

Bevelander, Pieter; Hellström, Anders

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Trespassing the threshold of relevance: Media exposure and opinion polls of the Sweden democrats, 2006-2010

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Media Exposure and Opinion Polls of the
Sweden Democrats, 2006-2010**

Pieter Bevelander
Anders Hellström

October 2011

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Pieter Bevelander

*MIM, Malmö University
and IZA*

Anders Hellström

MIM, Malmö University

Discussion Paper No. 6011
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IZA

P.O. Box 7240
53072 Bonn
Germany

Phone: +49-228-3894-0

Fax: +49-228-3894-180

E-mail: iza@iza.org

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ABSTRACT

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

In September 2010 the anti-immigration party, the Sweden Democrats (SD), crossed the electoral threshold to the Swedish parliament (*Riksdagen*) for the first time with 5.7 percent of the total votes. The aim of this article is to analyze the effect of the media exposure on fluctuations in opinion polls for political parties; i.e. the *media effect*. In particular to what extent this can explain the electoral fortunes of the SD. We correlate the number of articles published in the print media with the results of the SD opinion polls as well as the opinion poll results of all the other parliamentary parties during a 48 month period, from the month after the 2006 elections (October 2006) up to September 2010. Our results show that the *media effect* is more important for the SD compared to the other parliamentary parties, similar in size. The *media effect* also differs between the six newspapers put into scrutiny in this study, the leading daily *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) had a considerably stronger effect on the opinion fluctuations, compared to the other five newspapers. To conclude, media exposure sometimes matters, especially for 'new parties', but neither to the same degree everywhere nor at the same time. Ultimately, our findings show that the threshold of relevance does not perfectly match with the crossing of the electoral threshold to the national parliament, as suggested in the literature to explain the electoral fortunes of new anti-immigration parties prior to their entry into parliament.

JEL Classification: Z10

Keywords: Populist Radical Right Parties (RPP), The Sweden Democrats (SD), public opinion, opinion polls

Corresponding author:

Pieter Bevelander
MIM
Malmö University
205 06 Malmö
Sweden
E-mail: pieter.bevelander@mah.se

INTRODUCTION

Since the second half of the 19th century the immigration to Sweden has been substantial.ⁱ In 2010 the Swedish immigrant population consists of approximately 14 percent foreign born individuals and another four percent with two parents born abroad. Politically, immigration to Sweden was in the 1950s and 1960s a means to neutralize labour shortage in the industrial sector. The following decades, 1970s, 1980s and the 1990s, with increased need for assistance to the world refugee situation, Sweden was among the industrial countries with the highest per capita intake of refugees. In addition, Sweden has one of the most liberal family reunion policies. Recapitulating the integration diachronically, the adaption of immigrants and their descendants, in particular economically, have been positive during the first decades after the Second World War, but decreased gradually since the 1970s. This weakening integration, especially into the labour market, but also into other segments of society, has been a great puzzle over the last decades.

For many European countries a similar development can be observed, but the political reactions to this situation, has been quite different and prompted scholars to explain why in some countries anti-immigrant opinions thrive, and not in others (see e.g. Mudde 2007; Ivarsflaten 2008). In countries such as Denmark (Hervik 2011) or the Netherlands (Koopmans et al. 2005), the mobilization against immigration (especially from countries perceived as culturally remote) and the resistance towards multiculturalism impinges on governmental politics. Sweden, on the other hand, is structured along a partisan consensus on the immigration issue with the exception of the most recent parliamentary party, the Sweden Democrats (SD). The SD wishes to limit immigration to Sweden, a cut up to 90 percent of current flows according to a recent budget proposal (Sverigedemokraterna 2010). The other

seven parliamentary parties, who managed to cross the electoral threshold of four percent in the 2010 elections, unanimously, reject the strong immigration-skeptic stance of the SD.

AIM OF THE STUDY

This article devotes full attention to the correlation between the media exposure and opinion poll fluctuations during the period that preceded the national elections in 2010, i.e. 2006-2010, assessing the entry of a so-called Populist Radical Right Party (RPP)ⁱⁱ in the Swedish parliament. Sweden was before the 2010 elections referred to as an exemption in Western Europe, elsewhere the RPP parties already had made headway. Following Ellinas (2010, 3) we assume the media to ‘control the gateway to the electoral market’. Without publicity, negative or positive, it is not possible for a new political party outside the parliament to gain enough votes to secure seats in the assembly. The aim of this article is to analyze the effect of media exposure on fluctuations in opinion polls for political parties; i.e. the *media effect*. In particular to what extent this could explain the SD entry into the national parliament (*Riksdagen*). More precise, we hypothesize that there is a selective *media effect*, i.e. the degree of media exposure affects the opinion poll fluctuations for the SD, but not for the other Swedish political parties represented in the parliament in the period between the national elections 2006 and 2010. Second, we hypothesize that the media exposure in the region of Skåne, where the SD already was an established party in 2006, has less effect on the SD opinion poll in this period.

SWEDEN BELONGS TO THE SWEDES

The scholarly interest in the SD outside Sweden has only recently gained speed. Before the 2010 elections, Sweden was typically referred to as an exception in Europe and also in more recent literature, such as Ellinas (2010), the SD is referred to as ‘a small Far Rightist group’

(10-11). Although Swedish journalists wrote extensively on the SD after its initial relative breakthrough in the 2006 elections, the international interest has hitherto been quite modest and mainly devoted to explain the relative failure of the SD to bring about a *negative* politization of the immigration issue (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008; Rydgren 2010; Art 2011).

The SD slogan before the 2010 elections read: ‘Give us Sweden back’ (Sverigedemokraterna 2010). They long back to a more homogenous Sweden [the heartland] before what they refer to as the ‘mass immigration’ gained hold.ⁱⁱⁱ This emphasis on Sweden as *the heartland* - now threatened by foreign ideas and foreign people causing societal ruptures, therefore in need of protection - shaped the SD party programs from the start in the late 1980s up to now.

The SD has developed from a loud organization of angry young men with clear Neo-Nazi tinges (with e.g. tentacles to the extreme right movement White Arian Resistance) to try becoming a party for the prudent ordinary worker, attracting voters from all the other parties - including those who abstain from voting (Holmberg 2007; Sannerstedt 2008). During its history, extremist views have been abandoned (such as the death penalty and resistance towards extra-European adoptions) and extremist party members, occasionally, being kicked out. The SD now says to represent the *common man*, to advocate a much more limited immigration policy (in their view, the Swedish immigration policy is extreme and they say to share the only responsible alternative in line with the Danish policy) and tougher policies regarding integration. The SD defers any integration measures, to be substituted by various assimilation strategies; i.e. all are welcome to become Swedes, but all the non-natives also *must* become ‘Swedes’.

The SD refers to the days of the Social Democratic Sweden under Prime Minister Tage Erlander; this was the People's Home at its best and *the heartland* they wish to restore (Hellström and Nilsson 2010). This is according to SD perceptions, yet also a view held by other voters who today might be troubled by the relative deterioration of the welfare-state and the global competition on the labour market. According to the SD, current labour immigration should be curtailed to very few people, with skills not available within the borders of the country (Sverigedemokraterna 2010).

The SD does not presuppose certain ethnic groups or cultures to hold superior or inferior qualities compared with others, yet they maintain that the difference between Swedes and the non-Swedes is impermeable and thus incommensurable. In this view - referred to as ethno-pluralism (Rydgren 2007), nativism (Mudde 2007) or cultural racism (Taguieff 1990) - all people share particular loyalties to their respective country of origin.

NEW PARTIES AND NEW ISSUES

The SD entry into the national parliament came rather late. Scholars try to explain why for instance the Danish People's Party (DP) managed to consolidate a stable position in Danish politics - since 2001 it has acted as a supporting party for the mainstream right government - whereas no equivalent party has made such breakthrough in Swedish politics. Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup (2008) argue that the different strategic situation of the mainstream right parties and the salience of the immigration issue explain the progress of the DP in Denmark, and the relative failure of the SD in Sweden. Also the re-alignment process (the shift to the socio-cultural cleavage structure dimension) is comparatively more salient in Denmark, leaving a confused and ideologically disoriented Danish Social Democratic Party poorly equipped to avoid losing working-class votes to the DP. In this regard, Jens Rydgren (2010)

shows that countries yet dominated by socio-economic cleavages provide less political opportunities for the RPPs to thrive on their anti-immigration and cultural protectionist agenda.

Recent research on the RPP parties (Bale et al. 2010; Rydgren 2010) thus suggest increased scholarly attention to the political competition of the voters and the salience of the immigration issue, to understand the emergence and further development of the RPP parties, rather than a mere focus on the demand for such parties, following e.g. periods of crisis. There is e.g. no clear significant correlation between e.g. levels of unemployment, slow economic growth or ethnic heterogeneity and the electoral fortunes of the RPP parties (Rydgren 2007). For instance, the size of the immigration population does not match well with high levels of anti-immigrant sentiments (Sprague-Jones 2010). While the RPP parties certainly attract more politically discontent voters than others, this does not help to explain why protest voters turn to the RPP parties and not to other system-critical parties.

To explain the RPP challenge to established party hierarchies, then, scholars need to emphasize the political opportunity structures in the electoral market, the argument goes (Rydgren 2007; Norris 2005). First, scholars converge on that new political parties mobilize voters around new issues, not enough issued by the mainstream parties. Much post-war politics was shaped around the socio-economic cleavage structure - between the left (more prone to accept an active welfare state) and the right (more prone to accept more market-oriented solutions). However, following e.g. the rise of the Green movement (Inglehart 1990), the politization of identity politics (Hervik 2011) and the moralization of politics (Mouffe 2005) the socio-cultural axis of political competition has gained ground. Ellinas (2010) recognizes this 'socio-cultural shift' in many stable democracies towards a polarization

between, on the one hand those embracing the post-material movement and thus inclined to pursue a political agenda that rests on cultural pluralism and, on the other hand, those resisting such views to instead find preferences for cultural protectionism.

Second, the convergence between the established parties in political space provides yet another favourable opportunity structure for new competitors (Rydgren 2007). Peter Mair (2004) points out that the political identities of the mainstream parties are increasingly blurred. Chantal Mouffe (2005) links the Social Democratic turn to the political centre and the abundance of the conflicts along the socio-economic axis to the recent electoral fortunes by the RPPs. In her view, the moralization of politics (politics being played out in the moral register between good versus evil (rather than solely between right and left) has taken speed due to this increased party convergence. This provides opportunities for new political contesters to occupy the position of a political underdog – protecting the wills and interests of the native population, to establish a feasible alternative to the consensual elites.

The overall structure of the political competition of the votes constitutes a third relevant opportunity structure; i.e. how the mainstream parties respond to the RPP parties. Bale et al. (2010) shows how the Social Democratic Parties, traditionally split between progressive- and conservative voters, have responded with rather different approaches to the challenge of the RPP parties, to *hold* its initial ‘generous’ approach; to *defuse* the immigration issue; to *adopt* the politics of the RPP parties. Previously, the mainstream parties in Sweden endured with the *hold*-strategy, or alternatively tried to *defuse* the immigration issue from the political agenda.

Looking at our case properly, the SD thrives on popular demands for a more restrictive immigration politics, yet it articulates rather mainstream views on socio-economic issues (see

e.g. Sannerstedt 2008). To date, the other seven parties are careful not to be associated with SD – as the card you least want on your hand in the dynamics of political competition – a loosening up of the moral distance towards SD risk credibility losses as the mainstream parties risk being accused of stealing (back) the SD-votes, as a consequence (Saveljeff 2011). This resistance, Rydgren (2010) concludes, has motivated a strategy of *cardon sanitaire* adapted by the other parties to answer (or rather not answer) to the challenge posed by the SD in Swedish politics.

There is thus a strong convergence at the centre around the immigrations issue to defer any influence of the SD in national politics, that is to debar the party from the ‘public’s zone of acquiescence’ (Norris 2005, 21). However, as envisaged by e.g. Norris (ibid), this zone is not static and in turn what is depicted as ‘normal’ talk on e.g. immigration shifts, also in mainstream political debate. In Sweden some of the mainstream parties have previously launched demands of e.g. language-tests and citizenship courses as prerequisites for naturalization, in addition, proposals were initiated to make possible the withdrawal of citizenship for foreign-born individuals (Bevelander et al. 2011). In sum, to remain ‘radical’ and yet remain in the ‘zone of acquiescence’ the SD exacerbates popular worries about e.g. multi-culturalism, suggesting further measures to strengthen the demands for citizenship qualification, and to limit the immigration to Sweden.

While the mainstream parties and the mainstream press ultimately rejects the challenge of SD, Sweden now faces a new political contender grand enough not to be taken seriously. It is not perfectly viable to counter a parliamentary party that enjoys the position of tipping the scales in favour of either political bloc with a *strategy of silence*. So far its influence on the dynamic of political competition is limited to the moralization of the political language and the

increased polarization around the immigration issue. Whether this will lead to increased politization, divisions between the mainstream parties or even to some issue convergence between the SD and other parliamentary parties (adaptation) – what has been the case in most other European countries (Bale et al. 2010), it is too close to call.

In this brief overview of some frequently adopted explanations of the electoral gains of the RPPs, we have e.g. discussed theories that emphasize the politization of new issues and the re-alignment processes from socio-economic issues to the socio-cultural cleavage dimension; the degree of convergence between the mainstream parties in the political space; the need to consider the strategies adopted by the mainstream parties to respond to the RPP-parties and the overall structure of the political competition.

Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup (2008) claim that the media plays a less dominant role to explain why e.g. the ‘immigration issue’ is politicized and made into a salient political issue in the political competition of the votes. This might be correct, not least in the Danish case, however to explain the SD entry into the Swedish national parliament 2010 there is reason to believe that a closer look at the *media effect*, especially in the period preceding its electoral breakthrough, is potentially enlightening. In line with Ellinas (2010, 18) who says that: ‘Media exposure can push minor parties into mainstream debate, give them visibility, and legitimating their claims’, and Rydgren (2005, 255) who suggests that here is a lack of research devoted to the role of mass media to explaining the RPP parties, our analysis of the electoral fortunes of the SD in relation to its media exposure emphasize the *media effect* in the political competition of the votes.

MEDIA EXPOSURE AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR

In 2010 Ellinas gave a systematic account of the role of the media and the rise of the ‘Far Right’ in countries such as France, Austria, Greece and Germany. His book has two main theses. Firstly, the party positioning on national identity issues structures the opportunities for the RPPs to enjoy their initial electoral breakthrough. Secondly, it examines how the media exposure granted to the political newcomer (or lack thereof) can explain or possibly hinder the newcomer to gain electoral fortunes. His analysis offers a temporal dimension to understand not only why certain RPPs make headway, while others fail, but also *when*.

Ellinas (2010, 15) 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’. He thus suggests a two-stage approach – before and after the initial electoral breakthrough. At the first stage, before the RPP parties have grown big enough to play a central role on the electoral market, it is most appropriate to focus on the reactions of the mainstream parties whether they i.e. choose to ignore, confront or adjust themselves to the political newcomer. Once the party has crossed the threshold of relevance, though, it is likely to moderate its claims to address a broader audience and the mainstream parties find it more difficult to ignore these claims. At this latter stage, it is increasingly more important to focus on the internal party arena, i.e. the organizational capacity of the new parliamentary party whereas the tactical maneuvering of the political competitors subsides in importance.

Faced with internal ruptures and a lack of solid organizational base, the party is a likely candidate to become a ‘flash phenomenon’ (see e.g. Taggart 2002), and thus abruptly suffer from heavy drops in their electoral support. Many of these parties mobilize voters around an anti-establishment agenda that help them to cross the initial electoral threshold. Once in the

parliament it is difficult to maintain with this underdog position as they, in fact, are parts of the establishment. In turn, at this stage, the role of the media subsides in importance.

The ‘threshold of relevance’, in our view, does not perfectly match with the crossing of the electoral threshold to the national parliament, though. We therefore suggest an extension of Ellinas approach, introducing *three* phases of development that better match the Swedish experiences. In 2006, SD failed to gain enough votes (2, 93 per cent) to cross the electoral threshold to the national parliament. However at the same time, SD gained seats in half of the country’s local governments, most obvious in the southern regions. Furthermore, its limited success at the local elections in 2006 generated a great deal of attention also at the national level, which did not correspond well with its, relatively, low strength at the polls (Hellström 2010). David Art (2011, 11- footnote 7) presents a similar argument with references to e.g. the Front National, defining the breakthrough of a new party when it receives enough votes to attract the attention of the media, and forces the political contesters to respond to its’ activities.

In our case, then, the first stage corresponds to the period before 2006 when the SD had very limited media exposure and most commentators disregarded the SD as ‘devils in disguise’ (Hellström and Nilsson 2010). The second stage takes place between 2006 and 2010 when the media interest escalated and also the mainstream political parties started to worry about the party, to gradually abandon their initial *cardon sanitaire* strategy to instead engage in debates with the SD. The third stage occurs after the 2010 when the party had crossed the electoral threshold to the Swedish *Riksdag*. We thus focus on the media exposure as an explanatory factor for the rise of the SD in the national parliament during the second stage; i.e. between 2006 and 2010.

MATERIAL, METHOD AND HYPOTHESES

As earlier mentioned, our aim is to discern the correlation between the opinion poll results, conducted every month *and* the magnitude in newspaper articles by the most important newspapers in Sweden. More specific, was the SD opinion poll and election results affected by the media attention in the period October 2006 – September 2010?^{iv}

We do this by the use of two data sources. On the one side, the opinion polls conducted by different opinion poll companies in Sweden over the period October 2006 to August 2010^v and, on the other side, the number of newspaper articles published by the six leading newspapers which can be traced in the Swedish digital media archive, Mediearkivet (2010).

The monthly opinion poll used in the article is the means of all opinion polls conducted in that particular month. For September 2010 we used the actual election outcome. Moreover, we created series for all the eight political parties that crosses the electoral threshold in the 2010 elections, the Social Democrats (S), the Moderaterna (M)^{vi}, the Sweden Democrats (SD), the Christian Democrats (KD), the Greens (MP), the Centre Party (C), the Liberal party (FP) and the Left party (V). Apart from the Social Democrats and the Moderaterna, the other parties are all relatively small, just above the four per cent parliamentary threshold. We emphasize the media exposure for these parties to compare the results of the SD to all other political parties and especially those who share about the same magnitude in potential votes in the period 2006—2010.

The statistics on the number of newspaper articles written on a particular party are based on monthly searches in the Swedish digital media archive by newspaper and political party. We

do this by means of key words match (hence, the names of all the political parties represented in the parliament after 2010) in the media archive. Our material is based on the six leading newspapers in Sweden, given their circulation rate (Mediefakta 2010). According to Strömbeck and Aalberg (2008: 95), the Swedish model of media and politics belong to the so-called ‘Democratic Corporativist Model’, which alludes to a historical co-existence 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 to a high degree broken their formal ties to political parties, leaving a majority of the newspapers to describe themselves as ‘independently liberal’.^{vii} Concerning the SD, all the dominant newspapers share a negative view towards the party (Hellström and Hervik 2011), after the national elections 2010 e.g. the tabloids *Expressen* (Exp) and *Aftonbladet* (AB) launched campaigns against the party, and the xenophobic sentiments they, supposedly, capitalize on. Our sample consists of the two largest tabloids (*Exp* and *AB*), two Stockholm-centered, yet nationwide newspapers (*Dagens Nyheter* (DN) and *Svenska Dagbladet* (SvD) and finally two regionally based newspapers (*Göteborgsposten* (GP) in the Gothenburg region and *Sydsvenskan* (SDS) in the Malmö region.

Indeed, the media market faces increased competition and it seems fair to suggest that many people now access news material via the internet, read free dailies and use various channels of social media to communicate actively or passively receive opinions and news about current socio political affairs.

In this regard Jesper Strömbeck, professor in journalism, had elaborated on the role of social media in relation to electoral outcome. The main functioning of the social media in partisan

politics, he claims, is about mobilization and organizing of party activists to pursue common tasks, serving a joint cause. At the same time, the social media has had very limited effect on the electoral performance (see e.g. Strömbeck 27 April 2010). In this article we shall put to test whether the traditional media still shows an effect on the opinion poll fluctuations.

To ensure reliability, we contacted the responsible editors-in-chief, the political editors and news editors of these six newspapers.^{viii} The respondents were asked to estimate whether they had published more, less or the same amount of articles on the SD, relative its size, compared to the other political parties. A response given by the editor-in-chief of *Exp*, Thomas Mattsson is symptomatic as he resists guidelines or publishing policies devoted to distinct parties, though he hints at the media logic that make priority over the ‘deviant’ and particular interesting phenomena in the total media coverage (interview 20 April 2011). Many of the interviewees also remembered much discussion on this issue, especially after that the SD increased its support in the polls. According to e.g. the news editor of *DN*, Anders Olsson (interview 9 May 2011; cf. interview with Eva Parkrud 27 April 2011), it is important to report meticulously on the SD, not being blue-eyed^{ix} and yet recognize that the party developed in this period to become a political contender on the verge to the national parliament. Accordingly, if the SD is conceived as a particular interesting and/or deviant case in Swedish politics, especially after it – according to the opinion polls – grew above the electoral threshold, we could perhaps expect more relative weight devoted to the SD in the media coverage, compared to the mainstream parties.

Provided the newspapers’ ambitions not to publish more, or less, articles around particular parties, the media effect should remain equally salient for all the parties of similar sizes. However, if we pay attention to Ellinas, the *media effect* rests more salient for parties that are

on the verge to cross the threshold of relevance, though not yet being in parliament. The special character of the SD, by some of the interviewees described as xenophobic, 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 to determining the electoral fortunes of the already established political parties. Yet there is a selective media effect for the SD, reflected in the monthly opinion polls 2006—2010.*

In addition, we anticipate a three-step temporal model to explain spatial varieties in the SD electoral performance. The degree of media exposure is not equally important in all newspapers, but shifts along regional preferences, we assume. Given this, we argue that the SD had already crossed the ‘threshold of relevance’ in Skåne by 2006, which suggests that the correlation between the media exposure of the SD in the regional newspaper *SDS* already had subsided in significance in the period 2006-2010. Our second explanatory hypothesis suggests:

2. *The media effect brings less significance for the SD in the regional newspaper *Sydsvenskan*, reflected in the monthly opinion polls 2006—2010.*

In the next section we will compare the opinion poll results for the parliamentary parties with the magnitude 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 two ways. Firstly, we correlate the first differences of opinion poll monthly levels of a political party with the first differences (FD) of the number of published articles in the same month. Secondly, we lag these series on the number of

published articles with one month to assess whether there is a lag in the effect of the media reporting on a particular party and its opinion poll. Using series with first differences, these are not affected by either an upward or downward trend, neither in the opinion poll nor in the number of articles published in this period. This can be the case especially concerning the number of articles published, since the number of monthly articles on the political parties, most likely, will increase approaching the elections. Finally, we conduct an ordinary least regression analysis to investigate to what extent published articles affect the SD opinion poll.

ANALYSIS

A first look at the data on the six political parties' opinion polls shows that only two parties are close to the electoral threshold in the period, namely the KD and the SD (figure 1). Four parties reach polls between four and eight percent, while the two major parties scored more than 20 per cent. One party, the Green party seems to do somewhat better in the polls than the other parties in the last year before the actual election. However, this did not clearly materialize in the election results as the Greens scored 7.3 of the votes in September 2010, which nevertheless was enough to become the third largest party.

[Fig. 1]

Table 1 shows the number of newspaper articles published by the six largest newspapers in Sweden, between 2006 and 2010. It shows that most articles were connected to the two largest and leading parties of the electoral block in Sweden, Moderaterna and the Social Democrats. The Green party generates more media exposure than the other smaller parties. The two

parties that in the opinion polls circulated close to the electoral threshold, the SD and the KD, have about the same number of articles.

The FP and the V occupy the middle ground and attract around 140 articles per month. The outlier in this table is the number of articles connected to the C, which is substantially lower than for the other parties. In this case, though, we should acknowledge limitations as to how we search for this party in the archive.^x

As can be seen in table 1, the newspaper *Sydsvenskan* is by far the newspaper that publishes most articles on any political party, and in particular the SD.

[Table 1]

Our primary focus is on the SD opinion poll development and media exposure over time, figure 2 therefore pin-points the opinion poll development of the SD. This figure clearly shows an increasing trend over time where both outliers above the trend are connected to two specific events in this four year period. The first event relates to an article published by the SD party leader Jimmy Åkesson in one of the evening tabloids, *Aftonbladet* in October 2009. In this article, he expresses the view that ‘Muslims’ are the largest threat to the Swedish society. This article was much disputed by the other parties and further voiced in the press, however in October 2009 the SD opinion poll elevates, for the first time, above the electoral threshold (4, 4 per cent). The article is published on October 19, and the poll increases to 5, 4 per cent in November 2009. The following months the SD poll gradually drops to its earlier level just below the threshold.^{xi} The second event is the elections, when the SD opinion polls foresighted the fortunate position of tipping scales in favour of either political bloc.

Figure 3 shows the number of news articles in the six newspapers for SD in the studied period. Also in this figure we observe a weak positive trend towards more newspaper articles, including the SD over time. The trend has three peaks. The first one is in October 2006, the month after the 2006 elections when the SD gained several seats in a number of municipalities. The second peak is in October 2009, the month in which Jimmy Åkesson published the above referred article in *Aftonbladet*. The third peak is in August/September 2010 in connection to the elections. Many articles in this latest peak concerned the SD promotion film that first was released, but then abandoned from television broadcasting due to its provocative imaginary directed at Islam. At the time when the election film was prohibited, millions of people could yet follow the uncensored version on You Tube.^{xii} Moreover, the number of articles dedicated to all the parties, rather dramatically, increases in the last month before the elections.

[Fig. 2 and 3]

Summarizing the descriptive results, the SD opinion poll and the number of articles seem to be connected towards a positive trend. Moreover, at two occasions both the opinion poll and the number of articles published peaked at the same time in the studied period. The newspaper *SDS* based in Malmö in Southern Sweden publishes most extensively on the SD compared to the other newspapers. In the following section we study, more sophisticated, the connection between the SD opinion poll and the number of articles written on the SD, correlating the first differences from the SD trend. Moreover, by studying the other parties that are close to the election threshold and the number of articles published on these parties, we try to establish a validation of the results, established for the SD.

CORRELATION RESULTS

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 each newspaper separately. Very few correlation coefficients are positive and significant. However, both the strongest correlations and number of significant correlations are measured, for the SD. In particular, articles that were published in the month earlier are stronger correlated to the opinion poll for the SD than articles in the same month.

[Table 2]

Table 2 shows the correlation coefficients between the SD opinion poll and the six newspapers. The correlations with the two leading national newspaper *DN* and *SvD* are positive and significant (0.29 and 0.50). Also for the national evening tabloid *Exp*, we find positive and significant correlations with the variable published newspaper articles on the SD and the lagged variant of this variable (0.34 and 0.39 respectively). The third newspaper that shows only one substantial correlation between published articles on the SD and the opinion poll in the studied period is the regional newspaper *SDS* (0.42). The two newspapers *AB* and *GP* have positive but insignificant correlations with the variable published news articles on the SD with the trend. Finally, the newspaper *SDS* had just one positive and significant correlation coefficient. This positive correlation is with the de-trended and lagged series of published newspapers on the SD (0.45).

If we scrutinize the tables for the other small parliamentary parties in Swedish, 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 the opinion poll and articles published in the evening tabloid *AB*. The Center party poll is positive correlated with articles in *SDS*. For the two large parties no significant correlations between opinion poll measures and published articles can be observed.

The correlations of the SD public opinion polls and the other parties with the published articles in the largest and most important newspapers in Sweden over the years between the two elections 2006-2010 differ in both number and in level. The correlations between the SD opinion poll 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 on a positive level. For no other party or newspaper we found equally many correlations between the opinion polls and the number of articles being published. Besides, only the correlation between the SD opinion poll and the number of articles published verged the 0.50 correlation levels; i.e. fairly strong levels, were obtained. These results indicate that the SD opinion poll has been affected by the media exposure in most major newspapers in Sweden. Other parties' poll show no such media effect.

In order to assess which newspaper affected the opinion poll to the largest extent and to what degree, we used an ordinary least square regression technique to analyze the effect of newspaper articles on the SD opinion poll. In table 3 (columns 1 and 2) the beta coefficients for separate regressions for each newspaper and one regression including all newspapers are displayed. The separate regressions show that four newspapers, *DN*, *SvD*, *Exp* and *SDS* have an impact on the opinion poll of the SD. The regression for all newspapers and with both series, in the same month and lagged one month, show only one positive and significant coefficient for *DN* and one negative and significant coefficient for *SDS*. The reason why the effects for the other newspapers are quite high, though yet insignificant, is due that in this

regression all series depend on each other. However, it also shows that *DN* is the most important newspaper in the regression explaining the correlation between the media and the SD opinion poll. In terms of effect on the SD opinion poll, if *DN* published ten more articles on the SD, the opinion poll rose with 0.2 percent one month later. However, when *SDS* published 10 more articles the opinion poll dropped with 0.1 percent in the month when the opinion poll was conducted.

[Table 3]

To test if the measured effect in the regressions is due to that both the opinion poll and the media exposure increase during the last months before the election, i.e. an electoral campaign effect, we run OLS regressions, excluding the last two months; i. e October 2006 – July 2010. The results of this analysis are shown in table 3 columns 3 and 4. The results here display similar patterns. The coefficient for *DN* is slightly lower, but it is still significant. This is also the case with *SvD*, *Exp* and *SDS*. This test shows that the media exposure and the opinion poll for the SD are only marginally affected by the electoral campaign.

DISCUSSION

In the Swedish national elections 2010 the SD crossed the parliamentary threshold. Certainly, a number of factors are relevant in explaining the increasing political support for the SD over the period 2006-2010. One of these factors, and our focus in this study, is the media exposure in Sweden and to what extent it provides some further knowledge of why the SD made it into the national parliament in Sweden by 2010. Emphasizing the explanatory power of the degree of visibility in the public debate - by means of measuring the correlation between media exposure and voting poll fluctuations - we contribute with a systematic test of the relevance of

the impact of media exposure, providing opportunities for the RPPs to capitalize on the demands for nationalist and immigration-skeptic politics.

Our analysis of the number of articles published in six leading newspapers on the political parties in Sweden, and in particular the SD, close to the four percent parliament threshold and the opinion poll of these parties in the period 2006-2010, shows no censoring of the SD by the mainstream press. The correlations obtained in the number of published articles on the SD and the SD opinion polls suggest that the SD managed to benefit from this publicity, good or bad, to receive sufficient votes to enter the parliament. Both, the quantity of positive and significant correlations, indicate that the SD was not excluded from publicity in these leading Swedish newspapers (cf. Nordstrand & Ljunggren 2010). This in turn affected its opinion poll, especially in the following month.

RETURNING TO THE HYPOTHESES

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 the SD poll results, and suggest that the *media effect*, in general, was rather limited. Our findings suggest that we need to refine the saying that the media matters. Certainly, it partly does, but not always and not to the same degree, not everywhere and not all the time. Especially for parties outside the parliament, returning to Ellinas, it is fundamental to get access to the media space, to get the message across to the public. Thus in the phase preceding the electoral breakthrough, referred to as the threshold of relevance by Ellinas, the media exposure makes an explanatory factor for the entry of new parties in the national parliament.

The articles published by the leading newspaper for public opinion in Sweden, *DN*, did have a significant effect on the opinion poll of the SD. Ten newspaper articles more on the SD, published the month before the opinion poll, and increased the poll for the SD with 0.2 percent. We thereby conclude that the *first* hypothesis is verified, though it matters which newspaper being referred to.

The regional newspaper *SDS* reported relatively most of all the newspapers on the SD. One explanation for this would be that the SD already in the 2006 elections crossed the electoral threshold to the regional parliament and almost all of the municipalities in that region. Another and related explanation is that this newspaper had a stronger incentive to publish articles on the SD due to its relatively high number of electoral mandates obtained in the region in which this newspaper, primarily, is read. An indication of this is the fact that we found a negative significant correlation between the number of newspaper articles published in this newspaper and the opinion poll of the SD in this period – the 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 the SD. The regional newspaper *SDS* had a negative *media effect*, conversely e.g. the other regional newspaper *GP* in our material had none. In relation to our *second* hypothesis, there was indeed no *positive* media effect for the SD in the *SDS*, however a *negative* one. Future research will preferably inform us about whether the media effect will subside in importance, or perhaps even turn negative, for all the other five newspapers put into scrutiny in this study after the 2010 elections. Instead factors such as the SD organizational capacity shall, hypothetically, gain in importance.

WHY AND WHEN THE RPP PARTIES GAIN ELECTORAL FORTUNES

In 2006, the SD received a little less than three percent of the overall votes – thus not eligible for the *Swedish* national parliament. Nevertheless, it was enough to be treated as a regular political contender by its adversaries. This certainly affects the behavior of the mainstream parties in a way that differs from the situation before the 2006 national elections. Our findings show that the threshold of relevance does not perfectly match with the crossing of the electoral threshold to the national parliament. Rather in the case of the SD, the explanatory weight of the *media effect* shifts along regional parameters and different newspapers, in the period put into scrutiny in this study. In terms of the relative weight of the other explanatory factors common in the literature, these probably also shift along spatial and temporal lines.

Whereas we have neither tested nor disputed the salience of other supply-side explanatory factors for the entry of the RRP-parties in the national parliaments, the *media effect* has *some* explanatory power in its own right, though rather limited.

During the period 2006-2010, the mainstream parties including the mainstream press acted unanimously against the SD and gradually abandoned their initial *cardon sanitaire* approach. We could, tentatively, find supporting evidence for a re-alignment process, from a sole focus on the socio-economic cleavage dimension to an increased focus on socio-cultural issues, ranging from the Christian Democrats leader's outburst against the "new radical elite" (*Dagens Nyheter* 17 September 2009), to the mobilization against the SD on the immigration issue.

There certainly is an increased convergence at the centre, as all the other parliamentary parties mutually, from the left to the right, refuted the SD claims or simply ignored them, though internally the other parties continued to quarrel along the classic socio-economic parameters

in the political competition of the votes before the 2010 elections. Our findings confirm that the SD was given a fair amount of publicity in the leading newspapers, between 2006 and 2010. They were talked about, and heard of, which confirm the view that without publicity there is no access to the electoral market for any new political contender.^{xiii}

Our results might be interpreted as ‘good news’ for the traditional media, i.e. the major newspapers. The emergence of the free dailies with large circulation rates and the burst of various forms of social media have, certainly, enhanced the competition on the media market. However, to some extent it still matters what the larger newspapers (e.g. *DN*) decide to focus on in their daily news coverage and in the opinionated material, which does not necessarily imply that it reaches out to a readership normally inclined to vote for an anti-establishment party such as the SD. What it does suggest however, we believe, is that other kinds of media might follow up on what is written in the larger newspapers to pursue with their own news reporting and commenting.

Summarizing, the normal implication from this study does not imply that the mainstream press was wrong to publish a fair amount of articles on the SD in the period between the national elections. Apparently there is a popular demand for a party such as the SD also in Swedish national politics. To completely refute or ignore that demand is neither necessarily democratically sound, nor to say that there are no anti-immigrant opinions among the Swedish populace as long as we do not speak of them. Future research could preferably devote more attention to the mechanisms around such anti-immigration demands, not to take these for granted, but conversely, to critically examine their accuracy (in fact, more people in Sweden seem prone to, gradually, accept a generous immigration policy and increased diversity in view of normative ideals of e.g. democratic inclusion. To address these issues, future research

needs to dwell into the content of the media reporting and thus expand beyond the mere quantitative *media effect*.

This invites further elaboration on the issue raised by Ellinas, not explicitly dealt with in this article, about the party positioning on national identity issues as structural conditioning of the opportunities for the RPPs to enjoy electoral gains, and remain in the national parliament. The opportunity structures that the RPPs capitalize on to gain electoral profits, is shaped in the broader partisan structure of political competition, as Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup (2008) observed. Our findings imply this to be a significant factor in Sweden after the 2010 national elections to explain fluctuations on the electoral market, as the *media effect* might subside in importance. In this regard, after the 2010 national elections, we need to foster increased attention to which explanations are given to the, comparatively, rather modest success of the SD and to which solutions the mainstream actors shift their attention.

[Appendix 1]

Notes

ⁱ Two previous versions of this paper were presented. The first at the PIKE-seminar held at the Malmö Institute for studies of migration, diversity and welfare (MIM), Malmö University in May 2011 and the second at the IMISCOE eighth annual conference in Warsaw, September 2011. The authors appreciate highly all valuable comments that stemmed from these sessions, especially to Didier Ruedin who took the time to address a number of important issues.

ⁱⁱ In the literature, there are many labels attached to this motley party-family, united in its resistance of multi-culturalism and generous policies of immigration. The label RPP, though certainly not contested, is frequently used.

ⁱⁱⁱ Taggart (2002, 67) suggests that populist parties unite in perceptions of ‘the people’, limited to the populace of ‘the heartland’: ‘The heartland is a construction of an ideal world but, unlike utopian conceptions, it is constructed retrospectively – being, in essence, a vision derived from the past and projected onto the present’.

^{iv} Theoretically we assume that the media exposure of a political party affects the opinion poll for that party. However, we are aware of the fact that the causality can go in either direction; hence, the analysis is an attempt to establish a correlation.

^v We are grateful to Henrik Oskarsson for granting us access to use the opinion poll data, i.e. ‘the poll of polls’.

^{vi} Conservative – liberal party.

^{vii} Four newspapers in our material are independently liberal (*DN*, *EXP*, *GP*, *SDS*). *AB* is Social-Democratic and *SVD* is conservative-liberal.

^{viii} In sum, we received seven responses – either in written form or by telephone. In the appendix, there is a complete list of the interviewees.

^{ix} Anders Olsson mentions the news reporting on the NyD before the 1991 national elections as warning example.

^x The results display certain linguistic complexities; i.e. biases. While there are other parties in Europe labeled ‘Social-democratic’, ‘the Green/s’, ‘The Christian Democrats’ or the ‘People’s Party’ – thus our sample also has the risk of incorporating non-Swedish parties in the sample, however, this is rarely the case with e.g. the Center party, Moderaterna or the Sweden Democrats. The alternative procedure would be to use the party abbreviations – however this search technique showed too be even more faulted as e.g. the Center Party shared the same abbreviation (C) as the target player in an ordinary ice-hockey team.

^{xi} *Aftonbladet* had already one month before (September 17) decided to allow the publication of election campaign materials from all the other parties, but the SD. The editor-in-chief, Jan Helin refused to be the sender of the SD propaganda, though the editorial policy was to allow the SD representatives to publish debate articles in their own names.

^{xii} In the film, a group of burqa-dressed women chased a native-looking female elder. The message was that the state could not afford to spend money on both: multi-culturalism – here associated with burqa-dressed women – threatens the Universalist welfare state. While many were angered by the film, yet other voters could relate to the dichotomy of multi-culturalism versus welfare. The SD here, visually, radicalizes concerns already being voiced by others who were anxious about the impact of the growing Muslim population in Sweden.

^{xiii} This invites further comparative research, to e.g. compare *the media effect* for any other new party (e.g. the Pirate Party in the 2009 European Parliament) with the SD.

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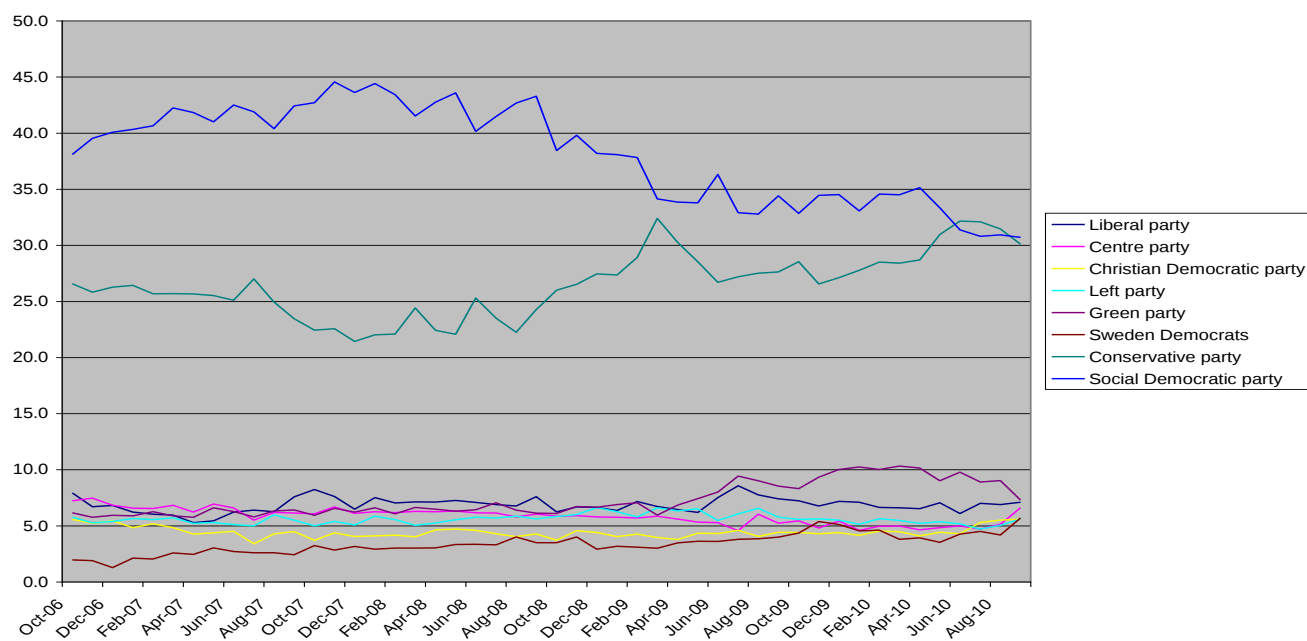
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Figure 1 Opinion polls results by month for Political Parties, October 2006 - September 2010.



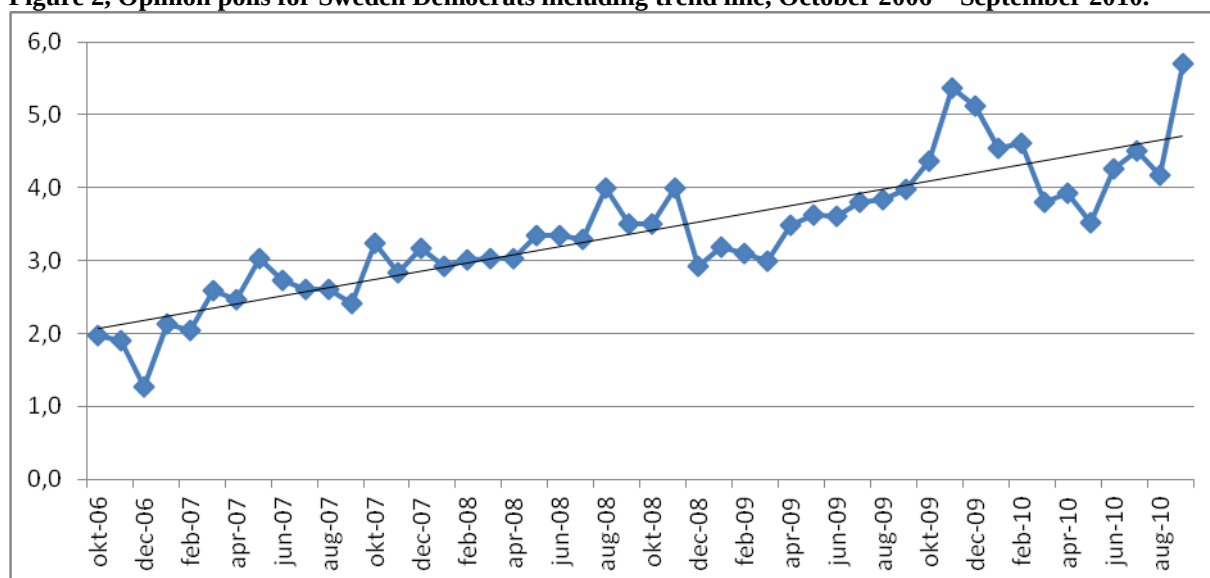
Source: Own calculations based on poll statistics 2006-2010.

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	106
Christian Democrats	1060	766	530	362	833	1239	4790	100
Green Party	1599	1232	820	546	1438	2225	7860	164
Centre Party	595	566	310	262	438	600	2771	58
Liberal Party	1315	1053	661	543	1245	1990	6807	143
Left Party	1322	1113	637	479	1204	1836	6591	137
Conservative Party	2098	1881	1473	1053	1609	3137	11251	234
Social Democrats	3661	2776	1904	1548	3062	4740	17691	369

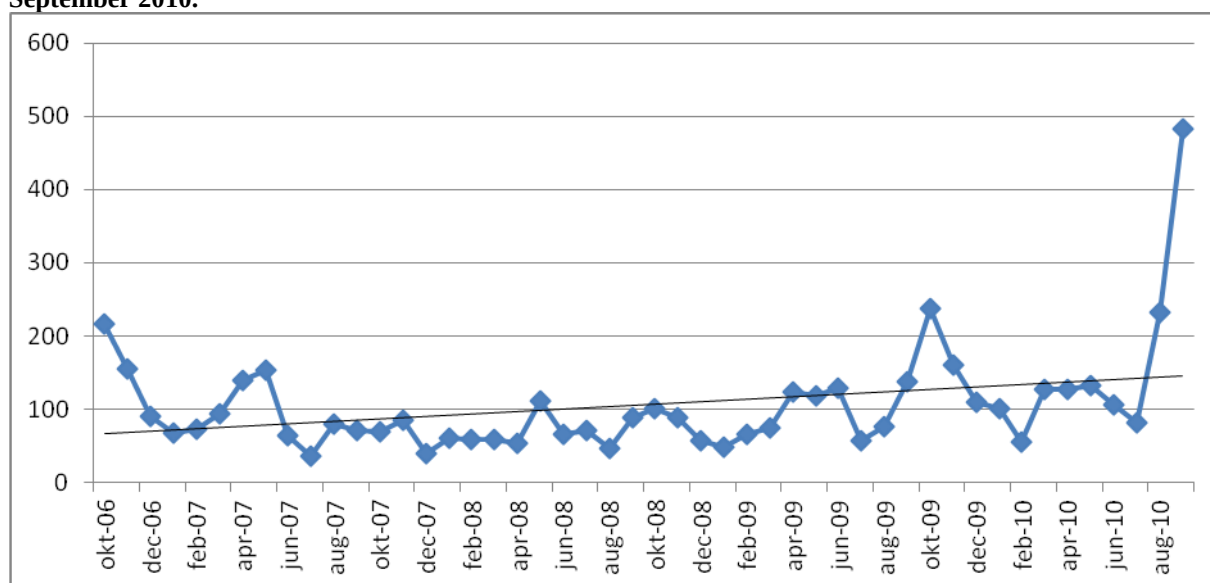
Source: Mediearkivet 2010

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 FD	0.20	0.16	-0.28	-0.20	-0.02	-0.05	-0.20	0.09
All articles FD lagged	0.51**	0.06	-0.05	-0.07	0.17	-0.15	-0.05	-0.16
DN FD	0.29*	0.18	-0.21	0.07	-0.03	0.03	-0.26	0.05
DN FD lagged	0.50**	0.13	-0.19	0.20	0.17	-0.13	-0.05	-0.10
SvD FD	0.05	0.06	-0.08	0.08	0.11	-0.25	-0.06	-0.08
SvD FD lagged	0.42**	0.18	-0.07	0.03	0.12	0.12	-0.06	-0.22
Exp FD	0.34*	-0.01	-0.36*	-0.19	-0.14	0.06	-0.11	-0.01
Exp FD lagged	0.39*	0.07	0.06	0.03	0.09	-0.04	-0.08	-0.08
AB FD	0.23	0.00	-0.37**	0.00	-0.11	0.06	-0.16	0.02
AB FD lagged	0.23	-0.02	0.19	0.02	0.05	-0.10	-0.13	-0.05
GP FD	0.22	0.28	-0.11	0.05	-0.06	-0.06	-0.18	0.01
GP FD lagged	0.25	-0.23	-0.09	-0.18	0.25	-0.15	0.03	0.03
SDS FD	-0.04	0.12	-0.24	0.42**	-0.02	-0.18	-0.22	0.20
SDS FD lagged	0.45**	0.16	0.02	-0.32	0.10	0.00	-0.01	-0.28

Source: Poll of polls and Mediearkivet, 2010.

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

Table 3, OLS on opinion poll for Sweden Democrats, Two periods: October 2006 – September 2010 and October 2006 – July 2010^{xiii}

	<i>October 2006-September 2010</i>		<i>October 2006-July 2010</i>	
	By newspaper	All newspapers	By newspaper	All newspapers
DN FD	.007	.001	.006	.001
DN FD lagged	.022***	.023**	.019**	.022*
SvD FD	.008	-0.14	.001	-0.13
SvD FD lagged	.029**	.013	.019*	.013
Exp FD	.014*	.013	.009	.013
Exp FD lagged	.020**	.015	.017**	.015
AB FD	.013	.016	.001	.016
AB FD lagged	.015	-.020	.006	-.020
GP FD	.010	.000	.007	.000
GP FD lagged	.011	-.003	.002	-.004
SDS FD	-.003	-.011**	-.007*	-.011**
SDS FD lagged	.013***	.001	.009**	.002
Constant		.060		.060
Adjusted R ²		.37		.37

Source: Poll of polls and Mediearkivet, 2010.

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

APPENDIX 1

List of respondents

Respondent	Position	Newspaper	Date of interview
Avellan, Heidi	Political editor, the editorial pages	SDS	27 April 2011
Jönsson, Martin	Managing editor	SvD	3 May 2011
Mattsson, Thomas	Editor-in-chief	Exp	20 April 2011
Melin, Lena	Assistant editor-in-chief	AB	3 May
Olsson, Anders	News editor	DN	9 May
Parkrud, Eva	Section editor (political- and the economical department)	GP	27 April 2011
Sandström, Daniel	Editor-in Chief	SDS	27 April 2011