

120 Years of Swedish Election Campaigns

A Story of the Rise and Decline of Political Parties and the Emergence of the Mass Media as Power Brokers

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This article reports findings of an extensive study of election campaigns in Sweden during the past century. Drawing on a wide range of different sources – newspaper articles, surveys, opinion polls, etc. – the article's main argument is that the political parties have lost their more than 50-year-old monopoly on political opinion formation. Thus, with the advent of more professionalized, resourceful and assertive political journalism, party campaigning tends to take the form of media-controlled party-voter communication, dismantling and side-stepping the party organization. It is against this background that the 'decline of parties' can best be understood.

A Model of Election Campaigning

The basic principle of election campaigning is quite simple: one way or another, political parties must establish some form of communication with the voters. Party-voter contacts can occur either through *direct* or *indirect* campaign channels. As used here, direct channels refer to face-to-face contact between voters and parties, whereas indirect channels refer to contacts through the mass media (cf. Asp 1986).

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speaker addressing voters. In private places the parties conduct *door-to-door canvassing* (visiting voters in their homes), and *workplace activities* (party activists contacting voters at factories, offices and so forth).

Indirect contacts are made through controlled (i.e. paid) media channels as well as through free media channels. *Controlled* media channels are pamphlets, posters, advertisements, and other channels under total command of the parties. *Free* media channels, i.e. mainly news coverage in radio, television, and daily newspapers, are, at least in a formal sense, independent of the parties.

This approach to political communication relates closely to a familiar analytical tool in communication research – the SOR-model. In this model, party campaigning is perceived as a communication process: the parties (the senders) use different campaign techniques (channels) to get in contact with the voters. In order to influence the voters, the parties send messages (campaign issues) through the channels. What creates a successful campaign is the strategic combination of efficient and extensive channels and attractive messages.

The adapted SOR-model provides a framework for a descriptive analysis of party campaigning (numbers refer to Figure 1): Which messages do the parties send to the voters (1)? Which direct and indirect campaign channels are used and to what extent (3)? What are the chief means employed by the parties (defined as the central party leadership) in order to control direct and indirect channels (2)? How effective are the different campaign channels and what level of effectiveness do the parties attribute to the channels (4)?

Before proceeding further, two comments should be made on this suggested framework. First, ever since its introduction in the 1950s, the SOR-model has been under heavy fire. The most significant criticism refers to the passive role attributed to the voters (the receivers). The literature is rich with more complex communication models, including feedback processes accounting for receivers' input pertaining to future communication (e.g. Smith 1982; Fiske 1982).

Second, the suggested framework concentrates on *overt* campaign activities. Indeed, it has been argued that campaign analyses should focus on other aspects of campaigning. In order to conduct overt campaigns the parties have to make a number of preparations that *de facto* determine the campaigns' image. Thus, nominating candidates (Gallagher & Marsh 1988), raising funds (Alexander 1989), formulating election platforms (Budge et al. 1987), and organizing the campaign staff (Goldenberg & Traugott 1984; Farrell 1987) are factors of apparent significance for the image as well as the outcome of the campaign. In a recent article, Farrell & Wortman (1987) attempt to encompass preparational and planning campaign elements in a

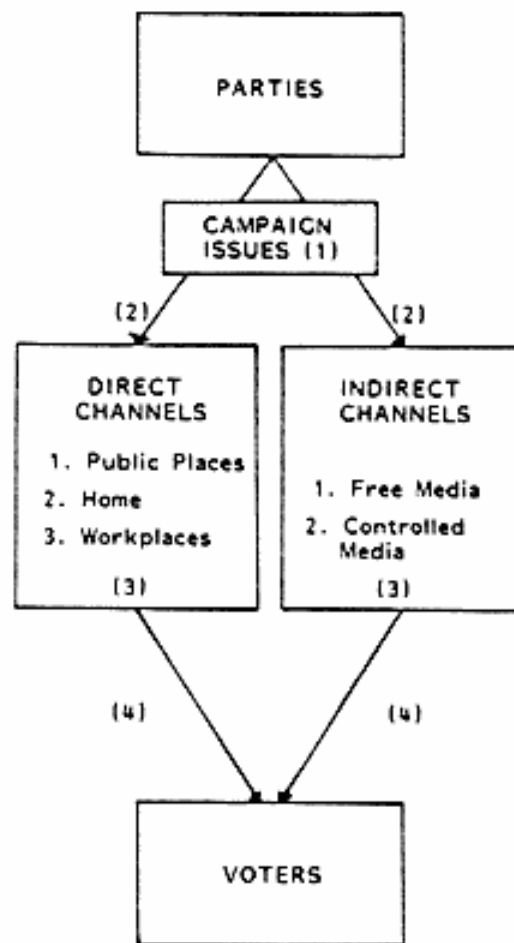


Fig. 1. A Framework for Analysis of Election Campaigns.

single analytical perspective, treating party campaigning as a special case of marketing (Koblik 1980).

These objections notwithstanding, there are good reasons to maintain a descriptive analytical framework as outlined here. Election campaign research is a discipline characterized by pluralism as well as anarchy; there is a strong need for comparable data sets. For late developers – a category to which comparative election campaign research belongs – it is always a sound strategy to concentrate on basic principles, and party-voter contacts is undeniably a key factor in campaigning.

The remainder of this article presents an analysis of the development of Swedish election campaigns since the late 19th century. The empirical investigation concentrates on trends in party-voter communication: which direct and indirect campaign channels are used and to what extent under which time period? From this analysis, covering a century of profound political, economic and social change, we will seek to derive some more

general conclusions: what major shifts in party campaigning have occurred during the last century and how can these changes be accounted for?

Campaign Meetings

For a long time Swedish MPs hesitated to speak publically in favor of themselves. During the 1800s the political culture was strongly biased against the notion of organized campaigns and candidates did not want to be seen as pretentious careerists (Wallin 1961). It was not until the breakthrough of political parties in the early 1900s that politicians started to overcome their reluctance to enter the rostrum.

Following the introduction of a PR-list electoral system and near universal suffrage for men in 1911, parties started to manage election campaigns more directly, and arranging public meetings was one way of getting out the vote. In the unusually heated election in the spring of 1914, in which the future of the military and the constitutional monarchy was at stake, the parties managed to mobilize speakers for as many as 8500 meetings (compared to 400–500 meetings during the 1890s).

The 1928–36 period was the golden age of campaign meetings in Sweden. Motivated by the introduction of women's suffrage and deep ideological clashes, and supported by technical innovations such as loudspeakers, automobiles and propaganda movies, the parties increased the number of public meetings considerably.¹ An all-time high was reached during the 1936 campaign, when politicians addressed voters on approximately 20 000 different occasions at locations throughout the country.

After the Second World War, and especially after the breakthrough of television in 1960, it was obvious that the heyday of campaign meetings was coming to an end. Thus, the number of campaign meetings arranged decreased from 15 000 in 1956 to roughly 5000 in 1960.

The late 1960s saw something of a revival of campaign meetings, albeit in a remodeled form. In order to reach the increasingly volatile electorate directly, the parties started to arrange a series of short meetings in crowded places (so called 'town square meetings' or '*torgmöten*'). Thanks to this new 'visiting form', the total number of meetings has now increased to above the level of the 1950s (approximately 15 000–18 000 meetings during the 1980s). If the voters do not come to the parties, the parties have to come to the voters!²

How many voters have attended these campaign meetings during the past decades? Figure 2 displays data from opinion polls covering the period 1948–88. As we see from this figure, public meetings were still a far-reaching campaign channel in the immediate postwar period. According to a Gallup poll, nearly one-third of the persons interviewed (31 percent)

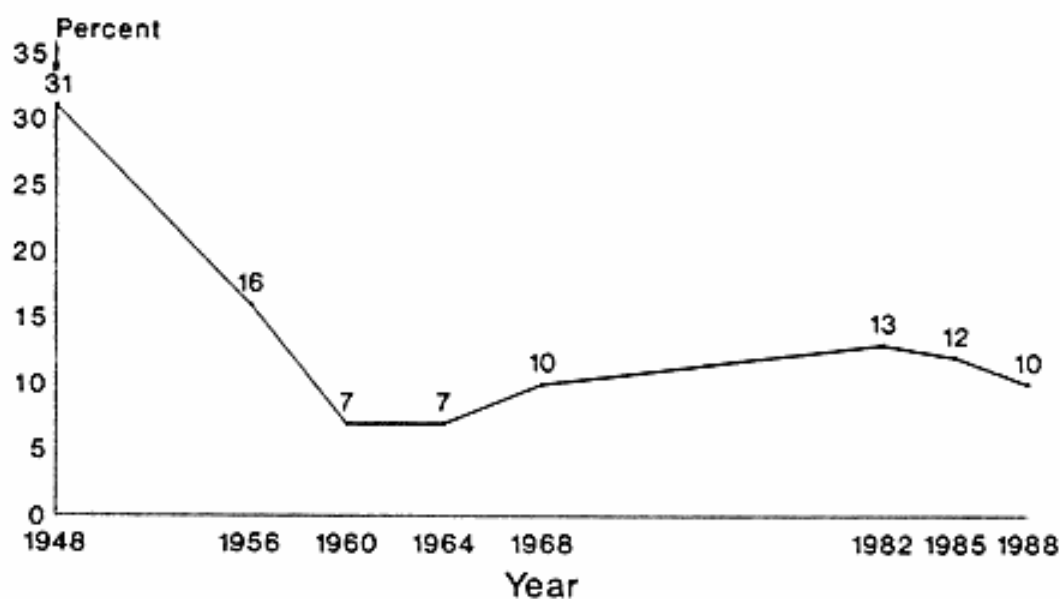


Fig. 2. Voters Attending Campaign Meetings 1948–88 (percent self-reported meeting attenders). *Source:* The Analysis is Based on a Gallup Poll Taken After the Election of 1948 and on the Swedish Election Studies 1956–88. For further information, see Esaiasson (1990).

reported having attended a meeting during the 1948 campaign. Over time, however, fewer voters bothered to attend traditional campaign meetings. By 1956, the number of self-reported meeting attenders had declined to 16 percent and after the breakthrough of television the number of attenders was halved once again (to 7 percent in 1960 and 1964). The introduction of new forms of meetings in the late 1960s has increased the share of voters attending campaign meetings, but only moderately (10–13 percent 1982–88).³

What, then, is there to say about personal contacts during the golden age of campaign meetings in the 1930s? In the absence of opinion polls we are left to more or less qualified guesses. An estimate, based among other things on the well-known popularity of propaganda movies (especially in the countryside, where there was little competition from other public amusements), is that half of the electorate listened to a campaign speech during the 1936 campaign. It is fair to conclude that campaign meetings today hold far less importance compared to earlier years.

Canvassing and Workplace Activities

Door-to-door canvassing and workplace activities are somewhat mythical elements in Swedish election campaigns. Partly because contacting voters

at home and at work leave less visible marks than arranging public meetings, but mostly for political cultural reasons, we do not know very much about these forms of personal contacts. Using organized personal contacts to persuade the voters has always been regarded as a somewhat shady business. Particularly, the bourgeois parties have shown a tendency to attribute activities to their opponents of terrifying proportions while downplaying their own attempts in this respect.⁴

Canvassing as a systematically used campaign technique was introduced as early as the 1880s (Vallinder 1962). However, when the parties took a firmer grip on election campaigns around 1910, they lacked personal resources for conducting more extensive canvassing (Lundqvist 1974; cf. Elklit 1989).

The heyday of door-to-door canvassing in Swedish election campaigns coincide with the glory days of campaign meetings, i.e. the period 1928–36. Trying to mobilize the newly democratized electorate (the number of voters trebled from 1 to 3 million during the 1920s), personal contacts were considered an effective means. As can be seen from membership figures, the parties now had the organizational manpower to contact many voters before D-day and on election day even provided transportation to the polling stations (the total number of party members rose from below 200 000 in 1911 to more than 600 000 in 1932). A further indication is to be found in the campaign management books from the 1930s, which strongly emphasized the importance of personal canvassing (Esaiasson 1990).

From the late 1940s, canvassing gradually went out of fashion (cf. Håstad 1957). With an electorate better educated in the art of voting, and with perhaps slightly less devoted activists, the parties perceived personal campaign contacts to be less effective.

Again, surveys provide relevant evidence. Results in Figure 3 display the proportion of interviewees who report having been canvassed by party representatives in their homes in five different surveys from 1946–88. In 1946, more than 1 in 10 voters was canvassed by the parties. In the 1988 campaign, the parties visited the homes of only a marginal proportion of the electorate (2 percent, or in absolute figures, about 250 000). However, the missing years in the time series hide a temporary surge in canvassing during the early 1960s. As a counterweight to omnipotent television, evidence suggests that party leadership tried to persuade the activists – including the MPs – to put extra effort into personally visiting voters (Esaiasson 1990).

Organized *workplace activities*, on the other hand, can take many forms, such as posting bills and distributing leaflets. The following will focus on personal contacts made by party activists at factories, offices and other places of work.

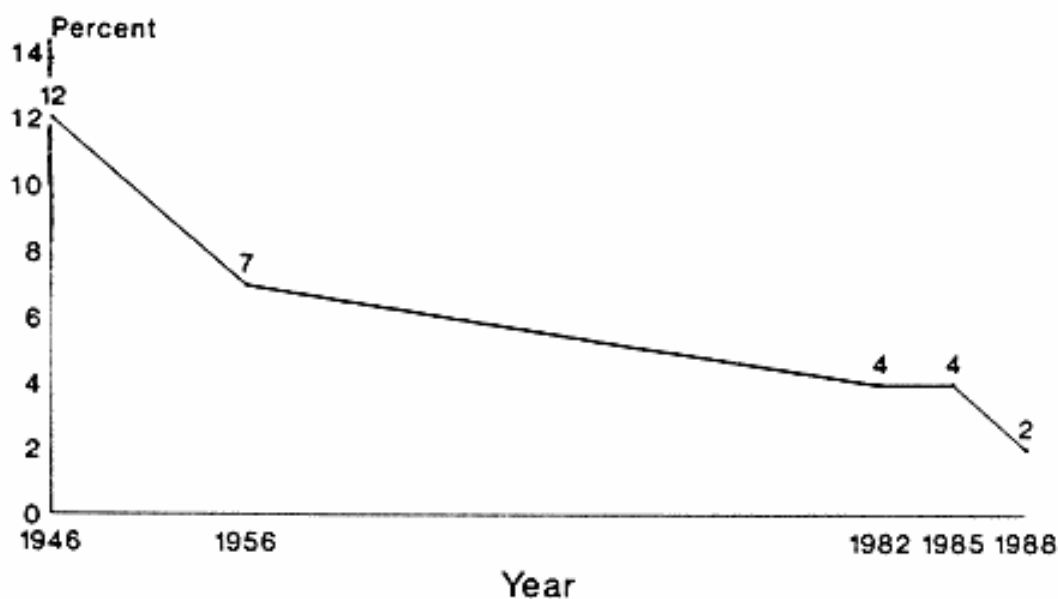


Fig. 3. Voters Canvassed by the Parties 1946-88 (percent electors called upon in their homes by at least one party). *Source:* Same as Fig. 2.

It is almost impossible to get an accurate estimation of the extension of workplace activities during the early 1900s. A fairly safe conclusion is that the Social Democrats and, to a lesser extent, the Communist Party were helped by their connection to the trade union. At the opposite end of the ideological spectrum, the Conservatives enjoyed support from authoritative employers, who could urge their employees to vote the 'right way'.

The first public debate on the parties' workplace activities was initiated during the 1948 campaign, when the Swedish Employers' Confederation (SAF) encouraged their members to ban all forms of political propaganda. The employers took this step to counteract what they perceived as extended activities from the Labor movement. Similar debates have taken place before the elections of 1958, 1968 and 1976, which can be taken as an indication of intensified agitation during the last decades (Sigeman 1975). This conclusion is supported, furthermore, by the fact that since 1970 most interest organizations pay increased attention to political opinion formation (Gidlund 1983; Hansson 1984).

Survey research evidence is scarce in this area. In a Gallup survey after the local elections of 1946 only 3 percent of those interviewed reported having been urged to vote for a party at their workplace. During the 1980s, this number has increased to 7-8 percent (Esaiasson 1990; cf. Gilljam & Holmberg 1990). More impressive figures can be found in a report from a state commission, however, where the parties are said to have personal

representatives at one-third of all major workplaces (Sigeman 1975). Given the state of the data it seems reasonable to conclude that the parties have increased their workplace activities during the last decades, but that the activist-voter contacts are limited.

The last component of this conclusion contradicts the widely held belief that the Social Democrats, with the support of the trade unions, mount major propaganda offensives at all factories at the time of elections. One way of saving this well established truth is to take into consideration the more informal and unorganized political discussions that take place in everyday life. Survey research tells us that about three-quarters of the voters are engaged in political discussions at their workplace during election campaigns (Asp et al. 1987). It is mainly in this respect that workplaces are centers of agitation for the political parties.

Pamphlets, Manifestos and Other Paid Media Channels

Centrally produced, mass distributed pamphlets were first used during the heated debate on custom tariffs, leading up to an extra parliamentary election in 1887 (Wallin 1961; Lewin 1988). Free Traders and Protectionists – the first two national organizations for political opinion formation in Sweden – distributed about 600 000 copies of propaganda brochures and leaflets of various quality. This figure stood as a record for a long time. Again, it was the breakthrough of the parties that changed the pattern. Distributing election manifestos and pamphlets became a key function for the parties' national campaign staffs at the turn of the century. In the 1911 election, the combined circulation figure rose to 4 million copies. Then during the hectic 1928–36 period, mass distribution of printed propaganda material reached a new peak (about 23 million copies in 1936) (Esaiasson 1990).

After the 1930s, the level of circulation figures stabilized. It was only after the parties' finances were supported by the introduction of public subsidies in the late 1960s that efforts were made to increase the mass distribution of printed propaganda. In particular, the local party organizations began printing propaganda brochures of their own. While the central party organizations distribute about 30 million copies of such brochures, the amount of locally produced brochures and leaflets is unknown even to the top party bosses.

However, an irreverent question keeps popping up: does anyone read the millions of pamphlets circulated? Figure 4 shows the percentage of self-reported readers of at least one of the parties' campaign pamphlets in six different surveys from 1956–88. The surveys do not mince matters. In the

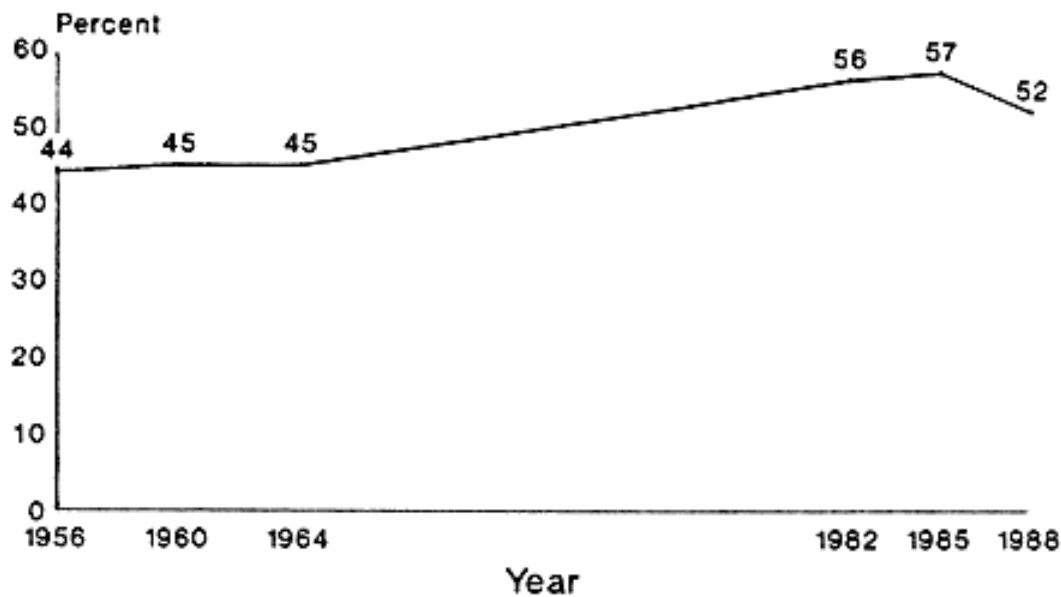


Fig. 4. Voters Reading the Parties' Propaganda Pamphlets 1956-88 (percent electors reporting themselves having read at least one propaganda brochure). *Source:* Same as Fig. 2.

1950s and 1960s, 4 of 10 voters (44-45 percent) claimed to have read at least one brochure. In the 1980s this figure is even higher (52-57 percent). Due to slight alterations in the wordings of questions in the later surveys, we cannot definitively conclude that the number of pamphlet readers have increased. Yet it is beyond doubt that printed pamphlets is, and has been, a campaign channel that reaches a substantial part of the electorate.

We would like to have survey evidence from before the Second World War. It seems logical that pamphlets are especially effective in times when competition from other campaign channels is limited. Printed pamphlets probably peaked as a powerful campaign channel in the first decades of this century (1900-20). By then enough pamphlets were circulated to reach the majority of voters, while the competition from other mass media and from personal channels were not as intense as they were to become later.

Political advertising is also an interesting form of paid campaign channel. As in most Western democracies - the US and Italy being the main exceptions - party advertising has been restricted to newspapers and magazines. Political advertising in daily newspapers was introduced in the late 1800s and grew steadily up to the late 1940s. Since the 1960s, the parties have preferred to put their money in fewer but bigger full-page advertisements. The total space of advertisements, though, remains more or less constant (Jonsson 1991).

Most likely campaign advertising has never had any major impact on the

outcome of elections. In the future, this may very well change. Although small in scale, televised political advertising will make its debut in the election of 1991. Given the current expansion of commercial television in Sweden, the potential effectiveness of TV advertisements is likely to grow in the next decade. For better or worse, advertising in television could be the new effective campaign channel so desperately needed by the parties presently distressed by the widening gap between themselves and the voters.

The Free Media

The press has been an important campaign channel ever since the 1800s. During this period the structure of the media market has of course undergone fundamental changes. Thus, the combined circulation figures of the daily newspapers rose more or less constantly to the mid-1970s, when they leveled out at the present 4.8 million copies. The total number of daily newspapers peaked at 224 in the 1920s, but was down to a low 120 in the mid-1960s. To counteract this 'death of the newspapers', public subsidies to the press were introduced in the early 1970s. This stabilized the situation at about the level of the 1960s (Holmberg et al. 1983; Hadenius & Weibull 1989). Hence, parties today have fewer (but in terms of circulation stronger) daily newspapers to use as campaign channels (Weibull 1983; Esaiasson 1990).

Radio was introduced as an election campaign channel in the hectic 1928–36 period. License figures indicate that about 1 million voters could listen to the formal and restricted presentation programs offered to them by the parties. However, it was not until the late 1940s that the new medium made its definitive breakthrough. By then most voters owned a radio and the National Broadcasting Company dared to try new and freer types of programs, such as debates and programs in which party leaders were questioned.

From 1948 to 1958, radio was perceived as the most important campaign channel, with politicians as well as voters paying great attention to the special election programs (the State regulation did not allow the radio to make any news coverage of the campaign).⁵ Yet radio's period of regency was short. Television took over as the most important campaign channel in the 1960 election. Following a rapid increase in the number of license payers – from almost zero to 1 million in the years 1956–60 – two-thirds of the voters exposed themselves to the televised election broadcasts in what is known as the first 'TV-election' in Sweden (Sjöden 1962; Esaiasson 1990). Ever since 1968, television has reached the vast majority of voters (2.3 million license payers in 1968).

Underlining the free media's dominant position is the substantial increase in election coverage that has paralleled the growth of the audience. The press doubled their news coverage of the elections between 1956 and 1976 (Asp 1987). Election broadcasting has grown even more – from 15 hours in 1956 to over 40 hours in the 1980s. Since the late 1970s, moreover, local radio and regional television cover the elections from their geographical horizon.

Controlling the Free Media

The importance of the free media as campaign channels poses a problem for the parties. If the free media have power over the voters, how are the parties to get control over the free media? It is in this area that the major changes in campaigning have occurred during the past decades.⁶

Gaining control over the press was a fundamental objective of the parties in the years of partisan politicization of election campaigns at the turn of the century. By founding new newspapers, buying existing ones, giving subsidies and establishing personal relations (e.g. offering the editors seats in Parliament), the parties succeeded in creating loyal allies. Over the years, the technical principles of editing changed as articles were shortened, headlines were made bigger and photographs became more frequent. However, the basic rule remained the same; the parties could depend on 'their' newspapers to support them in editorials as well as in news coverage. In practice, the press functioned as passive megaphones for the respective parties.

The role as a passive election platform was played even more scrupulously by the radio. Each party was given a program of its own to present its manifesto. Party representatives, moreover, handled the questioning of party leaders. Independent news coverage by the radio's journalists was out of the question. This tradition of passive mediation was subsequently taken over by television. Thus, the first 'TV-election' in 1960 was staged more or less completely by the parties (Esaiasson 1990).

This pattern was fundamentally changed in a few dramatic years at the end of the 1960s. Starting in radio and television, the journalists refused to accept their passive roles as mediating campaign channels for the parties. Referring to their position as the third (fourth) estate, and helped by general ideological radicalization of the population, journalists wanted to take active part in setting the agenda for debate and scrutinizing politicians' standpoints.

The change first became visible in television. In the local elections of 1966, journalists took over the questioning of party leaders from the party representatives. Then in the 1968 election, the parties were deprived

of their right to produce their own presentation programs. Even more importantly both television and radio started to cover the election campaign in their news programs. From then on the party representatives had to give increasing attention to news journalism, and be prepared to answer aggressive questions from journalists (Furhoff 1974; Westerståhl & Johansson 1985; Esaiasson 1990). The press also began a process of emancipation from the parties, although at a slower speed.⁷

During the past decade, the journalists have continued to move their positions forward, making themselves less and less dependent on the parties as sources of news (Asp 1983). One of their means has been to order opinion polls, thereby being able to report on the 'horse-race aspects' of the campaigns (Holmberg 1986). Another method has been to produce feature material pushing for certain issues, e.g. environmental issues, and to let independent experts evaluate the parties' policies on different issues. The competition to set the agenda for debate has been sharpened even more by the decision of many interest organizations to urge support for their demands during the campaigns. Compared to the rather concordant party choir of yesterday, the modern election campaign is a cacophony of voices.

The scenario outlined is not uncontroversial despite the fact that journalists, like most powerholders, prefer to think of themselves as powerless. One way to illustrate the modern parties' difficulties in setting the agenda for debate is to investigate the behavior of party representatives. Party leaders have been leading spokesmen and the single most important actors in election campaigns since the turn of the century. Figure 5 shows the average number of public performances made by the party leaders in election campaigns from 1902 to 1988.

Party leaders were rather fastidious about their public appearances in the early days of this century (at most 30 performances in the hectic spring election of 1914). In the 1928–36 period, the number of performances reached a peak that would not be surpassed for decades (an average of 42 in 1932). The breakthrough of television in 1960 caused a considerable *decrease* in public campaign performances (from 42 in 1956 to 24 in 1960, and 27 in 1964).⁸ Concentrating on the performances in the special election programs, the party leaders followed the general trend in cutting down on the campaign tours.

Then in the dramatic election of 1968, as a means of gaining coverage in the news media – mainly television – the party leaders made more campaign performances than ever (49 on average). Since then, the number of campaign performances has increased more or less constantly, reaching an all-time high of 104 in the 1988 campaign.

The adaptation to the demands of the mass media is even more striking if we turn to the form of the party leaders' campaign performances. Figure

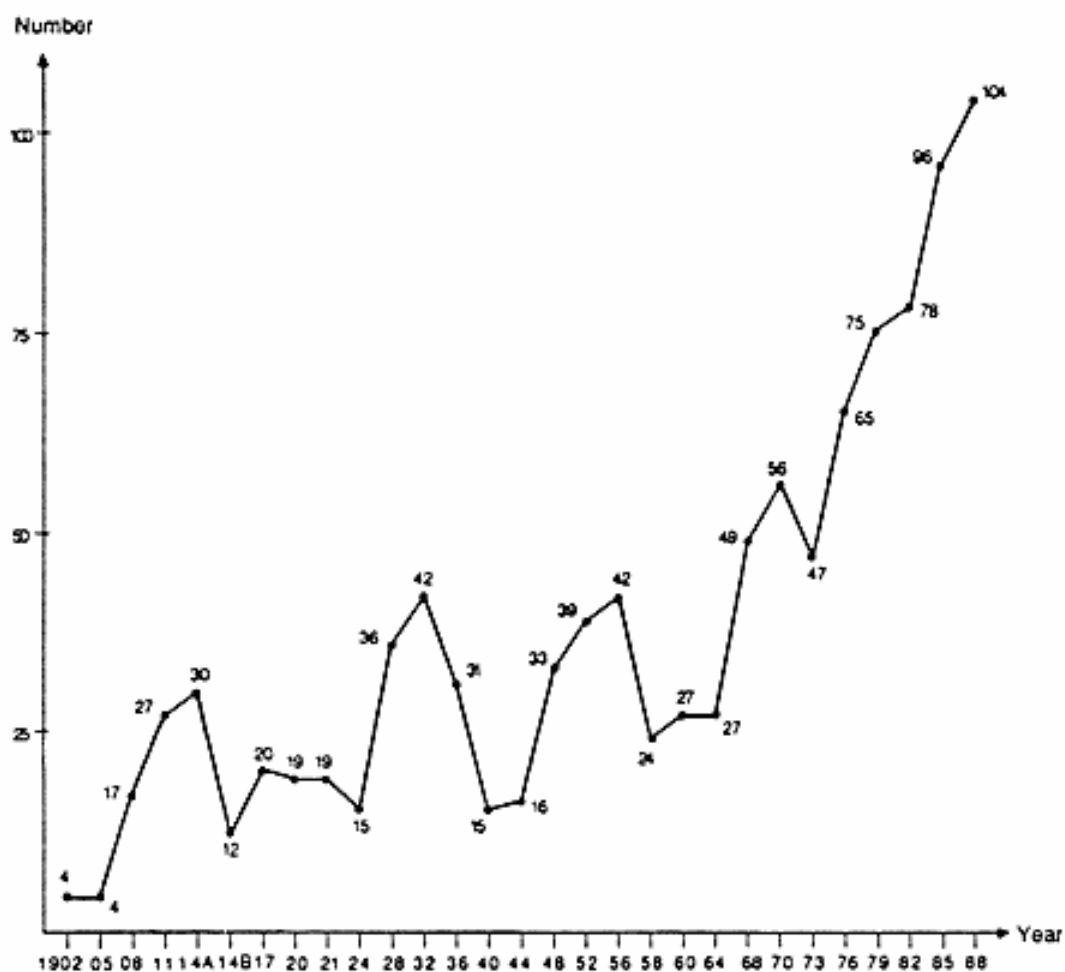


Fig. 5. The Average Number of Campaign Performances Made by the Party Leaders 1902–88. *Note:* Campaign Performances are Defined as Public and Outward Directed Appearances such as Campaign Speeches, Press Conferences and Media Events. The Results are Based on Content Analysis of Some 10 000 Newspapers. For further information, see Esaiasson (1990).

6 shows the distribution of campaign speeches, media contacts (press conferences and broadcasted election programs) and media events (visits to factories etc.). Campaign speeches were the dominant feature in the party leaders' campaigning until the late 1950s. Although perceived as highly important, performances in election broadcasts and a few debate confrontations with other party leaders were still small in numbers (6–10 percent and 5–9 percent, respectively).

All this began to change in the election of 1968. In order to profit from the mass media's hunger for news, the party leaders started to give daily press conferences, even inviting the journalists to join their campaign tours (the percentage of direct media contacts increased from 9 to 20 percent

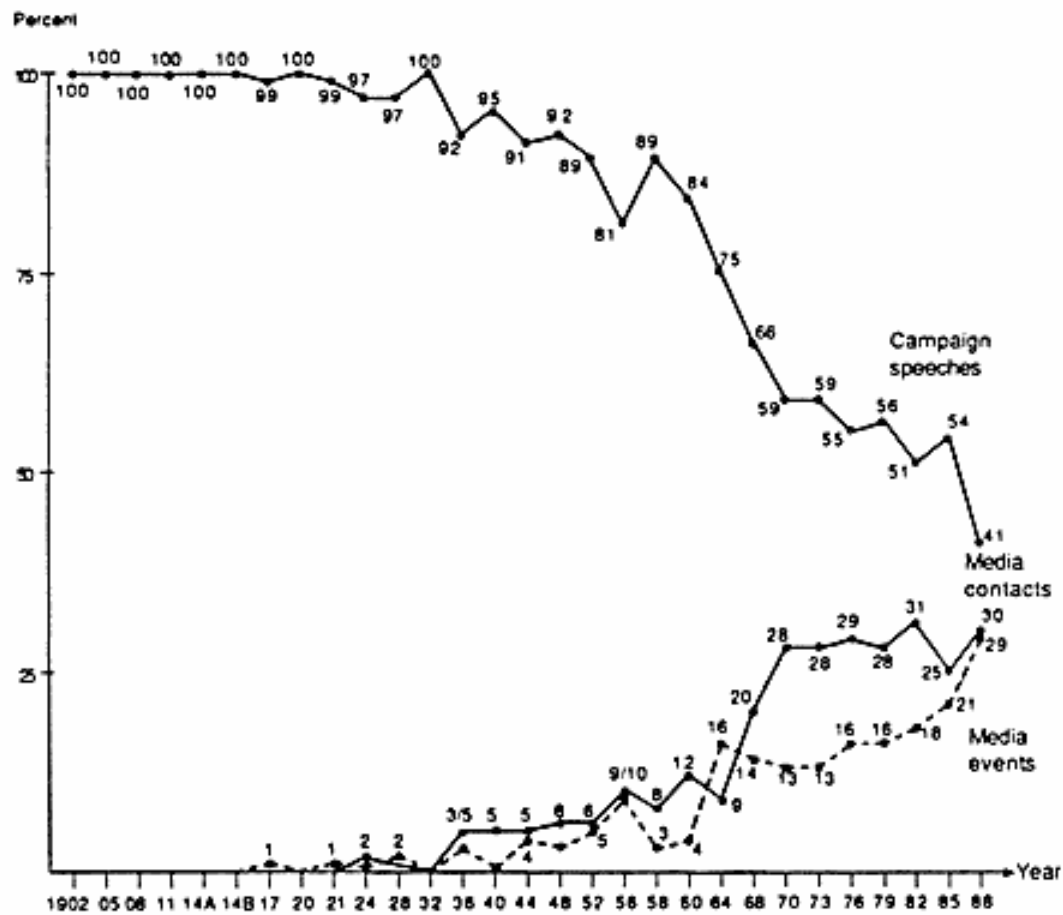


Fig. 6. The Forms of the Party Leaders' Campaign Performances 1902-88 (average of all party leaders). Note: The Percentage Base is the Number of Campaign Performances Made by the Party Leaders as Shown in Fig. 5. For further information, see Esaiasson (1990).

between 1964 and 1968). Since the early 1970s, the party leaders have made greater use of 'media events', keeping up the high number of press conferences (the percentage of media events was 13 in 1973 and 29 in 1988). In 1988, for the first time ever, more performances were devoted to media contacts and media events than to campaign speeches.

The development can be summarized briefly. The party leaders' campaigning remained stable until the late 1960s. The leaders addressed the voters directly and were reported more or less extensively in the press. Election broadcasting gave larger audiences, but the party leaders still had the opportunity to develop their standpoints relatively undisturbed. Not until the breakthrough of activated and aggressive journalism did the basis of campaigning change. Since the late 1960s, the party leaders' – and hence the parties' – messages to the voters are filtered by questioning journalists.

The Rise and Decline of Party Campaigning in Sweden

From 1866 to 1988 there has been 42 elections to the directly elected national Parliament in Sweden (35 elections to the second chamber, seven elections to the present one chamber Parliament). Based on a detailed historical account seven different periods in the history of Swedish election campaigns can be distinguished (Esaiasson 1990):

- 1866–84: *Locally dominated campaigns*. The infrequent campaign activities were arranged by the candidates themselves.
- 1887–1905: *National politicization*. Central propaganda organizations helped to create national election debates with the same topic discussed all over the country.
- 1908–28: *Party politicization*. With the help of constitutional reforms, parties took a firm grip on the campaigns.
- 1928–44: *Technicalization*. Technical innovations such as election broadcasting and propaganda films were incorporated in an intensified effort to mobilize the electorate, giving special attention to direct campaign channels.
- 1948–58: *Radio centering*. Party controlled election broadcasts aroused the most interest.
- 1960–64: *Television centering*. Television replaced radio as the most important campaign channel, but the parties kept tight control over the broadcasting.
- 1968– : *Competition increase through an independent media*. With an activated and assertive political journalism, the parties lost their monopoly for setting the agenda for debate.

The Swedish experience may well hold some general features, typical for the development of election campaigning in the Nordic countries as well as in other Western democracies. Most likely, the sequence of nationalization – party politicization – technicalization, can be found in many different political contexts, although with certain timelags. Another general feature is that the election campaigns during the postwar period have been centered first around radio, and then television, whereas direct campaign channels have receded since their heydays during the 1920s and 1930s (cf. Butler 1990).

The Swedish example, moreover, pertains to the 'decline of parties thesis'. Too often we are subject to simplified generalizations over the impact of television on today's politics. From Swedish history we learn that the development should be described in accordance with a more long-ranging model: (1) the breakthrough of radio; (2) television takes over; (3) the journalists move in. It was not until the journalists started their process

of emancipation that the parties began to lose their grip over political opinion formation.

Analytically speaking, television has changed from an effective campaign channel to an independent actor in election campaigns, nowadays having a strong influence on what issues are actually to be discussed. The development may have gone further in Sweden than in most other Western countries.⁹ However, the problems of the Swedish parties are not totally unique. If the parties do not find adequate countermeasures, a new period in the campaign history may be underway – the period of media dominated campaigns.

NOTES

1. The introduction of loudspeakers made life easier for both spectators and agitators. It is unclear how many spectators could actually hear the agitators at Social Democratic mass meetings during the early years. For agitators, however, bronchial catarrh used to be an occupational disease.
2. It is the ordinary MPs that shoulder the main burden for these numerous short speeches, while the more traditional and carefully arranged campaign meetings that still take place are left to the party leaders (Holmberg & Esaiasson 1988).
3. The mass attendance at campaign meetings – and the following decline in interest – is a common phenomenon internationally, see e.g. Britain, Italy and the US (Butler 1990; Penniman 1978; Dinkin 1989; cf. Asp et al. 1987; Björklund 1991).
4. This negative view of organized personal contacts seems to be a common feature in the Nordic countries (e.g. Valen & Katz 1964; Pesonen 1968; Asp et al. 1987). Interestingly, the Anglo-Saxon tradition is quite different in this respect (e.g. Harrop & Miller 1987). In Ireland, a MP who *does not* conduct personal canvassing is heavily criticized (e.g. Katz 1980; Gallagher & Sinnott 1990).
5. According to opinion polls, the number of voters following the debate between the party leaders that traditionally end the Swedish election campaigns was as high in 1946 and 1948 as in the 1980s (about 70 percent).
6. The distinction between power over the voters and power over the media is taken from Asp (1986) (cf. Katz 1971).
7. As late as the 1980s, the press showed tendencies to favor their 'own party' and 'own party bloc' in the news coverage (most of all the Center Party press, thereafter the Social Democratic press and the Conservative press) (Asp 1990).
8. The election of 1958 is a special case as it was held in June at short notice. Likewise, the elections of 1940 and 1944 took place under special circumstances.
9. For example, the Swedish parties, unlike most of their Western counterparts, do not have the right to broadcast presentation programs (cf. Penniman 1981). Furthermore, the Swedish political journalists are highly homogeneous, sharing basic values (Weibull 1991). Also, the high number of parties makes it hard for the parties to stage news coverage in the manner of American presidents and British prime ministers (e.g. Germond & Witcover 1989; Cockerell et al. 1985). However, most of these features are true also in Norway (cf. Björklund 1991).

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of emancipation that the parties began to lose their grip over political opinion formation.

Analytically speaking, television has changed from an effective campaign channel to an independent actor in election campaigns, nowadays having a strong influence on what issues are actually to be discussed. The development may have gone further in Sweden than in most other Western countries.⁹ However, the problems of the Swedish parties are not totally unique. If the parties do not find adequate countermeasures, a new period in the campaign history may be underway – the period of media dominated campaigns.

NOTES

1. The introduction of loudspeakers made life easier for both spectators and agitators. It is unclear how many spectators could actually hear the agitators at Social Democratic mass meetings during the early years. For agitators, however, bronchial catarrh used to be an occupational disease.
2. It is the ordinary MPs that shoulder the main burden for these numerous short speeches, while the more traditional and carefully arranged campaign meetings that still take place are left to the party leaders (Holmberg & Esaiasson 1988).
3. The mass attendance at campaign meetings – and the following decline in interest – is a common phenomenon internationally, see e.g. Britain, Italy and the US (Butler 1990; Penniman 1978; Dinkin 1989; cf. Asp et al. 1987; Björklund 1991).
4. This negative view of organized personal contacts seems to be a common feature in the Nordic countries (e.g. Valen & Katz 1964; Pesonen 1968; Asp et al. 1987). Interestingly, the Anglo-Saxon tradition is quite different in this respect (e.g. Harrop & Miller 1987). In Ireland, a MP who *does not* conduct personal canvassing is heavily criticized (e.g. Katz 1980; Gallagher & Sinnott 1990).
5. According to opinion polls, the number of voters following the debate between the party leaders that traditionally end the Swedish election campaigns was as high in 1946 and 1948 as in the 1980s (about 70 percent).
6. The distinction between power over the voters and power over the media is taken from Asp (1986) (cf. Katz 1971).
7. As late as the 1980s, the press showed tendencies to favor their 'own party' and 'own party bloc' in the news coverage (most of all the Center Party press, thereafter the Social Democratic press and the Conservative press) (Asp 1990).
8. The election of 1958 is a special case as it was held in June at short notice. Likewise, the elections of 1940 and 1944 took place under special circumstances.
9. For example, the Swedish parties, unlike most of their Western counterparts, do not have the right to broadcast presentation programs (cf. Penniman 1981). Furthermore, the Swedish political journalists are highly homogeneous, sharing basic values (Weibull 1991). Also, the high number of parties makes it hard for the parties to stage news coverage in the manner of American presidents and British prime ministers (e.g. Germond & Witcover 1989; Cockerell et al. 1985). However, most of these features are true also in Norway (cf. Björklund 1991).

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