

*Trespassing the Threshold of Relevance: Media  
Exposure and Opinion Polls of the Sweden  
Democrats, 2006-2010*

*Traspassando el umbral de la relevancia: exposición  
mediática y encuestas de opinión sobre el partido Sweden  
Democrats, 2006-2010*

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ABSTRACT

Democratic theory seldom meets democratic practice and fluctuations in public opinion and media representations of the same political actor do not easily converge. In September 2010, Sweden's anti-immigration party, the Sweden Democrats (SD), crossed the electoral threshold to participate in Sweden's parliament and it has continued to grow. In this article, we analyze the effect of media exposure on fluctuations in opinion polls for political parties, or the *media effect*. Our results show the media effect is more important for SD than for other parliamentary parties. Media exposure sometimes matters, but not to the same degree everywhere and not necessarily at the same time.

KEYWORDS

OPINION POLLS, POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES (RRPs), PUBLIC  
OPINION, THE MEDIA, THE SWEDEN DEMOCRATS (SD)

## RESUMEN

La teoría democrática rara vez se ajusta a las prácticas democráticas y las fluctuaciones de la opinión pública rara vez coinciden con la cobertura de ese mismo actor político en los medios de comunicación. En septiembre de 2010, el partido anti-inmigración sueco, los Sweden Democrats (SD), superaron el límite electoral necesario para participar en el parlamento de Suecia y su popularidad no ha cesado de crecer. En este artículo, analizamos el efecto que tiene la exposición mediática en las fluctuaciones de las encuestas de opinión sobre los partidos políticos, o el llamado *efecto mediático*. Nuestros resultados muestran que el efecto mediático es más intenso en el caso del SD que en el de otros partidos parlamentarios. La exposición mediática repercute en ocasiones, pero no en el mismo grado ni necesariamente en el mismo momento.

## PALABRAS CLAVE

ENCUESTAS DE OPINIÓN, PARTIDOS POPULISTAS DE DERECHA RADICAL (RRPs), OPINIÓN PÚBLICA, MEDIOS DE COMUNICACIÓN, SWEDEN DEMOCRATS (SD)

Ideally, there is a perfect match between media representations and opinion poll fluctuations for political parties.<sup>1</sup> The public's attitudes should, theoretically, be reflected by political parties. The parties' views should then be disseminated to the public through mainstream media. However, the debate on immigration is highly sensitive and democratic practices do not always live up to the often-proud declarations. The paradoxes between theory and practice, latent in representative democratic governance, are often evident in relation to topics of immigration and anti-immigration parties.

Since the 1950s, immigration to Sweden has been substantial and has become increasingly diverse, inducing strong political debate from time to time. Many European countries have similar experiences, with various political reactions, prompting scholars to explain why anti-immigrant opinions thrive in some countries but not in others. For instance, in Denmark (Hervik 2011) and the Netherlands (Koopmans et al. 2005), the mobilization against immigration and the resistance towards multiculturalism impinges on governmental politics. With the exception of the recently-elected Sweden Democrats (SD) who argue for strong reductions in immigration, Sweden has partisan consensus on the immigration issue. SD's challenge to Swedish politics epitomizes the latent tensions between theory and practice in representative

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democratic politics: the voters increasingly feel attracted to SD, but the party remains isolated.

In this article, we study the correlation between media exposure and opinion poll fluctuations during the period that preceded the national elections in 2010 (2006-2010) to assess the entry of a so-called Populist Radical Right Party (RRP)<sup>2</sup> in Sweden's Parliament. Prior to the 2010 election, SD in Sweden was considered an exception in Western Europe (Arter 2010); in many other countries, RRP had already made headway (e.g. the Danish People's Party in Denmark and Front National in France).

The aim of this article is to analyze the effect of media exposure on fluctuations in opinion polls for political parties, or the *media effect*. More specifically, we wish to examine the extent to which there is a correlation between media exposure and opinion poll fluctuations. We speculate that a particular media threshold is crossed once the mainstream press recognizes a «new» political party. Moreover, we predict that any new political party needs to cross the media threshold to gain enough votes to also subsequently cross the electoral threshold to the national parliament. Given this, we hypothesize that there is a selective media effect, that is, the degree of media exposure affects the opinion poll fluctuations for SD but not for other Swedish political parties represented in the parliament between the national elections of 2006 and 2010. Second, we hypothesize that the media exposure in the region of Scania -where SD was already an established party in 2006 having crossed the regional media threshold- has comparatively less effect on SD opinion polls during this period.

We are aware that the causality can go in either direction; hence, our analysis seeks to establish a correlation. Whereas other factors might affect the electoral fortunes of individual parties, these need to be communicated through the press.

## I. SWEDEN BELONGS TO THE SWEDES

Even though Swedish journalists wrote extensively on SD after its initial breakthrough in the 2006 elections, international interest has hitherto been modest,<sup>3</sup> mainly devoted to explaining the relative failure of SD to foster a

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2 In the literature, there are many labels attached to this family of motley parties united in its resistance of multiculturalism and generous policies of immigration. The label RRP, though certainly not contested, is frequently used.

3 For instance Ellinas (2010, 10-11) depicts SD as «a small Far Rightist group».

*negative* politicization of the immigration issue (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008; Rydgren 2010; Art 2011).

SD developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s from an organization of angry young men with clear neo-Nazi influences to a party today for the prudent, ordinary worker, attracting voters from all other parties (Sannerstedt 2008). During its history, its extreme views were abandoned and extremist party members were occasionally removed. SD now claims to represent the common man and advocates a limited immigration policy and tougher policies regarding integration (compared to mainstream parties). SD defers any integration measures, which are to be substituted by various assimilation strategies.

## II. NEW PARTIES AND NEW ISSUES

Recent research on populist radical right parties (RRPs) (Bornschieer 2010) suggests increased scholarly attention to the political competition of voters and the salience of the immigration issue in an attempt to understand the emergence and further development of RRP, as opposed to merely focusing on the demand for such parties following, for example, periods of crisis. Some argue (e.g. Norris 2005) that to explain RRP's challenge to established party hierarchies scholars need to emphasize the political opportunity structures in the electoral market.

First, scholars agree that new political parties mobilize voters around issues not addressed by mainstream parties. Much of post-war politics was shaped around the socio-economic division between the left (likely to accept an active welfare state) and the right (prone to accept more market-oriented solutions). However, following, for instance, the rise of the Green movement (Inglehart 1990), the politicization of identity politics (Hervik 2011), and the moralization of politics (Mouffe 2005), the socio-cultural axis of political competition gained prominence. Ellinas (2010) recognizes a socio-cultural shift in many stable democracies toward a polarization between, on the one hand, those who embrace post-material values and, thus who are inclined to pursue a political agenda that rests on cultural pluralism, and, on the other hand, those who resist such views and instead find preferences for cultural protectionism. Recently, scholars have contended that the two axes of political competition need to be redefined and increasingly related to one another (Häusermann and Kriesi 2011).

Second, the convergence of the established parties in political space provides yet another favorable opportunity structure for new competitors. Recently, van Biezen et al. (2012) argued that traditional parties suffer from membership losses and electoral drops because they face difficulties answering the shifting

demands of the electorate. Mouffe (2005) links the social democratic turn to the political center and the abundance of conflicts along the socio-economic axis to the recent electoral fortunes by RRPs. The convergence at the center thus provides opportunities for new political parties to occupy the position of political underdog.

Third, the way mainstream parties react to the progress of RRPs constitutes a separate political opportunity structure. Bale et al. (2010) show how the social democratic parties, traditionally split between progressive and conservative voters, have responded with significantly diverse approaches to the challenge of RPP parties: to *maintain* their initial «generous» approach, to *defuse* the immigration issue, or to *adopt* RPP policies, among others.

SD thrives on popular demands for more restrictive immigration policies, yet it articulates rather mainstream views on socio-economic issues (see e.g. Sannerstedt 2008). To date, the other seven parties in Sweden are careful to not be associated with SD; a loosening up of the moral distance towards SD risks credibility losses and the mainstream parties risk being accused of stealing (back) SD votes (Hellström 2010). According to Rydgren (2010), this resistance has motivated a strategy of *cordon sanitaire*. Thus, there is a convergence at the political center concerning the immigration issue to defer any influence of SD in national politics.

While mainstream parties and the mainstream press ultimately reject the challenge of SD, Sweden now faces a new political contender grand enough to be taken seriously – a strategy of silence is no longer feasible, if it ever was. Thus far SD's influence is limited to the moralization of political language and to the increased polarization of the immigration issue. Whether or not this will lead to increased politicization is unclear.

To determine the extent to which SD manages to take advantage of the available political opportunity structures – that is, the re-alignment from socio-economic divisions to socio-cultural issues, the convergence between the blocs, and the strategies adopted by mainstream parties to counter their political adversary – to gain further electoral success, we need to consider both the correlation between the media and voting behavior and the ability to cross the media threshold.

### III. MEDIA EXPOSURE AND VOTING BEHAVIOR

Zaller (1992) develops a model for explaining how people convert political information into political preferences. The argument goes that individual

media consumers, based on, for example, their normative presuppositions and degree of political awareness, do not start formulating opinions on SD until the mainstream press starts engaging with SD as a relevant political actor. The relative significance given to SD in the mainstream press thus, potentially, motivates the individual media consumer (and voter) to formulate an opinion on SD.

Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup (2008) claim the media plays a less dominant role in explaining why the RRP's improve their electoral fortunes after their initial breakthroughs. This may be correct, as seen in the Danish case. However, to explain SD's entry into the Swedish national parliament in 2010, there is reason to believe that a closer look at the media effect is potentially illuminating. In line both with Ellinas (2010, 18), who states, «[m]edia exposure can push minor parties into mainstream debate, give them visibility, and legitimate their claims», and with Rydgren (2005, 255), who suggests there is a lack of research devoted to the role of mass media in explaining RRP's, our analysis of the electoral fortunes of SD in relation to its media exposure emphasizes the media effect in the political competition of the votes.

Recently, Ellinas (2010) gave a systematic account of the role of the media and the rise of the «far right» in countries like France and Germany. His analysis offers a temporal dimension to explain both why and when certain RRP's make headway.

Ellinas relies on the Sartorian notion of «threshold of relevance», which is based on the premise that «once parties become electorally relevant, their electoral fortunes are determined by different factors than before» (2010, 15). He thus suggests a two-stage approach: before and after the initial electoral breakthrough. In the first stage, before RRP's have grown large enough to play a central role in the electoral market, it is most appropriate to focus on the reactions of mainstream parties. However, once the party has crossed the threshold of relevance, it is likely to temper its claims to address a broader audience, and mainstream parties find it more difficult to ignore these claims.

Faced with internal ruptures and the lack of a solid organizational base, the party is a likely candidate to become a «flash phenomenon» (see e.g. Taggart 2002), and thus abruptly suffer from significant drops in its electoral support. Many of these «new» parties mobilize voters around an anti-establishment agenda that helps them to cross the initial electoral threshold. Once in parliament, it is difficult to maintain this underdog position as they are now part of the establishment. In turn, at this stage, the role of the media subsides in importance.

Nevertheless, the threshold of relevance, in our view, does not perfectly match with the crossing of the electoral threshold to the national parliament.

Instead, we suggest an extension of Ellinas' approach and introduce three phases of development to better match the Swedish case. Art (2011, 11 n. 7) presents a similar argument with references to Front National, for example, and defines the breakthrough of a new party as the moment it receives enough votes to attract the attention of the media and forces the political contenders to respond to its activities.

In our case, then, the first stage corresponds to the period before 2006 when SD had very limited media exposure (Hellström and Nilsson 2010). The second stage takes place between 2006 and 2010 when media interest escalated and when mainstream political parties started to be concerned about the presence of SD. The third stage occurs after 2010 when SD crossed the electoral threshold and into Sweden's *Riksdag* (the Swedish parliament). In the analysis, we will focus on the correlation between media exposure and SD's voting poll fluctuations during the second stage (between 2006 and 2010).

We do not suggest the quantitative media effect alone determines the electoral fortunes for new parliamentary parties -the dynamics of the relation between public opinion and public discourse is not reducible to one explanatory factor-. However, in our view the correlation between public opinion, measured through voting poll fluctuations, and media exposure, measured as visibility in the mainstream press, is potentially illuminating.

#### IV. MATERIAL, METHOD, AND HYPOTHESES

Our aim is to discern the correlation between the opinion poll results that are conducted every month and the number of references to SD in newspaper articles by the most important newspapers in Sweden. Were SD's opinion poll and election results affected by the media attention during the period October 2006-September 2010?

We answer this by utilizing two data sources. First, we examine the monthly average of all the opinion polls conducted by different opinion poll companies in Sweden from October 2006 to September 2010.<sup>4</sup> Second, we detail the number of newspaper articles with references to SD published by the six leading newspapers all of which are recorded through the Swedish digital media archive, *Mediearkivet* (2010).

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<sup>4</sup> We are grateful to Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson for granting us access to the opinion poll data. The «poll of polls» is the weighted means of the polls conducted by five different poll institutes.



The monthly opinion poll figure used in this article is an aggregate of all opinion polls conducted in that particular month. We used the actual election outcome for September 2010. In addition, we created data series for all eight political parties that crossed the electoral threshold in the 2010 elections.

The statistics on the number of newspaper articles written on a particular party are based on monthly searches in the Swedish digital media archive filtered by newspaper and by political party. We do this by matching key words (the names of all political parties represented in the parliament after 2010) in the media archive. A single article might include references to more than one party. Our material is based on the six leading newspapers in Sweden, determined by their circulation rate (Mediefakta 2010). According to Strömbeck and Aalberg (2008, 95), Sweden belongs to a «Democratic Corporatist Model», which alludes to a historical coexistence of commercial and public media tied to particular social and political groups with a legally limited, though relatively active, role of the state (ibid, 92). The newspapers in Sweden, traditionally split along the classic left-right continuum, have for the most part broken their formal ties to political parties allowing a majority of the newspapers to claim that they are «independently liberal».<sup>5</sup>

Our analysis does not engage with the normative claims addressed in the news material, though previous research shows that all the dominant newspapers share a negative view toward SD (Hellström and Nilsson 2010) after the 2010 national elections. Our sample consists of the two largest tabloids, *Expressen* and *Aftonbladet* (*Exp* and *AB*); two Stockholm-centered, yet nationwide newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* (*DN*) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (*SvD*); and two regionally based newspapers, (*Göteborgs-Posten*) (*GP*) in the Gothenburg region and *Sydsvenskan* (*SDS*) in the Scania region.

The media market faces increased competition and many people now access news material via the Internet or free dailies. Many more use various channels of social media to communicate actively or to passively receive opinions and news regarding current socio-political affairs. According to Strömbeck, the main function of social media in partisan politics is to attract new members and to organize party activists to pursue common tasks. However hitherto, social media has had a very limited effect on electoral performance (Strömbeck 27 April 2010).

To ensure reliability, we contacted the editors-in-chief, political editors, or news editors of these six newspapers.<sup>6</sup> The respondents were asked to estimate

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<sup>5</sup> Four newspapers in our material are independently liberal (*DN*, *EXP*, *GP*, and *SDS*). *AB* is Social-Democratic and *SvD* is conservative-liberal.

<sup>6</sup> In sum, we received seven responses, either in written form or over the telephone.



whether they had published more, less, or the same amount of articles on SD, relative to its size, compared to other political parties.

The media effect should remain equally significant for all similar-sized parties, if they receive an equal amount of exposure in the mainstream press. However, if we acknowledge Ellinas, the media effect is more salient for parties on the verge of crossing the electoral threshold. SD, described as xenophobic by some of the interviewees, and its gradual boost in the opinion polls motivate us to formulate the first hypothesis:

1) *The degree of media exposure is not a significant factor in determining the electoral fortunes of already established political parties, yet there is a selective media effect for SD, reflected in the 2006-2010 monthly opinion polls.*

In addition, we anticipate a three-step temporal model to explain spatial varieties in SD's electoral performance. The degree of media exposure is not equally important in all newspapers; it shifts by region. In the 2006 national elections, SD scored approximately 1 percent below the electoral threshold. Even if our data sample does not involve opinion polls for Scania specifically, there is reason to believe the readers of the Scania regional newspaper *Sydsvenskan* (SDS) were already acquainted with SD by 2006 due to the electoral results in Scania. Given this, we argue that SD had already crossed the media threshold in Scania by 2006, suggesting the correlation between the media exposure of SD in the regional newspaper SDS should have already evaporated. Our second hypothesis is the following:

2) *The media effect is less significant for SD in the regional newspaper Sydsvenskan as reflected in the 2006-2010 monthly opinion polls.*

In the next section, we will compare the parliamentary parties' opinion poll results with the number of articles published in the six largest newspapers in Sweden. To establish a connection between opinion poll results and the media attention for a particular party, we correlate these two data sources in three ways.

First, we correlate the first differences of monthly opinion poll levels of a political party with the first differences (FD) of the number of published articles in the same month. Second, we analyzed the data to determine whether SD is mentioned more often in the media during one month, is connected to an increase in the opinion polls for the party in the following month. Third, in order to investigate the extent to which the published articles affect SD's opinion poll-rates, we conducted an ordinary least square (OLS) regression analysis. We ran a regression analysis for each newspaper

including FD series and lagged series as well as an analysis including all series for all newspapers.<sup>7</sup> Whereas the first analysis is conducted to establish the effect of each individual newspaper, the second analysis aims to detect which newspaper has the largest impact of all the analyzed newspapers. Finally, we conducted a sensitivity analysis to determine whether the measured effect in the regressions is due to both the opinion poll and the media exposure increasing during the months preceding the election (i.e. an electoral campaign effect), we ran multivariate regression analysis, excluding the last two months before the election.

## V. ANALYSIS

A first look at the descriptives reveals that only two parties were close to the electoral threshold during the period, namely, KD and Sweden Democrats (SD) (figure 1 in the appendix). Four parties reached polls between 4 and 8 percent, while the two major parties scored more than 20 percent each. The Green Party -which eventually became the third largest party in the 2010 national elections- performed somewhat better in the polls than the other parties in the year preceding the election.

Table 1 (see appendix) shows that most articles were connected to the two largest parties, the Moderate Party and the Social Democrats, between 2006 and 2010. The Green Party generated more media exposure than the other smaller parties. The two parties that circulated close to the electoral threshold in the opinion polls, SD and KD, have approximately the same number of article mentions, whereas FP and V occupy the middle ground, each attracted around 140 articles per month.<sup>8</sup> *Sydsvenskan*, based in Malmö in the southern parts

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7 We used Vector Autoregressive Models for establishing the causal direction. The analysis showed that media increase resulted in a higher opinion poll rating for SD. The number of lags for each individual newspaper was up to four lags. The analysis for each newspaper is in accordance with this, showing that several newspapers had significant coefficients for lagged series (table 3). However, the results of the analysis including all newspapers showed significant results only for the one lag series (table 4).

8 The outlier in the data is the Centre party (C), which is substantially lower than for the other parties. The results display certain linguistic complexities. There are other parties in Europe labeled «social-democratic» or «the Christian democrats» so our sample risked incorporating non-Swedish parties in the sample net. This is rarely the case with the Centre party, Moderaterna or the Sweden Democrats. The alternative procedure would be to use the party abbreviations instead of the full names; however, this search technique showed to be even more flawed as the Center Party shared the same abbreviation (C) as the main attacker in e.g. an ice-hockey team.

of the country, is the newspaper that by far publishes the most articles on any political party and in particular on SD.

Our primary focus is on SD's opinion poll development and media exposure over time. Figure 2 (see appendix) displays an increasing trend over time where both outliers above the trend are connected to two specific events in this period. The first event relates to an article published by SD's party leader, Jimmie Åkesson, in an evening tabloid, *Aftonbladet*, on 19 October 2009. In the article, Åkesson claims, «Muslims are the largest threat to Swedish society». In October 2009, SD's opinion poll elevated above the electoral threshold for the first time (to 4.4 percent), increasing to 5.4 percent in November 2009. The percentage gradually dropped to earlier levels, just below the threshold, in the months that followed. The second event is the elections, when SD's opinion polls approached the position of tipping the scales in favor of either political bloc.

Figure 3 (see appendix) shows the number of news articles with references to SD in the six newspapers in the studied period. Here, we observe a weak positive trend toward more newspaper articles, including for SD, over time. The trend has three peaks. The first occurred in October 2006, the month after the 2006 elections, which saw SD gaining several seats in a number of municipalities. The second peak was in October 2009, when Jimmie Åkesson published the aforementioned article in *Aftonbladet*. The third peak occurred in connection with the elections in August-September 2010, when the number of articles increased dramatically for all the parties (see Fig. 2 and 3).

Summarizing the descriptive results, SD's opinion polls and the number of articles appear to be connected toward a positive trend. Moreover, on two occasions, both the opinion polls and the number of articles published peaked at the same time in the studied period. In the following section, we study more closely the connection between SD's opinion polls and the number of articles written on SD, correlating the first differences from the SD trend. Moreover, by studying other parties that are close to the electoral threshold and the number of articles published on these parties, we try to validate the results established for SD.

Table 2 shows the correlation results between the two variables: opinion polls and published newspaper articles connected to the different parties for all newspapers together and for each individual newspaper. Few correlation coefficients are positive and significant. However, both the strongest correlations and the number of significant correlations are measured for SD. In particular, articles that were published the previous month are more strongly correlated to SD's opinion polls than articles in the same month.

Concerning the correlation coefficients between SD's opinion polls and the six newspapers, the results show that the correlations with the leading na-

tional newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, are positive and significant (0.29 and 0.50). Concerning the national evening tabloid *Expressen*, we also find positive and significant correlations with the variable published newspaper articles on SD and the lagged variant of this variable (0.34 and 0.39). The national newspaper *Svenska Dagbladet* shows only one significant correlation between published articles and the opinion polls (0.42). The two newspapers *Aftonbladet* and *Göteborgs-Posten* have positive but insignificant correlations with the variable displaying published news articles on SD with the trend. Finally, the regional newspaper *Sydsvenskan* had just one positive and significant correlation coefficient: the lagged series of published newspapers on SD (0.45).

If we scrutinize the tables for the other parliamentary parties in Sweden, and their correlation coefficients with the number of published articles in the studied period, we observe very few positive and significant correlation coefficients. For the Green Party, we observe a negative and significant correlation of its opinion poll and articles published in the evening tabloid *Aftonbladet*. The Center Party poll is positively correlated with articles in *Sydsvenskan*. For the two largest parties, no significant correlations between opinion poll measures and published articles can be observed.

Summarizing the results, the correlations of SD's public opinion polls and the other parties with the published articles in the largest newspapers in Sweden over the years between the elections of 2006 and 2010 differ both in number and in level. The correlations between SD's opinion polls and the relative media exposure in three newspapers display a number of significant positive correlations. For the other three newspapers, at least one correlation is positive. We found fewer correlations between the opinion polls and the number of articles being published for all other parties and newspapers. Furthermore, only the correlation between SD's opinion polls and the number of articles published came close to the 0.50 correlation levels (i.e. obtained fairly strong levels). These results indicate that SD's opinion polls have been affected by the media exposure in most major newspapers in Sweden. Other parties' polls show no such effect.

To assess which newspaper most affected the opinion polls, we used an ordinary least square (OLS) regression technique to analyze the effect of newspaper articles on SD's opinion polls. In tables 3 and 4 (see appendix), the beta coefficients for separate regressions for each newspaper and one regression for all newspapers are displayed. The separate regressions, including lags up to three months before opinion poll measurement (table 3), show that all newspapers have an impact on the opinion polls of SD, in particular when we look at it one month after. All newspapers show a positive and significant coefficient for articles published a month before the opinion poll measurement. We find the strongest

effects for *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Aftonbladet* (.041 and .030) and less effect for *Dagens Nyheter* and *Expressen* (.026 and .025). The smallest effects are obtained for *Göteborgs-Posten* and *Sydsvenskan* (.020 and .013). For *SvD* and *EXP*, we find significant effects in all other lags, two and three months before the opinion poll, and for *Aftonbladet*, we find a significant effect when we lag two months. Only two newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* and *Aftonbladet*, show small but significant effects for published articles in the same month as the opinion poll measurement.

The summary of these results supports the earlier conducted correlation analysis and indicates that the opinion polls of SD are affected by media exposure. In particular, the number of articles published on SD the month before an opinion poll seems important.

In our analysis of all the newspapers in table 4, we analyzed which of the those newspapers has the most impact. It shows that *Dagens Nyheter* is the most important newspaper in the regression explaining the correlation between the media and SD's opinion polls. The reason the effect for the other newspapers is quite high but insignificant is because in this regression all series depend on each other. In terms of effect on SD's opinion polls, if *Dagens Nyheter* published ten more articles on SD, the opinion poll rose one month later by 0.2 percent. However, when *SDS* published ten more articles, the opinion poll dropped by 0.1 percent in the month the opinion poll was conducted.

To test if the measured effect in the regressions is due to the opinion poll and the media exposure increasing during the months preceding the election (i.e. an electoral campaign effect), we run OLS regressions, excluding the last two months (i.e. August and September 2010) from the whole period. The results of this analysis are shown in tables 3 and 4 in column 2, and they display similar patterns (see the appendix). This test shows that media exposure and the opinion poll for SD are only slightly affected by media exposure during the electoral campaign.

## VI. DISCUSSION

In the 2010 Swedish national elections, Sweden Democrats crossed the parliamentary threshold. A number of factors are relevant in explaining this. One of these factors, and our focus, is the degree of media exposure.

Our analysis of the number of articles published in six leading newspapers on political parties in Sweden and their opinion poll results in the period 2006-2010 shows no censoring of SD by the mainstream press; this is indicated by both the quantity of articles published and the correlation results. The correlations obtained in the number of published articles on SD and SD's opinion

polls suggest SD managed to benefit from this publicity. The few correlations between the opinion polls of the other parties and the number of articles published are an indirect indication of the *media effect* on SD's poll results and suggest that the media effect, in general, was rather limited. Our findings suggest we need to refine the belief that the media matters. In part, it does, but not always, not to the same degree, not everywhere, and not all the time. Particularly for parties that do not hold seats in the parliament, it is fundamental to get access to the media space. Thus, in the phase preceding the electoral breakthrough (referred to as the threshold of relevance), media exposure is important for the entry of new parties in the national parliament (Ellinas 2010).

The articles published by the leading newspaper for public opinion in Sweden, *Dagens Nyheter*, had a significant effect on SD's opinion polls. Ten newspaper articles more on SD, published the month preceding the opinion poll, increased the poll results for SD by 0.2 percent. We thereby conclude that the *first hypothesis* is verified. There is indeed a selected *media effect* for SD.

The regional newspaper *Sydsvenskan* reported on SD more than all the other newspapers. One explanation for this would be that in the 2006 elections, SD already crossed the electoral threshold to the regional parliament and all the municipalities in Scania. Another and related explanation is that this newspaper had a stronger incentive to publish articles on SD due to the relatively high number of electoral mandates it obtained in the region in which this newspaper is primarily read. SD had to live up to its voters' expectations, to face the realities of day-to-day politics. Our findings thus detect some regional deviances in the case of SD.

Future research will hopefully inform us as to whether or not the media effect will decrease in importance as the party stabilizes its position in the Swedish parliament. It might be that other factors such as SD's organizational capacity may increase in importance instead.

In turn, future analyses on the relation between media exposure and voting behavior also need to take into account how opinion polls fluctuate on the regional level to bring fuller justice to the potential impact of individual newspapers with regional coverage. Tentatively, our analysis shows that the media effect is less prominent in the Scania region, where SD is already a political actor, as suggested by our second hypothesis. Our findings show the threshold of relevance does not perfectly match with crossing the electoral threshold to the national parliament. Rather, the explanatory weight of the media effect shifts along regional parameters and different newspapers.

Whereas we have neither tested nor disputed the salience of other explanatory factors for the entry of Radical Right Parties (RRPs) in the national parliaments, the media effect has *some* explanatory power in its own right, if



rather limited. Our findings confirm that SD was given a fair amount of publicity in the leading newspapers between 2006 and 2010. They were discussed and known, confirming the assertion that without publicity there is no access to the electoral market for new political parties.

Our results might be interpreted as good news for traditional sources of media. The emergence of the free dailies with large circulation rates and the eruption of various forms of social media have, certainly, enhanced competition in the media market. However, to some extent, it still matters what the larger newspapers focus on in their daily news coverage and in their editorials. This has repercussions on what topics and what parties are in focus in the public debate.

In sum, the normative implication from this study does not imply the mainstream press was wrong to publish a fair amount of articles on SD in the period between the national elections. To avoid publishing articles about the SD would have been to further escalate the discrepancy between democratic theory and practice. There exists a popular demand for a party such as SD in Swedish national politics. There are anti-immigrant opinions among the Swedish populace, even if we continue to ignore them. However, the discussion is extensively polarized. In fact, more people in Sweden are gradually accepting a generous immigration policy and increased diversity (Demker 2014).

This invites further elaboration on the issue raised by Ellinas, not explicitly dealt with in our study, regarding party positioning on national identity issues as structural conditioning of the opportunities for RRP to enjoy electoral gains and remain in the national parliament. The crucial interplay between opinion poll fluctuations for parliamentary parties and media representations are worthy of further investigation, both quantitatively and qualitatively, to understand the paradoxes involved in representative politics.

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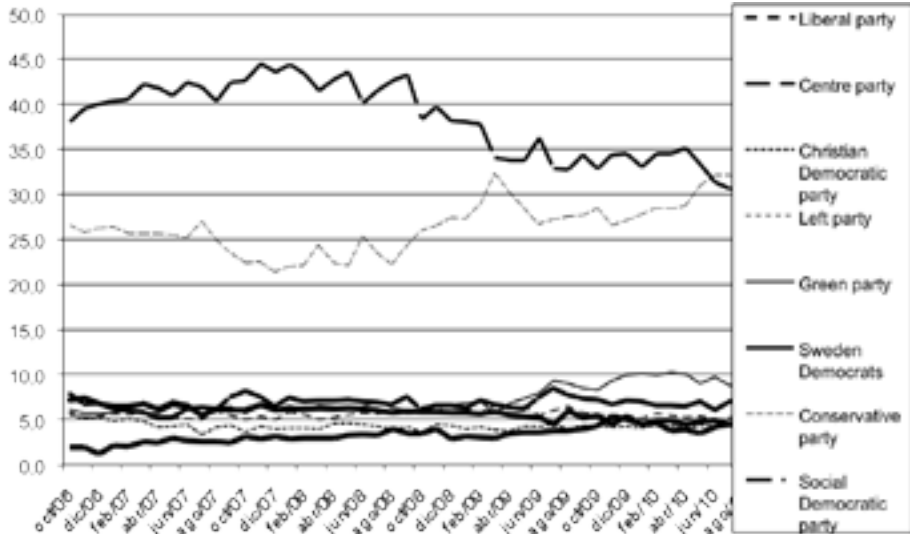
## APPENDIX

**Table 1, Number of Newspaper articles written on political parties, October 2006-September 2010**

	DN	SvD	Exp	AB	GP	SDS	Total	Articles per month
Sweden Democrats	810	495	627	479	688	1982	5081	<b>106</b>
Christian Democrats	1060	766	530	362	833	1239	4790	<b>100</b>
Green Party	1599	1232	820	546	1438	2225	7860	<b>164</b>
Centre Party	595	566	310	262	438	600	2771	<b>58</b>
Liberal Party	1315	1053	661	543	1245	1990	6807	<b>143</b>
Left Party	1322	1113	637	479	1204	1836	6591	<b>137</b>
Conservative Party	2098	1881	1473	1053	1609	3137	11251	<b>234</b>
Social Democrats	3661	2776	1904	1548	3062	4740	17691	<b>369</b>
Total	12460	9882	6962	5272	10517	17749	62842	<b>1311</b>

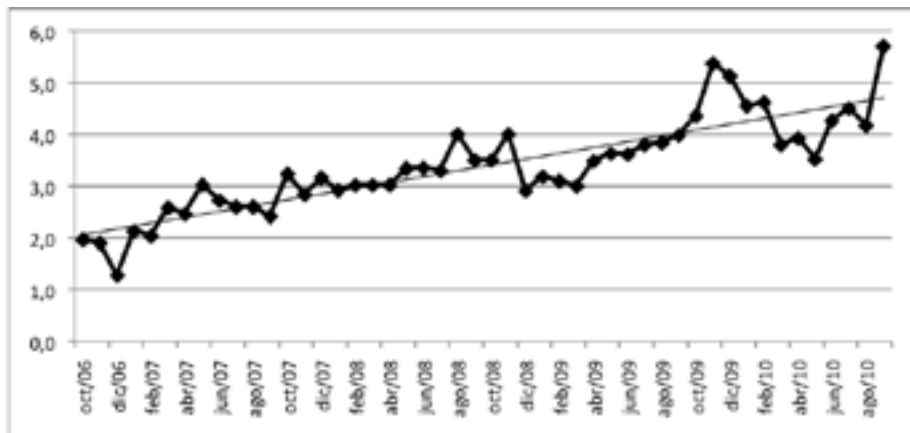
Source: Mediarkivet 2010

**Figure 1, Opinion polls results by month for Political Parties, October 2006-September 2010**



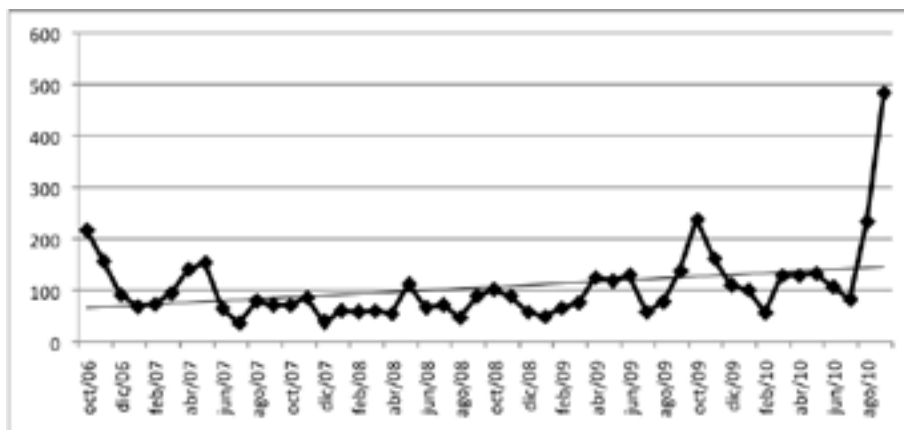
Source: Own calculations based on poll statistics 2006-2010.

**Figure 2, Opinion polls for Sweden Democrats including trend line, October 2006 – September 2010.**



Source: Poll of polls, 2010.

**Figure 3, Number of newspaper articles for Sweden Democrats including trend line, October 2006 – September 2010.**



Source: Mediarkivet, 2010.

**Table 2, Correlations between opinion polls and published articles, monthly statistics, October 2006-September 2010.**

	SD	Ch. Dem	Greens	Centre	Liberal	Left	Cons.	Soc. Dem
All articles	0.20	0.16	-0.28	-0.20	-0.02	-0.05	-0.20	0.09
All articles lagged 1 month	0.51**	0.06	-0.05	-0.07	0.17	-0.15	-0.05	-0.16
DN	0.29*	0.18	-0.21	0.07	-0.03	0.03	-0.26	0.05
DN lagged 1 month	0.50**	0.13	-0.19	0.20	0.17	-0.13	-0.05	-0.10
SvD	0.05	0.06	-0.08	0.08	0.11	-0.25	-0.06	-0.08
SvD lagged 1 month	0.42**	0.18	-0.07	0.03	0.12	0.12	-0.06	-0.22
Exp	0.34*	-0.01	-0.36*	-0.19	-0.14	0.06	-0.11	-0.01
Exp lagged 1 month	0.39*	0.07	0.06	0.03	0.09	-0.04	-0.08	-0.08
AB	0.23	0.00	-0.37**	0.00	-0.11	0.06	-0.16	0.02
AB lagged 1 month	0.23	-0.02	0.19	0.02	0.05	-0.10	-0.13	-0.05
GP	0.22	0.28	-0.11	0.05	-0.06	-0.06	-0.18	0.01
GP lagged 1 month	0.25	-0.23	-0.09	-0.18	0.25	-0.15	0.03	0.03
SDS	-0.04	0.12	-0.24	0.42**	-0.02	-0.18	-0.22	0.20
SDS lagged 1 month	0.45**	0.16	0.02	-0.32	0.10	0.00	-0.01	-0.28

Source: Poll of polls and Mediarkivet, 2010.

Significance: \* = 0.1, \*\* = 0.05, \*\*\* = 0.01

**Table 3, OLS on opinion poll for Sweden Democrats,  
October 2006-July/September 2010**

	October 2006-September 2010	October 2006-July 2010
	Regression by newspaper	Regression by newspaper
DN	.008*	.008
DN lagged 1 month	.026***	.024**
DN lagged 2 months	.004	.004
DN lagged 3 months	.006	.005
SvD	.012	.005
SvD lagged 1 month	.041***	.031***
SvD lagged 2 months	.024**	.020*
SvD lagged 3 months	.018*	.016
EXP	.016**	.014*
EXP lagged 1 month	.025***	.023***
EXP lagged 2 months	.016**	.014*
EXP lagged 3 months	.017**	.016
AB	.015**	.007
AB lagged 1 month	.030***	.021**
AB lagged 2 months	.025**	.021*
AB lagged 3 months	.016	.011
GP	.009	.008
GP lagged 1 months	.021**	.012
GP lagged 2 months	.007	.004
GP lagged 3 months	.007	.005
SDS	-.002	-.007*
SDS lagged 1 month	.013***	.008*
SDS lagged 2 months	.004	.003
SDS lagged 3months	-.006	-.006

Source: Poll of polls and Mediearkivet, 2010.

Significance: \* = 0.1, \*\* = 0.05, \*\*\* = 0.01

**Table 4, OLS on opinion poll for Sweden Democrats, Two periods:  
October 2006 – July/September 2010**

	Regression including all newspapers	Regression including all newspapers
DN	.001	.001
DN lagged 1 month	.023**	.022*
SvD	-0.14	-0.13
SvD lagged 1 month	.013	.013
Exp	.013	.013
Exp lagged 1 month	.015	.015
AB	.016	.016
AB lagged 1 month	-.020	-.020
GP	.000	.000
GP lagged 1 month	-.003	-.004
SDS	-.011**	-.011**
SDS lagged 1 month	.001	.002

Source: Poll of polls and Mediearkivet, 2010.

Significance: \* = 0.1, \*\* = 0.05, \*\*\* = 0.01

