The Personalisation of Swedish Politics
Party Leaders in the Election Coverage 1979-2010

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Abstract
In The Personalisation of Swedish Politics: Party Leaders in the Election Coverage 1979-2010, the question of whether Swedish news media focus increasingly on the party leaders is thoroughly examined. All in all, five formats are studied: Broadsheets (Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet), tabloids (Aftonbladet, Expressen), public service television (SVT), public service radio (SR) and commercial television (TV4).

Analytically, personalisation is conceived of as a concept with three dimensions: personification, orientation towards personae and intimisation. The multidimensionality of the concept is a most fundamental aspect to consider, not least since different dimensions can be related to different processes and developments: whereas personification, essentially, reflects a development of (increased) individualisation, orientation towards personae and intimisation are both related to a development in which personal characteristics are becoming increasingly important.

On a theoretical level, a contribution of the study is that it relates the question of increased personalisation not only to changes within the news media system; also changes within the political system are considered. And here, three developments are central: increased interdependence, increased complexity and decreased party identification. Against this theoretical background, the author questions a view where (increased) personalisation is automatically condemned. Given that the political system has changed, the author argues that a prospective and party-centered model may have become somewhat obsolete; with citizens’ information needs in mind, information about the party leaders’ personal characteristics may well have become increasingly important.

With regard to the empirical results, it is shown that claims of an increasingly party leader oriented coverage must be more nuanced than they usually are. Of the five formats that are examined, a general trend of personalisation can be found only for the tabloids. For all other formats, the overall evidence is really quite mixed.

Keywords: personalisation, party leaders, election coverage, news media, personification, orientation towards personae, intimisation, Sweden.