as an occasion to remind the public, as well as other stakeholders, that they are important. For a number of years, the “old” media organisations have experienced decreasing circulation figures, challenged business models, and increasing polarisation and mistrust from parts of the population. Legacy media have also been challenged and critiqued by a growing subset of hyperpartisan, alternative news sites in the Scandinavian countries (Heft et al., 2020; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, Chapter 13), such as *Samtiden* (Sweden), *Den Korte Avis* (Denmark), and *Resett* (Norway), that claim to offer “an alternative vision to hegemonic policies, priorities, and perspectives” (Downing, 2001: v). Research of various countries consistently shows that audiences who identify as right-leaning are typically deeply distrustful of the news in general and are therefore more likely to use alternative media (Newman et al., 2018). The alternative, hyperpartisan sites are known for challenging established news formats (i.e., the clear distinction between news and views; see Holt et al., 2019), which is a cornerstone of the legacy media’s claim to fact-based reporting (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Nevertheless, the fake-news crisis offers legacy media an opportunity to reassert their importance as an institution of democracy, emphasising the value of quality journalism and independent reporting that adheres to the professional and ethical standards of the “high modernism of journalism” (Hallin, 1992).

This opportunity has been seized. Protecting their position as a democratic institution, the editorial news media have responded to the fake-news crisis by publicly emphasising both the importance of independent, diverse, and high-quality journalism on the one hand and, on the other, how they themselves act as safeguards of such journalism. One problem is, however, that the practices of journalism have been somewhat weaponised and turned against journalism by political actors peddling claims of questionable truthfulness. If a politician makes a controversial claim, the journalistic instinct will be to report that claim; but, if the claim is false, the journalist must strike a delicate balance to not be criticised as biased.

Another concrete example is the campaign that TU (the trade organisation of the privately owned media in Sweden) launched in 2017. Under the heading “Ethics and credibility [translated]”, the organisation strategically communicated how editors and journalists work and signalled how they demonstrate higher editorial and ethical standards than the general public might think (TU Medier i Sverige, 2019).

A rather unorthodox and activist media initiative to counter fake news that also deserves mentioning is the Danish television programme *Ultra Snydt* (Rubin, 2018). Aimed at school children, the weekly programme imitates the



serious format of television news and presents its audiences with one true and one fabricated news story. Its ambition is to teach critical skills and prompt discussions about trust, journalism, and misinformation among young audiences, improving their media literacy. This example illustrates how, when it comes to the battle for the hearts and minds of the public, the legacy media will not just stand on the sidelines and report what goes on in the public sphere; rather, they pursue a more active approach and act accordingly.

Much of the news media's strategic positioning in response to the fake-news scare has, as a matter of fact, explicitly targeted young people and their media literacy. When Danish media company JP/Politikens Hus announced the launch of *Børneavisen* (a printed weekly newspaper for 9–12-year-olds) in 2018, editor-in-chief and director Louise Abildgaard Grøn asserted the following:

*Børneavisen* will guide the child by the hand in a world where information about societal issues increasingly takes place through social media, where fake news flourishes, and where children – through their use of social media – are presented with much that is difficult to sort through [translated]. (JP/Pol, 2018: para. 5)

Striking a similar note, the Norwegian Media Authority produced and published materials for teachers “who want [...] to strengthen young people's critical understanding of the media and their skills in evaluating media content (source criticism) [translated]” (Medietilsynet, 2018: 2).

### News media use, trust, and concerns of fake news

Turning to the attitudes and experiences of citizens regarding fake news, manipulated information, and trust towards different media outlets in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, we use and present data from the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2018). This empirical material deals with news consumption, media trust, and views of fake news. The study was commissioned by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism to understand how news is being consumed in a range of countries. Research was conducted by YouGov, using an online questionnaire, at the end of January and beginning of February 2018. The data was weighted to targets based on census and industry-accepted data on age, gender, and region, to represent the total population of each country. The sample is reflective of the population that has access to the Internet, with the following sample sizes: Denmark ( $N = 2,025$ ); Norway ( $N = 2,027$ ); and Sweden ( $N = 2,016$ ).

First, we focus on media use in these Scandinavian countries, where the media environments are characterised by a mix of strong commercial and public service media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Syvertsen et al., 2014). The main news

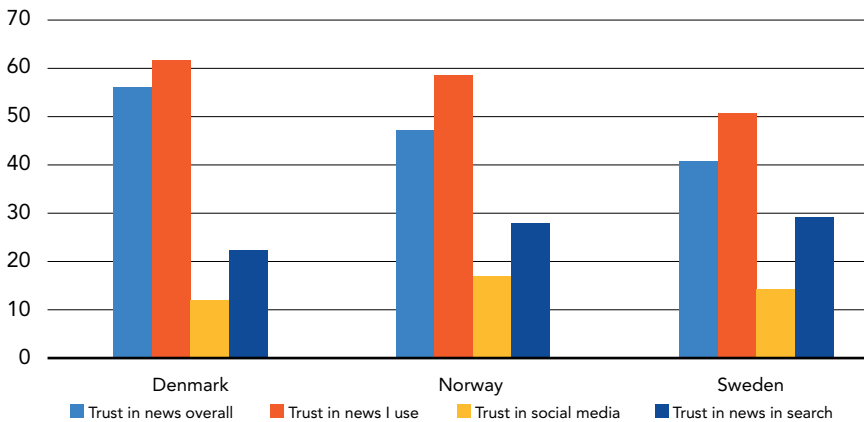
sources for Danes, Norwegians, and Swedes include public and commercial broadcasters such as DR, TV 2, NRK, and SVT, as well as national quality newspapers, national tabloids, and local press. Use of traditional sources such as print and television is declining, and online use remains high in Norway (87%) and Sweden (87%), although slightly decreasing in Denmark (82%) (Newman et al., 2018).

In all three countries, media consumption has thus become more and more digital as audiences move online. This development goes hand in hand with the use of smartphones – which is increasing – and the majority of audiences in these countries use their phones to access news (Newman et al., 2019). Digital platforms are playing an increasingly central role in news consumption. Most legacy media run their own websites and apps and additionally select news for distribution on third-party platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Audiences are thus able to consume a mix of news from commercial, public service, and other actors on their social media platforms.

In 2018, the top social media platform used for news consumption was Facebook, with 40 per cent of Norwegian, 36 per cent of Swedish, and 34 per cent of Danish users receiving news from the platform (Newman et al., 2018: 10). The rising political and public concern with digital dominance – and the dominance of particular companies – is thus a concern with user autonomy, user agency, and the power of platforms to impact opinions and decision-making through profiling, information control, and behavioural nudges (Kreiss, 2016; Tambini & Moore, 2018). There has been a lively debate since 2016 concerning the political and social implications of the size and dominance of two particular players: Facebook and Google. The debate has centred on issues such as fake news, disinformation, misinformation, and the influence of Google search results.

### *Trust in the media*

As Figure 14.1 shows, the public in the Scandinavian countries still express trust in legacy media, and in Denmark, the trust score for news in general has increased to 56 per cent (+ 6 percentage points since 2017, according to Newman et al, 2018: 74). This might come as no surprise after the legacy media seized the opportunity to reassert the importance of quality journalism and the need for source criticism following the fake-news debate. The trust scores are generally higher for quality news brands (both public service and commercial), lower for tabloids, and lowest for partisan sites such as *Den Korte Avis* in Denmark, *Human Rights Service* in Norway, and *Fria Tider* in Sweden. It appears that the public differentiates between competing sources of news and that trust is rooted in traditional media actors.

**Figure 14.1** Trust in news and social media (per cent)

Source: Newman et al., 2018

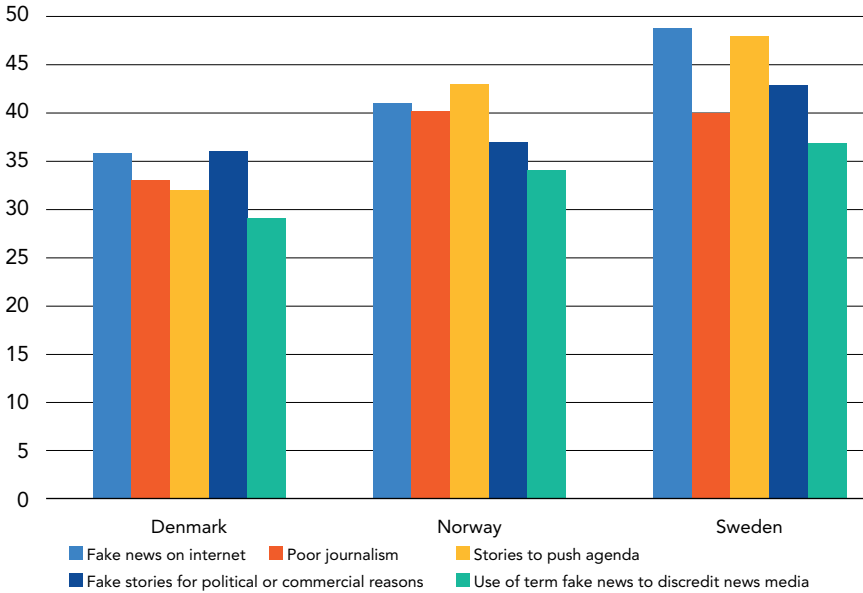
Trust scores are even higher for the news sources that individuals use themselves, suggesting two factors affecting these scores: first, people are critically assessing the news they consume; and second, people who use partisan sites find them more trustworthy than non-users. The ambition of many fact-checking initiatives is to raise awareness about fake news, disinformation, and misinformation and to increase critical skills and media literacy. It is not possible to disentangle whether these initiatives have had an effect on the public, but the data presented in the *Reuters Digital News Report* suggests that news consumers are aware of the need for media literacy in a digital media landscape. Amid discussions about social media polluted with manipulated and fake information, it is not surprising that the trust scores are significantly lower for news in social media and for news from searches using platforms like Google.

### *Public concern with fake news and misinformation*

In line with the low trust for news in social media and from search engines, the concern about what is real and what is fake in online news ranges from 36 per cent in Denmark to 49 per cent in Sweden (see Figure 14.2). The concern about fake news, disinformation, and misinformation made by journalists, politicians, and other actors to push an agenda either for political or commercial reasons differs to some extent depending on who is seen as the perpetrator. Overall concerns are lower in Denmark and highest in Sweden. Concern about stories where facts are spun or twisted to push a particular agenda are highest in Norway (43%) and Sweden (48%), whereas in Denmark, the concern for stories that are completely made up for political or commercial reasons is highest (36%). Three to four out of ten people have concern for poor journalism,

defined as factual mistakes, dumbed-down stories, and misleading headlines or clickbait (Newman et al., 2018). It is clear that citizens across the three countries are aware of – and concerned about – various types of fake or manipulated information they can encounter, especially in an online environment.

**Figure 14.2** Concerns about fake news and poor journalism (per cent)



*Comments:* Respondents who are concerned (very and extremely concerned).

Q1: Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: “Thinking about online news, I am concerned about what is real and what is fake on the internet”.

Q2: To what extent, if at all, are you concerned about the following: Poor journalism (factual mistakes, dumbed down stories, misleading headlines/clickbait).

Q3: To what extent, if at all, are you concerned about the following: Stories that are spun or twisted to push a particular agenda.

Q4: To what extent, if at all, are you concerned about the following: Stories that are completely made up for political or commercial reasons.

Q5: To what extent, if at all, are you concerned about the following: The use of the term fake news (e.g., by politicians, others) to discredit news media they don’t like.

*Source:* Newman et al., 2018

When asked if they had personal experience with fake stories, the numbers are lower; 24 per cent of the Danes, 33 per cent of the Norwegians, and 41 per cent of the Swedes said that they had encountered “stories where facts are spun or twisted to push a particular agenda”, and even less encountered “stories that are completely made up for political or commercial reasons” (Danes, 9%; Norwegians, 14%; Swedes, 22%) (Newman et al., 2018). Self-reported survey results do not, however, tell us anything about people’s actual ability to recognise

factual news stories or opinion pieces that reflect the beliefs, values, or reasons of whoever expresses them. A recent study by Nygren and Guath (2019) shows that Swedish youth have a hard time determining the trustworthiness of factual, biased, and false information online. The inability to determine credibility is partly explained by a mindset of overconfidence and ignorance, enhancing confirmation bias. In other words, the lack of knowledge in a domain results in overconfidence in one's own ability and the incapacity to judge the performance of others. Finally, the study concludes that it is important to learn critical evaluation to support a critical and constructive treatment of digital news.

When it comes to ways of preventing the spread of fake news, the overwhelming majority of people expect social networking sites, journalists, and politicians to be responsible. Across the three countries, the majority of respondents agree with the statements that social media sites, media, journalists, and the government should do more to make it easier to separate what is real and fake on the Internet (Newman et al., 2018). So far, many different actors have initiated fact-checking, information about how to identify fake news for audiences, new rules and regulation on social media platforms, and so forth. The awareness of the existence and concern for the effects of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation in digital media seems to be relatively high among the Scandinavian public, but the ability to handle this media environment is still under-researched.

## Conclusion

The phenomenon of fake news has a long history, but the expansion of its politically oriented incarnation is nevertheless recent. Despite high levels of trust in societal institutions and the media – and despite traditionally solid politics and media institutions – none of the Scandinavian countries are spared from worry about manipulated and false information. Fake news, disinformation, and misinformation have created concerns about what is real and what is fake online – in Scandinavia as elsewhere. Citizens are most concerned with fake news in Sweden (49%), followed by Norway (41%), then Denmark (36%) (Newman et al., 2018).

Scandinavian politicians have been both accusers and victims of fake news. The temptation to accuse the media of producing fake news when the framing disfavours the politician may be hard to resist, as we can see from the examples in this chapter. Many political actors also express concern about fake news and depict themselves as victims accused by political opponents. However, there are also examples of politicians warning against the use of the term fake news based on whether someone likes the framing of a story or not, as it may lead to reduced trust in editorial media in general.

Legacy media has seized the opportunity to assert their own role as guardians of quality journalism and source criticism, and the many fact-checking initiatives appearing in Scandinavia are a response to the chaotic digital information ecosystem. Paradoxically, however, legacy media might simultaneously serve as an amplification and reverberation channel for fake news narratives as they cover fake news and movements that challenge the established information order. The increase in the number of fact-checking organisations has thus raised questions about how they function and what kind of corrections of disinformation and misinformation work best and why. Clearly, both media and political actors, as well as the public, are concerned about the impact of fake news and manipulated information; but, we are still not entirely sure of its scale. We also know that an overwhelming majority of people expect social networking sites, journalists, and politicians to do their share to make it easier to separate what is real and fake online.

We need more research on the scale and scope of the problem of false and manipulated information to address different types of fake news, disinformation, and misinformation in Scandinavia. We also need to know more about how people differentiate between different types of information online (in line with, e.g., Nielsen & Graves, 2017) and about people's actual abilities to recognise factual news stories compared to opinions that reflect the beliefs, values, or motivations of the author. The potential to produce and disseminate false information through social media has motivated many different actors to engage in the discussion about the role and the impact of fake news and disinformation.

The ease of information manipulation in texts, icons, images, videos, and sounds have increased the need for new methods to track and detect information manipulation. We also need new methods for digital source criticism, verification, and media literacy in an information environment suited to the digital manipulation of voice and video (so-called deep fakes). From this perspective, it is worrying that a number of studies argue that citizens overvalue their ability to determine the credibility of digital news (see, e.g., Nygren & Guath, 2019). It is also of concern that news users spread fake news and information manipulation even though they know it is fake, because they want to incite the spread of misinformation, to "call out" the stories as fake, for the amusement value, or for some other reason (Barthel et al., 2016). With the rapid development of deep fakes, the issue of media literacy and source criticism becomes even more important for future democratic public discussions.

## References

- Aelst, P., & Aalberg, T. (2011). Between trust and suspicion: A comparative study of the relationship between politicians and political journalists in Belgium, Norway and Sweden. *Javnost – The Public*, 18(4), 73–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2011.11009068>

- Avery, J. M. (2009). Videomalaise or virtuous circle? The influence of the news media on political trust. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14(4), 410–433. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161209336224>
- Barthel, M., Mitchell, A., & Holcomb, J. (2016). Many Americans believe fake news is sowing confusion. *Pew Research Center*, 15, 12.
- Brandtzaeg, P. B., Følstad, A., & Domínguez, M. A. C. (2018). How journalists and social media users perceive online fact-checking and verification services. *Journalism Practice*, 12(9), 1109–1129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1363657>
- Cook, T. (1998). *Governing with the news: The news media as a political institution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dijk, J. V., Poell, T., & de Waal, M. (2018). *The platform society: Public values in a connective world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190889760.001.0001>
- Downing, J. D. H. (2001). *Radical media: Rebellious communication and social movements*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452204994>
- Duke Reporters' Lab. (n.d.). Fact-checking. Duke University. Retrieved March 18, 2020, from <https://reporterslab.org/fact-checking/>
- Eurostat. (2019a). Digital economy and society statistics – households and individuals. Retrieved March 18, 2020, from [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital\\_economy\\_and\\_society\\_statistics\\_-\\_households\\_and\\_individuals](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Digital_economy_and_society_statistics_-_households_and_individuals)
- Eurostat. (2019b). Education and training in the EU – facts and figures. Retrieved March 18, 2020, from [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Education\\_and\\_training\\_in\\_the\\_EU\\_-\\_facts\\_and\\_figures](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Education_and_training_in_the_EU_-_facts_and_figures)
- Farkas, J., & Schou, J. (2018). Fake news as a floating signifier: Hegemony, antagonism and the politics of falsehood. *Javnost – The Public*, 25(3), 298–314. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2018.1463047>
- Farkas, J., Schou, J., & Neumayer, C. (2018). Cloaked Facebook pages: Exploring fake Islamist propaganda in social media. *New Media & Society*, 20(5), 1850–1867. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817707759>
- Figenschou, T. U., & Ihlebæk, K. A. (2018). Challenging journalistic authority – media criticism in far-right alternative media. *Journalism Studies*, 20(9), 1221–1237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1500868>
- Gans, H. (1980). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Garret, R. K., Bond, R., & Poulsen, S. (2019, August 16). Too many people think satirical news is real. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/too-many-people-think-satirical-news-is-real-121666>
- Graves, L. (2016). *Deciding what's true: The rise of political fact-checking in American journalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gulati, R., Nohria, N., & Zaheer, A. (2000). Strategic networks. *Strategic Management Journal*, 21(3), 203–215. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1097-0266\(200003\)21:3<203::AID-SMJ102>3.0.CO;2-K](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1097-0266(200003)21:3<203::AID-SMJ102>3.0.CO;2-K)
- Hallin, D. C. (1992). The passing of the “high modernism” of American journalism. *Journal of Communication*, 42(3), 14–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1992.tb00794.x>
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hammersley, M. (1992). *What's wrong with ethnography?* London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351038027>
- Heft, A., Mayerhöffer, E., Reinhardt, S., & Knüpfer, C. (2020). Beyond Breitbart: Comparing right-wing digital news infrastructures in six Western democracies. *Policy & Internet*, 12(1), 20–45. <https://doi.org/10.1002/poi3.219>
- HLEG (High Level Expert Group). (2018, March). *A multi-dimensional approach to disinformation: Report of the independent high level group on fake news and online disinformation*. Publications office of the EU. <https://www.doi.org/10.2759/739290>

- Holt, K., Figenschou, T. U., & Frischlich, L. (2019). Key dimensions of alternative news media. *Digital Journalism*, 7(7), 860–869. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2019.1625715>
- Ipsos. (2017). Svenska folket om ”fejk-nyheter” [Swedes on “fake news”]. *TU Medier i Sverige*. [https://tu.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Ipsos\\_analys\\_TU\\_Fejk-nyheter-24-feb-2017.pdf](https://tu.se/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Ipsos_analys_TU_Fejk-nyheter-24-feb-2017.pdf)
- Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*. New York: New York University Press
- Jowett, G. S., & O'Donnell, V. J. (2012). *Propaganda & persuasion* (5th ed.). London: Sage.
- JP/Pol. (2018, May 30). Ny avis til de 9-12-årige – JP/Politikens Hus lancerer Børneavisen [A new newspaper for 9–12-year-olds – JP/Politikens Hus launches Børneavisen]. *JP/PolitikensHus*. <https://jppol.dk/pressemeddelelser/ny-avis-til-de-9-12-aarige-jp-politikens-hus-lancerer-boerneavisen/>
- Kalsnes, B. (2018). Fake news. In *Oxford research encyclopedia, communication* (21 pp.). <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.809>
- Kalsnes, B. (2019). *Falske nyheter: Løgn, desinformasjon og propaganda i den digitale offentligheten* [Fake news: Lies, disinformation, and propaganda in the digital public sphere]. Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk.
- Kalsnes, B., & Krumsvik, A. (2019). Building trust: Media Executive perceptions of readers' trust. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 16(4), 295–306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16522354.2019.1640534>
- Kalsnes B., & Larsson, A. O. (2019, December 21). Facebook news use during the 2017 Norwegian elections – Assessing the influence of hyperpartisan news. *Journalism Practice*, 1–17. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2019.1704426>
- Keshvari, M. (2017, February 24). Folket har våknet og gjennomskuet mediene [The people have woken up and seen through the media]. *Aftenposten*. <https://www.aftenposten.no/meninger/debatt/i/OKo6k/Folket-har-vaknet-og-gjennomskuet-mediene--Mazyar-Keshvari>
- Kiousis, S. (2001). Public trust or mistrust? Conceptions of media credibility in the information age. *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(4), 381–403. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0404\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0404_4)
- Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2007). *The elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*. New York: Three Rivers Press
- Kreiss, D. (2016). *Prototype politics: Technology-intensive campaigning and the data of democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199350247.001.0001>
- Lindquist, A. (2018). Våbensmugling, fake news og bedrageri: Her er de svenske Valgskandaler [Weapon smuggling, fake news, and fraud: Here are the Swedish election scandals]. *Danmarks Radio*. <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/udland/valgsvirige/vaabensmugling-fake-news-og-bedrageri-her-er-de-svenske-valgskandaler>
- McGonagle, T. (2017). “Fake news”: False fears or real concerns? *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights*, 35(4), 203–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0924051917738685>
- Medietilsynet. (2017). Falske nyheter: En webundersøkelse utført av Sentio Research for Medietilsynet [Fake news: A web survey conducted by Sentio Research for the Norwegian Media Authority]. [https://www.medietilsynet.no/globalassets/publikasjoner/2017/falske\\_nyheter\\_undersokelse\\_hovedfunn.pdf](https://www.medietilsynet.no/globalassets/publikasjoner/2017/falske_nyheter_undersokelse_hovedfunn.pdf)
- Medietilsynet. (2018). *Falske nyheter – kritisk medieforståelse* [Fake news – critical media understanding]. Frederikstad: Medietilsynet. <https://www.dubestemmer.no/falske-nyheter-og-kritisk-medieforstaelse>
- Moe, H., & Sakariassen, H. (2018). Bruksmønstre for digitale nyheter [User patterns for digital news] [Reuters digital news report]. University of Bergen. [https://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/attachments/bruksmonstre\\_for\\_digiale\\_nyheter\\_2018\\_0.pdf](https://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/attachments/bruksmonstre_for_digiale_nyheter_2018_0.pdf)
- Mortensen, A. (2018, September 2). S-profil raser over advarsel til svenskerne: – Det er fake news! [S-profile is raging over the warning for the Swedes: – It is fake news!] *Ekstra Bladet*. <https://ekstrabladet.dk/nyheder/politik/s-profil-raser-over-advarsel-til-svenskerne-det-er-fake-news/7289735>
- Mæland, K. (2017, February 24). FrP-Keshvari rasende etter Aftenposten-sak: – Falske nyheter [FrP Keshvari is furious after Aftenposten case: – Fake news]. *Nettavisen*. <https://www.nettavisen.no>



- no/na24/propaganda/frp-keshvari-rasende-etter-aftenposten-sak---falske-nyheter/3423316425.html
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., Levy, D. A. L., & Nielsen, R. K. (2018). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2018*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, R., Kalogeropoulos, A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2019). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2019*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/>
- Nielsen, R. K., & Graves, L. (2017). “*News you don’t believe*”: *Audience perspectives on fake news*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. [https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/Nielsen%26Graves\\_factsheet\\_1710v3\\_FINAL\\_download.pdf](https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/Nielsen%26Graves_factsheet_1710v3_FINAL_download.pdf)
- Nygren, T., & Guath, M. (2019). Swedish teenagers’ difficulties and abilities to determine digital news credibility. *Nordicom Review*, 40(1), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2019-0002>
- Poniewozik, J. (2012, August 8). PolitiFact, Harry Reid’s pants, and the limits of fact-checking. *TIME Magazine*. <http://entertainment.time.com/2012/08/08/politifact-harry-reids-pants-and-the-limits-of-fact-checking/>
- Proactima. (2019). *Sikkerheten i demokratiske prosesser i Norge: Utredning – valgprosessen [The security in democratic processes in Norway: Investigation – the election process]*. Rapport: Sekretariatet for valglovutvalget [Report: Secretariat for the election law committee]. [https://www.valglovutvalget.no/files/2019/07/Utredning\\_av\\_sikkerheten\\_i\\_demokratiske\\_prosesser\\_i\\_Norge.pdf](https://www.valglovutvalget.no/files/2019/07/Utredning_av_sikkerheten_i_demokratiske_prosesser_i_Norge.pdf)
- Rasmussen, L. L. [@larsloekke]. (2018, April 24). Mine gode venner på Ekstrabladet overrasker til stadighed med historier om min familie og mig. Anede ikke, at min kone er blevet fyret... #FakeNews #dkpol [My good friends at Ekstrabladet continue to surprise me with stories about my family and me. Had no idea my wife had been fired... #FakeNews #dkpol] [Image attached] [Tweet]. Twitter. <https://twitter.com/larsloekke/status/988539930619064320?lang=da>
- Rubin, M. (2018). Kan mænd blive gravide? DR’s fornemme børnefjernsyn om fake news er herligt, superfedt tænkt og fremragende public service [Can men become pregnant? DR’s children television is great, smartly executed, and excellent public service]. *Politiken*. [https://politiken.dk/kultur/film\\_og\\_tv/art6775998/DRs-fornemme-b%C3%B8rnefjernsyn-om-fake-news-er-herligt-superfedt-t%C3%A6nkt-og-fremragende-public-service](https://politiken.dk/kultur/film_og_tv/art6775998/DRs-fornemme-b%C3%B8rnefjernsyn-om-fake-news-er-herligt-superfedt-t%C3%A6nkt-og-fremragende-public-service)
- Runge, T. (2019). Fake news er en del af valgkampen – sådan undgår du at blive snydt [Fake news is a part of the elections campaigning – this is how not to get cheated]. *Forskerzonen*. <https://videnskab.dk/kultur-samfund/fake-news-er-en-del-af-valgkampen-saadan-undgaar-du-at-blive-snydt>
- Russell, A. (2011). *Networked: A contemporary history of news in transition*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Schori, M. (2018). Så ska Sverige skydda sig i valrörelsen [This is how Sweden should protect itself in the elections]. *Aftonbladet*. <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/p6pQOj/sa-ska-sverige-skydda-sig-i-valrorelsen>
- Schrøder, K. C., Ørsten, M., & Eberholst, M. K. (2018). *Danskernes brug af nyhedsmedier 2018 [Danes’ use of news media 2018]*. Center for News Research: Roskilde University. <https://www.doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1285599>
- Shah, B. (2018, June 19). Nye borgerlige vildledninger [New bourgeois deceptions]. *Informationen*. <https://www.information.dk/debat/2018/06/nye-borgerlige-vildledninger>
- Silverman, C. (2017, November 28). Social platforms promised a level playing field for all: The Russian trolls showed that was never true. *BuzzFeed News*. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/social-platforms-promised-a-level-playing-field-for-all-the>
- Silverman, C., & Alexander, L. (2016, November 3). How teens in the Balkans are duping Trump supporters with fake news. *BuzzFeed News*. <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/how-macedonia-became-a-global-hub-for-pro-trump-misinfo>
- Slydal-Jensen, G. (2017, March 9). Kulturministeren: At politikere ikke liker vinklingen på en sak, betyr ikke at det er en falsk nyhet [Minister of Culture: That politicians don’t like the angle of a case does not mean it’s a fake news]. *Journalisten*. <https://journalisten.no/linda-hofstad->

- helleland-falske-nyheter/kulturministeren-at-politikere-ikke-likervinklingen-pa-en-sak-betyr-ikke-at-det-er-en-falsk-nyhet/284046
- Skipshamn, S. (2018, May 4). Nei, rekordmange gigantiske brennmaneter inntar ikke norskekysten [No, a record number of giant jellyfish are not occupying the Norwegian coast]. *Faktisk*. <https://www.faktisk.no/faktasjekker/PXv/rekordmange-gigantiske-brennmaneter-inntar-norskekysten-i-sommer>
- Strömbäck, J., Djerf-Pierre, M., & Shehata, A. (2016). A question of time? A longitudinal analysis of the relationship between news media consumption and political trust. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 21(1), 88–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161215613059>
- Strömbäck, J., Ørsten, M., & Aalberg, T. (2008). *Communicating politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Syvertsen, T., Enli, G., Mjøs, O. J., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>
- Tambini, D., & Moore, M. (2018). Dominance, the citizen interest and the consumer interest. In M. Moore, & D. Tambini (Eds.), *Digital dominance: The power of Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple* (pp. 396–408). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2017). Defining “fake news”: A typology of scholarly definitions. *Digital Journalism*, 6(2), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143>
- Tandoc Jr., E. C., Jenkins, J., & Craft, S. (2018). Fake news as a critical incident in journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 13(6), 673–689. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2018.1562958>
- Taylor, A. (2016, November 26). Before ‘fake news,’ there was Soviet ‘disinformation’. *Washington Post*. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/11/26/before-fake-news-there-was-soviet-disinformation/?utm\\_term=.cd285bd64174](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/11/26/before-fake-news-there-was-soviet-disinformation/?utm_term=.cd285bd64174)
- Trump Twitter Archive. (2019). Search through all of Trump’s tweets. Retrieved May 2, 2019, from <http://www.trumptwitterarchive.com/>
- TU Medier i Sverige. (2019). Etik och trovärdighet [Ethics and credibility]. <https://tu.se/standpunkt/trovardighet/>
- Wardle, C., & Derekshan, H. (2017, September 27). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policy making*. Council of Europe report DGI (2017)09. <https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-toward-an-interdisciplinary-framework-for-research/168076277c>
- Williams, A. E. (2012). Trust or bust? Questioning the relationship between media trust and news attention. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 56(1), 116–131. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2011.651186>
- Østergaard, J., & Mathiessen, P. (2018, April 24). Privat-Lars slår til igen [Private Lars strikes again]. *Ekstra Bladet*. <https://ekstrabladet.dk/nyheder/politik/danskpolitik/privat-lars-slaar-til-igen-en-meget-usaedvanlig-situation/7128653>

## Chapter 15

# Lobbying in Scandinavia

Øyvind Ihlen, Anne Skorkjær Binderkrantz,  
& PerOla Öberg

### Abstract

This chapter is a tour of the Scandinavian lobbying landscape providing the state of the art for research on a contested and necessary activity. We discuss the particular context of the Scandinavian countries and current trends relevant for lobbying. Lobbying is often juxtaposed with the corporatist channel which implies institutionalised contact patterns between politicians and organised interests. The corporatist channel has, however, declined in importance while a number of trends have led to more diverse interest group systems, and new actors have assumed a more prominent role in Scandinavian lobbying. Besides discussing such trends, we also present some of the main findings about strategies and techniques used and what similarities and dissimilarities exist between the countries.

**Keywords:** lobbying, interest groups, corporatism, professionalisation, diversity

## Introduction

Political influence comes in many shapes. It is wielded through votes and engagement in political parties; but lobbying – whether by organised interest groups or other actors – is also a prominent source of influence. This type of activity can involve meetings to provide views and information to policy-makers but also more long-term cultivation of relationships and indirect lobbying, for example, in the shape of media campaigns and mobilisation of members (Binderkrantz, 2005). Lobbying is simultaneously a necessary and contested activity. It is necessary because policy-makers need viewpoints on the consequences of certain policies, which makes lobbying an important part of policy advisory systems (Craft & Howlett, 2012). It is contested since lobbying is often hidden from public scrutiny and might skew the influence of resourceful actors at the expense of the principle of “one person, one vote”. It is, however, indisputable that how interest groups and other actors use their policy capacity (Daugbjerg et al., 2018) and how policy advice and interest advocacy is balanced in the political

---

Ihlen, Ø., Binderkrantz, A. S., & Öberg, P. (2021). Lobbying in Scandinavia. In E. Skogerbø, Ø. Ihlen, N. N. Kristensen, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Power, communication, and politics in the Nordic countries* (pp. 305–323). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299-15>

system (Öberg, 2015) have a profound impact on a community's public policy (Thelen, 2019). To put it differently, studies of lobbying illustrate “the edges and boundaries of representative democracy” (Scott, 2018: 7).

In this chapter, we discuss the state of the art in Scandinavian lobbying and in the literature addressing the role of interest groups and lobbying. Our main focus is on a number of important trends changing the contours of the lobbying landscape in the last decades; on this basis, we discuss the present-day use of different types of lobbying strategies and the challenges for the literature on Scandinavian lobbyism. Reflecting the corporatist tradition, Scandinavian research on interest groups historically focused on formal participation in government committees and government agency boards – that is, “corporatism”. More recently, there has been growth in the number of studies of lobbying as well as related phenomena such as the shift towards different types of group mobilisation and new types of actors (Binderkrantz, 2005; Binderkrantz et al., 2016b; Christiansen et al., 2010). This literature forms the core of the discussion in this chapter.

Internationally, especially in countries where corporatist elements in the political system were always rare, there is a relatively large research literature on lobbying (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998; Baumgartner et al., 2009; Dür & Mateo, 2016; Godwin et al., 2013; Scott, 2018). While several of the findings from this international research have relevance in a Nordic setting, they often relate to different political contexts, be it the presidential system in the US (Hojnacki et al., 2015) or the multilevel system of the European Union (Joos, 2016; Klüver, 2013). Studying Nordic lobbying requires sensitivity to the political, economic, and cultural traditions of the region.

This chapter focuses on the three monarchies in the region: Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – or Scandinavia, as the trio is called. This choice of focus is due to how the Scandinavian countries are relatively similar in the sense that they are social-democratic welfare regimes with long democratic traditions (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Language-wise, as well as in their choice of government model, the Scandinavian countries set themselves apart from Finland and Iceland (Arter, 2016; Bengtsson et al., 2014).

First, we clarify some key terms in this chapter, and then we discuss the particular context of the Scandinavian countries and current trends relevant for lobbying, lobbying strategies and techniques, and one of the challenges for research on lobbying, namely measuring influence. We draw heavily on existing research (e.g., Binderkrantz & Christiansen, 2015; Binderkrantz et al., 2014; Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999; Christiansen et al., 2010; Espeli, 1999; Gulbrandsen, 2009; Rommetvedt, 2017a; Öberg et al., 2011) to discuss the similarities and differences between the countries. We also contrast them with other Western European democracies (e.g., Binderkrantz et al., 2016a; Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2017; Bitonti & Harris, 2017) to discuss the merit of the

notion of exceptionalism of the Nordic region. The chapter ends with some ideas for further research on lobbying in the region.

### Definition of key terms

As stated above, lobbying deals with attempts at political influence, the latter defined as an ability to shape a political decision in line with one's own preference (Dür, 2008). In short, lobbying is “*an effort designed to affect what the government does* [emphasis original]” (Nownes, 2006: 5). In the interest group literature, lobbying is usually discussed under the term “influence strategies”, and scholars distinguish between insider and outsider strategies, or direct and indirect strategies (Beyers, 2004; Binderkrantz, 2005). In other literatures, lobbying may be seen as related to terms such as “public affairs” (Harris & Fleischer, 2017) or “political public relations” (Strömbäck & Kioussis, 2019). Lobbying, then, is frequently described as a subset of such overarching approaches. Public affairs, for instance, would also include community relations and corporate social responsibility (Harris & Fleischer, 2017). Such activities are designed to help organisations achieve their goals. In this mix, lobbying is ultimately directed at political decision-makers and politicians as well as bureaucrats. The aim of lobbying is either to change or maintain policies through direct and indirect actions that influence the policy community. Lobbying can involve putting an issue on the political agenda, in addition to attempts to influence the decision-making and implementation phase of politics.

It is often assumed that many lobbyists would prefer to work the back channels of politics and keep issues away from the public eye (Culpepper, 2011). In other instances, however, lobbyists might go in the opposite direction and try to influence politicians through media coverage or grassroots initiatives. Such indirect lobbying might have a mid-term goal to involve people in advocating a cause to political decision-makers (Trapp & Laursen, 2017). Some researchers prefer to call this “outside lobbyism” (Kollman, 1998), while others argue for a narrow approach, reserving the notion of lobbying for direct contact with politicians (Hermansson et al., 1999). We, however, follow the European Commission and others and define lobbying as “all activities carried out with the objective of influencing the policy formulation and decision-making processes” (Commission of the European Communities, 2006: 5).

Lobbying may be conducted by any political actor, but special attention has been devoted to the lobbying carried out by interest groups, often defined as an organised group not seeking public office and not being a public institution (Beyers et al., 2008). Together with individual corporations, often included in the definition of interest groups by American scholars (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998), these actors are usually the most active and influential lobbyists (see

below). However, it is also important to keep in mind that there are many voluntary associations that refrain from activities aimed at influencing public policy (Arvidson et al., 2018b), and that social movements and even temporary groups of individuals – for example parents of children in schools under threat of closure – can pursue more or less advanced lobbying strategies (Öberg & Uba, 2014). In addition – and as will be discussed later – new actors, including think tanks and public affairs companies, have increased in importance in Scandinavia.

## Political and social context

As argued in the introductory paragraph and reflected elsewhere in this book, there are certain political, economic, and cultural traditions that set the Nordic countries apart and that are crucial for understanding the political communication in these countries; we highlight some of these aspects that have particular importance for lobbying strategies. Scale is key, since the formation of elites and how they interact with each other and with grassroots differs between smaller and larger countries (Bengtsson et al., 2014; Katzenstein, 1985; Maktutredningen, 1990). Many informal connections in small personal networks can open up doors for lobbyists (Tyllström, 2017) while simultaneously limiting access to policy-makers for citizen groups outside homogenous networks with strong elements of elite consensus (Christiansen et al., 2018). In addition, while a number of countries have (or are preparing) legislation that regulate lobbying activities, the Scandinavian countries have not introduced similar regulation (Crepaz et al., 2019). Rather, regulation in Scandinavia is relatively limited with a focus on anti-corruption and rules about donation to parties, although stricter rules and the introduction of lobbying registers are debated from time to time.

The Scandinavian countries are also comparably decentralised – though less so than federal systems with autonomous legislatures at the subnational level – and belong to a group of countries that have the highest level of municipal autonomy, with extensive fiscal autonomy and control over large policy scopes (Ladner et al., 2016). This, of course, has implications for lobbying strategies, for example, within welfare policies where an exclusively national focus dominates in other countries (Arvidson et al., 2018b). Closely related to this is the fact that Scandinavian countries have a high proportion of publicly funded welfare, which makes public policy-makers particularly interesting lobbying targets for actors within that sector (Svallfors, 2016). In addition, parallel with the development of large welfare states, associations of local authorities have assumed central roles both as organising the providers of welfare state services and as lobbyists vis-à-vis the central authorities (Blom-Hansen, 2002).

The often-emphasised Scandinavian political culture where consultation, cooperation, compromise, and consensus are central values (Arter, 2016) is

significant for incentives and strategies of lobbying as well. These values have been clearly visualised in the corporatist tradition with the formal involvement of interest groups in public policy-making as well as policy concertation involving organised labour, trade, and industry (e.g., Christiansen & Rommetvedt, 1999; Hermansson et al., 1999; Öberg et al., 2011). It is important to understand that the corporatist system provided advantages but also challenges for interest groups engaged in lobbying decision-makers. While corporatism provided interest groups with opportunities to influence politics, some scholars argue that groups also became part of the established system, limiting their opportunities for challenging the system (Eriksen et al., 2003). Over the last decades, the corporatist structure has been in a stage of rupture (Öberg et al., 2011), and societal pluralisation has increased (Rommetvedt, 2017a), but it is important to keep in mind that parts of the old structure still exist (Christiansen et al., 2010). For example, trade union density and membership rates are still much higher than in most other countries (Crouch, 2017).

Hence, there are several political and social aspects that most certainly condition lobbying in the Scandinavian countries. Still, how and to what extent this matters more precisely for lobbying as a particular aspect of political communication is mostly unknown and should be a subject for further research. In addition, several new trends impact these factors and create new conditions for lobbying in the Scandinavian countries, which is something we elaborate on in the next section.

### Trends and changes: Increasing professionalisation and more diversity

In the last decades, Scandinavian interest representation has changed in notable ways, from well-organised interest group systems centred along political lines of division to present-day politics where news actors have become more prominent and traditional interest groups have professionalised and diversified their political work. We will discuss some of these trends and how they matter for lobbying in the region.

First, a shift in the dynamics of political representation has affected voting, group membership, and patterns of group mobilisation. While workers would traditionally join trade unions and vote for left-wing parties, today, voting and interest group membership crosscuts traditional social divides. The traditional left-wing divide remains strong in Scandinavian politics, but new political issues such as environment, immigration, and “law and order” have gained in importance (Elgenius & Wennerhag, 2018). In effect, relations between political parties and interest groups have gradually weakened. Thus, for both parties and interest groups, it is less functional to withhold strong bonds, although trade

unions and business groups have maintained relations to particular parties to some extent (Allern & Bale, 2012; Christiansen, 2012). Additionally, there is a shift towards a larger role of citizen groups – representing constituencies outside the labour market – as citizens increasingly join groups based on new political issues. Welfare policies have also given rise to new forms of citizen representation vis-à-vis the state since client groups representing patients, for example, have proliferated (Amnå, 2006; Fisker, 2013; Lundberg, 2012; Opedal et al., 2012). A Danish study thus finds that citizen groups constituted 42 per cent of all active interest groups in 2010, compared to 29 per cent in 1975 (Binderkrantz et al., 2016b).

Second, as politics has become increasingly mediated, interest groups have responded with a general professionalisation. Researchers have observed that more and more of society's institutions value media attention and adapt to media logic to meet their goals (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014; Rommetvedt et al., 2013; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014). Taken together, this creates a new situation for organisations seeking political influence. More and more, organisations must pay attention to the media, news cycles, and news values. This has accelerated the need for people with particular knowledge about such processes, and consequently, all major interest groups have established large public relations departments. While groups previously recruited staff based on shared political goals, now generalised skills are more important as groups hire increasing numbers of professional policy strategists, public relations advisors, and communication experts (Öberg & Svensson, 2012).

Third, new types of policy actors have become important. In a comparative perspective, traditional interest groups have played a particularly dominant role in Scandinavia, and although private corporations, local authorities, and other actors have also lobbied (Christiansen & Nørgaard, 2003), their political role has been less prominent than in most other countries. More recently, research has described how interest group members – such as large businesses – prefer lobbying directly rather than mobilising through their group (Drutman, 2015; Gulbrandsen, 2009). Also, many municipalities and counties have begun to hire public relations agencies to help influence national politicians. Media coverage has documented the use of many conventional lobbying tools and techniques in this regard (Allern, 2015; Ihlen & Gullberg, 2015). The tendency for the State to lobby the State has been noted (and criticised) in Denmark as well (Hegelund & Mose, 2013). In present-day politics, think tanks have also become more important, as they increase in number and media prominence, particularly in Sweden (Blach-Ørsten & Kristensen, 2016).

Fourth, due to a combination of the trends described above, the so-called revolving-doors phenomenon has increased in importance in Scandinavian countries. Historically, career shifts from, for example, major trade unions to social democratic parties were not uncommon, but in recent years, there are



indications that former members of parliament take up positions in a broader range of political organisations (Tyllström 2019; Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017). With the rise of public relations agencies, the job market for politicians has grown as they utilise their political capital and knowledge of the political system. Research in Norway has shown how politicians from all political parties (except the Green Party) have found jobs in public relations agencies, and that all the major agencies have teams where former political rivals work together for the interests of the paying client. In the spring of 2015, this included four former cabinet ministers and eleven former state secretaries (Allern, 2015). Overall, more people are working professionally with lobbying, something that is also reflected in the growing number of practical handbooks (e.g., Esbensen, 2012; Gramnæs, 2018; Raknes & Solhjell, 2018). Some argue that this development has even created a new political class: policy professionals (Garsten et al., 2015).

Fifth, increasing globalisation has also opened up new international arenas for lobbying by Scandinavian actors. These increasing attempts to influence international organisations, for example the European Union, seem to copy many of the strategies used on local and national arenas but still call for new knowledge of politics and policy and other kinds of alliances, which together change the context for lobbying at other levels as well (Dellmuth & Tallberg, 2016; Johansson et al., 2018; Tallberg et al., 2018). At the same time – but still to a limited extent – international actors such as multinational companies have made their appearance in Scandinavian politics.

Summing up, a number of trends have led to more diverse interest group systems, and new actors have assumed a more prominent role in Scandinavian lobbying. Still, there is a very large element of stability. For example, while the revolving-doors phenomenon clearly exists, most former members of parliament find occupations outside of lobbying (Blach-Ørsten et al., 2017). Relatively speaking, public relations agencies still do not have a huge role in Scandinavia, and scholars have even remarked that the media attention to these agencies belies their influence (Rommetvedt, 2014). Traditional actors such as business associations and organisations, trade unions, and organisations of local authorities still control the majority of economic and personnel resources, and even though union membership has declined, it is still at relatively high levels (Binderkrantz et al., 2014).

### Lobbying strategies and techniques

While the previous section focused on change over time, this section presents the current state of the art in Scandinavian lobbying. In other words, what do we know about lobbying in the political situation that is an effect of the trends identified?

The international literature points to a range of different strategies and techniques used by lobbyists (Binderkrantz, 2005). Baumgartner and colleagues (2009) list inside advocacy (personal contacts with members of parliament, dissemination of external research to policy-makers, etc.), outside advocacy (public relations campaigns, paid ads, etc.), and grassroots advocacy (mobilising mass membership, organising a lobby day, etc.). Godwin and colleagues (2013) argue that three activities take up most of a lobbyist's time: monitoring what policy-makers are doing, supplying information to policy-makers, and building relationships with policy-makers and other lobbyists.

Research in Scandinavia finds that organised interests typically use a combination of many methods – both lobbying politicians and pursuing media coverage – while less conventional activities such as protests or demonstrations are less widely used (Binderkrantz et al., 2014; Opedal et al., 2012; Thesen & Rommetvedt, 2009). There are strong indications in the literature that strategy choices are constrained by political opportunity structures as well as by the particular identity of the interest group (Arvidson et al., 2018b). For example, in a study of Swedish trade unions, Peterson and colleagues show that these organisations have only marginally and slowly changed and diversified the repertoire of actions that they use in the postwar period. Since the main specificities of the Scandinavian labour market regime persist, traditional ways to influence politics are still the most important (Peterson et al., 2012).

A finding in both Denmark and Norway is that lobbyists often grasp the opportunity to let the politician “shine” in the media even though a proposal might be theirs originally (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019; Kværna, 2011; Trapp & Laursen, 2017). With the advent of social media, organisations have acquired an additional tool for political influence, although we still have limited insight into what extent lobbyists use these and with what effects. Potentially, organisations are not as reliant on traditional news media as previously when they want to influence political decisions. Several recent examples show how campaigns are launched and build momentum on social media before gaining coverage in legacy media (Ihlen & Gullberg, 2015). One might also hypothesise that social media provide initial framing control, and hence is a better strategic choice in the initial stage of a lobbying campaign compared to using legacy media. The best and most powerful actors, however, are able to utilise all arenas (Binderkrantz et al., 2014; Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019) – a finding in line with international research (van der Graaf et al., 2015). Contrary to claims in American research (i.e., Baumgartner et al., 2009), resources are indeed important to gain access to the bureaucracy, the Parliament, and the media in Denmark (Binderkrantz et al., 2014). Money, members, and employees are vital, and resources may even be more important in today's lobbying environment with the focus on professional communication. At the same time, “citizen groups report a higher level of agenda-setting

success and a lower level of decision-making influence than economic groups” (Binderkrantz & Pedersen, 2017: 92).

Research on Norwegian health policy has shown how Twitter is an important tool for addressing politicians directly. Lobbyists attempt to get politicians to respond to them in public and make promises (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019). When politicians say something publicly that the lobbyist disagrees with, the latter might ask for a meeting to present his or her critical arguments in private. There is, however, a general feeling that if you use the media to chastise politicians, the case is lost since the positions then become firmly established and the politicians need to stand their ground, save face, or both (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019; Kværna, 2011). Such findings have a parallel, at least in the US, in how efficient lobbyists do not rely on crisis mongering and are less inclined to use pathos. Ethos, or credibility, is the most important, since lobbyists want to be the ones that politicians seek out for advice (Baumgartner et al., 2009). In a seminal study, Berry (1977) argued that if you seek confrontation, you have accepted that you will not become an insider.

Effective lobbying is seldom performed solely based on the interests of the client, as the interests of the politicians must also be taken into account; just as any sales person, lobbyists must convey the usefulness of “the product” (Kværna, 2011). Lobbyists tend to argue from facts and science, efficiency, equity, or a combination (Vining et al., 2005). A staple strategy is to argue that a proposal will serve the public interest (Ihlen et al., 2018; Rommetvedt, 2017a); correspondingly, the use of self-interested arguments has dwindled (Uhre & Rommetvedt, 2018). This finding is not peculiar to the Norwegian setting. In general, legitimacy is based on the ability to align “the self-interested socio-political claims of the organization with a view of the public interest held by at least some influential segments of society” (Oberman, 2017: 484). A recent study of group appearances in the news media confirms that interest groups often frame their concerns in public terms, although references to membership interests are more common among Danish groups than British groups (Binderkrantz, 2020).

Still, the notion of the public interest is slippery, and furthermore, “rivals are highly likely to counter such arguments by making use of a conflicting social value” (Baumgartner et al., 2009: 147). Thus, it becomes important for lobbyists to build alliances. The parties in a lobby alliance do not need to agree on everything, but the alliance must be sufficiently strong (Rommetvedt, 2017a). At least two of the practical handbooks argue that the best alliances are those that bring together surprising partners – partners usually thought of as adversaries (Heglund & Mose, 2013; Raknes & Solhjell, 2018).

## Differences within and between Scandinavian countries

It is important to acknowledge that while the Scandinavian countries are often lumped together as examples of a democratic corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) – and there are indeed many other similarities – this may obscure important differences that also have consequences for lobbying. One of the more important dissimilarities is the organisation of state administration, where Sweden differs from the other Nordic countries, except for Finland. Sweden has an organisational divide between government ministries and central government agencies (Ahlbäck Öberg & Wockelberg, 2016); in contrast to countries with ministerial rule (like Norway and Denmark), Swedish ministries can only steer government agencies through legislation and control of finances and are not allowed to interfere in particular cases when agencies exercise public authority. The fact that administrative agencies enjoy a high degree of independence and discretion means that some decisions that can be influenced through politicians in Denmark and Norway must be directed towards civil servants in Sweden.

The Scandinavian countries are also said to have different versions of corporatist arrangements. For instance, some hypothesise that “more consensual roll calls will be found in Denmark as compared to Norway and Sweden” since the two latter countries have reduced the number of implementing corporatist committees to a larger degree (Christiansen et al., 2010: 36). Governments in Sweden and Norway have traditionally been stronger than in Denmark; hence, parliament lobbying might be stronger in the latter (Christiansen et al., 2010).

Another difference is that Norway has stronger localised media systems and, together with Sweden, a higher network readiness than Denmark (Baller et al., 2016). Thus, local and regional media are likely to be more central in lobbying media strategies in Norway than in Denmark and Sweden, and accordingly, local and regional media are often used to build an agenda in Norway (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019). In addition, there are differences in decision-making competences on various levels (Ladner et al., 2016) and even variations within countries. Lobbying on the local level, for example, must be adjusted to different civil society regimes in municipalities in the same country, based on how local governments integrate civil society in public social welfare (Arvidson et al., 2018a).

## Challenges to lobbying research: Measuring political influence

Depending on the lack of transparency that characterises lobbying, research in this field faces several challenges. One of the most important but difficult issues is to measure the effects of lobbying, which we often understand as political

influence. This is challenging for interest group research in general, but while other strands of interest group research can study participation (and assume or draw inferences about influence from those observations) and – maybe more importantly – policy processes, those options are seldom available, or at least more complicated, for lobby researchers.

We do know that Scandinavian politicians are, in general, positive towards lobbying (Rommetvedt, 2014; Strömbäck, 2011). It is easy to get access to politicians, and anecdotal evidence suggests that this often comes as a surprise for organisational representatives from abroad. Furthermore, the lobbying system ensures that a wider range of interests are heard compared to those represented in the corporatist system (Rommetvedt, 2014). Still, the Norwegian members of parliament do think that the most resourceful organised interests have too much influence compared to weaker interest groups (Rommetvedt, 2014). It is, however, necessary to be critical towards sources based on the involved actors. Politicians are biased because it is pivotal for trust in politicians that they make decisions based on their own judgement and not on skewed information they coincidentally found, or even worse, was provided by interest groups. Hence, politicians tend to view lobbying as unproblematic and providing important or even essential policy advice. They often “welcome all information”, since they – according to themselves – have the ability to process information from interest groups and take policy positions after serious deliberation (Hermansson et al., 1999). This picture might be true, but it might also be a natural way for politicians to legitimate themselves (intentionally or not). Simultaneously, lobbyists, especially public relations agencies, are often secretive about whom they represent, what they do, how they do it, and what they have achieved, often referring to customer confidentiality or enterprise secrets. When they are asked general questions about lobbying and democracy (Hermansson et al., 1999), their answers are similar to those of politicians, but the lobbyists frequently emphasise successes of political influence. Again, it might be a true picture, but it might also be biased towards promoting the service from which they make their living. A similar mechanism is present and might produce bias when member-based organisations are studied; how can you recruit members for your organisation unless you argue that you are excellent and professional in influencing politics and policy and are generally successful?

The challenge of measuring the influence of lobbying has been discussed by many, and important advances have been made, for example, by mapping access to political arenas or linking group preferences to political outcomes (Bernhagen et al., 2014; Dür, 2008; Pedersen, 2013; Klüver & Mahoney, 2015). Still, as Helboe Pedersen (2013) argues, we are probably left with getting at certain aspects of influence through correlation and triangulation of methods.

## Conclusion

Much international attention has been lavished on the Nordic region due to the seemingly social and economic success built on strong democracies, welfare states, and high trust. The notion of exceptionalism has been debated in this regard, with some scholars arguing that the Nordic countries as a whole are not much different from any other Western European democracy (Bengtsson et al., 2014). They are, for instance, certainly not the only small, stable countries with welfare systems. These authors do, however, agree that the Scandinavian countries have high levels of trust, voter turnout, and satisfaction levels among citizens. A Scandinavian model of corporatism might have been a fitting description in the 1960s and 1970s, but even then, substantial differences existed (Rommetvedt, 2017b). Others have pointed to a Scandinavian model built on high work effort, small wage differentials, high productivity, and a generous welfare state (Barth et al., 2015). By and large, however, it is argued by others that the myth of exceptionalism is typically journalist driven (Arter, 2016). Even the often-mentioned value of egalitarianism, especially touted in Norway, has been described as a myth (Korsnes et al., 2014).

Still, there is a need for more research that would describe the similarities and differences between the Scandinavian countries themselves and the similarities and differences with countries outside the region. A hypothesis could be that lobbying in the Scandinavian countries is not that much different from other small welfare states. In many such states, the economy is open and the elite tend to know each other. As indicated above, there are even some lobbying techniques that seem to be staples in many countries. The existence of the public interest argument might function as “exhibit A” (Ihlen et al., 2018).

Research has concluded that the lobbying styles in the US and Europe differ, but this is mostly due to the dissimilar institutional contexts (Hanegraaff et al., 2017). Still, it would be worthwhile to explore, for instance, the political and cultural values that lobbyists might be able to draw on in their communicative construction of the public interest. In the Norwegian setting, the application of the seminal work of Rokkan (1967) seems obvious. That is, his work described the political landscape with a model of political cleavages. The original lines of cleavage in the Norwegian system were “territorial and cultural: the province opposed the capital, the peasantry fought the officials of the King’s administration, the defenders of the rural cultural traditions spoke against the steady spread of urban secularism and nationalism” (Rokkan, 1967: 437). Interesting research could be conducted focusing on how lobbyists are able to frame and utilise these cleavages – that is, if they are still relevant. An expectation is that regional politics and interests are more important in Norway than in Sweden and Denmark and that this will be an important element in the framing of lobbyists. Jobs in the district are a trump card in many Norwegian political

discussions, while the centralisation processes have been much stronger in Denmark and Sweden. A particularly interesting question that remains is how these cleavages are holding up against the mentioned trends, especially the new international arenas for lobbying.

In fact, most of the mentioned trends do merit more research. A case in point is the rise of new policy actors as well as the professionalisation of lobbying and the role of public relations agencies. Such agencies are sometimes considered to constitute “hired guns” working for individual corporations, local authorities, or even traditional interest groups, and the work of such agencies is generally less transparent than the lobbying of organised interests (Allern, 2015; Helgeson & Falasca, 2017; Tyllström, 2013). The latter point is troubling from a normative democratic perspective.

Another example where more research is needed concerns the mentioned use of social media. How widespread is this use? What influence does it have? The mentioned Norwegian study channels (Figenschou & Fredheim, 2019) stem from the health sector, but we do not have much knowledge from other sectors and policy fields. Similarly, with only a few exceptions (e.g., van der Graaf et al., 2015), research has not really addressed the democratic implications. Is social media yet another tool for those who have influence? Or, is it the “poor person’s” lobbying channel?

Other unanswered questions relate to studies of “knowledge use” in politics more generally (Lundin & Öberg, 2014). There are, for example, formal and informal rules which regulate access for lobbyists to decision-makers. Some politicians instruct their assistants to sort between the actors who try to contact them. How do these and other obstacles for lobbyists vary and work in practice? While politicians often argue that they have the ability to evaluate information from lobbyists, there is scarce knowledge about how this is done and the conditions for deliberation over these policy advices. How important is it that politicians have resources to produce or find information on their own? Does it make a difference if their ways of organising services for parliamentarians differ? Is it more difficult for politicians with strong and clear ideological positions to evaluate information from lobbyists? Are professional or more experienced politicians less susceptible to biased information than amateur politicians? Do different ways of inviting advisories and advocates, for example to public hearings, mitigate an otherwise biased, selected, or fragmented flow of information from lobbying actors trying to influence policy decisions, or are they only window dressing, and a waste of time in that regard? While research has progressed, we still need more explorations of how the edges and boundaries of representative democracy impact politics and policies.

## References

- Ahlbäck Öberg, S., & Wockelberg, H. (2016). The public sector and the courts. In P. Pierre (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of Swedish politics* (pp. 130–146). New York: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199665679.001.0001>
- Allern, E. H., & Bale, T. (2012). Political parties and interest groups: Disentangling complex relationships. *Party Politics*, 18(7), 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068811422639>
- Allern, S. (2015). PR-byråene og politikken [PR agencies and politics]. In Ø. Ihlen, E. Skogerbø, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon [Power, media and politics: Norwegian political communication]* (pp. 118–130). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Amnå, E. (2006). Still a trustworthy ally? Civil society and the transformation of Scandinavian Democracy. *Journal of Civil Society*, 2(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17448680600730884>
- Arter, D. (2016). *Scandinavian politics today* (3rd ed.). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Arvidson, M., Johansson, H., Johansson, S., & Nordfeldt, M. (2018a). Local civil society regimes: Liberal, corporatist and social democratic civil society regimes in Swedish metropolitan cities. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 9(1), 3–20. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204080518X15199961331635>
- Arvidson, M., Johansson, H., Meeuwisse, A., & Scaramuzzino, R. (2018b). A Swedish culture of advocacy? Civil society organisations' strategies for political influence. *Sociologisk Forskning*, 55(2/3), 341–364.
- Baller, S., Dutta, S., & Lanvin, B. (Eds.). (2016). *The global information technology report 2016: Innovating in the digital economy*. Geneva: World Economic Forum. [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GITR2016/WEF\\_GITR\\_Full\\_Report.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GITR2016/WEF_GITR_Full_Report.pdf)
- Barth, E., Moene, K. O., & Willumsen, F. (2015). The Scandinavian model – An interpretation. *Journal of Public Economics*, 127, 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2014.04.001>
- Baumgartner, F. R., Berry, J. M., Hojnacki, M., Kimball, D. C., & Leech, B. L. (2009). *Lobbying and policy change: Who wins, who loses, and why*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Baumgartner, F. R., & Leech, B. L. (1998). *Basic interests: The importance of groups in politics and political science*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bengtsson, Å., Hansen, K. M., Hardarson, O., Narud, H. M., & Oscarsson, H. (2014). *The Nordic voter: Myths of exceptionalism*. Colchester, England: ECPR Press.
- Bernhagen, P., Dür, A., & Marshall, D. (2014). Measuring lobbying success spatially. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 3(2), 202–218. <https://doi.org/10.1057/iga.2014.13>
- Berry, J. M. (1977). *Lobbying for the people: The political behavior of public interest groups*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Beyers, J. (2004). Voice and access: Political practices of European interest associations. *European Union Politics*, 5(2), 211–240. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116504042442>
- Beyers, J., Eising, R., & Maloney, W. (2008). Researching interest group politics in Europe and elsewhere: Much we study, little we know? *West European Politics*, 31(6), 1103–1128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402380802370443>
- Binderkrantz, A. S. (2005). Interest group strategies: Navigating between privileged access and strategies of pressure. *Political Studies*, 53(4), 694–715. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2005.00552.x>
- Binderkrantz, A. S. (2020). Interest group framing in Denmark and the UK: Membership representation or public appeal? *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(4), 569–589. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2019.1599041>
- Binderkrantz, A. S., & Christiansen, P. M. (2015). From classic to modern corporatism: Interest group representation in Danish public committees in 1975 and 2010. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 22(7), 1022–1039. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2014.1000365>
- Binderkrantz, A. S., Christiansen, P. M., & Pedersen, H. H. (2014). *Organisationer i politik [Organisations in politics]*. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels.
- Binderkrantz, A. S., Bonafont, L. C., & Halpin, D. R. (2016a). Diversity in the news? A study of interest groups in the media in the UK, Spain and Denmark. *British journal of political science*, 47(2), 313–328. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0007123415000599>



- Binderkrantz, A. S., Fisker, H. M., & Pedersen, H. H. (2016b). The rise of citizen groups? The mobilization and representation of Danish interest groups, 1975–2010. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 39(4), 291–311. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12073>
- Binderkrantz, A. S., & Pedersen, H. H. (2017). The lobbying success of citizen and economic groups in Denmark and the UK. *Acta Politica*, 54, 75–103. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-017-0076-7>
- Bitonti, A., & Harris, P. (Eds.). (2017). *Lobbying Europe: Public affairs and the lobbying industry in 28 EU countries*. London: Palgrave MacMillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55256-3>
- Blach-Ørsten, M., & Kristensen, N. N. (2016). Introduktion: Tænketaanke i de nordiske lande. [Introduction: Think tanks in the Nordic countries]. *Politik*, 19(1), 4–6.
- Blach-Ørsten, M., Willig, I., & Pedersen, L. H. (2017). PR, lobbying and democracy: Mapping the revolving door in Denmark from 1981 to 2015. *Nordicom Review*, 38(2), 19–31. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0405>
- Blom-Hansen, J. (2002). *Den fjerde statsmagt? Kommunernes Landsforening i dansk politik [The fourth state: The National Association of Municipalities in Danish politics]*. Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press.
- Christiansen, P. M. (2012). The usual suspects: Interest group dynamics and representation in Denmark. In D. Halpin, & G. Jordan (Eds.), *The scale of interest organization in democratic politics: Data and research methods* (pp. 161–179). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9780230359239>
- Christiansen, P. M., Mach, A., & Varone, F. (2018). How corporatist institutions shape the access of citizen groups to policy-makers: Evidence from Denmark and Switzerland. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 25(4), 526–545. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1268194>
- Christiansen, P. M., & Nørgaard, A. S. (2003). *De som meget har... Store danske virksomheder som politiske aktører [Those that already have... Big Danish organisations as political actors]*. Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press.
- Christiansen, P. M., Nørgaard, A. S., Rommetvedt, H., Svensson, T., Thesen, G., & Öberg, P. (2010). Varieties of democracy: Interest groups and corporatist committees in Scandinavian policy making. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 21(1), 22–40. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-009-9105-0>
- Christiansen, P. M., & Rommetvedt, H. (1999). From corporatism to lobbying: Parliaments, executives, and organized interests in Denmark and Norway. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 22(3), 195–220. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.00013>
- Commission of the European Communities. (2006). *Green paper: European transparency initiative [COM(2006) 194 final]*. [http://europa.eu/documents/comm/green\\_papers/pdf/com2006\\_194\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu/documents/comm/green_papers/pdf/com2006_194_en.pdf)
- Craft, J., & Howlett, M. (2012). Policy formulation, governance shifts and policy influence: Location and content in policy advisory systems. *Journal of Public Policy*, 32(2), 79–98. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0143814X12000049>
- Crepaz, M., Chari, R., Hogan, J., & Murphy, G. (2019). International dynamics in lobbying regulation. In D. Dialer, & M. Richter (Eds.), *Lobbying in the European Union: Strategies, dynamics and trends* (pp. 49–63). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98800-9>
- Crouch, C. (2017). Membership density and trade union power. *Transfer: European Review of Labour and Research*, 23(1), 47–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1024258916673533>
- Culpepper, P. D. (2011). *Quiet politics and business power: Corporate control in Europe and Japan*. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511760716>
- Daugbjerg, C., Fraussen, B., & Halpin, D. (2018). Interest groups and policy capacity: Modes of engagement, policy goods and networks. In W. Xun, M. Howlett, & M. Ramesh (Eds.), *Policy capacity and governance: Assessing governmental competences and capabilities in theory and practice* (pp. 243–261). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54675-9\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-54675-9_11)
- Dellmuth, L. M., & Tallberg, J. (2016). Advocacy strategies in global governance: Inside versus outside lobbying. *Political Studies*, 65(3), 705–723. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321716684356>

- Drutman, L. (2015). *The business of America is lobbying: How corporations became politicized and politics became more corporate*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190215514.001.0001>
- Dür, A. (2008). Measuring interest group influence in the EU: A note on methodology. *European Union Politics*, 9(4), 559–576. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116508095151>
- Dür, A., & Mateo, G. (2016). *Insiders versus outsiders: Interest group politics in multi-level Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198785651.001.0001>
- Elgenius, G., & Wennerhag, M. (2018). The changing political landscape of Sweden: Political cleavages, actors and processes. *Sociologisk Forskning*, 55(2/3), 139–154.
- Eriksen, T. B., Hompland, A., & Tjønneland, E. (2003). *Et lite land i verden 1950–2000: Norsk idéhistorie bind VI [A small country in the world 1950–2000: Norwegian history of ideas volume VI]*. Oslo: Aschehoug.
- Esbensen, M. C. (2012). *Lobbyisme i organisationer: Mod en professionel og legitim praksis [Lobbying in organisations: Towards a professional and legitimate practice]*. Copenhagen: Dansk psykologisk.
- Espeli, H. (1999). *Lobbyvirksomhet på Stortinget [Lobbying at the Storting]*. Oslo: Tano Aschehoug.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. London: Polity Press.
- Esser, F., & Strömbäck, J. (Eds.). (2014). *Mediatization of politics: Understanding the transformation of Western democracies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9781137275844>
- Figenschou, T. U., & Fredheim, N. (2019). Social media lobbying: Interest groups' use of a networked media logic for organizational and political aims. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 20(2), 8 pp. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2012>
- Fisker, H. M. (2013). Density dependence in corporatist systems: Development of the population of Danish patient groups (1901–2011). *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 2, 119–138. <https://doi.org/10.1057/iga.2013.4>
- Garsten, C., Rothstein, B., & Svallfors, S. (2015). *Makt utan mandat: De policy professionella i svensk politik [Power without a mandate: The policy professionals in Swedish politics]*. Stockholm: Dialogos.
- Godwin, R. K., Ainsworth, S. H., & Godwin, E. K. (2013). *Lobbying and policymaking: The public pursuit of private interests*. London: CQ Press. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483349336>
- Gramnæs, K. (2018). *Lobby: Håndbok i politisk gjennomslag [Lobby: Handbook in political influence]*. Oslo: Spartacus.
- Gulbrandsen, T. (2009). Private business lobbying in a corporatist society: The case of Norway. In F. Sattler, & C. Boyer (Eds.), *European economic elites: Between a new spirit of capitalism and the erosion of state socialism* (pp. 375–403). Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hanegraaff, M., Poletti, A., & Beyers, J. (2017). Explaining varying lobbying styles across the Atlantic: An empirical test of the cultural and institutional explanations. *Journal of Public Policy*, 37(4), 459–486. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0143814x16000052>
- Harris, P., & Fleischer, C. S. (Eds.). (2017). *The Sage handbook of international corporate and public affairs*. London: Sage.
- Hegelund, S., & Mose, P. (2013). *Lobbyistens lommebog: Politikere under pres [The lobbyist's wallet: Politicians under pressure]*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Helgesson, E., & Falasca, K. (2017). The construction of an elusive concept: Framing the controversial role and practice of lobbying in Swedish media. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 6(3), 275–291. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X17713543>
- Hermansson, J., Lund, A., Svensson, T., & Öberg, P. (1999). *Avkorporativisering och lobbyism: Konturerna till en ny politisk modell [Lobbyism and the decline of corporatism: The contours of a new political model]*. [SOU 1999:121]. Stockholm: Sveriges Riksdag. <https://data.riksdagen.se/fil/556609C7-1CDA-4842-B1FA-612E2FEC79D2>

- Hojnacki, M., Marchetti, K. M., Baumgartner, F. R., Berry, J. M., Kimball, D. C., & Leech, B. L. (2015). Assessing business advantage in Washington lobbying. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 4(3), 205–224. <https://doi.org/10.1057/iga.2015.3>
- Ihlen, Ø., & Gullberg, A. T. (2015). Lobbyisme: Påvirkning av politikere og byråkrater [Lobbying: Influencing politicians and bureaucrats]. In Ø. Ihlen, E. Skogerbø, & S. Allern (Eds.), *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon [Power, media and politics: Norwegian political communication]* (pp. 232–243). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Ihlen, Ø., Raknes, K., Somerville, I., Valentini, C., Stachel, C., Lock, I., Davidson, S., & Seele, P. (2018). Framing “the public interest”: Comparing public lobbying campaigns in four European states. *Journal of Public Interest Communications*, 2(1), 107–128. <http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-68192>
- Johansson, H., Scaramuzzino, R., & Wennerhag, M. (2018). Multilevel strategies for political influence: How and why do domestic civil society organisations seek political influence at national and EU levels? *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 14(2), 68–86. <https://doi.org/10.30950/jcer.v14i2.878>
- Joos, K. (2016). *Convincing political stakeholders: Successful lobbying through process competence in the complex decision-making system of the European Union*. Weinheim: Wiley.
- Katzenstein, P. J. (1985). *Small states in world markets: Industrial policy in Europe*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Klüver, H. (2013). *Lobbying in the European Union: Interest groups, lobbying coalitions, and policy change*. New York: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199657445.001.0001>
- Klüver, H., & Mahoney, C. (2015). Measuring interest group framing strategies in public policy debates. *Journal of Public Policy*, 35(2), 223–244. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0143814x14000294>
- Kollman, K. (1998). *Outside lobbying: Public opinion and interest group strategies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Korsnes, O., Hansen, M. N., & Hjellbrekke, J. (2014). *Elite og klasse i et egalitært samfunn [Elites and class in an egalitarian society]*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Kværna, I. B. (2011). *Lobbykonsulentene: En studie av PR-byråenes påvirkning av politikk og journalistikk [The lobby consultants: A study of PR-agencies and their influence on politics and journalism]* [Master's thesis, University of Oslo, Norway].
- Ladner, A., Keuffer, N., & Baldersheim, H. (2016). Measuring local autonomy in 39 countries (1990–2014). *Regional & Federal Studies*, 26(3), 321–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2016.1214911>
- Lundberg, E. (2012). Changing balance: The participation and role of voluntary organisations in the Swedish policy process. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 35(4), 347–371. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2012.00292.x>
- Lundin, M., & Öberg, P. (2014). Expert knowledge use and deliberation in local policy making. *Policy Sciences*, 47(1), 25–49. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-013-9182-1>
- Maktutredningen. (1990). *Demokrati och makt i Sverige: Maktutredningens huvudrapport [Democracy and power in Sweden: The main report from the power investigation]*. Stockholm: Allmänna förlaget.
- Nownes, A. (2006). *Total lobbying: What lobbyists want (and how they try to get it)*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Oberman, W. D. (2017). Lobbying resources and strategies. In P. Harris, & C. S. Fleischer (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of international corporate and public affairs* (pp. 483–497). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Opedal, S., Rommetvedt, H., & Vrangbæk, K. (2012). Organised interests, authority structures and political influence: Danish and Norwegian patient groups compared. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 35(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2011.00274.x>
- Pedersen, H. (2013). Is measuring interest group influence a mission impossible? The case of interest group influence in the Danish parliament. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 2(1), 27–47. <https://doi.org/10.1057/iga.2012.19>
- Peterson, A., Wahlström, M., & Wennerhag, M. (2012). Swedish trade unionism: A renewed social movement? *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 33(4), 621–664. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X11425257>

- Raknes, K., & Solhjell, B. V. (2018). *Jakta på makta: 12 råd for effektiv påvirkning [Hunting power: 12 advices for efficient persuasion]*. Oslo: Gyldendal.
- Rokkan, S. (1967). Geography, religion, and social class: Crosscutting cleavages in Norwegian politics. In S. M. Lipset, & S. Rokkan (Eds.), *Party systems and voter alignments: Cross-national perspectives* (pp. 367–444). New York: Free Press.
- Rommetvedt, H. (2014). Lobbyvirksomhet [Lobbying]. In H. M. Narud, K. Heidar, & T. Grønlie (Eds.), *Stortingets historie 1964–2014 [The history of the Storting 1964–2014]* (pp. 457–478). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Rommetvedt, H. (2017a). *Politikkens allmenngjøring: Stortinget, regjeringen og de organiserte interessene i et nypluralistisk demokrati [The generalisation of interests: The Storting, the government and the organised interests in a neo-pluralistic democracy]* (3rd ed.). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Rommetvedt, H. (2017b). Scandinavian corporatism in decline. In O. Knutsen (Ed.), *The Nordic models in political science* (pp. 171–192). Stavanger, Norway: Fagbokforlaget.
- Rommetvedt, H., Thesen, G., Christiansen, P. M., & Norgaard, A. S. (2013). Coping with corporatism in decline and the revival of Parliament: Interest group lobbying in Denmark and Norway, 1980–2005. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(4), 457–485. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012453712>
- Scott, J. C. (2018). *Lobbying and society: A political sociology of interest groups*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Strömbäck, J. (2011). *Lobbyismens problem och möjligheter: Perspektiv från dem som både lobbar och har blivit lobbade [The problem and the potential of lobbying: Perspectives from those that are lobbying and have been lobbied]*. Stockholm: The Association of Public Relations Consultancies in Sweden – Precis.
- Strömbäck, J., & Kiousis, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Political public relations: Principles and applications* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351053143>
- Svallfors, S. (2016). Politics as organised combat – New players and new rules of the game in Sweden. *New Political Economy*, 21(6), 505–519. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2016.1156662>
- Tallberg, J., Dellmuth, L. M., Agné, H., & Duit, A. (2018). NGO influence in international organizations: Information, access and exchange. *British journal of political science*, 48(1), 213–238. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712341500037X>
- Thelen, K. (2019). Transitions to the knowledge economy in Germany, Sweden, and the Netherlands. *Comparative politics*, 51(2), 295–315. <https://doi.org/10.5129/001041519X15647434969821>
- Thesen, G., & Rommetvedt, H. (2009). Norske organisasjoners strategier for politisk innflytelse [Norwegian organisations' strategies for political influence]. In B. Enjolras, & R. H. Waldahl (Eds.), *Frivillige organisasjoner og offentlig politikk [Non-governmental organisations and public policy]* (pp. 32–63). Oslo: Novus.
- Thorbjørnsrud, K., Figenschou, T. U., & Ihlen, Ø. (2014). Mediatization in public bureaucracies: A typology. *Communications*, 39(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2014-0002>
- Trapp, N. L., & Laursen, B. (2017). Inside out: Interest groups' "outside" media work as a means to manage "inside" lobbying efforts and relationships with politicians. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 6(2), 143–160. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41309-017-0016-y>
- Tyllström, A. (2013). *Legitimacy for sale? Constructing a market for PR Consultancy* [Doctoral dissertation, Uppsala University, Sweden].
- Tyllström, A. (2017). Lobbying in practice: An ethnographic field study of public affairs consultancy. In C. Garsten, & A. Sörbom (Eds.), *Power, policy and profit: Corporate engagement in politics and governance* (pp. 82–99). Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar.
- Tyllström, A. (2019, May 30). More than a revolving door: Corporate lobbying and the socialization of institutional carriers. *Organization Studies*, 1–20. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840619848014>
- Uhre, A. N., & Rommetvedt, H. (2018). Civil associations and interest groups in the policy-making process: Pluralisation and generalisation of interests. *Interest Groups & Advocacy*, 8(2), 233–253. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41309-019-00049-w>
- van der Graaf, A., Otjes, S., & Rasmussen, A. (2015). Weapon of the weak? The social media landscape of interest groups. *European Journal of Communication*, 31(2), 120–135. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323115612210>

- Vining, A. R., Shapiro, D., & Borges, B. (2005). Building the firm's political (lobbying) strategy. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 5(2), 150–175. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.17>
- Öberg, P. (2016). Interest organizations in the policy process: Interest advocacy and policy advice. In J. Pierre (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of Swedish politics* (pp. 1–17). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199665679.001.0001>
- Öberg, P., & Svensson, T. (2012). Civil society and deliberative democracy: Have voluntary organisations faded from national public policies? *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 35(3), 246–271. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9477.2012.00288.x>
- Öberg, P., Svensson, T., Christiansen, P. M., Nørgaard, A. S., Rommetvedt, H., & Thesen, G. (2011). Disrupted exchange and declining corporatism: Government authority and interest group capability in Scandinavia. *Government and Opposition*, 46(3), 365–391. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2011.01343.x>
- Öberg, P., & Uba, K. (2014). Civil society making political claims: Outcries, interest advocacy, and deliberative claims. *Public Administration Review*, 74(3), 413–422. <https://doi.org/10.1111/par.12199>



## Chapter 16

# Public bureaucracies

Tine Ustad Figenschou, Magnus Fredriksson,  
Kristoffer Kolltveit, & Josef Pallas

### Abstract

Public bureaucracies have mostly been invisible in research on political communication, but more recently, there has been an increasing interest in their communicative efforts. In this chapter, we review the literature and synthesise the scholarship on Nordic public bureaucracies in relation to political communication. Three research areas are put to the fore: 1) Mediatisation: how and to what extent bureaucracies prioritise the media and what consequences it has for activities, routines, and resource allocations across organisational contexts; 2) Reputation management: why and how bureaucracies make use of communication to build, maintain, and protect their reputation; and 3) Crisis communication: public actors' abilities to provide information and support to citizens and communities before, during, and after crises. Although highly interconnected in practice, these strands of literature have largely been three separate academic discussions. We therefore suggest that a first step to consolidate research on communication and public bureaucracies would be to combine the knowledge research has gained in terms of media management, reputation management, and crisis communication. Such an effort would provide a much broader, but also detailed, knowledge on the motives, organising, content, and consequences of public bureaucracies and their communicative efforts.

**Keywords:** public bureaucracies, mediatisation, crisis communication, reputation management, strategic communication

### Introduction

A faceless system inhabited by introverted, grey pedants, governed by rules, laws, and paragraphs and providing incomprehensible technical accounts. Public bureaucracies are often understood as anonymous, but reliable, neutral experts behind media-oriented politicians and leaders. They have mostly been invisible in research on political communication (Salomonsen et al., 2016), as scholars primarily have focused on party politics in general and party leaders, prime ministers

---

Figenschou, T. U., Fredriksson, M., Kolltveit, K., & Pallas, J. (2021). Public bureaucracies. In E. Skogerbø, Ø. Ihlen, N. N. Kristensen, & L. Nord (Eds.), *Power, communication, and politics in the Nordic countries* (pp. 325–345). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. <https://doi.org/10.48335/9789188855299-16>

or presidents, and prominent members of parliament in particular. In a similar manner, scholars from public administration have largely emphasised reforms of politico-administrative systems, with changing organisational values, structures, and policy processes in their research, without explicitly studying the role of media and communication in these processes (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2006).

More recently, there has been an increasing interest in the communicative efforts made by public bureaucracies. To some extent, this research focuses on bureaucracies when they act as instruments for the political executive, and accordingly, become involved in government communication (Johansson & Nygren, 2019). But it is also research highlighting the use of communication among bureaucracies when they give voice to their own interests as “players in politics” (Moe, 1995: 131) to realise and cultivate their own interests. In this chapter, we review this literature and synthesise the scholarship on Nordic public bureaucracies in relation to political communication.

### Public bureaucracies: Actors and institutions

By public bureaucracies, we mean central government entities such as ministries and agencies, as well as regional and local bodies. What they all have in common is their embeddedness in a public service ethos in which regulations and norms of transparency, accountability, and privacy protection are paramount. Civil servants are expected to act with integrity and impartiality (Olsen, 2008), and compared to other types of organisations analysed in this anthology, it is evident that public bureaucracies encounter certain formal constraints, which, arguably, make communication more challenging (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016a).

For instance, decisions in public bureaucracies are regulated by law, official statute, or decree. Civil servants are expected to contribute with policy advice, loyally execute policy decisions set by political majorities (evaluate the consequences and the costs and benefits, as well as the implementation of these), and provide public services including often unending or unsolvable problems (e.g., unemployment, conditions of the poor, and protecting consumer rights). Today, an active public demands efficient public services and gives direct responses to public organisations in real time (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). Consequently, public bureaucracies (particularly large, service-delivering public agencies) often become subject of intense media attention (Boon et al., 2018), which brings them into blame games (Hood, 2011).

Another peculiarity is that public bureaucracies’ communication is guided by information and communication mandates defined and constrained by freedom of information laws and public service codes of conduct (Laursen & Valentini, 2015), with an emphasis on neutral, factual, and comprehensive information. To ensure that public bureaucracies conduct their activities according to appropri-



ate rules ensuring predictability and accountability, their activities are morally and legally bound to be open and transparent. The purpose of bureaucratic communication can thus be seen as providing citizens with the information they need as citizens and voters. In most cases, this means that the public and other interest groups (including media) ought to be given general access to documents and acts received or drawn up by public agencies and ministries (Hood & Heald, 2006).

In addition to this, we also have to add that public bureaucracies operate in increasingly complex communication environments (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019), interacting with an extensive number of stakeholders – ranging between politicians, other public sector organisations, citizens, corporations, unions, media, industry organisations, experts, and lobby organisations. The communication landscape of public bureaucracies has become more uncertain and unstable as public bureaucracies have become complex organisations after multiple reforms (Christensen et al., 2007), the media landscape has changed dramatically (Chadwick, 2013), and more stakeholders are employing a greater range of media platforms in more sophisticated ways to gain political influence (Figenschou, 2020; Kuhn & Nielsen, 2014). For public bureaucracies, these stakeholders often represent divergent (and sometimes competing) interests, as they are expected and even legally bound to take all interests under consideration and realise them without favouring one over another (Salomonsen, 2013).

In many ways, these circumstances are general and unavoidable, but it is worth noting that various actors and departments within these organisations hold different communicative mandates and agendas which all impact their strategic communication.

## The Nordic politico-administrative systems

As with media systems, the politico-administrative systems in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden share a number of features. They are all unitary states, with varying degrees of power delegated to regional and local levels of government (Knutsen, 2017), and they are parliamentary democracies often governed by coalition governments (Lægreid, 2017). While Denmark, Norway, and Sweden are constitutional monarchies, Finland and Iceland are presidential systems. In all countries, there is a strong legal basis of the state, combined with a strong *étatist*, state-welfare, and deep-seated democratic orientation (Painter & Peters, 2010).

However, there are some important differences amongst the countries, potentially affecting political communication in public bureaucracies. First, the ministerial responsibility differs. In Sweden, there is a constitutional ban on individual ministerial decisions; instead, all cabinet decisions are made collectively

(Lindbom, 1997). In Finland as well, all ministers are collectively responsible for cabinet decisions. In Denmark, Iceland, and Norway, the principle of ministerial rule applies, meaning that individual ministers make decisions and are responsible for their own ministries and their subordinate agencies (Greve et al., 2016). These differences raise the question of how the promotion of individual ministers is balanced against promotion of the cabinet agenda.

Second, there is variation in the politicisation of ministries, understood here as the number of political appointees. While Danish and Icelandic ministers only have one special advisor each (Kristinsson, 2016), there are over five or six different political appointees for each minister in Sweden. Norway and Finland lie somewhat between (Kolltveit, 2016; Shaw & Eichbaum, 2018; Sundström, & Lemne, 2016). The differences in ministerial entourage raise the questions of how much civil servants are involved in helping promote their media-oriented ministers and how they potentially shield the civil servants from engaging in party-political work (Figenschou et al., 2020).

Third, in Sweden and Finland, ministerial rule is prohibited, creating a dual system with formally autonomous agencies (Sundström & Lemne, 2016). This means that agencies in the Nordic countries are formally accountable to different “types” of governments bodies. This dual versus integrated structure raises the question of how ministry-agency relations play out, for instance, during crises and reputational threats.

Fourth, while the Nordic countries are sometimes referred to as cautious friends of new public management (NPM) (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011), they have differed somewhat in their NPM reform trajectories. Sweden and Finland have applied NPM reforms – such as privatisation of government-owned corporations and management by objectives and results – more eagerly than Denmark, Iceland, and Norway (Lapsley & Knutsson, 2016). Amongst other things, the NPM reforms have affected the autonomy of agencies. While subordinate agencies in countries like Denmark and Norway have gained (de facto) autonomy following NPM reforms and structural changes, ministers have regained some of the political control through widespread use of management by objectives and results (Christensen & Lægheid, 2006). At the same time, international research shows that most systems experience increasing levels of political interventions (Peters & Pierre, 2004).

### Central approaches and theories

The policies and practices of communication in public bureaucracies have been prioritised and professionalised over time. Communication experts have become a natural and prominent part of public bureaucracies as communication units have expanded in recent years (Falasca & Nord, 2013; Jakobs & Wonneberger,

2017; Sanders et al., 2011; Wonneberger & Jakobs, 2016). Moreover, communication units in public bureaucracies are increasingly placed directly under the central command, working across the departments and the traditional hierarchical organisational structures in public bureaucracies (Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014), as a testament to the increased emphasis on communication.

Partly, this runs parallel to the development of new governance structures and political ambitions to turn bureaucracies into “proper” or “complete” organisations (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000). That way, the idea of strategic communication has become essential, as it offers strategies, work models, and routines adapted from business organisations to legitimise and support the transformation of public administrations alongside the NPM rationales (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016b). But it is also a development that takes place in the light of a general growth of communication experts and an increase of policy professionals across parliaments, ministries, parties, and bureaucracies (Garsten et al., 2015). Within ministries, these policy professionals have been known as ministerial advisors (Hustedt et al., 2017; Shaw & Eichbaum, 2018). Taken together, these developments have boosted the importance of strategic communication and political public relations within ministries and public agencies (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016a; Strömbäck & Kiosis, 2019).

On this background, research projects have been initiated in Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Denmark from the late 2000s onwards. Over time, three main bodies of research have developed, including research on media management and mediatisation, reputation management, and crisis communication. In each, key contributions in the international literature originate from Nordic scholars and scholarly networks, building on rich empirical data and contributing conceptual debates.

### *Media management and mediatisation*

A substantial literature has studied how public bureaucracies deal with the news media. Since media management in public agencies was largely uncovered terrain, the first strand of studies was exploratory in asking: How do public bureaucracies meet media requests and criticism? How do they present policy in the news media? To what extent is media visibility important for public bureaucracies? And if, and how, does media management impact on organisational priorities, routines, and practices?

Broadly, studies of media management distinguish between reactive media strategies (how media requests are logged, dealt with, and responded to) and proactive media strategies (how the organisation takes initiative towards the media to inform and promote). Based on empirically grounded research projects, the following key characteristics of media management have been emphasised in a Nordic context.

First, studying how public bureaucracies deal with the news media in a time with rolling deadlines, continuous critical news coverage, and media-oriented political leaders, studies found that government ministries and agencies have routinised reactive media management: they monitor media coverage; the communication desk operates a 24/7 press service; and media requests are dealt with in designated meetings. The communication staff take the media requests to the other departments to prepare background and talking points, which are edited by communication experts and presented in the media by agency leaders or designated spokespersons. These internal processes involve disagreements, negotiations, and compromises between the different professions and departments in the organisation (Johansson & Nygren, 2019; Pallas et al., 2016; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014).

Second, asking whether and how media management impact on organisational priorities, routines, and practices, studies find that public bureaucracies strive to adapt to the rhythm and format of the news media (Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014), as news stories are “always” prioritised and largely set internal agendas (Figenschou et al., 2019). Public servants experience that the media’s agenda-setting also impacts on resource allocation and case decisions – under certain conditions such as massive media pressure, broad popular and political mobilisation, and the government politicians’ priorities (Figenschou et al., 2019; Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014b; Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012).

Third, analysing when public bureaucracies are challenged by the media and how they deal with critical coverage, another strand of literature has emphasised the dilemmas and limits of reactive media management. In recent years, when individual citizens suffer the consequences of failed policies and poor services, they increasingly raise their case in the news media or social media (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). The negative coverage represents a burden for many public servants. To manage such a coverage, public bureaucracies employ a number of strategies (Ihlen & Thorbjørnsrud, 2014a) and changes in policies (Knudsen, 2016). For government ministries and their leaders, balancing the need to be visible and demonstrate agency in the media (Figenschou et al., 2017) with institutional constraints and the formal delegation of responsibility limits the communication repertoire available, and often results in a standard type of unconvincing media performance (Thorbjørnsrud & Figenschou, 2018).

Fourth, studies find a new and growing emphasis on proactive media management in public bureaucracies as a result of changing journalist–public bureaucracy relations, intense media pressure, and increasing awareness of reputation and strategic communication in the public sector (Malling, 2019). Civil servants justify such proactive pitches of news stories from government agencies to selected journalists and media outlets as a necessary counter-strategy to set the agenda otherwise dominated by “critical” and “hostile” media campaigns (Figenschou & Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). Internal discussions often concern when

and where to pitch policies and how to follow up, with expert bureaucrats constituting an internal buffer and communication experts and politicians driving proactive initiatives. Fundamental proactive media strategies employed by communication experts include involving the minister (personalisation of ministerial communication) and offering exclusivity (Figenschou et al., 2017). Overall, this new emphasis on selective proactive leaks and pitches exemplifies the trend towards a more professional, yet more informal, government communication (Malling, 2019).

Together, these studies build on and contribute to the theorisation of mediatisation (e.g., Lundby, 2014), an area where Nordic scholars have been internationally leading (see, e.g., Asp, 2014; Hjarvard, 2008; Lundby, 2009; Strömbäck, 2008). In short, mediatisation refers to the institutionalisation of media and how ideas regarding media's functionalities, values, work methods, and effects are widely distributed across sectors and fields and eventually intervene with the organisations' activities, decisions, and communication. Broadly, mediatisation comprises both how different institutions and organisations adapt to and adopt media logics, and how they use these to promote and secure the organisations' values and aims. Nordic scholars have predominantly studied these processes on the meso-level, employing mixed methods, case studies, and comprehensive ethnographic data, which have arguably enabled some important theoretical contributions.

Conceptualising how public bureaucracies adapted to, and adopted, a news logic, Thorbjørnsrud and colleagues (2014) elaborated the news logic concept and positioned this research within a neo-institutional approach to news journalism (Cook, 1998), stressing that the news logic largely works as a logic of appropriateness – self-evident, given, natural, and hence not the object of deliberation (March & Olsen, 2006). Insights that the media-first approach is largely practice-driven, tacit knowledge, and often not formalised in existing communication plans and policies represent a key contribution here. Overall, the resources spent on media work and the prioritisation of media requests are perceived as necessary, important, and self-evident (although there are variations between different professions and parts of the organisation), and these priorities are thus difficult to change or challenge (Figenschou et al., 2017; Thorbjørnsrud et al., 2014).

How the (news) media logic is embedded in and translated into particular contexts (Pallas et al., 2016) and the need to understand mediatisation within the distinct type of organisation (public bureaucracies) (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2020) represent a second key contribution to mediatisation literature. This approach illuminates how logics are translated locally, and hence do not always collide with or colonise other organisational logics (Pallas et al., 2016) and challenge strict perceptions of a media logic versus political and administrative logics (Kunelius & Reunanen, 2012).

### *Reputation management*

Over the last decade, the concept of reputation has resurfaced in research on bureaucracies (Carpenter, 2010; Carpenter & Krause, 2012; Maor, 2007, 2010, 2011; Maor & Wæraas, 2015), and it has attracted broad scholarly attention from scholars studying communication, management, political science, and others (Barnett & Pollock, 2012; Chun, 2005; Fomnrun & Van Riel, 2004). “Reputation” has been defined as the “set of beliefs about an organisation’s capacities, intentions, history, and mission that are embedded in a network of multiple audiences” (Carpenter, 2010: 34), and in this context, bureaucracies build, maintain, and protect their reputation to generate public support and to accrue autonomy and discretion from politicians (Carpenter, 2002). Thus, bureaucracies face a complex web of reputational concerns regarding how they are conceived by multiple audiences prioritising different dimensions of their work (Carpenter, 2010).

Research on bureaucratic reputation often refers to the framework of Carpenter (2001, 2002) and asks how regulatory agencies balance the various reputation elements related to performance (does the agency do its job?); morality (does the agency protect the interests of its clients?); technical expertise (does the agency have the skills and capacity required?); and procedures (does the agency follow accepted rules and norms?). In their comparative study of agencies in the societal security sector in Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, and the UK, Christensen and Lodge (2016) find several differences across the studied cases. For instance, autonomy is emphasised across the Swedish agencies, reflecting their long tradition of agency autonomy, and Sweden also scores higher on individual moral symbols than Norway, something Christensen and Lodge say might reflect a higher level of adoption of NPM-related themes in Sweden. In a similar study of Norwegian regulatory agencies, Christensen and Gornitzka (2019) find that agencies tend to emphasise outputs and outcomes of their activities (performance), with increasing emphasis on professional and technical aspects, as well as moral values, over time. In Christensen and Gornitzka’s study, reputation is explained by the age of the agency, as well as the audience that the agency is trying to reach. Sector and tasks are less relevant.

Carpenter’s (2001, 2002) framework attributes some relevance to communication but it is sub-oriented to decision-making and other activities (Maor, 2015). Among Nordic scholars, communication has been put at the fore and accordingly much more attention has been paid to reputation management – that is to say, a recipe for how organisations are to organise, allocate resources, distribute responsibilities, and perform communication activities to create and maintain a strong reputation (Byrkjeflot, 2015). Studies from Denmark (Nielsen & Salomonsen, 2012), Norway (Wæraas et al., 2011), and Sweden (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016a) show that the recipe has gained wide distribution in public

sector organisations. Wæraas and colleagues (2011) have made an extensive contribution to Nordic research, and within this scholarship, the branding and reputation management of local government has received considerable attention. Wæraas and colleagues (2014) find that Norwegian municipalities brand themselves as places, organisations, and political institutions, with all three branding strategies being almost equally important. In her longitudinal study of reputation projects in two Norwegian municipalities, Bjørnå (2016) finds that the mayor or chief executive functions as a reputational agent, with different motives and politically conscious strategies. Lockert and colleagues' (2019) recent study targeted mayors and other persons responsible for strategic communication in Norwegian and Danish municipalities. They found that local government responses to reputation reform depended on the size of the municipality and the type of actors involved. The larger the municipality, the more the administration was involved. Further on, the more administrative actors were involved, the more the strategies targeted organisational reputation.

The application of reputation management is not without problems, however; among other things, it challenges (legal) requirements for openness and transparency (Wæraas, 2008). Reputation management promotes autonomy, consistency, and organisational control, whereas openness is related to collective welfare, governance, and accountability, and consequently, bureaucracies must handle tensions between the two ideas. To do this, agencies make use of several different strategies – all of them contributing to the transformation and hybridisations of both reputation management and what it means to be “open” (Fredriksson & Edwards, 2019).

Concerning the empirical focus of Nordic studies, a considerable body of research has focused on certain sectors, especially within higher education and universities (Christensen et al., 2018; Sataøen, 2015; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2016), within the health sector and hospitals (Sataøen, & Wæraas, 2015), and the police (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2015). Much emphasis has also been put on subordinate agencies and municipalities, whereas ministries have received little attention. However, Salomonsen and colleagues (2016) find that permanent civil servants in Danish ministries to some degree are involved in strategic communication to accommodate the realisation of political goals. Concerning the methods used in the Nordic studies, a wide variety exist. Some have used content analysis of web pages (Christensen et al., 2018; Sataøen & Wæraas, 2016), others have used interviews with communication managers (Sataøen & Wæraas, 2015), and still others have used surveys (Lockert et al., 2019).

The scholarship on reputation management in the Nordic countries is well established and growing. What seems to be missing, however, are studies on how reputation management is actively used by subordinate agencies to accrue more autonomy and discretion from politicians (Carpenter, 2002). As underlined by Luoma-Aho (2007), public sector organisation does not necessarily need a

strong reputation, as this might demand a lot of resources and become a burden. A neutral reputation is sufficient and enables a critical operating distance from interference from the political masters (Luoma-Aho, 2007). Further on, reputation management in central government entities, such as ministries, has received limited attention. Although ministries, to a lesser extent than agencies, might be autonomy seeking, reputation management is still highly important towards external stakeholders, for instance when their unique reputation as trustworthy developers of public policies is under threat.

### *Crisis communication*

A third stream of Nordic research focuses on bureaucracies' crisis communication. In the wake of social unrest caused by the welfare state's inability to fulfil the promises of general welfare, security, and equal civil rights (Voss & Lorenz, 2016), scholars and bureaucrats alike have showed increased interest for its applicability. Public agencies are central players in the welfare state, and it is evident that bureaucrats in general, and communicators working for agencies in particular, often get significant responsibilities for communication in large-scale crises (Olsson, 2014). Accordingly, crisis communication has become a central component in their communication repertoires. Scholars have followed suit, not least because of the extensive funding governments and agencies offer, and today, crisis communication is an expansive theme in the Nordic countries, especially in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden (Frandsen & Johansen, 2016).

The interest in public organisations distinguishes Nordic scholars from international colleagues, who largely give precedence to corporations. This also means that the interest for organisational reputation, vital to much international research, is less prominent among Nordic scholars (cf. Christensen & Lægreid, 2015). In the Nordic context, much more attention has been given to resilience and public actors' abilities to provide information and support to citizens and communities, not just to manage the acute phases of a crises, but also to help and support actors to recover after a crises and to restore trust in institutions and public organisations (Olsson, 2014). This, in turn, means that much research has focused on the interactions between agencies, news media, and the public.

Given the strong connections between practice and research, a significant amount of the work on bureaucracy and crisis communication has been designated to find solutions to the problems and challenges agencies and public bodies encounter. Consequently, many publications are reports or articles written by scholars commissioned by government organisations, often with an extraordinary event as a point of departure, such as the 2008 financial crisis (Johansson & Nord, 2011), the eruption of Eyjafjallajökull in 2010 (Bird et



al., 2018), or the terrorist attack in Norway in 2011 (Socialstyrelsen, 2012). It also means that research on public agencies and crisis communication, rather than a field or theory, is a problem or theme studied in a number of different disciplines, including media and communication studies, political science, tourist studies, volcanology, and others. The diversity is also evident when it comes to topics. There are examples of studies focusing on what crisis communication can imply for the public's trust in bureaucracies (Christensen & Lægheid, 2015; Nord & Shehata, 2013), what it means to communicate to heterogeneous audiences (Olofsson, 2007) or certain audience groups (Sjöberg, 2018), and what rhetoric agencies make use of in crises (Johansson & Odén, 2018). Two themes are prominent, however.

The first prominent theme is how agencies organise, plan, manage, and perform their communication activities before, during, and after crises. Among other things, studies have shown limitations in how agencies organise and set up their routines to make sure that they are notified when something happens or is about to happen – events that are, or can develop into, a crisis. Studies covering Finland and Sweden (Kivikuru & Nord, 2009) showed the difficulties agencies had when they were set to master the situation after the tsunami in the Indian Ocean in 2004. The time (Christmas) and the place (South East Asia) were contributory factors, but overall, agencies showed obvious inabilities to act and provide information, support, and responses to those who posed questions. The tsunami event led to several investigations and commissioned research projects, and Frandsen and Johansen (2016) suggest that governments and civil services in all Nordic countries have learned a lot from the events. The question is not settled, however, and there are several examples of more recent studies showing that the problem still exists, for instance, during the terrorist attack in Norway in 2011 (Christensen & Lægheid, 2015) and the wildfires in Sweden in 2014 (Odén et al., 2016).

A second prominent theme is agencies' abilities to get their messages through. Historically, this has primarily been a question of media relations and news coverage. Scholars (and bureaucrats) have shown extensive interest in how news media report and to what extent citizens can rely on media reporting when they encounter a crisis (Kivikuru, 2006). The interest for news media is still evident both among bureaucrats (Odén et al., 2016) and scholars (Nord & Olsson, 2013), but the focus has shifted, and today, online communication and social media are frequent topics in research (Odén et al., 2016). What digital media is said to offer is an ability for agencies and bureaucrats to communicate directly with citizens and provide relevant and impartial information. Eriksson (2014a) also argues that digital media offer opportunities for situational adaptations and adjustments of messages to different platforms or target groups. They are also mobile and offer opportunities for prompt reactions, although there are notable limitations: the use of digital media in a crisis situation seems to be

higher among agencies and bureaucrats compared to the general public, even in a Nordic context where Internet penetration is relatively high (Eriksson & Olsson, 2016); agencies' messages seem to disappear in the steady stream of updates from other sources (Odén et al., 2016); and agencies have difficulty attracting followers outside the groups they reach in other ways (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016). The overall impression is, therefore, that agencies' focus on social media tends to amplify an already prominent line in society between those who get information and those who do not (Rasmusson & Ihlen, 2017).

Research beyond the techno-administrative approach is limited, and there are few attempts to develop theory or gain richer understandings of crisis communication as ideology, system, or practice. This is not characteristic of Nordic scholars nor for research on public agencies, but something typical for research on crisis communication in general. There are some notable examples of Nordic studies offering other perspectives; some have made calls for more creativity and improvisation, both in research and practice (Eriksson, 2014b; Falkheimer & Heide, 2010), whereas others have shown that we cannot expect too much as the (institutionalised) idea of crisis communication is strongly supported by conceptions of planning, organising, and routinising (Fredriksson, 2014; Fredriksson et al., 2014). The role of institutions is also evident in the work of Frandsen and Johansen (2009; see also Frandsen et al., 2016), who have been trying to understand the mobilising factors for crisis communication and how we can understand its condition when its emergency logic (represented by emergency officers) is challenged by a new crisis management logic (represented by communicators and managers). Others have shown that similar tensions are evident when agencies try to adapt to the logic of social media (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016), and that public agencies, due to their multi-professionality, are particularly exposed for internal tensions (Heide & Simonsson, 2015).

## Conclusion

For bureaucrats involved in communication activities in one way or another, media management, reputation management, and crisis communication are interrelated and overlapping responsibilities and concerns. The day-to-day encounters with journalists are believed to be of certain relevance when public organisations are set to create and maintain their trust and reputation. In times of crisis, the importance of the two is enhanced, and agencies' performance during a major crisis can be seen as a test of their abilities to communicate in general and their ability to handle media in particular. It is also well known that agencies' abilities to uphold and secure autonomy is put to test during crisis, as ministers have a tendency to make political interventions in times of heavy media scrutiny (Kolltveit, 2019). At the same time, agencies' ability to

reach out during a major crisis builds on their already established reputation and trustworthiness in the existing networks and through existing channels.

Although highly interconnected in practice, these strands of literature (with their separate models, concepts, and references) have largely been three separate academic discussions (notable exceptions include Christensen & Læg Reid, 2015). Moreover, they tend to follow disciplinary divides – with journalism and media scholars contributing to mediatisation and media management discussions as well as research on crisis communication, whereas political scientists and organisation scholars tend to dominate the literature on bureaucratic reputation. These divides are by no means absolute, but it is evident that they have had consequences for the three strands of literature and contribute to some of their limitations.

One of the shortcomings is the media-centrism in journalism and media research on mediatisation (for critical discussions, see Figenschou et al., 2020; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2017). Here, developments in the media landscape are often used to explain changing communication regimes in public bureaucracies (both empirically and analytically), whereas non-media drivers to mediatisation have often been left unexplored (developments in the political system, structural changes in public bureaucracies, etc.). Another shortcoming is the tendency among reputation scholars to oversee media or to reduce it to a channel for communication or an arena for other actors involved in the reputational game. Developments in the media landscape and what consequences they have for agencies' interactions with their principals as well as other stakeholders are often set aside. Consequently, scholars disregard many of the contexts where the reputation of agencies is shaped, negotiated, or questioned. Research on crisis communication shows similar shortcomings. Even if media is a central theme in research, there is a strong tendency to handle it as a source providing information to different actors involved or affected by the crisis. There are studies of the interactions between journalists and bureaucrats and what the two groups think of each other; less is known, however, about how mediatisation affects crisis communication (for an analysis of this in terms of social media, see Olsson & Eriksson, 2016). In line with this, research on crisis communication tends to oversee the variety in motives for agencies to communicate throughout crises. Public information and how to get the message through have been a returning question, even if it is evident that communication in public administrations is mobilised by different principles and that reputation management often outdoes civic communication (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016b).

To combine the knowledge research has gained in terms of media management, reputation management, and crisis communication, a first step would be to consolidate research on communication and public administration. With this, we would get much broader, but also detailed, knowledge about the motives, organising, content, and consequences of government agency communication.

In addition to this, there are other questions lacking answers, and from our point of view, future research would make an extensive contribution if it paid more attention to the following themes.

First, there is a lack of comprehensive analysis of the political, organisational, and democratic consequences of the professionalisation of communication in public bureaucracies. How does this affect policy-making processes, resource allocation, and prioritisation over time? One area that needs more investigation is if and how the ongoing professionalisation of communication contributes to and magnifies politicisation of public bureaucracies (Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2017; Thorbjørnsrud, 2015). The increased presence of ministerial advisors (special advisors, political advisors, or state secretaries) in Nordic government ministries has spurred a growing interest in politicisation of public bureaucracies (Christiansen et al., 2016; Hustedt et al., 2017); future research on how professionalisation of communication inside ministries – with an outspoken focus on strategic and proactive communication – impacts political processes requires more empirical emphasis. Newer studies indicate that the professionalisation of communication in Northern governments blurs the borders between different actors inside governments (Johansson & Nygren, 2019) and leads to more informal communication (off-the-record conversations, pitches, leaks, etc.) (see, e.g., Malling, 2019), and that the use of new digital platforms in particular alters the communication of public bureaucracies towards political promotion and campaigning (Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018), which are all trends that call for further analysis.

Second, more scholarly attention is needed pertaining to how the new hybrid, networked media landscape will impact on public sector communication. Citizens today raise questions, concerns, and complaints directly to government agencies and they expect quick, clear answers from public authorities (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019). Moreover, interest groups and advocacy campaigns increasingly use social media to raise awareness for their causes; mobilise for policy change; and target responsible public authorities and politicians in government (Vromen, 2017). For public bureaucracies, networked media both amplify and intensify ongoing mediatisation processes and pose new opportunities and fundamental challenges related to format, speed, accessibility, and resources. Existing studies of the use of social media in Nordic government communication have raised a number of issues calling for future studies; the adaptation of social media has had an ad-hoc character resulting in hasty implementation (experimentation, poor guidelines, and unclear responsibilities), which evoke numerous ethical dilemmas and challenge the balance between political promotion and neutral, factual information (Brekke & Thorbjørnsrud, 2018; Johansson & Nygren, 2019; Olsson & Eriksson, 2016). Particularly, interactivity and real-time dialogue – which are stressed as key dimensions in building public trust as well as reputation (Canel & Luoma-aho, 2019) – are

perceived as complicated and resource-demanding by government agencies (Figenschou, 2019).

## References

- Asp, K. (2014). Mediatization: Rethinking the question of media power. In K. Lundby (Ed.), *Mediatization of communication* (pp. 349–374). Berlin: Walter de Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110272215>
- Barnett, M. L., & Pollock, T. (Eds.). (2012). *The Oxford handbook of corporate reputation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199596706.001.0001>
- Bird, D. K., Jóhannesdóttir, G., Reynisson, V., Karlsdóttir, S., Gudmundsson, M. T., & Gísladóttir, G. (2018). Crisis coordination and communication during the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption. In C. J. Fearnley, D. K. Bird, K. Haynes, W. J. McGuire, & G. Jolly (Eds.), *Observing the volcano world: Volcano crisis communication* (pp. 271–288). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-44097-2>
- Bjørnå, H. (2016). Norwegian municipalities and reputation building – Agents, agendas, coalitions and outcomes. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*, 20(2), 39–58.
- Boon, J., Salomonsen, H. H., & Verhoest, K. (2018). The effects of organisational features on media attention for public organisations. *Policy & Politics*, 47(2), 245–264. <https://doi.org/10.1332/030557318X15407316633243>
- Brekke, J.-P., & Thorbjørnsrud, T. (2018). Communicating borders – Governments deterring asylum seekers through social media campaigns. *Migration Studies*, 8(1), 43–65. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mny027>
- Brunsson, N., & Sahlin-Andersson, K. (2000). Constructing organizations: The example of public sector reform. *Organization Studies*, 21(4), 721–746. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840600214003>
- Byrkjeflot, H. (2015). Driving forces, critique, and paradoxes of reputation management in public organizations. In A. Wæraas, & M. Maor (Eds.), *Organizational reputation in the public sector* (pp. 54–74). New York: Routledge.
- Canel, M.-J., & Luoma-aho, V. (2019). *Public sector communication: Closing gaps between citizens and public organizations*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Carpenter, D. (2001). *The forging of bureaucratic autonomy: Reputations, networks, and policy innovation in executive agencies, 1862–1928*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Carpenter, D. (2002). Groups, the media, agency waiting costs, and FDA drug approval. *American Journal of Political Science*, 46(3), 490–505. <https://www.doi.org/10.2307/3088394>
- Carpenter, D. (2010). *Reputation and power: Organisational image and pharmaceutical regulation at the FDA*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Carpenter, D., & Krause, G. A. (2012). Reputation and public administration. *Public Administration Review*, 72(1), 26–32. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2011.02506.x>
- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>
- Christensen, T., & Gornitzka, Å. (2019). Reputation management in public agencies: The relevance of time, sector, audience, and tasks. *Administration & Society*, 51(6), 885–914. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0095399718771387>
- Christensen, T., Gornitzka, Å., & Ramirez, F. O. (Eds.). (2018). *Universities as agencies: Reputation and professionalization*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-92713-8>
- Christensen, T., & Lodge, M. (2016). Reputation management in societal security: A comparative study. *The American Review of Public Administration*, 48(2), 119–132. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0275074016670030>
- Christensen, T., & Lægread P. (Eds.). (2006). *Autonomy and regulation: Coping with agencies in the modern state*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Christensen, T., & Lægread, P. (2015). Reputation management in times of crisis: How the police handled the Norwegian terrorist attack in 2011. In A. Wæraas, & M. Maor (Eds.), *Organizational reputation in the public sector* (pp. 95–117). New York: Routledge.

- Christensen, T., Lægred, P., Roness, P. G., & Røvik, K. A. (2007). *Organization theory and the public sector: Instrument, culture and myth*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367855772>
- Christiansen, P. M., Niklasson, B., & Öhberg, P. (2016). Does politics crowd out professional competence? The organisation of ministerial advice in Denmark and Sweden. *West European Politics*, 39(6), 1230–1250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2016.1176368>
- Chun, R. (2005). Corporate reputation: Meaning and measurement. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 7(2), 91–109. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2005.00109.x>
- Cook, T. E. (1998). *Governing with the news: The news media as a political institution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Eriksson, M. (2014a). *En kunskapsöversikt om krishantering, kriskommunikation och sociala medier [A knowledge overview of crisis management, crisis communication, and social media]* [Report No. 21]. Sundsvall, Sweden: Demicom, Mid Sweden University.
- Eriksson, M. (2014b). Crisis communication and improvisation in a digital age. In D. Holtzhausen, & A. Zerfass (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of strategic communication* (pp. 508–519). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094440>
- Eriksson, M., & Olsson, E.-K. (2016). Facebook and Twitter in crisis communication: A comparative study of crisis communication professionals and citizens. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 24(4), 198–208. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12116>
- Falasca, K., & Nord, L. (2013). Structures, strategies & spin: Government communication in Sweden. In K. Sanders, & M. J. Canel (Eds.), *Government communication: Cases and challenges* (pp. 27–44). New York: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Falkheimer, J., & Heide, M. (2010). Crisis communication in change: From plans to improvisations. In W. T. Coombs, & S. J. Holladay (Eds.), *The handbook of crisis communication* (pp. 511–526). Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444314885.ch25>
- Figenschou, T. U. (2019, November 22). Social bureaucracy? The integration of social media into government communication. *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 1–22. Advance online publication. <https://www.doi.org/10.1515/commun-2019-2074>
- Figenschou, T. U. (2020). Public sector communication and NGOs: From formal integration to mediated confrontation? In V. Luoma-aho, & M. J. Canel (Eds.), *The handbook of public sector communication* (pp. 259–271). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Figenschou, T. U., Fredriksson, M., Pallas, J., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2020). Under the influence of politics: Mediatization and politico-administrative systems in Scandinavia. *Nordic Journal of Media Studies*, 2, 85–96. <https://doi.org/10.2478/njms-2020-0008>
- Figenschou, T. U., Karlsen, R., Kolltveit, K., & Schillemans, T. (2019). Mounting media pressure: Push and pull forces influencing agendas, resource allocation and decision making in public bureaucracies. *European Journal of Communication*, 34(4), 377–394. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323119861513>
- Figenschou, T. U., Karlsen, R., Kolltveit, K., & Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2017). Serving the media ministers: A mixed method study of the personalization of ministerial communication. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 22(4), 411–430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161217720772>
- Figenschou, T. U., & Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2015). Backstage media-government negotiations: The failures and success of a government pitch. *International Journal of Communication*, 9, 1947–1965. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/3376>
- Fombrun, C. J., & Van Riel, C. B. M. (2004). *Fame & fortune: How successful companies build winning reputations*. Indianapolis: FT Press
- Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2009). Institutionalizing crisis communication in the public sector: An explorative study in Danish municipalities. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 3(2), 102–115. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15531180902805460>
- Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2016). Crisis communication research in Northern Europe. In A. Schwarz, M. W. Seeger, & C. Auer (Eds.), *The handbook of international crisis communication research* (pp. 373–383). New York: John Wiley & Sons. <https://www.doi.org/10.1002/9781118516812>

- Frandsen, F., Johansen, W., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2016). Responding to institutional complexity: Reputation and crisis management in Danish municipalities. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*, 20(2), 7–38.
- Fredriksson, M. (2014). Crisis communication as institutional maintenance. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 3(3), 319–340. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147X14536724>
- Fredriksson, M., & Edwards, L. (2019). Communicating under the regimes of divergent ideas: How public agencies in Sweden manage tensions between transparency and consistency. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 33(4), 548–580. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318919859478>
- Fredriksson, M. & Pallas, J. (2016a). Characteristics of public sectors and their consequences for strategic communication. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 10(3), 149–152. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1176572>.
- Fredriksson, M., & Pallas, J. (2016b). Much ado about media: Public relations in public agencies in the wake of managerialism. *Public Relations Review*, 42(4), 600–606. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2016.03.016>
- Fredriksson, M., & Pallas, J. (2017). The localities of mediatization: How organizations translate mediatization into everyday practices. In O. Driessens, G. Bolin, A. Hepp, & S. Hjarvard (Eds.), *Dynamics of mediatization: Institutional change and everyday transformations in a digital age* (pp. 119–136). Cham, Switzerland: Springer. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62983-4>
- Fredriksson, M., & Pallas, J. (2020). Public sector communication and mediatization. In V. Luoma-aho, & M. J. Canel (Eds.), *The handbook of public sector communication* (pp. 167–179). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Fredriksson, M., Olsson, E.-K., & Pallas, J. (2014). Creativity caged in translation: A neo-institutional perspective on crisis communication. *Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas*, 4(8), 43–64. <http://hdl.handle.net/10630/8458>
- Garsten, C., Rothstein, B., & Svallfors, S. (2015). *Makt utan mandat: de policyprofessionella i svensk politik [Power without a mandate: The policy professionals in Swedish politics]*. Stockholm: Dialogos.
- Greve, C., Læg Reid, P., & Rykkja, L. H. (2016). Introduction: The Nordic model in transition. In C. Greve, P. Læg Reid, & L. H. Rykkja (Eds.), *Nordic administrative reforms: Lessons for public management* (pp. 1–22). London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56363-7>
- Heide, M., & Simonsson, C. (2015). Struggling with internal crisis communication: A balancing act between paradoxical tensions. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 4(2), 223–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x15570108>
- Hjarvard, S. (2008). The mediatization of society: A theory of the media as agents of social and cultural change. *Nordic Review*, 29(2), 105–134. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0181>
- Hood, C. (2011). *The blame game: Spin, bureaucracy and self-preservation in government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Hood, C., & Heald, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Transparency: The key to better governance?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hustedt, T., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2017). Political control of coordination? The roles of ministerial advisers in government coordination in Denmark and Sweden. *Public Administration*, 95(2), 393–406. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12312>
- Hustedt, T., Kollveit, K., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2017). Ministerial advisors in executive government: Out from the dark and into the limelight. *Public Administration*, 95(2), 299–311. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12329>
- Ihlen, Ø., & Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2014a). Tears and framing contests: Public organisations countering critical and emotional stories. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 8(1), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2013.850695>
- Ihlen, Ø., & Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2014b). Making news and influencing decisions: Three threshold cases concerning forced return of immigrants. *European Journal of Communication*, 29(2), 139–152. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323114523149>
- Jakobs, S., & Wonneberger, A. (2017). Did we make it to the news? Effects of actual and perceived media coverage on media orientations of communication professionals. *Public Relations Review*, 43(3), 547–559. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.03.010>

- Johansson, C., & Nord, L. (2011). *Konsten att kommunicera oro utan att oroa: Svenska myndigheter under finanskrisen 2008* [The art of communicating worry without worrying: Swedish authorities during the financial crisis 2008] [Report No. 1]. Sundsvall, Sweden: Demicom, Mid Sweden University.
- Johansson, K. M., & Nygren, G. (2019). Locked in mutual dependency: Media and the political executive in close interplay. In K. M. Johansson, & G. Nygren (Eds.), *Close and distant political executive media relations in four countries* (pp. 247–260). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Johansson, B., & Odén, T. (2018). Struggling for the upper hand: News sources and crisis communication in a digital media environment. *Journalism Studies*, 19(10), 1489–1506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2017.1279980>
- Kivikuru, U. (2006). Tsunami communication in Finland: Revealing tensions in the sender-receiver relationship. *European Journal of Communication*, 21(4), 499–520. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323106070013>
- Kivikuru, U., & Nord, L. (Eds.). (2009). *After the tsunami: Crisis communication in Finland and Sweden*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Knudsen, E. (2016). *Journalistikkens fremstillingsmakt: Nybetsrammer, meningsdanning og medialisering* [The manufacturing power of journalism: News frames, opinion formation, and mediatization] [Doctoral thesis, University of Bergen, Norway]. <http://hdl.handle.net/1956/12225>
- Knutsen, O. (Ed.). (2017). *The Nordic models in political science: Challenged, but still viable?* Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.
- Kolltveit, K. (2016). Spenninger i det politisk-administrative systemet: Erfaringer fra Norge [Tensions in the political-administrative system: Experiences from Norway]. *Politica*, 48(4), 481–496. [https://politica.dk/fileadmin/politica/Dokumenter/politica\\_48\\_4/kolltveit.pdf](https://politica.dk/fileadmin/politica/Dokumenter/politica_48_4/kolltveit.pdf)
- Kolltveit, K. (2019). On the minister's tight leash? Media appearance and autonomy in public agencies. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*, 23(1), 41–58.
- Kristinsson, G. (2016). Specialists, spinners and networkers: Political appointees in Iceland. *Acta Politica*, 51(4), 413–432. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41269-016-0001-5>
- Kuhn, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (Eds.). (2014). *Political journalism in transition: Western Europe in a comparative perspective*. London: Taurus.
- Kunelius, R., & Reunanen, E. (2012). Media in political power: A Parsonian view on the differentiated mediatization of Finnish decision makers. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 17(1), 56–75. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161211424207>
- Lapsley, I., & Knutsson, H. (Eds.). (2016). *Modernizing the public sector: Scandinavian perspectives*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315560328>
- Laursen, B., & Valentini, C. (2015). Mediatization and government communication: Press work in the European Parliament. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 20(1), 26–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161214556513>
- Lindbom, A. (1997). *Ministern och makten: Hur fungerar ministerstyre i praktiken?* [The minister and the power: How does ministerial government work in practice?] [SOU: 54]. Stockholm: Government Offices of Sweden. <https://lagen.nu/sou/1997:54>
- Lockert, Å. S., Bjørnå, H., Haugen, K. H., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2019). Reputation reform strategies in local government: Investigating Denmark and Norway. *Local Government Studies*, 45(4), 504–525. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2018.1560270>
- Luoma-aho, V. (2007). Neutral reputation and public sector organizations. *Corporate Reputation Review*, 10(2), 124–243. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.crr.1550043>
- Lundby, K. (Ed.). (2014). *Mediatization of communication*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110272215>
- Lundby, K. (Ed.). (2009). *Mediatization: Concept, changes, consequences*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Lægred, P. (2017). Nordic administrative traditions. In P. Nedergaard, & A. Wivel (Eds.), *The Routledge handbook of Scandinavian politics* (pp. 80–91). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315695716>
- Malling, M. (2019). Power and exchange in formal and informal interaction between journalists and their sources. In K. M. Johansson, & G. Nygren (Eds.), *Close and distant political ex-*



- ecutive media relations in four countries* (pp. 175–198). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Maor, M. (2007). A scientific standard and an agency's legal independence: Which of these reputation protection mechanisms is less susceptible to political moves? *Public Administration*, 85(4), 961–978. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9299.2007.00676.x>
- Maor, M. (2010). Organizational reputation and jurisdictional claims: The case of the US Food and Drug Administration. *Governance*, 23(1), 133–159. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2009.01470.x>
- Maor, M. (2011). Organizational reputations and the observability of public warnings in 10 pharmaceutical markets. *Governance*, 24(3), 557–582. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0491.2011.01536.x>
- Maor, M. (2015). Theorizing bureaucratic reputation. In A. Wæraas, & M. Maor (Eds.), *Organizational reputation in the public sector* (pp. 31–50). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315850825>
- Maor, M., & Wæraas, A. (2015). Understanding organizational reputation in a public sector context. In A. Wæraas, & M. Maor (Eds.), *Organisational reputation in the public sector* (pp. 15–28). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315850825>
- March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (2006). Elaborating the “new institutionalism”. In R. A. W. Rhodes, S. Binder, & B. Rockman (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of political institutions* (pp. 3–20). Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199548460.001.0001>
- Moe, T. M. (1995). The politics of structural choice: Toward a theory of public bureaucracy. *Organization theory: From Chester Barnard to the present and beyond* (pp. 116–153). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Nielsen, J. A., & Salomonsen, H. H. (2012). Why all this communication? Explaining strategic communication in Danish local governments from an institutional perspective. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Administration*, 16(1), 69–89.
- Nord, L., & Olsson, E.-K. (2013). Frame, set, match! Towards a model of successful crisis rhetoric. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 2(1), 79–94. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x12464205>
- Nord, L., & Shehata, A. (2013). *Finanskrisen, förväntningarna och förtroendet [The financial crisis, expectations, and trust]* [Report No. 11]. Sundsvall, Sweden: Demicom, Mid Sweden University.
- Odén, T., Djerf-Pierre, M., Gherse, M., & Johansson, B. (2016). *Kriskommunikation 2.0: Allmänhet, medier och myndigheter i det digitala medielandskapet [Emergency communication 2.0: Public, media, and government in the digital media landscape]*. Stockholm: Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency. <https://rib.msb.se/filer/pdf/28206.pdf>
- Olofsson, A. (2007). Kriskommunikation i ett heterogent samhälle – Lika för alla eller till var och en efter behov? [Crisis communication in a heterogeneous society – Equal for all or to each and everyone as required?]. *Sociologisk forskning*, 6–29. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20853550>
- Olsson, E.-K. (2014). Crisis communication in public organisations: Dimensions of crisis communication revisited. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 22(2), 113–125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12047>
- Olsson, E.-K., & Eriksson, M. (2016). The logic of public organizations' social media use: Toward a theory of 'social mediatization'. *Public Relations Inquiry*, 5(2), 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2046147x16654454>
- Olsen, J. P. (2008). The ups and downs of bureaucratic organization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 11, 13–37. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.11.060106.101806>
- Painter, M., & Peters, G. B. (Eds.). (2010). *Tradition and public administration*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/9780230289635>
- Pallas, J., Fredriksson, M., & Wedlin, L. (2016). Translating institutional logics: When the media logic meets professions. *Organization Studies*, 37(11), 1661–1684. <https://doi.org/10.1177/017084061665548>
- Peters, B. G., & Pierre, J. (2004). *Politicization of the civil service in comparative perspective: The quest for control*. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203799857>
- Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2011). *Public management reform, a comparative analysis: New public management, governance, and the neo-Weberian state*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Rasmusson, J., & Ihlen, Ø. (2017). Risk, crisis, and social media: A systematic review of seven years' research. *Nordicom Review*, 38(2), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0393>
- Salomonsen, H. H. (2013). Offentlig ledelse og strategisk kommunikation – Et spørsmål om overlevelse [Public management and strategic communication – A matter of survival]. In H. H. Salomonsen (Ed.), *Offentlig ledelse og strategisk kommunikation [Public management and strategic communication]* (pp. 11–32). Copenhagen: Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag.
- Salomonsen, H. H., Frandsen, F., & Johansen, W. (2016). Civil servant involvement in the strategic communication of central government organizations: Mediatization and functional politicization. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 10(3), 207–221. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1176568>
- Sanders, K., Crespo, M. J. C., & Holtz-Bacha, C. (2011). Communicating governments – A three-country comparison of how governments communicate with citizens. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 16(4), 523–547. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161211418225>
- Sataøen, H. L. (2015). Higher education as object for corporate and nation branding: Between equality and flagships. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 37(6), 702–717. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2015.1102822>
- Sataøen, H. L., & Wæraas, A. (2015). Branding without unique brands: Managing similarity and difference in a public sector context. *Public Management Review*, 17(3), 443–461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2013.841976>
- Sataøen, H. L., & Wæraas, A. (2016). Building a sector reputation: The strategic communication of national higher education. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 10(3), 165–176. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1176567>
- Shaw, R., & Eichbaum, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Ministers, minders and mandarins: An international study of relationships at the executive summit of parliamentary democracies*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Sjöberg, U. (2018). It is not about facts – It is about framing. The app generation's information-seeking tactics: Proactive online crisis communication. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 26(1), 127–137. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5973.12145>
- Socialstyrelsen. (2012). *Bombattentatet i Oslo och skjutningarna på Utøya 2011 [The bombing in Oslo and the shootings on Utøya 2011]*. Kamedo-rapport 97 [Kamedo (emergency medical observational studies) Report 97]. Stockholm: Socialstyrelsen. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:548761/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Strömbäck, J. (2008). Four phases of mediatization: An analysis of the mediatization of politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 13(3), 228–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161208319097>
- Strömbäck, J., & Kiouisis, S. (Eds.). (2019). *Political public relations: Concepts, principles and applications* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351053143>
- Sundström, G., & Lemne, M. (2016). Bo Smith investigation viewed from the other side of the bridge]. *Politica*, 48(4), 455–480. [https://politica.dk/fileadmin/politica/Dokumenter/politica\\_48\\_4/sundstroem\\_og\\_lemne.pdf](https://politica.dk/fileadmin/politica/Dokumenter/politica_48_4/sundstroem_og_lemne.pdf)
- Thorbjørnsrud, K., Figenschou, T. U., & Ihlen, Ø. (2014). Mediatization in public bureaucracies: A typology. *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, 39(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2014-0002>
- Thorbjørnsrud, K., & Figenschou, T. U. (2018). Mediated agency, blame avoidance and institutional responsibility: Government communication in a personalised media landscape. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 41(2), 210–232. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12117>
- Thorbjørnsrud, K. (2015). Mediatization of public bureaucracies: Administrative versus political loyalty. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 38(2), 179–197. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12041>
- Voss, M., & Lorenz, D. F. (2016). Sociological foundations of crisis communication. In A. Schwarz, M. W. Seeger, & C. Auer (Eds.), *The handbook of international crisis communication research* (pp. 45–55). New York: John Wiley & Sons. <https://www.doi.org/10.1002/9781118516812>
- Vromen, A. (2017). *Digital citizenship and political engagement: The challenge from online campaigning and advocacy organisations*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-48865-7>

- Wonneberger, A., & Jakobs, S. (2016). Mass media orientation and external communication strategies: Exploring organisational differences. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 10(5), 368–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2016.1204613>
- Wæraas, A. (2008). Can public sector organizations be coherent corporate brands? *Marketing Theory*, 8(2), 205–221. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593108093325>
- Wæraas, A., Bjørnå, H., & Moldenæs, T. (2014). Place, organization, democracy: Three strategies for municipal branding. *Public Management Review*, 17(9), 1282–1304. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2014.906965>
- Wæraas, A., Byrkjeflot, H., & Angell, S. I. (2011). Dilemmaer i omdømmehåndtering [Dilemmas in reputation management]. In A. Wæraas, H. Byrkjeflot, & S. I. Angell (Eds.), *Substans og framtredden: Omdømmehåndtering i offentlig sektor* [Substance and appearance: Public sector reputation management] (pp. 15–33). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.



## Political media effects in a Nordic perspective

Audun Beyer, Erik Knudsen, Kim Andersen,  
& Adam Shehata

### Abstract

In this chapter, we focus on one of the most central issues within the scholarly literature on political communication: political media effects. We centre our discussion on the role played by the Nordic context for political media effects and focus on media effects on political learning and knowledge gaps; agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects; and media effects on voting and other political behaviours. Because much of the research and theories that have shaped the political communication literature on media effects emanate from the US, we discuss how differences between the American and the Nordic contexts may influence how well the theories of political media effects emanating from an American perspective fit the Nordic countries. We pay particular attention to studies related to the different theories that have been conducted in the Nordic context.

**Keywords:** political media effects, agenda-setting, framing, political learning, effects on political behaviour

### Introduction

In the scholarly field of media and communication research, the study of media effects is one of the most central (Nabi & Oliver, 2009). Studies of media effects span various research fields, such as health communication and science communication, but are particularly prominent in the field of political communication. Within this field, the study of media effects has moved from being labelled “one of the most notable embarrassments of modern social science” (Bartels, 1993: 267) to having “a major impact in political science and communications scholarship” (Iyengar, 2010: 190). As such, it is by now clear that the media play an important role in shaping people’s political beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours.

In this chapter, we focus on media effects on political learning and knowledge gaps; agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects; and finally, media effects on

voting and other political behaviours. These are some of the most prominent theories and areas of interest within media effects research (Neuman & Guggenheim, 2011), and they are especially well suited for the purpose of this chapter, namely to illustrate the role played by the Nordic context for political media effects. Much of the research and theories that have shaped the study of these central media effects within political communication emanate from the US. We will therefore ask and discuss how traits highlighting the differences between the American and the Nordic contexts (e.g., the status of public service broadcasting) may influence how well the theories of political media effects emanating from an American perspective fit the Nordic countries. This is, of course, not to say that important research has not been done outside the US or the Nordic countries. However, to limit the scope of the chapter, we refrain from including other contexts – such as Germany or the Netherlands, for example – where a lot of research on political media effects has also been done.

We will argue that for theories relating to the human psychology, as, for example, framing, priming, and agenda-setting, there are few reasons to expect differences between different contexts, such as the US and the Nordic countries. However, when it comes to more contextual-dependent theoretical perspectives – such as the knowledge gap hypothesis or how different media types may or may not foster feelings of cynicism and apathy – there is reason to believe that there can be differences between the Nordic and the American contexts. Such differences may be due to the nature of the media systems with, for example, smaller distinctions between quality and tabloid newspapers and strong public service broadcasters.

We start by discussing the context of political media effects in the Nordic countries. We then proceed with discussions concerning political learning and knowledge gaps; agenda-setting, priming, and framing; and finally, effects on voting and other political behaviour. Lastly, we summarise our discussions and provide some concluding remarks concerning the state of media effects research in the Nordic region. Throughout the chapter, we pay particular attention to studies related to the different theories that have been conducted in the Nordic context. We limit ourselves to political media effects on public opinion generally, and individuals more specifically, but it is, of course, also possible to study effects of political communication on the macro level, such as on political culture and institutions (see Potter, 2012). For instance, the macro level theory of mediatisation is one of the most studied in the Nordic context but will not be included in our discussions.

## Political media effects in the Nordic countries

Even though the media effects considered in this chapter are typically studied from a micro-level perspective, various institutional and contextual factors play

an important role. The idea that macro-level characteristics condition opinion dynamics and media effects at the individual level is widely recognised in the field and one reason behind the growing interest in cross-national political communication research (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). More generally though, the importance of macro-level factors in media effects has also been highlighted by the vast media environmental transformations in the last decades. A range of classic political media effects, such as agenda-setting, priming, framing, and learning, are conditioned upon the wider socio-technological contexts that have characterised Western democracies at different points in time (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Prior, 2007). A changing media environment (macro-level) influences patterns of individual media consumption and effects (micro-level). As such, macro-level influences vary across both time and space.

Macro-level influences on media effects are well captured by the so-called O-M-A (i.e., opportunities, motivations, and abilities) framework, which is developed specifically to explain the interplay between structural and individual factors (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990). Accordingly, media system characteristics influence the information opportunities citizens have. Opportunities typically refer to the number and character of different media available to citizens in a given society. With better opportunities to select among various media with diverse content (supply-side), personal motivations and abilities will have a greater influence on what content people are exposed to (demand-side). Cross-national variations in media environmental opportunity structures are therefore highly important for understanding differential media effects across countries.

As such, research on comparative media systems highlights important institutional characteristics that distinguish the Nordic countries. Historically, the Nordic media systems have belonged to the “democratic corporatist model”, characterised – among other things – by strong journalistic professionalism, high newspaper circulation, and strong public service broadcasting institutions (Brüggemann et al., 2014; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Although media systems are constantly changing, and distinct characteristics between models may gradually disappear, some of these characteristics are highly relevant today.

Compared to the American media system, where most media effects research has been conducted, the Nordic countries therefore provide different opportunity structures for selective media exposure with important implications for a variety of media effects, such as the ones discussed in this chapter. A long tradition of research into selective exposure has shown that people have a tendency to seek out attitude-consistent media content, without necessarily avoiding the other side (Garrett, 2009; Stroud, 2011). The extent to which citizens can engage in selective exposure is, however, dependent on opportunity structures for selective exposure at the country level. The concept of opportunity structures for selective exposure refers to the “availability of different media, media formats,

media genres, and media content, and the ease with which citizens can select media and media content based on their personal preferences” (Skovsgaard et al., 2016: 4; see also Castro-Herrero et al., 2018). While the current American media system provides significant opportunities for citizens to select media based on both a general interest in politics (current affairs vs. entertainment) as well as political *preferences* (partisan media), this is not the case in the Nordic countries.

Even though entertainment options have grown dramatically in the Nordic countries as well, allowing citizens who are not particularly interested in politics to tune out from news and current affairs, partisan media outlets are much less prevalent. As such, the structural opportunities – although gradually expanding in the online environment – for citizens to select media content based on partisan or ideological preferences are generally lower. In the Nordic countries, legacy media and public service broadcasters have transitioned into the online sphere quite successfully, further curbing the development of partisan, online media. This is not to say that that selective exposure to ideologically congruent sources does not occur in the Nordic countries (see, e.g., Knudsen et al., 2018; Knudsen & Johannesson, 2018; Johannesson & Knudsen, 2020), but that it is much less prevalent than in the American media system. The extent to which media systems are fragmented and politically polarised significantly influences how individual-level media effects translate into aggregate-level outcomes. The fact that Nordic media environments are less fragmented politically and traditional news organisations continue to play a significant role, sets the stage for a variety of media effects to play out differently here (Aalberg & Curran, 2012; Dahlgren, 2019; Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2017; cf. Knudsen, 2020).

### Political learning and knowledge gaps

As most citizens experience politics through the media, the media play a central role for citizens learning about politics and current affairs. Whether people learn from the media will depend on both individual and structural factors, however. According to the “knowledge gap hypothesis” (Tichenor et al., 1970), people with higher socioeconomic status (SES) tend to learn faster and more from the media than people with lower SES. The mass media contributes to creating a knowledge gap because of a range of factors that differ between persons with higher and lower SES. These factors include learning habits, information-processing skills, social networks, communication skills, perceived relevance leading to selective exposure, and, finally, that the media are “geared toward people with high SES with the result that low SES may have difficulty understanding the news” (McCombs et al., 2011: 94). This will eventually create a Matthew Effect where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer in terms of political knowledge.



Just as the O-M-A framework helps explain differences in selective exposure, as we described above, it also helps explain differences in political learning from the media (Prior, 2007). In line with the knowledge gap hypothesis, the framework posits that political learning depends on people's motivations and abilities to process information from the media. In addition, however, the framework also highlights that the influence of these individual factors will be conditioned by the structural opportunities to get information. When people have more opportunities to access different types of information (both political and non-political), their motivation for processing such information becomes more important for their political learning. Such information opportunities vary both across time and cross-nationally.

From a time perspective, Prior (2007) shows how Americans' preferences have become more important for their news use and political learning in today's high-choice media environment compared to the earlier time's low-choice environment where only a few media sources were available. Consequently, the amount of accidental exposure or incidental exposure, where people are exposed to news while using the media for other purposes, has decreased. Similar results are found in the Nordic context. In a study from Sweden, Strömbäck and colleagues (2013) show how the number of both news avoiders and news seekers have increased over time, and how political interest has become a more important predictor for news consumption. Comparative studies by Norwegian researchers indicate that such trends are taking place across most European countries (Aalberg et al., 2013; Blekesaune et al., 2012). However, a recent study of news avoidance in Norway, spanning a 20-year period, only finds a small, incremental increase in total news avoidance of about 0.1 per cent per year (Karlsen et al., 2020). The same study also finds that the decrease in news exposure from traditional news media is largely compensated for when one takes into account news exposure from online and social media.

From a cross-national perspective, the O-M-A framework can be used to explore how differences in opportunity structures for selective exposure affects political learning. In the Nordic countries, public service broadcasting ensures a better opportunity structure for being accidentally exposed to political information in the news media. For example, research from Denmark shows how scheduling the entertainment show *The X Factor* before and after the public service television news leads more people, especially younger people and those with lower news interest, to watch the news (Andersen et al., 2019). As a natural consequence, research from Sweden has shown that especially people with low interest learn about politics from public service news (Shehata et al., 2015). Likewise, the importance of context is underlined by research showing that public service media provide more hard news and that people therefore know more about politics in the Nordic countries compared to the US (Curran et al., 2009; Iyengar et al., 2010).

With the rise of the Internet and social media, researchers have debated whether such media platforms help or hinder incidental exposure to news and political information. On social media, people often stumble upon news – shared by friends, suggested by algorithms, or sponsored by news companies – while doing other things (Bergström & Belfrage, 2018; Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018). However, the people most likely to be accidentally exposed to and engage with news on social media are those who already have an interest in news and politics (Kümpel, 2020). Just as the knowledge gap hypothesis and the O-M-A framework highlight, this is likely to cause a Matthew Effect, where the rich get richer while the poor get poorer. Even if social media benefits the poor, it will likely be to a lesser extent than for the rich.

Related, researchers have also examined whether social media facilitate political knowledge. Research has shown that news use through traditional media like newspapers facilitates political learning to a larger degree than reliance on social media news use. In fact, several recent studies have shown that social media news use may be negatively related to political knowledge. Recently, this has been documented in a Nordic context, where Karlsen and colleagues (2020) show that what they label passive news use in social media is related to less political learning. In other words, the more reliant one is on getting news through social media, the less likely one is to be politically knowledgeable. The absence of political learning effects from using social media has also been documented in three separate panel surveys conducted in Sweden, all showing that traditional news media use is a stronger predictor of political and current affairs knowledge than social media news use (Dimitrova et al., 2014).

In sum, although changes in the media environment have given people more opportunities to turn their backs to the news media, with consequences for the political knowledge, this seems to happen to a larger extent in the US than in the Nordic countries. One main reason for this is the presence of strong public service broadcasters securing better opportunity structures for being exposed to political information. However, these positive learning effects are, in general, challenged by news consumption moving to social media sites.

### Agenda-setting and priming effects

Learning factual knowledge concerning, for example, who is in power and how the political spectrum is defined, is one important way in which the media contribute to political communication effects. However, the media are also able to play a role for political communication by focusing attention towards some issues while ignoring others. Three important – and by many scholars considered related – theories in this regard are agenda-setting, priming, and framing.

Agenda-setting's core tenet is that there is a transfer of salience from the media agenda to the public agenda. This means that, on average, issues that receive much attention by the media are also considered as more important by the public. Agenda-setting is one of the most studied perspectives and theories in communication science, and it has been strengthened through literally hundreds of studies, all over the world for the last 50 years. Agenda-setting was first established as a concept by Walter Lippman about 100 years ago and reiterated by Cohen (1963) almost 60 years ago. However, it only received a proper empirical test by the now seminal Chapel Hill study in the US (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The Chapel Hill study, followed by a range of agenda-setting studies over time and in different contexts, found strong support for the original assumption; the more salient an issue was on the media agenda, the more important that issue was perceived to be by the public.

Public agenda-setting has also been studied in the Nordic countries. For example, it has been studied in Sweden, both during election campaigns (Shehata, 2010; Shehata & Strömbäck, 2013) and over longer time spans (Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2017; Shehata & Falasca, 2014). Findings from these studies lend support for the basic hypothesis, but also highlight the significance of individual-level moderators conditioning agenda-setting effects. There is also not much evidence that agenda-setting influence of traditional news media in Sweden has become weaker during the transition from a low- to high-choice media environment (Djerf-Pierre & Shehata, 2017). Regarding intermedia agenda-setting between traditional and online news media and social media, Harder and colleagues (2017) conclude that online media can indeed alter agenda-setting processes by significantly setting the agenda for other media to follow. However, they also show, in line with Djerf-Pierre and Shehata (2017), how slower media, such as printed newspapers, are still highly important.

Perhaps the closest relative to agenda-setting is priming. While priming has been known in the field of psychology for many years, it was first used in a media and communication setting a little over thirty years ago (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). Priming is said to be the case when the media focus attention on an issue (similar to agenda-setting), and that issue then becomes important in individuals' later judgments. Concerning the mechanism behind priming, it "occurs when a given message activates a mental concept, which for a period of time increases the probability" that this mental concept comes to mind again (McLeod et al., 2009: 230). Priming has often been studied with regards to presidential evaluations in an American context. When judging how well a president is doing, people seem to place more weight on the issue on which they had been primed with beforehand than on other issues. This means that a president's overall approval rating is highly contingent on how well they are doing on the most salient issue of the day. For instance, Pan and Kosicki (1997) show that the overall evaluations of the first President Bush were highly dependent

on the media coverage of first the Gulf War, leading to a higher overall rating, and then the economy, leading to a lower overall rating.

Priming has also been studied in the Nordic context. In Denmark, de Vreese (2004) shows how the news media's coverage of the euro referendum primed voters in their evaluation of politicians. Likewise, in Denmark, Kalogeropoulos and colleagues (2017) show how exposure to news about the economy primes people's government evaluation. A Swedish study also documented priming effects of economic issues on government approval during the financial crisis, although these effects were conditioned by voters' attributions of responsibility (Shehata & Falasca, 2014). In Norway, studies conducted as part of the Norwegian National Election Studies have also shown the occurrence of priming effects during an election campaign (Jenssen & Aalberg, 2004).

Although studies suggest that agenda-setting and priming effects persist in the Nordic countries, the gradual fragmentation of media environments certainly challenge these classic mass communication theories. As citizens' opportunities for media choice increase, with personal values and preferences becoming more important for explaining media usage, the idea of a homogenous media agenda influencing all citizens becomes less viable (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Chaffee & Metzger, 2001). With a more heterogenous supply of news, selective exposure and reinforcing spirals may better explain the formation of fragmented public agendas (Slater, 2015; Stroud, 2011).

### Framing effects

While agenda-setting and priming effects often deal with larger issues, and how the salience of those issues in the media affect judgments concerning issue importance and issues as standards for evaluations, framing is concerned with the nature of the coverage of specific news items. This means that agenda-setting and priming are concerned with *what* the media cover, while framing is concerned with *how* an issue is covered. When choosing, whether deliberately or not, a perspective from which to tell a news story, the journalist frames the story. What it means to frame something has received a lot of scholarly attention over the years, but the most cited definition is the version that Entman provided in his seminal 1993 article. Here, Entman (1993: 52) argues that to frame is to choose some elements of a phenomenon over others in such a way that it promotes "a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation". If a frame can define something, name the causes of the problem, how to evaluate it, and how to fix it, these elements may in turn come to influence how people respond to, think about, and behave towards the problem at hand. For instance, if climate change is mainly framed in terms of the problems it creates for businesses that have to

stop polluting, rather than something that may cause serious weather problems with even more severe economic consequences (McCombs et al., 2011), these are two very different problem definitions that may lead to equally different causal claims and remedies.

In the framing literature, scholars have often distinguished between two main types of frames: issue-specific and generic. Issue-specific frames pertain to a particular issue, and in themselves are not transferable to different issues. For example, a budget deficit can be framed as a political scandal, where the responsible politician is forced to leave office, or can be framed as a consequence of long-term developments focusing on macro-economic factors. Generic frames “transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts” (de Vreese, 2005: 5). Examples of generic news frames are human-interest framing, which focuses on individuals and cases, or the framing of politics as a game or a dispute over an issue. The game framing of politics focuses on the horse-race element of election campaigns, it employs language of winning and losing, and deals with election polls to a large degree (see Beyer, 2012; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997; de Vreese, 2005). Such frames also construe politicians as strategic actors in a battle for power. Effects of such frames are increased cynicism and apathy among the electorate and lower levels of political efficacy (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997).

Framing effects have also been found in the Nordic context. In Denmark, de Vreese and Semetko (2002) show how exposure to news that relies on strategy framing leads to an increase in political cynicism. The effects of the strategic game frame on cynicism and trust towards both political actors and the media themselves have also been documented in election campaign studies in Sweden (Hopmann et al., 2015; Shehata, 2014). Likewise, in Norway, Beyer (2012) shows that people who rely on a commercial broadcaster rather than a publicly funded broadcaster – and thereby are exposed more to strategic framing – show higher levels of both cynicism and apathy towards politics. Studies have also been conducted on the use of human-interest framing. In Denmark and Norway, studies have shown how including a case in news stories affects both people’s political opinions (Hopmann et al., 2017; Knudsen, 2016) and their intention to participate politically (Andersen et al., 2017).

In sum, agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects, similar to those originally identified in the US, have been identified in the Nordic countries. If such effects should differ across some contexts, it should therefore be a result of differences in media content – for example, the extent to which a topic is framed in a specific manner – rather than differences in how people react to such content.

## Voting, turnout, and other behavioural effects

Concerning political behaviours, voting is clearly the most central activity that has been explored in research on political communication effects. Voter turnout is perhaps the most-studied variable in relation to the election process, and also the variable that all scholars (and others) view as normatively beneficiary, *per se*. Research has shown that different forms of mediated political communication can have both positive and negative effects on turnout. For instance, negative advertising and campaigning is often shown to increase turnout, but can, however, also alienate voters by creating cynicism and apathy that leads to demobilising in parts of the electorate (for a discussion, see McLeod et al., 2009). Generally, attention to and use of traditional forms of news media, such as newspapers, seem to be positively related to turnout, but the direction of causation between news use, political discussion, and turnout at the ballots remains unclear (Norris, 2000; McCombs et al., 2011).

Studies have also examined the effects of the publication of public opinion polls on both turnout and changes in party choice. Some studies propose a bandwagon effect (Miller, 2000), where parties that are leading the race gain additional momentum because some voters seem to prefer being on the winning side. Other studies propose an underdog effect (Fleitas, 1971), where the opposite happens, as parties that are behind on the polls may mobilise voters that otherwise would not have decided to turn up on election day to secure that a party is represented in parliament. The concern for these types of effects has caused several countries to have restrictions on the publication of opinion polls in different lengths of time prior to an election, and the World Association for Public Opinion Research conducts regular studies of countries that maintain different forms of such restrictions.

In their book on how the media affect civic life, McCombs and colleagues (2011) review scholarship that has extended our understanding of how the news media affect not only voting behaviours, but also other forms of participation. Such behaviours include going to political meetings, signing petitions, contacting public officials, protesting, boycotting, volunteering for organisations, and being a member in civic organisations. Taken together, the evidence suggests that engaging with news media is positively related to most forms of such participation in political and civic life. However, some forms of news media use may also disengage citizens and raise levels of cynicism. In addition, some scholars argue that general television viewing limits and decreases political participation by lowering social capital (see, e.g., Putnam, 2000).

Research from the Nordic context also shows how the media influence political participation. In Denmark, for example, Andersen and colleagues (2016) show how use of hard news in general is positively related to political participation by increasing knowledge and efficacy, while the use of soft news is

negatively related. In another study, however, Andersen (2019) shows how soft news have the ability to mobilise people with a low political interest. Also in Denmark, Ohme (2019) shows how exposure to political information on social media can foster campaign participation. In Sweden, Dimitrova and colleagues (2014) likewise show how social media use has a positive effect on political participation. In Norway, Beyer and colleagues (2014) report two experiments that show the potential for media saliency to change vote intention, in line with issue ownership literature and expectations.

With respect to behavioural effects, the changing media environment may similarly lead to polarisation between groups of citizens. As citizens can seek out whatever content they prefer – following generally their interests as well as political values – political inequalities and gaps might increase. Personalised communication flows stemming from a combination of self-selection and algorithms are typically assumed to reinforce differences in political participation and polarise attitudes between groups (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Prior, 2007). So far, however, the empirical evidence for such polarisation remains inconclusive.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we outlined some of the most central theories for political media effects, focusing on media effects on political learning and knowledge gaps; agenda-setting, priming, and framing effects; and finally, media effects on voting and other political behaviours. Throughout the chapter, we highlighted studies from the Nordic countries that are relevant to the theories discussed, and we argued why political media effects in the Nordic context are similar to or different from other contexts. The study of political media effects has been strongly dominated by US-based scholars who tend to draw on empirical data from the American political and media context. This may represent a bias in the study of political media effects, as the American system, both politically and with regards to the media, differs in important respects from many European countries, and particularly the Nordic countries (see Esping-Andersen, 1990; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). At the same time, the research on political media effects in the Nordic countries has been limited compared to US-based research, albeit with several noteworthy contributions as highlighted in this chapter. This means that there is a limited pool of studies to draw on if we wish to explore possible differences in political media effects between the Nordic countries and other contexts, such as the US.

Theoretically, however, one can assume both substantial similarities and differences between the Nordic countries and other contexts, such as the US. Regarding the former, we believe that for theories and mechanisms that are clearly rooted in human psychology, such as framing, priming, and agenda-setting,

there is little reason to expect large differences across contexts. For instance, when individuals participate in controlled experiments examining framing effects across countries, people tend to react similarly to stimuli (e.g., Aarøe & Petersen, 2014). Thus, if there are real-world differences across contexts in, for example, framing effects, it is likely to be a consequence of differences in media coverage, rather than individuals in the Nordic countries reacting differently to stimulus compared to individuals from other contexts. This is of course not to say that the media in different societies are creating similar pictures in people's heads, but merely that people from different contexts respond similarly, for example, when exposed to the same frame.

This interpretation is, of course, a simplification of a more complex reality. However, it serves the purpose of highlighting that it is important to take contextual factors into account when studying such media effects. Contextual factors are particularly important regarding more context-dependent theories, such as selective exposure and the knowledge gap hypothesis, or when looking at effects of real-world media coverage. The importance of different political media effects may very well differ across different contexts that, for example, have different opportunity structures for news consumption (Esser et al., 2012). Thus, we argue that a key factor in explaining why political media effects, such as differences in political learning from the media, play out differently in the Nordic context compared to the American context, is differences in the opportunity structures for exposure to political information in these contexts. In other words, the underlying individual mechanisms in political media effects are likely to be similar in the Nordic context compared to other contexts, but the context in which these effects unfold differs.

Scholars of media effects in the Nordic countries are increasingly providing valuable knowledge on how some media effects are similar to, and other media effects are different from, the effects identified in other contexts. Both types of evidence are important, as both point to the potential limits or universality of communication theories. As with the study of individual differences and similarities in media effects (Oliver & Krakowiak, 2009), contextual similarities and differences can enrich our understanding of when, how, and for whom political media effects apply. Importantly, one of the core developments of media effects research, since the field's earliest work, is the understanding that media effects are not "one-size-fits-all" (Oliver & Krakowiak, 2009). Rather, researchers are likely to find heterogeneous differences in media effects. Because media effects can play out differently across contexts due to differences in opportunity structures, evidence on media effects from the Nordic context have contributed with bringing the field closer to a general understanding of when, how, and for whom different types of media influence individuals politically. For that reason, it is important that Nordic political communication scholars not only continue to, but also increase their effort to, engage with the international



literature on political media effects to explore and explain how different types of such effects play out in the Nordic countries. Only by testing theories, and further developing them with data from the Nordic context, can the field start to move away from a possible theoretical bias and blind spots that arise from focusing on one, or just a few, contexts.

As exposure to information online is increasingly determined by interactions between humans and algorithms, the task of reliably measuring media effects is increasingly hard to accomplish (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). Algorithms increasingly determine the selection of items shown to each user on social media and the order and presentation of news on online news sites. This means that individuals are now more likely than ever before to receive different “treatments” in terms of which news and news framing they receive (Helberger, 2019). If individuals receive different “treatments”, then media effects are also likely to be increasingly individualised. Thus, the challenge for future media effects research is not only to study and understand differences across time and countries, but also across platforms and personalised online news sites and social media news feeds. Only by rising to this challenge and developing new methods and theoretical concepts that can help explain and account for individualised and personalised information can the field continue to reliably estimate different forms of media effects in the future.

## References

- Aalberg, T., Blekesaune, A., & Elvestad, E. (2013). Media choice and informed democracy: Toward increasing news consumption gaps in Europe? *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(3), 281–303. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161213485990>
- Aalberg, T., & Curran, J. (Eds.). (2012). *How media inform democracy: A comparative approach*. New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203803448>
- Aarøe, L., & Petersen, M. B. (2014). Crowding out culture: Scandinavians and Americans agree on social welfare in the face of deservingness cues. *The Journal of Politics*, 76(3), 684–697. <https://www.doi.org/10.1017/S002238161400019X>
- Andersen, K. (2019). An entrance for the uninterested: Who watches soft news and how does it affect their political participation? *Mass Communication and Society*, 22(4), 487–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2019.1585544>
- Andersen, K., Bjarnøe, C., Albæk, E., & de Vreese, C. H. (2016). How news type matters: Indirect effects of media use on political participation through knowledge and efficacy. *Journal of Media Psychology*, 28(3), 111–122. <https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-1105/a000201>
- Andersen, K., Skovsgaard, M., Albæk, E., & de Vreese, C. H. (2017). The engaging effect of exemplars: How an emotional reaction to (dis)similar people in the news media affects political participation. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 22(4), 490–509. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161217723152>
- Andersen, K., Skovsgaard, M., & Pedersen, R. T. (2019). The X Factor of opportunity structures: How grab and wrap effects of entertainment create inadvertent news audience in a high-choice media environment. *European Journal of Communication*, 34(5), 535–551. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323119874623>
- Bartels, L. M. (1993). Messages received: The political impact of media exposure. *The American Political Science Review*, 87(2), 267–285. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2939040>

- Bennett, W. L., & Iyengar, S. (2008). A new era of minimal effects? The changing foundations of political communication. *Journal of Communication*, 58(4), 707–731. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00410.x>
- Bergström, A., & Belfrage, M. J. (2018). News in social media: Incidental consumption and the role of opinion leaders. *Digital Journalism*, 6(5), 583–598. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2018.1423625>
- Beyer, A. (2012). *Valgets nyhetsrammer: Produksjon, innhold, opinion* [Election news frames: Production, content, opinion] [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Oslo, Norway].
- Beyer, A., Knutsen, C. H., & Rasch, B. E. (2014). Election campaigns, issue focus and voting intentions: Survey experiments of Norwegian voters. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 37(4), 406–427. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12029>
- Blekesaune, A., Elvestad, E., & Aalberg, T. (2012). Tuning out the world of news and current affairs: An empirical study of Europe's disconnected citizens. *European Sociological Review*, 28(1), 110–126. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcq051>
- Brüggemann, M., Engesser, S., Büchel, F., Humprecht, E., & Castro, L. (2014). Hallin and Mancini revisited: Four empirical types of Western media systems. *Journal of Communication*, 64(6), 1037–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12127>
- Cappella, J. N., & Jamieson, K. H. (1997). *Spiral of cynicism: The press and the public good*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Castro-Herrero, L., Nir, L., & Skovsgaard, M. (2018). Bridging gaps in cross-cutting media exposure: The role of public service broadcasting. *Political Communication*, 35(4), 542–565. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1476424>
- Chaffee, S., & Metzger, M. (2001). The end of mass communication? *Mass Communication and Society*, 4(4), 365–379. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0404\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0404_3)
- Cohen, B. C. (1963). *Press and foreign policy*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Curran, J., Iyengar, S., Lund, A. B., & Salovaara-Moring, I. (2009). Media system, public knowledge and democracy: A comparative study. *European Journal of Communication*, 24(1), 5–26. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323108098943>
- Delli Carpini, M., & Keeter, S. (1996). *What Americans know about politics and why it matters*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press. [www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cc2kv1](http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1cc2kv1)
- de Vreese, C. H. (2004). Primed by the Euro: The impact of a referendum campaign on public opinion and evaluations of government and political leaders. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 27(1), 45–64. [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0080-6757.2004.099\\_1.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0080-6757.2004.099_1.x)
- de Vreese, C. H. (2005). The spiral of cynicism reconsidered. *European Journal of Communication*, 20(3), 283–301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323105055259>
- de Vreese, C. H., & Semetko, H. A. (2002). Cynical and engaged: Strategic campaign coverage, public opinion, and mobilization in a referendum. *Communication Research*, 29(6), 615–641. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365002237829>
- Dahlgren, P. M. (2019). Selective exposure to public service news over thirty years: The role of ideological leaning, party support, and political interest. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 24(3), 293–314. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219836223>
- Dimitrova, D. V., Shehata, A., Strömbäck, J., & Nord, L. W. (2014). The effects of digital media on political knowledge and participation in election campaigns: Evidence from panel data. *Communication Research*, 41(1), 95–118. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650211426004>
- Djerf-Pierre, M., & Shehata, A. (2017). Still an agenda setter: Traditional news media and public opinion during the transition from low to high choice media environments. *Journal of Communication*, 67(5), 733–757. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12327>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58.
- Esping-Andersen, G. (1990). *The three worlds of welfare capitalism*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Esser, F., de Vreese, C. H., Strömbäck, J., van Aelst, P., Aalberg, T., Staney, J., . . . Reinemann, C. (2012). Political information opportunities in Europe: A longitudinal and comparative study of thirteen television systems. *International Journal of Press/Politics*, 17(3), 247–274.

- Fleitas, D. W. (1971). Bandwagon and underdog effects in minimal-information elections. *The American Political Science Review*, 65(2), 434–438. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1954459>
- Fletcher, R., & Nielsen, R. K. (2018). Are people incidentally exposed to news on social media? A comparative analysis. *New Media & Society*, 20(7), 2450–2468. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444817724170>
- Garrett, R. K. (2009). Politically motivated reinforcement seeking: Reframing the selective exposure debate. *Journal of Communication*, 59(4), 676–699. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01452.x>
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Harder, R. A., Sevenans, J., & Van Aelst, P. (2017). Intermedia agenda setting in the social media age: How traditional players dominate the news agenda in election times. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 22(3), 275–293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161217704969>
- Helberger, N. (2019). On the democratic role of news recommenders. *Digital Journalism*, 7(8), 993–1012.
- Hopmann, D. N., Shehata, A., & Strömbäck, J. (2015). Contagious media effects: How media use and exposure to game-framed news influence media trust. *Mass Communication and Society*, 18(6), 776–798. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2015.1022190>
- Hopmann, D. N., Skovsgaard, M., & Elmelund-Præstekær, C. (2017). What have I done to deserve this? The role of deservingness in effects of ordinary citizens as cases in the news. *European Journal of Communication*, 32(4), 333–347. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0267323117710900>
- Iyengar, S. (2010). Framing research: The next steps. In B. F. Schaffner, & P. J. Sellers (Eds.), *Winning with words: The origins and impact of political framing* (pp. 185–191). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203883112>
- Iyengar, S., Curran, J., Lund, A. B., Salovaara-Moring, I., Hahn, K. S., & Coen, S. (2010). Cross-national versus individual-level differences in political information: A media systems perspective. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion & Parties*, 20(3), 291–309. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2010.490707>
- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (1987). *News that matters: Television and American opinion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jenssen, A. T., & Aalberg, T. (2004). På valgkampens slagmark: En eksperimentell studie av medieeffekter [On the election campaign battlefield: An experimental study of media effects]. In B. O. Aardal, A. Krogstad, & H. M. Narud (Eds.), *I valgkampens hete [In the heat of the election campaign]* (pp. 327–353). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Johannesson, M. P., & Knudsen, E. (2020). Disentangling the influence of recommender attributes and news story attributes: A conjoint experiment on exposure and sharing decisions on social networking sites. *Digital Journalism*, 1–21. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2020.1805780>
- Kalogeropoulos, A., Albæk, E., de Vreese, C. H., & van Dalen, A. (2017). News priming and the changing economy: How economic news influences government evaluations. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 29(2), 269–290. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edv048>
- Karlsen, R., Beyer, A., & Steen-Johnsen, K. (2020). Do high-choice media environments facilitate news avoidance? A longitudinal study, 1997–2016. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 64(4), forthcoming.
- Karlsen, R., Beyer, A., Steen-Johnsen, K. (2020, May). *Opportunity structures, news-finds-me beliefs, and general political knowledge: Conditions for learning about politics on social media* [Conference presentation]. 70th ICA Conference, Gold Coast, Australia.
- Knudsen, E. (2016). *Journalistikkens fremstillingsmakt: Nyhetsrammer, meningsdanning og medialisering [The power of journalistic framing: News frames, public opinion and mediatization]* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen, Norway]. <http://bora.uib.no/handle/1956/12225>
- Knudsen, E. (2020). Affective polarization in multiparty systems? Comparing affective polarization toward voters and parties in Norway and the United States. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 1–11. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9477.12186>
- Knudsen, E., Iversen, M. H., & Vatnøy, E. (2018). Mistillit til den andre siden: Ideologisk selektiv eksponering og tillit til røde og blå medier [Distrust in the other side: Ideological selectivity

- in news use and trust in Norwegian “red” and “blue” news media]. *Norsk Medietidsskrift*, 25(2), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.0805-9535-2018-02-04>
- Knudsen, E., & Johannesson, M. P. (2018). Beyond the limits of survey experiments: How conjoint designs advance causal inference in political communication research. *Political Communication*, 36(2), 259–271. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2018.1493009>
- Kümpel, A. S. (2020). The Matthew Effect in social media news use: Assessing inequalities in news exposure and news engagement on social network sites (SNS). *Journalism*, 21(8), 1083–1098. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920915374>
- Luskin, R. C. (1990). Explaining political sophistication. *Political Behavior*, 12(4), 331–361.
- McCombs, M., Holbert, R. L., Kioussis, S., & Wanta, W. (2011). *The news and public opinion: Media effects on civic life*. Malden, Massachusetts: Polity.
- McCombs, M., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176–187. <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>
- McLeod, D. M., Kosicki, G. M., & McLeod, J. M. (2009). Political communication effects. In J. Bryant, & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 228–251). New York: Routledge.
- Miller, W. L. (2000). Bandwagon effects. In Rose, R. (Ed.) *International encyclopedia of elections* (pp. 21–23). Washington, DC: CQ Press.
- Nabi, R. L., & Oliver, M. B. (2009). Introduction. In R. L. Nabi, & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of media processes and effects* (pp. 1–5). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Neuman, R. W., & Guggenheim, L. (2011). The evolution of media effects theory: A six-stage model of cumulative research. *Communication Theory*, 21(2), 169–196. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01381.x>
- Norris, P. (2000). *A virtuous circle: Political communications in postindustrial societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ohme, J. (2019). When digital natives enter the electorate: Political social media use among first-time voters and its effects on campaign participation. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 16(2), 119–136. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2019.1613279>
- Oliver, M. B., & Krakowiak, K. M. (2009). Individual differences in media effects. In J. Bryant, & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *Media effects: Advances in theory and research* (3rd ed.) (pp. 517–532). New York: Routledge.
- Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. M. (1997). Priming and media impact on the evaluations of the president’s performance. *Communication Research*, 24(1), 3–30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/009365097024001001>
- Potter, W. J. (2012). *Media effects*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Prior, M. (2007). *Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Shehata, A. (2010). Unemployment on the agenda: A panel study of agenda-setting effects during the 2006 Swedish national election campaign. *Journal of Communication*, 60(1), 182–203. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2009.01475.x>
- Shehata, A. (2014). Game frames, issue frames, and mobilization: Disentangling the effects of frame exposure and motivated news attention on political cynicism and engagement. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 26(2), 157–177. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edt034>
- Shehata, A., & Falasca, K. (2014). Priming effects during the financial crisis: Accessibility and applicability mechanisms behind government approval. *European Political Science Review*, 6(4), 597–620. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773913000258>
- Shehata, A., Hopmann, D. N., Nord, L., & Höijer, J. (2015). Television channel content profiles and differential knowledge growth: A test of the inadvertent learning hypothesis using panel data. *Political Communication*, 32(3), 377–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2014.955223>
- Shehata, A., & Strömbäck, J. (2013). Not (yet) a new era of minimal effects: A study of agenda setting at the aggregate and individual levels. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 18(2), 234–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161212473831>

- Skovsgaard, M., Shehata, A., & Strömbäck, J. (2016). Opportunity structures for selective exposure: Investigating selective exposure and learning in Swedish election campaigns using panel survey data. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 21(4), 527–546. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161216658157>
- Slater, M. D. (2015). Reinforcing spirals model: Conceptualizing the relationship between media content exposure and the development and maintenance of attitudes. *Media Psychology*, 18(3), 370–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2014.897236>
- Strömbäck, J., Djerf-Pierre, M., & Shehata, A. (2013). The dynamics of political interest and news media consumption: A longitudinal perspective. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 25(4), 414–435. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/eds018>
- Stroud, N. J. (2011). *Niche news: The politics of news choice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tichenor, P. J., Donohue, G. A., & Olien, C. N. (1970). Mass media flow and differential growth of knowledge. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 34(2), 159–170. <https://doi.org/10.1086/267786>



## Chapter 18

# Political rhetoric in Scandinavia

Jens E. Kjeldsen, Christian Kock, & Orla Vigsø

### Abstract

Rhetorical research in the three Scandinavian countries has made contributions to the study of political communication, representing approaches that are not often found in research coming from the social sciences or from more systemic, theory-based orientations. Rhetoric, both as an ancient tradition and as a modern discipline, tends to emphasise close study of actual pieces of communication – verbal, visual, or otherwise. This rarely leads to quantitative, generalisable findings, but instead to observations and conceptualisations of phenomena – which may then be studied from quantitative and empirical angles. Often, rhetorical studies will have a normative tilt, based on notions of democracy, deliberation, and the public sphere – often with an eye for malfunctions and possible remedies. A growing literature of studies in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway tend to share some of these characteristics. At the same time, rhetorical scholars in Scandinavia recognise the value of empirical observation and have made contributions of their own in that regard, for example, in the field of reception studies.

**Keywords:** political debate, speechmaking, political rhetoric, Scandinavia, visual rhetoric

## Introduction

Political rhetoric in Scandinavia is characterised by an informal style undergirded by egalitarianism and authenticity. Compared to the ideological style and frequent hostility found in, for instance, the US, Scandinavian politicians' rhetoric is mostly pragmatic, plain, and less polarising – for reasons of national cultures and democratic systems. This goes for traditional genres such as debates and speeches as well as for visual and online communication.

Before we describe this in more detail, we preface our account with remarks on what we might call the epistemology of rhetorical research, in other words, the kinds of insights rhetorical scholars typically seek. Rhetoric is historically

a humanistic discipline emphasising close, qualitative study of texts and other artifacts, considered singly or in small corpora. Such studies typically emphasise observations of significant phenomena that are then described and theorised. Quantitative claims of prevalence, causation, or effect are not typical, but the observations and concepts presented may invite and enable quantitative study. Also, rhetorical work often includes normative perspectives, for example on whether the phenomena observed are conducive to or inimical to a healthy democracy. Thus, rhetorical scholars' research results, while different from typical empirical findings in the social sciences, may inspire and complement them, and conversely.

Most rhetoric researchers in Scandinavia practice rhetorical criticism, analyses of rhetorical practice in political communication, and historical studies (e.g., Berge, 2014a). Their work is generally pragmatic about methodological purity, integrating several theories and methods and combining them with methods adapted from neighbouring fields, such as discourse analysis or linguistic pragmatics. Methods, in any given case, are chosen in order to best answer the research question. Textual analyses focusing on argumentation, ethos, gender, attitudes, or political debate all call for different tools.

Recently, scholars have turned towards work rooted in political science and deliberative theory. They increasingly realise that they not only have distinctive insights to offer on political rhetoric themselves, but also something to learn from disciplines using empirical, systemic, and quantitative approaches.

Scandinavian research differs from contemporary American rhetorical research published in journals such as *Quarterly Journal of Speech* and *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, which generally appears more theoretical and often reflects political engagement on behalf of groups considered disenfranchised or marginalised. Scandinavian rhetoricians usually seek to communicate to a broader audience, even in research journals. This is considered part of a scholarly ethos, but also a public duty. Thus, alongside academic publications, rhetorical scholars regularly discuss political rhetoric in print, broadcast, and online media aimed at general audiences.

This chapter discusses the practice of political rhetoric in use as well as the study of it. We point briefly to some contextual determinants of Scandinavian political rhetoric before highlighting key traits in contemporary practice: egalitarianism, attempted authenticity, and a turn towards populism and increased polarisation. Then follows a short discussion of political rhetoric in different genres. Finally, we highlight a few emerging research trends in the study of political rhetoric in Scandinavia.



## The framework for Scandinavian political rhetoric: Media system and political system

The three Scandinavian countries – Sweden, Denmark, and Norway – have closely related languages and cultures and similar political systems (see Chapters 2–6), hence the political rhetoric is rather similar, and that is also true of research fields, objects, and methods (Kjeldsen, 2012; Kjeldsen & Grue, 2011).

The Scandinavian countries are established parliamentary democracies with high levels of social welfare. As elsewhere, political rhetoric is mainly performed in the media, and the media system creates important rhetorical constraints. The Scandinavian media system – with dominant public broadcasters and relatively small populations – has fostered shared national public spheres with a high degree of newspaper reading and dominant public broadcasters. In practice, there is a marked proximity between politicians and the public: politicians, including party leaders, cabinet members, and prime ministers, regularly participate in the public sphere with comments, interviews, and debate pieces, and especially in broadcast political debates.

Because Scandinavian countries have multi-party systems and proportional party representation (see Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11), both “catch-all” rhetoric and bi-partisan hostility is less prevalent than in the “winner-takes-all” systems of the UK and the US. Because Scandinavian voters have several alternative parties to pick from, voters may turn their backs on both the attacker and the attacked. Thus, traditionally, party political polarisation in these countries is low; politics in Scandinavia is generally oriented towards compromise or, if possible, consensus.

The party-centred focus of election campaigns and the collegiality between politicians emphasise the prime minister’s character (ethos) and abilities less and the party’s policies more. The prime minister routinely meets opponents in public debates or interviews, so he or she tends to – and is expected to – excel at live debate, confidently displaying command of government policy and skilfully countering opponents’ arguments. Compared to the US, Scandinavian politicians are in much more direct rhetorical contact with the public, continuously engaged in rhetorical exchanges – with the electorate watching.

## The Scandinavian rhetoric of egalitarianism and authenticity

The political rhetoric of Scandinavia – especially in Norway and Denmark – reflects an ideology emphasising egalitarianism and authenticity. We see this in visual rhetoric in print ads (in Denmark; Kjeldsen, 2008), in video adverts (in Norway; Iversen, 2018a), in speechmaking (Johansen, 1999, 2002; Kjeldsen & Johansen, 2011), and online (Krogstad, 2013, 2014). Politicians do not want

to appear as rising above ordinary people. The lowering of the political hero's status reflected in television (e.g., Meyrowitz, 1985), weeklies, and popular culture has made the ethos of "the ordinary" central in political communication. This phenomenon, of course, goes beyond Scandinavia: In the US, for instance, we have witnessed the casual fireside chats of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the colloquial styles of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush. In Denmark and Norway, appearing ordinary and unassuming matters even more. A Danish study of public spokespersons found that in addition to credibility (ethos) and charisma, public communicators were evaluated according to "one-of-us" appeal, subsuming qualities like sensitivity, warmth, folksiness, and capability of admitting mistakes (Hansen & Kock, 2003).

In Norway, Johansen has defined authenticity in political communication as expressing yourself with a "lack of style and form in the traditional sense" (Johansen, 1999: 162; see also Johansen, 2002). Already in 1966, the American social scientist Harry Eckstein described the particular authority and legitimacy of a Norwegian politician, displaying a style still prevalent in Scandinavian politics – especially in Norway and Denmark: Prime ministers "cultivate equality more than primacy" (Eckstein, 1966: 156f). Such observations suggest, we claim, a general Scandinavian appreciation of equality, uniformity, and artlessness in advertising and speeches, television debates, and online presence. We find such rhetoric exemplified in Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's New Year's speech on 1 January 2002, which called out "chartered arbiters of taste who determine what is good and right":

There are tendencies towards a tyranny of experts, which risks suppressing free popular debate. The population should not put up with the wagging fingers of so-called experts who think they know best. (Rasmussen, 2002)

Print and television ads (Kjeldsen, 2008) depict "ordinary Danes" or something typically "Danish", such as the Danish countryside. Advertisements showing politicians mostly address viewers as equals through eye contact, normal perspective, and small conventional portrait photos, refraining from conspicuous statements or symbols, presenting politicians as friendly, ordinary persons. Compared to France, the UK, or the US, Scandinavian ads lack appeals to leadership capabilities or international experience. Another study suggests that while female French politicians seek to project effortless superiority, their Norwegian counterparts demonstrate conspicuous modesty (Krogstad & Storvik, 2012).

### The rhetoric of populism, hostility, and polarisation

While political rhetoric in Scandinavia is generally less hostile and polarised than in many other European countries – and especially the US – the last 20 years

have shown right-wing movements using increasingly hostile and aggressive rhetoric. In Denmark and Norway, populist parties have used anti-elitist and anti-immigration rhetoric since the 1970s. The important year in Sweden was as late as 2010, when the nationalist Sweden Democrats (SD) began morphing from a neo-Nazi organisation and entered parliament with 5.7 per cent of the vote. In 2011, they redefined themselves as a social-conservative nationalist party, reaching 17.5 per cent in 2018. They display strong anti-immigration – often anti-Muslim – rhetoric, especially in less formal communication (e.g., Mral & Oja, 2013).

The growth of SD gave more space in the media for political discourse that had been absent from mainstream media, leading to a general change of tone in debates. SD's representatives engaged freely in offensive generalisations, personal attacks, and confrontations, especially in social media and blogs. SD leaders have denounced and excluded members who use explicitly racist language. At the same time, prominent politicians from the centre and right-wing parties have also adopted a more hostile tone. The distinction between alternative and mainstream media has been blurred, and fake claims, personal attacks, insinuations, and name-calling have become integral parts of much political communication (e.g., Ihlebæk & Nygaard, Chapter 13).

In Denmark, there has also been a slide toward hostile, uninhibited rhetoric about certain population segments and those holding divergent views (Krogh & Zuleta, 2017; Institut for Menneskerettigheder, 2017). Politicians increasingly turn to social media, avoiding independent journalism in favour of direct communication to the public or to carefully targeted segments, using sharp, slogan-like rhetoric, visuals, and mediated oratory.

In tone and rhetorical style – especially in the immigration debate – Norway stands between Denmark and Sweden (Hovden & Mjelde, 2019): Denmark exhibits the harshest rhetoric, Sweden the most restraint (Gripsrud, 2018). In Denmark, new right-wing anti-immigration and anti-Muslim parties have emerged, and in Norway, new right-wing populist news sites take more confrontational political stands, attacking the “elite”, the left, and especially Islam (e.g., *Document* and *Resett*). Still, the populist appeals of most Scandinavian parties are subdued compared to European counterparts. Studies have found, for instance, that the traditional high/low distinction and the “bad manner” trait of populism either does not apply, or applies in different ways (Villadsen, 2019).

Studies of online debates (Andersen, 2019, 2020) demonstrate how an issue like immigration facilitates personal engagement and expression, strong emotions, and conflict, but sidelines argumentation and issue-oriented deliberation.

All-out hostility in populist rhetoric is dampened by dominant, shared public spheres. Shaming is notable in debate on moral issues like immigration (Villadsen, 2018). While shaming can function as a society's moral correction of immoral behaviour, it may also suppress deviant views, leading to increased

polarisation. A common response by those shamed for being xenophobic is the populist accusation that the elite suppresses ordinary people (Kjeldsen, 2019b). Analyses of rhetorical dissent, shaming, and hostility have shown that the victims of such attacks often have the rhetorical agency to fight back (Villadsen, 2017). Mral (2019), for instance, demonstrates how rhetorical attempts are used to silence women through verbal threats in social media, but also demonstrates how women's resistance strategies – showing outspoken but calm and demonstrative personal deportment – can discredit attackers.

## The main genres

In general, the most explored political genres in rhetorical studies in Scandinavia have traditionally been speechmaking, broadcast debates, and visual party rhetoric. As in other parts of the world, online rhetoric and social media communication are now becoming dominant.

### *Political speechmaking*

The study of political speechmaking in Scandinavia has two dominant trends: historical accounts (e.g., Johannesson, 1996; Johansen, 2019) and criticism or case studies of individual speakers or speeches (e.g., Kjeldsen, 2013; Kock & Villadsen, 2017). Since such humanistic studies are interpretive and hermeneutic in nature, reductive accounts of “results” are inappropriate. Analysis provides insight into genres, their rhetorical appeals, and the historical development of speechmaking. Historically, it is clear that political speechmaking has changed in content and even more so in form. With the expansion of broadcast and online media, speeches moved from an oratorical style to a more informal and personal, conversational style (Johansen, 2002; Kjeldsen et al., 2019; Lund, 2020). Political speeches no longer address a live audience exclusively – or even primarily – but rather composite media audiences. Political convention speeches and election night speeches, for instance, have become staged media events celebrating the party and the party leader, somewhat shifting attention from party and policy to leader and ethos (Lund, 2020). Traditional political speechmaking has converged with contemporary media forms, image staging, and visual rhetoric.

While political speeches are traditionally expected to be deliberative (weighing arguments for and against issues), research shows that they often do not primarily deliberate, but deal with praise and blame, promoting and negotiating shared values: they are epideictic (Kjeldsen, 2019a; Kjeldsen, 2020; Lund & Tønnesson, 2017; Tønnesson & Sivesind, 2015; Vatnøy, 2015).

Most studies of speechmaking have been historical. While such studies have often focused on “great speeches by great men” (e.g., Jørgensen, 2009),

scholarship has also highlighted female leaders in political movements (Mral, 1999, 2013; Mral et al., 2009; von der Lippe & Tønnesson, 2013). In Sweden, The Labour Movement and Language project mapped out the development of a specific rhetoric, with influences from both foreign agitators and domestic religious movements (e.g., Johannesson, 1996; Åsard, 1996).

Argumentation studies have played an important role in the study of political rhetoric and speechmaking. Studies have examined the “between-the-lines” argument (Sigrell, 2001), demonstrated the importance of narratives (Dahlin, 2008), scrutinised uses of implicature and innuendo (Kock, 2016), and investigated situations where politicians face an internal but divided audience (Bruhn, 2018). Such studies point to the different strategies used by politicians in order to persuade and meet the demands of the situation, especially the contexts – ranging from the party-internal opposition via the parliamentary situation to large scale international politics.

In general, studies of political speech genres show that the political has always been an integrated part of epideictic genres, and conversely. Political speechmaking can be seen as rhetorical seismographs for disputes and disagreements that simultaneously divide the nation and hold it together. Even in an age of the Internet and social media, speechmaking offers a unique rhetorical possibility for the public to look to leaders for direction, especially in times of distress and confusion (e.g., Johansen, 2019; Kjeldsen, 2020; Lund & Tønnesson, 2017; Vatnøy, 2015; Villadsen, 2020).

### *Visual political rhetoric: Posters, advertisements, and online communication*

Another prominent object of Scandinavian rhetorical studies is visual political rhetoric. Mostly, this research deals with advertisements, posters, and online communication.

A genre more prominent in Scandinavia – especially Sweden and Denmark – than in, for instance, the US, is the election poster. Parties use posters in public spaces and print advertisements in newspapers. Studies have noted a general absence of negative campaigning in Scandinavia, placing the countries in a special position. A general tendency is increased personalisation (Håkansson et al., 2014), but means of depicting the ethos of candidates stay within a narrow range (Vigsø, 2017), creating a conformity which may add to a public weariness of political campaigns. A comparative study of political ads in Germany and Sweden (Holtz-Bacha & Johansson, 2017) shows that positive appeals dominate the poster campaigns in both countries, using “soft sell” rhetoric for indirect critique and implied comparisons rather than direct attacks.

Political print ads are also extensively studied in Scandinavia (e.g., Carlson et al., 2017; Dahl, 2015; Johansson & Odén, 2013; Kjeldsen, 2008). A study

of Danish ads emphasises Scandinavian egalitarianism and authenticity (Kjeldsen, 2008): the design is typically plain, often featuring shortlists, contrasts, and antitheses, seeing politics as a matter of simple choices. This aligns with a “documentary” style, apparently presenting reality unadorned. Conspicuous artfulness appealing to voters’ decoding abilities, as in commercial advertising, would contradict “plain talk” egalitarianism and risk being regarded as manipulative – a visual equivalent of a speaker flaunting their eloquence. Scandinavian politicians seldom gain by portraying themselves as brilliant, proudly competent, or even visionary.

Similar trends are apparent in political television advertising and political online communication. Political television advertising is prohibited in Denmark and Norway. It was prohibited in Sweden as well, until it finally appeared on Swedish terrestrial television for the first time during the 2006 elections, and had its breakthrough with the European Parliament election in 2009 and the general election in 2010 (Johansson, 2017; e.g., Iversen, 2018b). In style, the rhetoric of Swedish political television commercials is similar to that in commercial ads, and it favours the use of humour and irony. As in much of Scandinavian political rhetoric, direct attacks are rare. Instead, “the parties criticize policy consequences of the opposing parties by direct or indirect comparison to highlight their own policy or ideology” (Johansson, 2017: 274).

Other studies look at political video ads shown in movie theatres and videos on party homepages and sites like YouTube and Facebook (e.g., Iversen, 2018a, 2018b). Much of this research suggests that this visual rhetoric in advertising is often epideictic: instead of offering arguments for policies, it displays image and values (Kjeldsen, 2000; Krogstad & Storvik, 2012; cf. Nilsen, 2013). However, research also shows how visual political rhetoric communicates arguments indirectly and perhaps more efficiently, because its implicit (“enthymematic”) character involves audiences in the cognitive construction of arguments meant to persuade them (Kjeldsen, 2007, 2015).

### *Political broadcast debates and interviews*

Despite changes in political broadcast debates since the beginning of the 1960s, for years this genre left politicians in charge of the set-up and the principles of participation. Without moderator interference, every speaker could go on undisturbed during their carefully allotted minutes, looking into the camera and appealing directly to viewers at home (Allern, 2011).

This began to change in the 1970s, as control moved from politicians to journalists. The public broadcasting corporations – SVT (Sweden), NRK (Norway), and DR (Denmark) – increasingly curated debate programmes, but not until the mid-1980s did they achieve full control over the most important genre: the party leaders’ final election debate.

In Norway, for instance, the use of a stopwatch to ensure that everybody got precisely the same amount of talking time was abandoned in the 1980s. The debates were now divided into distinct themes, with more active questioning by the journalists (Allern, 2011). Such changes were partly caused by the introduction of new commercially funded public channels that broke the broadcasting monopolies in Sweden and Denmark in 1988 and in Norway in 1992. Debates became even more firmly controlled by journalists, and the demand for more entertainment value rose.

One important result of the research in televised political debates – and in political argumentation in general – is the distinction between vote-gathering and vote-shifting (Jørgensen et al., 1994, 1998). Vote-gatherers are ideological, categorical, and polarised, use attention-getting devices reminiscent of popular journalism, and tend to be “telegenic”. They tend to be favoured by television and other popular media. Vote-shifting rhetoric, by contrast, is focused, offers specific instantiation, and tends to clearly demarcate claims. Generally, vote-shifters are moderate and polite verbally and nonverbally, less sprightly than vote-gatherers, but more earnest and insistent. Vote-gathering rhetoric seems to be best at winning undecided voters and energising believers; vote-shifting seems better at winning votes from the opposition. The Rhetoric that Shifts Votes project studied 37 televised town hall debates over a period of ten years, finding that debate winners were more likely to be typical vote-shifters. Effective debaters generally use both strategies, but vote-shifting rhetoric tends to be more effective in a bipartisan debate, since votes won from the opposition count twice – down for “them”, up for “us”.

Unlike the massive Rhetoric that Shifts Votes project, some studies indicate that vote-gathering, image-oriented rhetoric may be more persuasive than issue-oriented rhetoric (Krogstad, 2001). However, more recently, the appeal of vote-shifting rhetoric has been supported by studies demonstrating that a rhetorical style of moderate self-assertion (acclaim) and few, but precise attacks generate the most positive evaluations in the media (Krogstad, 2006). In egalitarian Scandinavia, excessive self-assertion and personal bragging will mostly be viewed negatively. Rhetorical reception studies (see more below) have also supported the power of vote-shifting rhetoric, showing that television audiences become involved when debate participants are allowed to give well-formulated, structured comments (Vatnøy et al., 2020); when debaters heckle and interrupt each other, viewers’ attention falters and is drawn away from the argument, towards the politicians’ appearance and the programme format (Vatnøy et al., 2020). While moderators and journalists seem to fear prepared and uninterrupted remarks from politicians, the study shows audiences reacting positively to coherent and well-reasoned mini speeches.

In contrast to other kinds of political communication research, studies of rhetoric do not shy away from being normative (e.g., Berge, 2014b). In many

studies, it is an explicit aim that research should not only study how debates, political interviews, and other types of political rhetoric are carried out and what consequences they may have, but rhetorical research should also help improve political and public discourse. Lantz (2013), for instance, proposes an empirically based model for the most useful way to moderate political debate. This normative aspect is also present in a line of research examining how political debates and election interview programmes meet the electorate's need for political information. Studies point to several ways political debates and interviews might improve. One challenge is media bias and differential treatment of participants. There is some evidence indicating that conservative parties are confronted with more critical questions and horse-race speculations (Haug et al., 2010; Vatnøy, 2010). Generally, though, unequal treatment appears to occur most in critical questioning of political incumbents (Svennevig et al., 2014). However, textual analyses indicate that equally important factors are journalistic practices framing the debate climate and the moderators' personal styles (Kamsvåg, 2013; Sandvik, 2016). While international, especially American, research provides some evidence that female politicians both communicate differently and are treated differently than male politicians, studies of the rhetoric of gender in Scandinavia tend to indicate that differences are small or inconsequential (Gomard & Krogstad, 2001; Krogstad, 1999; Mral, 2013; Mral et al., 2009; Sandvik, 2004).

A line of research examines rhetorical practices that mislead, obfuscate debates, and dodge counterarguments (e.g., Andersen, 2016; Kock, 2011a). Among others, Gabrielsen and colleagues (2020) have observed and conceptualised how politicians evade critical questions by means of "shifting" strategies. They identify three subcategories: time-shifts, agent-shifts, and level-shifts. Like much rhetorical research, such studies seek to improve public discourse on behalf of citizens. For example, knowledge of shifting strategies could enable journalists to quickly detect shifts and react appropriately.

Even though research points to a range of challenges, the general picture is that Scandinavian political debates and interviews serve the electorate well in providing both information and clarity about policies. Several studies, for example, suggest that reporters' questioning style has shown slightly less counterproductive aggressiveness in the period from the 1990s to the middle of the 2010s (e.g., Sandvik, 2014; Vatnøy et al., 2016).

In general, rhetorical research demonstrates how hostile rhetoric and personal attacks may undermine public discourse, but the research also contributes to a qualified understanding of why and how reasonable disagreement and agonistic (rather than antagonistic) rhetoric is an essential component of a well-functioning democracy. For example, research by Jørgensen (e.g., 1998, 2011) has conceptualised the genre of public political debate on a speech-act-theoretical and normative basis, emphasising that disagreement is part of the essential nature of debates, while hostility is not.



## New directions for rhetorical political research

Recent research in Scandinavian political rhetoric has three notable trends: 1) rhetorical citizenship and deliberation; 2) philosophical understanding of the political; and 3) rhetorical reception.

A dominant trend is a move towards work rooted in political science and deliberative theory. Public debate has always been a central object of study for Scandinavian rhetoricians. The public debates and arguments regarding nuclear power plants and waste disposal in Sweden, for instance, have been analysed by Mral and Vigsø (2013; see also Hansson-Nylund, 2016), as has the communication and press coverage during the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan, involving a comparison between German and Swedish media. One important aspect of this is the analysis of how public debate develops in relation to the constraints of the situation and the format of the discussion (Vigsø, 2009). Danish scholars have looked at public debate on prostitution as a case study in productive versus unproductive political argumentation (Jørgensen, 2011; Kock, 2011b; Onsberg, 2011). The affinities with work on deliberative democracy is evident in Kock's work (e.g., 2009, 2017), proposing a view of rhetorical argumentation as essentially deliberative: It is centrally concerned with collective action and does not allow for deductive or compelling demonstration of *the* right action to choose. It nevertheless posits rules and requirements for proper arguments in regard to the parameters of "relevance" and "weight", but recognises that these have subjective components. Relevant and weighty reasons regarding some issue may moreover belong to multiple different "dimensions", and hence be "incommensurable", leading to "reasonable disagreement".

In Norway, the rapprochement between political science, media studies, and rhetoric is apparent in the Centre for Political Communication (POLKOM) at the University of Oslo. Many issues addressed there are rhetorical, including questions of power, media, and politics (Ihlen et al., 2015). Ihlen has published extensively on strategic communication, public relations, and framing, among other things, in relation to lobbying, immigration, and environmental issues (e.g., Dan et al., 2019; Ihlen et al., 2015, 2018).

A crosscutting concept developed in recent years thematises "rhetorical citizenship", in other words, the ways citizenship is constituted and enacted not just by legal rights and duties but also discursively. This notion, proposed by Kock and Villadsen (2012, 2014, 2015), is a conceptual frame and invitation to cross-disciplinary work, rather than a theory; however, it has begun to gain currency in academic work in all Nordic countries, as well as among scholars abroad. Among these studies in rhetorical citizenship, Villadsen's (2007, 2013, 2014) close readings of official apologies has revealed how these are potentially powerful forces in shaping social norms and the conditions of citizenship.

A different approach to political rhetoric, representing a more philosophical understanding of the political, uses philosophical theories – including those of Ernst Cassirer, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Slavoj Žižek – and examines several questions such as, What is the political in rhetorical terms? What is the relation between the political and the creation of social meaning? How can we use rhetoric to study the formation of contemporary ideas about social relations? (e.g., Bengtsson, 2019; Buhre, 2019; Rosengren, 2016, 2018; Stagnell, 2020).

Another new direction is rhetorical audience and reception research. This approach aims at studying not only rhetorical text and context, but also how empirical audiences accept, negotiate, or reject political rhetoric (Kjeldsen, 2016, 2018). The approach acknowledges the impact of rhetoric but rejects a simple transmission model of communication. The aim is to understand the interaction between the rhetorical situation, the characteristics of the utterances, and the audience's uptake and negotiation of them. Instead of moving conjecturally from textual traits to assumed effect, reception studies allow researchers to move from response to text and point to rhetorical traits that may have shaped the response. Studies deal with press photographs (Kjeldsen & Andersen, 2018), Facebook (Vatnøy, 2018), political advertising (Iversen, 2018a, 2018b), and television debates (Vatnøy et al., 2020). In Denmark, similar approaches have been used to examine political commentary (Bengtsson, 2018) and how political debate in online media is curated by journalists (Rønlev, 2018).

## Conclusion

Describing the varieties of political rhetoric in Scandinavia is not easily done. Sweden, Denmark, and Norway are different countries, with varying rhetorical traditions and styles. However, compared to other countries – and especially the US – these three countries share an informal type of rhetoric undergirded by egalitarianism and authenticity. While the political rhetoric in Scandinavia is certainly confrontational, it is rarely explicitly ideological, hostile, or vile. Instead, it is marked more by a compromising, plain, and pragmatic style that is less polarising, compared with two-party, winner-takes-all political systems. It is probably safe to say that the notion of a public sphere comes to mind more easily when looking at Scandinavian political rhetoric than is the case in large countries like Germany, France, Italy, Britain, or the US.

This goes for the political rhetoric coming from political actors as well as for the academic study of it. Politicians and other political debaters are rhetorically very present in the public eye because they constantly contribute opinion pieces, appear in news programmes and media interviews, and make live public appearances as speakers or debaters. They cannot retain the position they seem to hold in many other countries: as distant figures moving in a

sphere of their own. The media and the public are constantly calling them to account, and they have to respond – which, in turn, has fostered a proliferation of defensive and diversionary techniques such as dodgy answers, parroting of talking points, and so on.

Practically all leading politicians nowadays have blogs, and larger parties have their own media outlets, aiming to have an apparent, ongoing dialogue with the population while evading the scrutiny of the mainstream media. While these are obviously more important than ever in the contemporary situation, it is arguable that over-zealous media monitoring of politicians tends to overemphasise a quasi-forensic approach to political coverage: politicians' alleged wrongdoings, misstatements, or past broken promises may then come to overshadow a more truly deliberative debate about what is to be done in the future.

In rhetoricians' study of political rhetoric – as well as in their public analyses in non-academic outlets – the idea of a public sphere is strongly, while implicitly, present. Rhetorical scholars looking at political rhetoric in their respective countries often more or less explicitly emphasise the potential democratic function and usefulness of their objects of study in an approach more inherently normative than studies more tilted towards political science and most journalistic commentary. There, the emphasis is more often on a purely “rhetor” angle – second-guessing politicians' possible strategic motives for whatever they do or say – and studies within the political science tradition tend to be more quantitative and purely descriptive on a “systemic” level – with hardly any textual analysis and little or no normativity relying on notions of democracy or deliberation. But, if the latter are desiderata in the study of political communication, then it is appropriate and fortunate they are among the contributions rhetorical research aims to provide.

## References

- Allern, S. (2011). *Fjernsynsvalgekampen: Program, deltakere og maktkamp 1961–2009* [*The television election campaign: Programme, participants, and power struggle 1961–2009*]. Oslo: Pax.
- Andersen, I. (2016). *Opplysningens retorikk: Noen bemerkninger til Christian Kocks krav til den politiske debatt* [*The rhetoric of enlightenment: Some remarks on Christian Kock's demands for the political debate*] [Master's thesis, University of Bergen, Norway]. <https://journals.uio.no/sakprosa/article/view/1145/2359>
- Andersen, I. (2019). Personal emotions, experiences and attacks: Immigration debate in Scandinavian comments sections. *Javnost – The Public*, 26(2), 194–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2019.1588001>
- Andersen, I. (2020). *Instead of the deliberative debate: How the principle of expression plays out in the news-generated Facebook discussion* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen, Norway]. <http://bibliotheca.uib.no/bitstream/handle/1956/24058/archive.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Bengtsson, M. (2018). Think-aloud reading: Selected audiences' concurrent reaction to the implied audience in political commentary. In J. E. Kjeldsen (Ed.), *Rhetorical audience studies and reception of rhetoric: Exploring audiences empirically* (pp. 161–183). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Bengtsson, E. (2019). *The epistemology of rhetoric: Plato, doxa and post-truth* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Uppsala, Sweden].
- Berge, K. L. (2014a). Article 100 and the evolution of a public opinion text culture in Denmark-Norway 1770–1799. In K. Gammelgaard, & E. Holmøyvik (Eds.), *Writing democracy: On the Norwegian constitution 1814–2014*. New York: Berghahn.
- Berge, K. L. (2014b). Hva er politisk retorikk? [What is political rhetoric?] *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 66/67, 11–34.
- Bruhn, T. (2018). *Delade meningar: Retorisk flertydighet och den pluralistiska publiken i politiska förnyelseprocesser* [Split opinions: Rhetorical ambiguity and the pluralistic audience in political renewal processes]. Ödåkra, Sweden: Retorikförlaget.
- Buhre, F. (2019). *Speaking other times: Arendt and the temporality of politics* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Uppsala, Sweden].
- Carlson, T., Johansson, B., & Vigsø, O. (2017). Persuading beyond words – visual appeals in the 2014 EU-election campaign. In C. Holtz-Bacha, E. Novelli, & K. Rafter (Eds.), *Political advertising in the 2014 European Parliament elections* (pp. 191–214). London: Palgrave.
- Dahl, J. M. R. (2015). Visual argumentation in political advertising: A context-oriented perspective. *Journal of Argumentation in Context*, 4(3), 286–298.
- Dahlin, M. (2008). *Tal om terror: Säkerhetspolitisk retorik i Sverige och Ryssland hösten 2001* [Talk about terror: Security policy rhetoric in Sweden and Russia in the autumn of 2001] [Doctoral dissertation, Umeå University, Sweden]. <http://umu.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:142327/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Dan, V., Ihlen, Ø., & Raknes, K. (2019). Political public relations and strategic framing: Underlying mechanisms, success factors, and impact. In J. Strömbäck, & S. Kiousis (Eds.), *Political public relations: Concepts, principles, and applications* (pp. 146–164). New York: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351053143>
- Eckstein, H. (1966). *Division and cohesion in democracy: A study of Norway*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Gabrielsen, J., Jønch-Clausen, H., Pontoppidan, C. (2020). Answering without answering: Shifting as an evasive rhetorical strategy. *Journalism*, 21(9), 1355–1370. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917738412>
- Gomard, K., & Krogstad, A. (2001). A debate on the debates. In K. Gomard, & A. Krogstad (Eds.), *Instead of the ideal debate: Doing politics and doing gender in Nordic political campaign discourse* (pp. 185–200). Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press.
- Gripsrud, J. (2018). *Norsk hamskifte? En kritikk av terje tvedt, et betinget forsvar for godheten og en etterlysning av midtbanen i innvandringsdebatten* [A critique of Terje Tvedt's claim that there no longer are national projects]. Bergen: Vigmostad & Bjørke.
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511790867>
- Hansen, F., & Kock, C. (2003). Evaluation of public spokespersons. *Nordicom Review*, 24(1), 27–32. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0294>
- Hansson-Nylund, H. (2016). *Hållbar dialog? Retorik i möten om svensk kärnavfallshantering* [Sustainable dialogue? Rhetoric in meetings about Swedish nuclear waste management] [Doctoral dissertation, Örebro University, Sweden]. <https://oru.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:922769/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Haug, M. M., Koppang, H., & Svennevig, J. (2010). Moderator bias in television coverage of an election campaign with no political advertising. *Nordicom Review*, 31(2), 79–94. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0131>
- Holtz-Bacha, C., & Johansson, B. (2017). Dimensions of negativity: Negative campaigning on election posters in Germany and Sweden. *The Poster*, 4(1–2), 99–116. [https://doi.org/10.1386/post.4.1-2.99\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/post.4.1-2.99_1)
- Hovden, J. F., & Mjelde, H. (2019). Increasingly controversial, cultural, and political: The immigration debate in Scandinavian newspapers 1970–2016. *Javnost – The Public*, 26(2), 138–157. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13183222.2019.1589285>

- Håkansson, N., Johansson, B., & Vigsø, O. (2014). *Politik i det offentliga rummet: Svenska valaffischer 1911–2010* [Politics in the public sphere: Swedish election posters 1911–2010]. Stockholm: Carlssons.
- Ihlen, Ø., Raknes, K., Somerville, I., Valentini, C., Stachel, C., Lock, I., Davidson, S., & Seele, P. (2018). Framing “the public interest”: Comparing public lobbying campaigns in European states. *Journal of Public Interest Communications*, 2(1), 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.32473/jpic.v2.i1.p107>
- Ihlen, Ø., Skogerbø, E., & Allern, S. (2015). *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon* [Power, media, and politics: Norwegian political communication]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Institut for Menneskerettigheder [The Danish Institute for Human Rights]. (2017, February 16). *Hadefulde ytringer på Facebook* [Hate speech on Facebook]. <https://menneskeret.dk/udgivelser/hadefulde-ytringer-paa-facebook>
- Iversen, M. H. (2018a). Audience response to mediated authenticity appeals. In J. E. Kjeldsen (Ed.), *Rhetorical audience studies and reception of rhetoric: Exploring audiences empirically* (pp. 109–134). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave.
- Iversen, M. H. (2018b). *Political advertising as a resource for citizenship: The reception of audiovisual rhetoric* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen, Norway]. <http://hdl.handle.net/1956/20553>
- Johannesson, K. (Ed.). (1996). *Agitatorerna* [The agitators]. Stockholm: Carlssons.
- Johansen, A. (1999). Credibility and media development. In J. Gripsrud (Ed.), *Television and common knowledge* (pp. 159–172). London: Routledge.
- Johansen, A. (2002). *Talerens troverdighet: Tekniske og kulturelle betingelser for politisk retorikk* [The speaker's credibility: Technical and cultural conditions for political rhetoric]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Johansen, A. (2019). *Komme til orde: Politisk kommunikasjon 1814–1913* [Having one's say: Political communication 1814–1913]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Johansson, B. (2017). Sweden. In C. Hotlz-Bacha, & M. R. Just (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of political advertising* (pp. 269–278). <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315694504-22>
- Johansson, B., & Odén, T. (2013). *Politiska annonser: Partiernas valreklam genom 100 år* [Political ads: The parties' election advertising through 100 years]. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Jørgensen, C. (1998). Public debate – An act of hostility? *Argumentation*, 12(4), 431–443.
- Jørgensen, C. (2009). Retorik som handling i Orla Lehmanns Ridehustale [Rhetoric as action in Orla Lehmann's Ridehustale]. In R. Therkelsen, & E. S. Jensen (Eds.), *Dramatikken i grammatikken: Festskrift til Lars Hedtoft* [The drama in grammar: Festschrift for Lars Hedtoft] (pp. 203–217). Roskilde, Denmark: University of Roskilde.
- Jørgensen, C. (2011). God og dårlig debatadfærd: To indlæg for et prostitutionsforbud [Good and bad debate behaviour: Two posts for a prostitution ban]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 59, 108–118.
- Jørgensen, C., Kock, C., & Rørbech, L. (1994). *Retorik der flytter stemmer* [Rhetoric that moves voices]. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Jørgensen, C., Kock, C., & Rørbech, L. (1998). Rhetoric that shifts votes: An exploratory study of persuasion in issue-oriented public debates. *Political Communication*, 15(3), 283–297. <https://doi.org/10.1080/105846098198902>
- Kamsvåg, R. E. (2019). Debattlederen som politisk aktør [The debate leader as a political actor]. *Norsk Medietidsskrift*, 26(3), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN.0805-9535-2019-03-04>
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2000). Visuel politisk epideiktik [Visual political epideictics]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 14, 18–31.
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2007). Visual argumentation in Scandinavian political advertising: A cognitive, contextual and reception oriented approach. *Argumentation and Advocacy*, 43(3–4), 124–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00028533.2007.11821668>
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2008). Visualizing egalitarianism: Political print ads in Denmark. In J. Strömbäck, M. Ørsten, & T. Aalberg (Eds.), *Communication politics: Political communication in the Nordic countries* (pp. 139–160). Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.

- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2012). The study of rhetoric in Norway. In J. F. Hovden, & K. Knapskog (Eds.), *Hunting high and low: Skriftfest til Jostein Gripsrud på 60-årsdagen [Festschrift for Jostein Gripsrud on his 60th birthday]* (pp. 757–778). Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press.
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2013). Speaking to Europe: A rhetorical approach to Prime Minister Tony Blair's speech to the EU Parliament. In K. Fløttum (Ed.), *Speaking of Europe: Approaches to complexity in European political discourse* (pp. 19–42). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2015). The rhetoric of thick representation: How pictures render the importance and strength of an argument salient. *Argumentation*, 29(2), 197–215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-014-9342-2>
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2016). Studying rhetorical audiences – a call for qualitative reception studies in argumentation and rhetoric. *Informal Logic*, 36(2), 136–158. <https://doi.org/10.22329/il.v36i2.4672>
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (Ed.). (2018). *Rhetorical audiences and the reception of rhetoric: Exploring audiences empirically*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave.
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2019a). Royal interventions in the public discourse on immigration: Rhetorical topoi on immigration in the New Year's speeches of the Scandinavian monarchs. *Javnost – The Public*, 26(2), 1–16.
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2019b). Skammens retorik i indvandringsdebatten [The rhetoric of shame in the immigration debate]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 79, 11–134.
- Kjeldsen, J. E. (2020). Ordene som formet oss. Jens Stoltenberg: Taler 22., 24. og 25. juli [The words that shaped us. Jens Stoltenberg: Speeches 22, 24, and 25 July]. In A. Gjelsvik (Ed.), *Bearbejdelser: 22 juli i ord og billeder [Adaptations: 22 July in words and pictures]* (pp. 57–72). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Kjeldsen, J. E., & Andersen, I. (2018). The rhetorical power of news photographs: A triangulatory reception approach to the Alan Kurdi images. In J. E. Kjeldsen (Ed.), *Rhetorical audiences and the reception of rhetoric: Exploring audiences empirically* (pp. 309–333). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave.
- Kjeldsen, J. E., & Grue, J. (Eds.). (2011). *Scandinavian studies in rhetoric: Rhetorica Scandinavica 1997–2010*. Ödåkra, Sweden: Retorikförlaget.
- Kjeldsen, J. E., & Johansen, A. (2011). The broadcasting of authenticity: How the media transforms public politics into personal feelings. In I. Tomanic, E. Sundin, N. Carpentier, H. Nieminen, P. Prүүлman-Vengerfeldt, R. Kilborn, & T. Olsson (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on the European mediasphere* (pp. 167–177). Ljubljana, Slovenia: University of Ljubljana.
- Kjeldsen, J. E., Kiewe, A., Lund, M., & Barnholdt Hansen, J. (2019). *Speechwriting in theory and practice*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave.
- Kock, C. (2009). Kynismesyndromet [The cynicism syndrome]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 49/50, 51–71.
- Kock, C. (2011a). *De svarer ikke: Fordømmende uskikke i den politiske debat [They do not respond: Dumbfounding nonsense in the political debate]* (2nd ed.). Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Kock, C. (2011b). Retoriske uskikke i offentlig debat – illustreret med eksempler fra prostitutionsdebatten [Rhetorical misdeeds in public debate – illustrated with examples from the prostitution debate]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 59, 94–107.
- Kock, C. (2016). Inception: How the unsaid may become public knowledge. In M. Załęska, & U. Okulska (Eds.), *Rhetoric, discourse and knowledge* (pp. 275–286). Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Kock, C. (2017). *Deliberative rhetoric: Arguing about doing* (5th ed.). Windsor: Windsor Studies in Argumentation.
- Kock, C., & Villadsen, L. S. (Eds.). (2012). *Rhetorical citizenship and public deliberation* (3rd ed.). University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University State Press.
- Kock, C., & Villadsen, L. S. (2014). Rhetorical citizenship as a conceptual frame. In C. Kock, & L. S. Villadsen (Eds.), *Contemporary rhetorical citizenship*. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Leiden University Press.
- Kock, C., & Villadsen, L. (2015). Citizenship discourse. *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi089>

- Kock, C., & Villadsen, L. S. (2017). Rhetorical citizenship: Studying the discursive crafting and enactment of citizenship. *Citizenship Studies*, 21(5), 570–586. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13621025.2017.1316360>
- Krogh, A. H., & Zuleta, L. (Eds.). (2017). *Hadefulde ytringer i den offentlige online debat [Hate speech in public online debate]*. The Danish Institute for Human Rights. [https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/ligebehandling\\_2017/rapport\\_hadefulde\\_ytringer\\_online\\_2017.pdf](https://menneskeret.dk/sites/menneskeret.dk/files/media/dokumenter/udgivelser/ligebehandling_2017/rapport_hadefulde_ytringer_online_2017.pdf)
- Krogstad, A. (1999). *Image i politikken: Visuelle og retoriske virkemidler [Image in politics: Visual and rhetorical tools]*. Oslo: Pax.
- Krogstad, A. (2001). Image and issue in televised debates. In K. Gomard, & A. Krogstad (Eds.), *Instead of the ideal debate: Doing politics and doing gender in Nordic political campaign discourse* (155–184). Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press.
- Krogstad, A. (2006). Retorikk, prinsipper og trillende terninger [Rhetoric, principles, and rolling dice]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 40, 40–61.
- Krogstad, A. (2013). Avatarpolitikk og visuell retorikk: Profilbilder på Facebook [Avatar politics and visual rhetoric: Profile pictures on Facebook]. *Tidsskrift for samfunnsforskning*, 54(2), 154–185.
- Krogstad, A. (2014). Kunsten å gjøre ingenting, men å være alt: Norske statsministeres profilbilder på Facebook [The art of doing nothing but being everything: Norwegian Prime Minister's profile pictures on Facebook]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 66/67, 35–56.
- Krogstad, A., & Storvik, A. (2012). Picturing politics: Female political leaders in France and Norway. *Historical Reflections*, 38(3), 129–152. <https://doi.org/10.3167/hrrh.2012.380308>
- Lantz, M. (2013). Ordstyreren afgør den politiske debat: Hvilken ordstyrerstrategi bidrager til den mest oplysende politiske debat? [The chairman decides the political debate: Which moderator's strategy contributes to the most enlightening political debate?]. *Tidsskrift for Medier, Erkendelse og Formidling*, 1(2), 3–22.
- Lund, M. (Ed.). (2020). *Danske taler: 20 oppbyggelige analyser [Danish speeches: 20 constructive analyses]*. Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University Press.
- Lund, M., & Tønnesson, J. (2017). Kongens tale ved hagefesten [The king's speech at the garden party]. In J. Bakken, & E. Oxfeldt (Eds.), *Åpne dører mot verden [Open doors to the world]* (pp. 32–46). Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Meyrowitz, J. (1985). *No sense of place: The impact of electronic media on social behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mral, B. (1999). *Talande kvinnor: Kvinnliga retoriker från Aspasia till Ellen Key [Talking women: Female rhetoricians from Aspasia to Ellen Key]*. Nora, Sweden: Nya Doxa.
- Mral, B. (2013). “Kvinnor i egenskap av människor”: Retoriska strategier i den svenska kvinnliga rösträttsrörelsen [“Women as human beings”: Rhetorical strategies in the Swedish women's suffrage movement]. In B. von der Lippe, J. L. Tønnesson, & L. Johan (Eds.), *Retorikken i kampen om kvinnestemmeretten [The rhetoric in the fight for women's suffrage]* (pp. 169–194). Oslo: Vidarforlaget.
- Mral, B. (2019). “Beyond-gender” analysis of power relations in language: The case of net hate in the Nordic countries. In J. Enoch, & J. Jack (Eds.), *Retellings: Opportunities for feminist research in rhetoric and composition studies* (pp. 54–68). Anderson, South Carolina: Parlor Press.
- Mral, B., Borg, N., Salazar, P.-J., Von Stedingk Wigren, M., & Hansson-Nylund, H. (2009). *Women's rhetoric: Argumentative strategies of women in public life. Sweden and South Africa*. Örebro, Sweden: Örebro studies in rhetoric.
- Mral, B., & Oja, S. (2013). The Sweden Democrats came in from the cold: How the debate about allowing the SD into media arenas shifted between 2002 and 2010. In R. Wodak, M. Khosravini, & B. Mral (Eds.), *Right-wing populism in Europe: Politics and discourse* (pp. 277–292). London: Bloomsbury.
- Mral, B., & Vigsø, O. (Eds.). (2013). *Krisretorik: Retoriska aspekter på kriskommunikation [Crisis rhetoric: Rhetorical aspects of crisis communication]*. Åstorp, Sweden: Retorikförlaget.
- Nilsen, A. B. (2013). Den visuelle Osama bin Laden [The visual Osama bin Laden]. *Ekfrase. Nordisk tidsskrift for visuell kultur*, 4(01), 20–34.

- Onsberg, M. (2011). Den danske prostitutionsdebat: Et signalement [The Danish prostitution debate: A report]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 59, 84–93.
- Rasmussen, F. (2002). *Nytårstale 2002* [New Year's Speech 2002]. Copenhagen: The Ministry of State. <https://www.regeringen.dk/statsministerens-nytaarstale/anders-fogh-rasmussens-nytaarstale-1-januar-2002/>
- Rosengren, M. (2016). Vad en svensk måste kunna: Att vilja demokratin [What a Swede must know: To want democracy]. *Tidskrift för Politisk Filosofi*, 3, 66–77.
- Rosengren, M. (2018). Des sujets autonomes? [Autonomous subjects?]. In V. Descombes, F. Guist-Desprairies, & M. Rosengren (Eds.), *Actualité d'une pensée radicale – hommage à Cornelius Castoriadis* (pp. 33–43). *Studia Rhetorica Uppsaliensis/Uppsala Rhetorical Studies*. Uppsala: Institutionen för litteraturvetenskap.
- Røvlev, R. (2018). Brølet i kommentarsporet: Journalisters formidling af den offentlige opinion på politiken.dk [The roaring in the comment section: Journalists' dissemination of public opinion on politiken.dk]. *Journalistica*, 1, 48–77.
- Sandvik, M. (2004). Valgkamp på TV: Står nøytralitetsidealet for fall? *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 29/30, 15–36.
- Sandvik, M. (2014). Retorisk rekonstruksjon av politisk diskurs [Rhetorical reconstruction of political discourse]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 66/67, 122–141.
- Sandvik, M. (2016). *Hva trenger velgerne å vite? Og får de vite det? En retorisk analyse av debattklima, journalistisk praksis og argumentasjon i valgkampdiskurs på radio og tv fra valgkampen i 1991, 1999 og 2009* [What do voters need to know? And do they get to know it? A rhetorical analysis of debate climate, journalistic practice, and argumentation in election campaign discourse on radio and television from the election campaign in 1991, 1999, and 2009]. Oslo: Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies, University of Oslo.
- Sigrell, A. (2001). *Att övertyga mellan raderna* [To convince between the lines]. Åstorp, Sweden: Rhetor förlag.
- Stagnell, A. (2020). *Diplomacy and ideology: From the French Revolution to the digital age*. New York: Routledge.
- Svennevig, J., Arisland, S., & Solvoll Rognmo, A. (2014). “Jeg bare spør...”: Pågående intervjustil i partilederspøringer [“I'm just asking...”: Ongoing interview style in party leader polls]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 66/67, 91–121.
- Tønnesson, J. L., & Sivesind, K. (2015). The rhetoric of the Norwegian Constitution Day: A topos analysis of young Norwegian students' May 17 speeches, 2011 and 2012. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 60(2), 201–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2015.1017837>
- Vatnøy, E. (2010). *VELG! 09: Journalistikk og retorikk i norsk valgkamp* [CHOOSE! 09: Journalism and rhetoric in Norwegian election campaigns]. Oslo: Civita.
- Vatnøy, E. (2015). Leaders' response to terrorism: The role of epideictic rhetoric in deliberative democracies. *Journal of Public Deliberation*, 11(2), article 5.
- Vatnøy, E. (2018). Focus group studies of social media rhetoric. In J. E. Kjeldsen (Ed.), *Rhetorical audience studies and reception of rhetoric: Exploring audiences empirically* (pp. 135–160). Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave.
- Vatnøy, E., Iversen, M. H., & Svennevig, J. (2016). Utspørerne: Journalistisk strategi og forskjell-behandling i stortingsvalget 2013 [The interrogators: Journalistic strategy and discrimination in the 2013 parliamentary elections]. *Norsk medietidsskrift*, 23(3), 1–25.
- Vatnøy, E., Kjeldsen, J. E., & Andersen I. (2020). Velgernes reaksjoner på retorikk i TV-debatter [Voters' reactions to rhetoric in TV debates]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 80, 1–19.
- Vigso, O. (2009). *Debatten kring slutförvaring av kärnavfall: En studie av argumentationen* [The debate over the final disposal of nuclear waste: A study of the argumentation]. Stockholm: Kärnavfallsrådet.
- Vigso, O. (2017). The visual construction of personal ethos in election posters. *The Poster*, 4(1–2), 31–57.
- Villadsen, L. (2007). Sorry seems to be the hardest word to say: Official apology and rhetorical agency in contemporary Danish politics. In D. Zarefsky, & E. Benacka (Eds.), *Sizing up rhetoric* (pp. 366–378). Long Grove, Illinois: Waveland.



- Villadsen, L. (2013). The regretful acknowledgement: A dignified end to a disgraceful story? In D. Cuyppers, D. Janssen, J. Haers, & B. Segaert (Eds.), *Public apology between ritual and regret* (pp. 209–228). Leiden, Netherlands: Brill Rodopi.
- Villadsen, L. (2014). More than a nice ritual. In H. van Belle, K. Rutten, P. Gillaerts, D. van de Mieroop, & B. van Gorp (Eds.), *Let's talk politics: New essays on deliberative rhetoric* (pp. 27–43). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Villadsen, L. (2017). Doxa, dissent, and challenges of rhetorical citizenship: “When I criticize Denmark, it is not the white nights or the new potatoes I have in mind”. *Javnost – The Public*, 24(3), 235–250.
- Villadsen, L. (2018). Fy, skam dig ikke! Skam som sanktionerende og sanktioneret følelse i den offentlige debat [Darn, do not be ashamed! Shame as a sanctioning and sanctioned feeling in the public debate]. *Rhetorica Scandinavica*, 78, 75–86.
- Villadsen, L. (2019). Low style the high way: Rhetorical mainstreaming of populism. In B. van Klink, H. Jansen, & I. van der Geest (Eds.), *Vox Populi: Populism as a rhetorical and democratic challenge* (pp. 140–158). Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Villadsen, L. (2020). Progress, but slow going: Public argument in the forging of collective norms. *Argumentation*, 34, 325–337. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-019-09500-3>
- von der Lippe, B., & Tønnesson, J. L. (2013). *Retorikken i kampen om kvinkestemmeretten [The rhetoric in the fight for women's suffrage]*. Oslo: Vidarforlaget.
- Åsard, E. (Ed.) (1996). *Makten, medierna och myterna: Socialdemokratiska ledare från Branting till Carlsson [The power, the media, and the myths. Social Democratic leaders from Branting to Carlsson]*. Stockholm: Carlssons.



## Chapter 19

### *Conclusion*

# Nordic political communication between change and continuity

Lars Nord, Eli Skogerbø, & Nete Nørgaard Kristensen

#### **Abstract**

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from the contributions in this anthology is that it is hardly relevant to talk about a clear-cut Nordic model of political communication that highly contrasts other democratic states and their political communication systems. Global trends such as digitalisation and commercialisation of media systems and blurring lines between national and global political issues influence political communication. Still, there are many observations that confirm the existence of prevailing Nordic system peculiarities, such as comparably higher levels of voter turnout and political trust and relatively strong private and public news media. While these merging characteristics exist, it is relevant to look more carefully upon factors in the Nordic countries that seem to contribute to continuity and stability in political communication systems. In our view, it is particularly interesting to pay attention to relevant factors in the Nordic countries that may contribute to resilience in these societies. So far, the Nordic countries have shown considerable ability to embrace international political communication trends without jeopardising essential nation-specific distinctive features. Whether this resilience will prevail in the future remains an open question.

**Keywords:** power, political communication, change, continuity, resilience, Nordic countries

### Introduction

The intention of this anthology on political communication in the Nordic countries has been to go beyond the usual existing generalisations and perceptions about this region in order to be able to paint more nuanced and insightful pictures of what is actually happening from political communication perspectives today. Does the Nordic model still stand out from the rest of the mature democracies in the world? Do political systems and media systems deviate so much from international trends that it is reasonable to continue talking about

a Nordic political communication model? And if so, what is it and how does it impact on the development and resilience of the Nordic countries?

There is of course not a single simple answer to such broad questions, but this anthology has intended to focus on current important developments by bringing together leading media and communication scholars and political scientists from the Nordic countries to offer valuable insights from both country-based and comparative perspectives. The main objective has been to supplement established images of societal conditions in the Nordic countries with theoretically driven assumptions and empirically based conclusions about political communication realities in these countries today.

In the following sections of this chapter, we address political, media, and voter perspectives, as well as possible shifting power relations between political communication actors in the Nordic countries. The final section focuses on the relevance of a Nordic model of political communication and the dynamic interplay between change and continuity in the process of political communication developments.

### A new political landscape

Politically, the once very stable Nordic countries have experienced considerable transformations of their formerly rather enduring party systems. The single most radical change is the successes of rightwing populist parties in national elections and the significant impact they have had on politics in the four biggest Nordic countries, as discussed in the chapters on media and politics in the five Nordic countries (chapters 2–6) and in Herkman and Jungar's contribution. The Danish Peoples' Party, the Finns Party, the (Norwegian) Progress Party, and the Sweden Democrats have all become well-established political actors in the national parliaments, and, with their presence and increased importance in the national assemblies, changed basic conditions for coalition-building and government formation. Populist parties have been part of governments in Finland (2015–2017) and Norway (2013–2020) and have been politically influential in Denmark. The Sweden Democrats have so far been more isolated in the parliament, even if collaborations with other parties to the right have started to grow recently.

The most obvious effect of the rise of populist parties in the Nordic countries is probably the declined importance of long withstanding ideological left-right conflicts in politics, even if they still exist to some extent. Besides this traditional economy-based conflict dimension, a rising disagreement is now very apparent between supporters of global, urban, and liberal values, and people more loyal to national, traditional, and authoritarian principles (the so-called GAL-TAN dimension). The new conflict dimension could also be described as a conflict be-

tween post-industrial, ecological perspectives and industrial, materialistic values. The change is not only evident with regard to political ideologies, but can also be noted by changing political agendas, where economic and welfare issues are now challenged by immigration, law and order, and cultural issues. International unexpected events can be added to the picture. The migration waves from the Middle East and Africa that affected Europe, especially in the autumn of 2015, have also contributed to the transformation of political agendas and political party policy positions in all Nordic countries, even if not in exactly the same way. Additionally, the global coronavirus crisis in 2020 and its deep consequences for economy and welfare will influence Nordic societies for many years, even if it is too early to pinpoint what the long-term political consequences will be.

Modern democracies are associated with an increasing role for professional pressure groups and lobbyists. This is also true for the Nordic countries, but the role of public relations professionals seems to be a bit overestimated in the Nordic political communication context, at least compared to the communicative resources of big organisations (Ihlen et al., Chapter 15). At the same time, the phenomenon of so-called revolving doors, where politicians now move more frequently between the political arena and the public relations industry, calls for more studies of how lobbying develops within this context.

The transformations of Nordic party systems and the increased strength of right-wing populist parties are similar to political trends observed worldwide, and particularly in Europe. However, these changes are taking place within political structures that can still be described as more consensus-oriented and corporatist than in most other countries.

## The hybrid media ecosystem

Parallel to the political systems in the Nordic countries, media systems have undergone considerable transformations. During recent years, the financing model for public service media has changed in the four biggest Nordic countries from a traditional licence fee model to a new tax-based system. Even if the main reason is digital media development, fear has been expressed by some political and media actors that this change challenges the established “arms length principle” and will make public service media more vulnerable for political pressure. This discussion has initially been most intense in Denmark, where substantial budget cuts in public service media have also been decided (Kristensen & Blach-Ørsten, Chapter 2). However, the intensified and polarised debate on public service media impartiality indicates that similar debates – as well as political actions – may follow everywhere (Allern et al., Chapter 7).

Despite political controversies, public service media have remained strong in Nordic media markets. Public service radio channels have the biggest audi-

ence market share everywhere, and public service channels also maintain their positions in the much more competitive television market. Furthermore, public service media in the Nordic countries have been successful in developing new services on digital platforms.

The digitalisation of Nordic media markets is an overall trend with significant influences on both public and commercial media performances. Many chapters (see Chapters 2–8) in this anthology refer to the emergence of so-called hybrid media ecosystems, where traditional news media logics and social media logics are blended and where media users develop more individual usage patterns based on their own interest and taste preferences. Overall, media use is more fragmented than ever, on national, regional, and local levels. Online and mobile communications have turned out to be the main channels for news consumption (Newman et al., 2019). Older generations are still relatively high consumers of printed papers and broadcast news, while younger generations to a large extent rely on digital and social media platforms. At the same time, new media formats like hyperlocals, freesheets, and alternative media add to the already complex media landscape in the Nordic countries (Lindén et al., Chapter 8; Ihlebæk & Nygaard, Chapter 13).

The hybrid media system certainly puts traditional news media in a less favourable position than previously but does not necessarily mean the end of news media as overall political communication expands and becomes more inclusive (Chadwick, 2013). Legacy media still play a fairly important role for many people, but more citizens tend to spend their limited time for media consumption on other media outlets in the expanding digital ecosystem. To put it simply, the hybrid media system offers previously unseen opportunities for individual choices, but at the same time, the high-choice media environment distorts conditions for well-functioning public spheres based on equal access and equal information capacities, and polarises public opinion (Prior, 2007). Even if more outlets mean greater media pluralism, the weakening of legacy news media and the increasing reliance on algorithm-driven digital media platforms seem to facilitate fragmentation and polarisation of the public in most European countries today (Davis, 2019). Thus, the connections between citizens, media, and political institutions have been described as increasingly “disrupted” (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018).

The Nordic countries do still have comparably strong national media companies. Newspapers face increasing economic problems, but their reach is comparably high, and public service media continue to be central in people’s media diets, particularly so in crisis situations. Local and regional media are relatively strong but operate in increasingly fragmented media landscapes (Lindén et al., Chapter 8). Media use is increasingly based on individual and socioeconomic predictors such as age, gender, class, ethnicity, and cultural values (Harrie, 2018). The continuous fragmentation is often perceived as a

problem, but previous research on media effects in the Nordic countries indicates that social media may have potential to increase political mobilisation in parts of the electorate, especially among people normally less interested in politics (Beyer et al., Chapter 17).

### The volatile electorate

To a large extent, Nordic citizens vote. Election data show that voter turnout in the Nordic countries is high in an international comparison (Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11). In some cases, the trend also indicates increasing figures. National elections attract more voters than do local or European Parliament elections, even though voter turnout in European Parliament elections increased in Denmark, Finland, and Sweden in 2019. Local elections in Sweden have significantly higher levels of voter participation than in neighbouring countries due to the electoral system where elections on different political levels take place on the same day (Nord & Grusell, Chapter 6). It is also important to note that voting turnout figures differ in various parts of each country in the Nordic region.

Despite the fact that voter turnout seems to be relatively stable over time, voters tend to be more volatile. The general trend of declining party identification continues, and voters make their decisions late during the campaigns. On average, about half of the electorate in the Nordic countries report that they make their voting decisions during the campaign (Hopmann & Karlsen, Chapter 11). The relatively huge number of swing voters and uncertain voters make election campaigning more intense and the election outcome less easy to predict. Additionally, issue voting has become more important when examining reasons for voters' preferences during election campaigns. Even if most Nordic voters can still refer to their position on a left-right-wing political scale, single issues like immigration, environment, education, or healthcare are becoming more decisive for the final selection of political party or candidate.

However, voter turnout is not the only indicator of a healthy democracy. Political trust is a cornerstone in contemporary sustainable and transparent societies. At the same time, a significant consequence of current media transformations in these societies is increasing problems of locating trust and reliable information in the complex communication environment. The Nordic countries are all faced with these challenges, and political trust has gradually become more polarised in Nordic societies, but trust in political institutions and political actors as well as trust in the media remain comparably high in relation to other mature democracies in the world. A comparison of trust in news media in the Nordic countries in 2019 showed that the highest figure is in Finland (59%) and the lowest in Sweden (39%) (Newman et al., 2019). Sweden also stands out as the country where trust in public service media is most polarised, and

the place where concern about the diffusion and effects of fake news are most articulated (Kalsnes et al., Chapter 14).

On the supply side, election campaign communications are becoming more diverse than ever, with parties using a wide range of channels to maximise public attention and electoral support. Political parties are able to use new digital tools, and voters can reach tailored political messages on many more platforms than before. News media, social media, and direct communication are more equally and innovatively used in order to target different parts of the electorate with individually based messages (Allern et al., Chapter 7; Bolin & Falasca, 2019; Magin et al., 2017). However, the degree of professionalisation of party election campaigning in the Nordic region seems to reflect differences between parties rather than differences between countries. Innovations and new campaign tools are also, to a large extent, influenced by practices and experiences from countries outside Northern Europe.

Nordic electorates are becoming more volatile, and party identification is going down, as in many other Western democracies. Election campaigns are increasingly influenced by external trends. At the same time, elections are taking place in a continued Nordic context of comparably high voter turnout and public trust in political institutions and news media.

To conclude, the last decades have seen both remarkable changes in the relations between political communication actors in the Nordic countries and strong signs of continuity with regard to basic political communication structures. In the next section of this chapter, we discuss the importance of change and continuity of political communication systems in the Nordic region. To what extent are power relations in society affected, and to what extent is it still relevant to talk about a Nordic model of political communication?

### Power shifts and “outside-election” contexts

Political communication studies are not simply a static overview of the existing relations between politics, media, and citizens. Political communication is basically a study of power dynamics within society with a specific interest in which actors dominate in the public sphere and influence political agendas, the framing of political issues, and peoples’ perceptions of reality. Political communication is, to a large extent, a matter of power struggles, not only between groups with different political ideas and policies, but also between political parties and other institutions with considerable opinion-formation capacities, such as legacy news media, social media, alternative media, pressure groups and lobbyists, non-governmental organisations, and grassroots movements. Power is gained and power is lost in the continuous development of political communication relations.



When analysing political communication power relations in the Nordic countries today, it is obvious that existing political and media conditions are under pressure. Leading political parties – both to the left and to the right – face increasing problems with maintaining dominance in national parliaments. The former big parties are not that big anymore (even though social democracy is still stronger than in the rest of Europe). National party systems have generally seen a more even distribution of voter support in recent elections, and government formation processes have become more complex. In the spring of 2020, both Denmark and Sweden were ruled by minority social democratic-led governments, while both Finland and Norway had newly reshuffled governments after internal government crises.

A similar pattern can be observed in Nordic media systems. Main actors such as daily newspapers and public service broadcasters are still important and reach relatively large audiences in the Nordic countries (as seen in the country-specific chapters 2–6 of this anthology). But their historically dominating role in agenda-setting, priming, and framing processes is not that evident in the evolving digital media landscape that characterises the Nordic countries today. As the time most people in the North spend with media consumption every day is more or less the same as before, competition for public attention has increased dramatically and generated more complex, fragmented, and individual media-use diets. Generally speaking, online and mobile media and social media have become more relevant for people in the Nordic countries, while national, regional, and local newspapers, as well as public service radio and television stations, are facing difficulties with decreased commercial revenues and weakening audience market shares, respectively.

However, the picture is not completely black and white. Some specific news organisations (such as Amedia, DR, and Schibsted) have been remarkably successful on digital media platforms. But in an overall perspective, media power in the Nordic countries has definitely become more difficult to define as the expanding media system also makes every single media outlet less powerful.

Power relations in political communication studies have traditionally often been examined within an election-campaign context strictly focusing on the three key actors of political parties, news media, and voters. For several reasons, it seems relevant to widen this perspective and also reflect upon power structures outside the limited campaign timeframe, as well as to include perspectives outside the usual suspects in the political communication *ménage à trois*.

Political communication activities are not isolated to the final four weeks before election day. On the contrary, political positions and declarations need to be officially articulated and motivated at any occasion. Communications must continuously be coordinated and effectively managed in this permanent campaign context. Political parties in governing positions must communicate in a way that maximises their possibilities of remaining in power after the next

election, and opposition parties need to do their best to communicate and lay ground for an alternative electoral outcome. Generally, political communication between elections is well suited for the sitting governments, as they often have the upper hand when communication resources and skills are compared (Sanders & Canel, 2013).

But there are definitely political “between-election” situations where power plays out differently. This is particularly true during societal crises and political scandals. In such dramatic situations, the political communication playground is less specifically defined and the evolving processes less easy to predict. If less cleverly managed by governments, these situations can shift the initiatives and framing of the story from the government to the political opposition and the media.

The global outbreak of the coronavirus in the spring of 2020 had the potential to be a political communication game changer in the Nordic countries, as well as everywhere else. In this unexpected and extreme situation, national governments imposed heavy restrictions and regulations of almost wartime character in order to decrease death tolls and improve health care capacity to handle the Covid-19 disease. The extraordinary situation changed the political agenda completely, and usual day-to-day political conflicts almost disappeared. As is normally the case in stressful situations, the initial stages of this crisis also resulted in increased support for political parties in the government and especially for prime ministers in the Nordic countries. In the long run, opposition parties, media, and public perceptions of capability and accountability may play out differently, but in initial times of crisis, ruling parties generally strengthen their position.

The possible effects of political scandals are also difficult to predict. Comparative studies of political scandals in the Nordic countries confirm that their number has increased in all countries (Allern & Pollack, 2012). This kind of dramatic and disruptive events normally have great news value and attract large audiences. Scandals and crisis processes deviate from the more structured campaign context and thus have significant potential to shift existing power relations. But as is the case in other crisis situations, skilled crisis management and carefully selected response strategies may work in favour of the exposed political party or candidate.

Finally, it is relevant to consider cultural dimensions of political communication processes. As the traditional left-right-wing political scale has become slightly less important in the Nordic region, conflict patterns rooted in cultural perspectives and values prove to be useful for understanding development of public opinion and debate. As concluded by Kristensen and Roosvall in this anthology, cultural journalism in the Nordic countries obviously matters for political opinion. This is particularly true for topics that do not follow established political conflict patterns. A typical example is the global debate on sexual

harassment initiated by the so-called #metoo movement in 2017 that, to a large extent, was driven by cultural journalists and followed up by news departments and political journalists. The issue remained on top of the political agenda for a long time – especially in Norway and Sweden – and had considerable impact on public life. For example, such scandals related to the Royal Swedish Academy were the reason why no Nobel Prize in literature was declared in 2018.

### Change and continuity factors

The above discussion on politics, media, and voter power relations brings us back to the basic – and in Nordic political communication research, often repeated – question of whether a Nordic model of political communication exists today or not. The overall conclusion that can be drawn from the contributions in this anthology is that it is hardly relevant to talk about a clear-cut Nordic model of political communication that highly contrasts other democratic states and their political communication systems. To a considerable extent, global trends such as the digitalisation and commercialisation of media systems and blurring lines between national and global political issues influence and affect political communication conditions in the Nordic countries. Thus, it makes sense to assume that transnational factors are becoming increasingly important when analysing contemporary developments and changes in Nordic societies.

Still, there are many observations in previous chapters that point in other directions and actually confirm the existence of prevailing Nordic system peculiarities. The Nordic region is somewhat of a democratic role model with comparably higher levels of voter turnout and political trust, relatively strong private and public news media, and an audience still willing to pay for news (Newman et al., 2019). Lobbying works within another political context, fake news concerns are not referred to as a main problem, and local journalism is still characterised by professional values, just to mention some of the conclusions from chapters in this anthology that support the idea of a more specific Nordic political communication model (see the country-specific Chapters 2–6; Lindén et al., Chapter 8; Kalsnes et al., Chapter 14; and Ihlen et al., Chapter 15).

So most correctly, international transformation driving changes and national distinctive features supporting continuity seem to merge when political communication systems are developing in the Nordic countries, as well as in other democracies. This mixture of external influences and internal conditions is also often referred to in political communication research literature (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Norris, 2002; Syvertsen et al., 2014). In contrast, the simple idea of a strong convergence of political communication systems all over the world is criticised. Calls are issued for more sophisticated hypotheses about possible changes (Hallin & Mancini, 2014). Previous systematic analyses of

political communication in Scandinavia have also observed the dynamic interplay between global convergence processes and national political culture, media systems, and traditions (Aagard & Blach-Örsten, 2018; Ihlen et al., 2015; Nord & Strömbäck, 2018).

While this cautious conclusion of merging characteristics makes sense, it is relevant to look more carefully upon factors in the Nordic countries that seem to contribute to continuity and stability in political communication systems and with potential to limit the effects of external influences. In our view, it is particularly interesting to pay attention to relevant factors in the Nordic countries that may contribute to resilience in these societies.

The notion of resilience is not much discussed in political communication, despite its potential to explain how and why some societies are successful as inclusive, innovative, and secure societies, also in times of crises and change. Social resilience can be defined as “the capacity of groups of people bound together in an organization, class, racial group, community, or nation to sustain and advance their well-being in the face of challenges to it” (Hall & Lamont, 2013: 2). Resilience is the capacity of a society to deal with issues such as the above, and being stable democracies, the Nordic countries have a good track record in handling societal challenges. While processes of globalisation might be said to contribute to convergence, it has also been argued that a certain national resilience can be found and attributed to both tradition and culture (Pfetsch & Esser, 2012).

For example, a comparative study of 18 countries concluded that a consensual cluster of countries, including the Nordic countries, showed a higher resilience to online disinformation. Within this cluster, countries were marked by a lower level of polarisation and populism communication, high levels of media trust and shared news consumption, and strong public service media. These countries seemed to be well equipped to face the challenges of the digital information age because they have stable, trusted institutions that enable citizens to obtain independent information and uncover manipulation attempts. The countries in this cluster are not yet affected to a large extent by the problem of online disinformation. However, it is possible that this will change in the future and that online disinformation will become a greater threat (Humprecht et al., 2020).

The various contributions to this anthology do suggest some possible factors that may be central for the understanding of resilience in the Nordic countries. Basic democratic indicators such as voter turnout and public trust are comparably high, public service media have a strong position in national media systems, and there is an inclusion of ethnic and cultural groups in decision-making structures.

International comparisons of how “democratic” different nations are have also reflected on other characteristics of the Nordic countries: they are small and wealthy states with long-established democratic traditions. Electoral systems are

more consensual than majoritarian, and taxes and welfare state expenditures are relatively high with some state intervention in the economy. Even if there is not one single perfect democratic model, one author states that “it might be tentatively argued that the odds of a strong democracy enduring might be improved if following the Scandinavian template” (Davis, 2019: 212).

So far, the Nordic countries have shown considerable ability to embrace international political communication trends without jeopardising essential nation-specific distinctive features. Whether this resilience will prevail in the future remains an open question and depends on the further strength of global democratic changes, the magnitude of future crises and challenges in modern societies, and their implications for existing power relations and political communication systems in the North.

## References

- Aagaard, P., & Blach-Ørsten, M. (2018). *Politisk kommunikation: Nye tider og nye aktører* [Political communication: New times and new actors]. Copenhagen: Hans Reitzels.
- Allern, S., & Pollack, E. (Eds.) (2012). *Scandalous! The mediated construction of political scandals in four Nordic countries*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg.
- Bennett, W. L., & Pfetsch, B. (2018). Rethinking political communication in a time of disrupted public spheres. *Journal of Communication*, 68(2), 243–253. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqx017>
- Bolin, N., & Falasca, K. (2019). Reaching the voter: Exploring Swedish political parties' assessment of different communication channels in three national election campaigns, 2010–2018. *Statsvetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 121(3), 347–365.
- Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199759477.001.0001>
- Davis, A. (2019). *Political communication: A new introduction for crisis times*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Esser, F., & Pfetsch, B. (2004). *Comparing political communication: Theories, cases, and challenges*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511606991>
- Hall, P. A., & Lamont, M. (2013). *Social resilience in the neoliberal era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139542425>
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2014). Ten years after Comparing Media Systems: What have we learned? *Political Communication*, 34(2), 155–171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2016.1233158>
- Harrie, E. (Ed.). (2018). *Newspapers in the Nordic media landscape*. Gothenburg: Nordicom, University of Gothenburg. [https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/publikationer-hela-pdf/nordic\\_media\\_trends\\_14\\_3.pdf](https://www.nordicom.gu.se/sites/default/files/publikationer-hela-pdf/nordic_media_trends_14_3.pdf)
- Humprecht, E., Esser, F., & van Aelst, P. (2020). Resilience to online disinformation: A framework for cross-national comparative research. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(3), 493–516. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161219900126>
- Ihlen, Ø., Skogerbø, E., & Allern, S. (Eds.). (2015). *Makt, medier og politikk: Norsk politisk kommunikasjon* [Power, media, and politics: Norwegian political communication]. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Magin, M., Podschuwiet, N., Hassler, J., & Russmann, U. (2017). Campaigning in the fourth age of political communication: A multi-method study on the use of Facebook by German and Austrian parties in the 2013 national election campaigns. *Information, Communication & Society*, 20(11), 1698–1719. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1254269>
- Newman, N., Fletcher, F., Kalogeropoulos, A., & Nielsen, R. K. (2019). *Reuters Institute digital news report 2019*. Oxford: Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, University of Oxford. <http://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2019/>
- Nord, L., & Strömbäck, J. (2018). *Svenska valrörelser: Väljare, partier och medier under 2000-talet* [Swedish elections: Voters, parties, and media during the 2000s]. Stockholm: Santérus.

- Norris, P. (2002). Campaign communication. In L. LeDuc, R. Niemi, & P. Norris (Eds.), *Comparing communication 2: New challenges in the study of elections and voting* (pp. 124–147). London: Sage.
- Pfetsch, B., & Esser, F. (2012). Comparing political communication. In F. Esser, & T. Hanitzsch (Eds.), *The handbook of comparative communication research* (pp. 25–47). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203149102>
- Prior, M. (2007). *Post-broadcast democracy: How media choices increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139878425>
- Sanders, K., & Canel, M. J. (Eds.). (2013). *Government communication: Cases and challenges*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Syvvertsen, T., Enli, G., Mjös, O. J., & Moe, H. (2014). *The media welfare state: Nordic media in the digital era*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press. <https://www.doi.org/10.3998/nmw.12367206.0001.001>

## POWER, COMMUNICATION, AND POLITICS IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES

The Nordic countries are stable democracies with solid infrastructures for political dialogue and negotiations. However, both the “Nordic model” and Nordic media systems are under pressure as the conditions for political communication change – not least due to weakened political parties and the widespread use of digital communication media.

In this anthology, the similarities and differences in political communication across the Nordic countries are studied. Traditional corporatist mechanisms in the Nordic countries are increasingly challenged by professionals, such as lobbyists, a development that has consequences for the processes and forms of political communication. Populist political parties have increased their media presence and political influence, whereas the news media have lost readers, viewers, listeners, and advertisers. These developments influence societal power relations and restructure the ways in which political actors communicate about political issues.

This book is a key reference for all who are interested in current trends and developments in the Nordic countries. The editors, *Eli Skogerbø*, *Øyvind Ihlen*, *Nete Nørgaard Kristensen*, and *Lars Nord*, have published extensively on political communication, and the authors are all scholars based in the Nordic countries with specialist knowledge in their fields.



UNIVERSITY OF  
GOTHENBURG



Nordic Council  
of Ministers

Nordicom is a centre for Nordic media research at the University of Gothenburg, supported by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

ISBN 978-91-88855-28-2



9 789188 855282 >

Nordicom, University of Gothenburg, PO Box 713, SE-405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden  
[www.nordicom.gu.se](http://www.nordicom.gu.se)