The *Personalisation* of Swedish Politics

Party Leaders in the Election Coverage 1979-2010

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Finally, my very deepest love goes to Lotta and Minou and Ulla and Max. This book is for you.

Palme:	As a competition between individuals, I think politics is uninteresting. The reason you put up with it—that which is stimulating—it is to belong to a large group, a group of peers, united by certain ideas and interests [...].
Hallberg:	But nevertheless—is not the personality of great importance in politics?
Palme:	I believe it to be greatly exaggerated. There are, of course, some exceptional persons... [interrupted]
Hallberg:	Uh-huh [chuckling], such as?
Palme:	Well, you can pick just about any—Stalin or Mao Tse-tung or Churchill—so in some situations, personality can, of course, make a difference. But generally, the mass media's hang-up on individuals is somewhat inaccurate—it is the ideas and interests that are decisive.
Hallberg:	So if you were to choose a branch of athletics, you would not choose 100 metre sprint but football?
Palme:	Well... [protractedly] [I would choose] bandy.

Olof Palme interviewed by Jonas Hallberg in 1982

Chapter 1

Introduction

"I would vote for a pig if my party put one up." This announcement, by a British voter in the early 1950s, today appears as somewhat bizarre. Because, as we all know, pigs do not talk; pigs do not twitter and pigs do not cut inauguration bands. And as far as I know, no pig has ever been seen playing either a guitar or a saxophone on the tele. Indeed, what was this British voter thinking?[1]

Since there is little reason to believe that he considers pigs in general to be apt for politics, what he asserts is, basically, that a pig chosen by his party cannot be wrong. That is, to him the party serves as a stamp of guarantee: since the right party cannot make the wrong choice, a pig chosen by the right party cannot be wrong.

Regardless of party preferences and ideological leanings, few voters should today be willing to vote for a pig. Not necessarily because pigs are considered to be less competent than before, but rather because people should be less prone to blindly trust political parties. Somehow, thus, the value of the guarantee stamp seems to have decreased; in order to trust, citizens now need to be convinced. And, important to stress, this development towards a more sceptical citizenry is not constricted only to a handful of countries; a development of partisan dealignment can be detected in a large majority of Western (European) democracies: over a time span of forty to fifty years, the class-based affiliations that marked high modernity have given way to all the more individualised voting patterns—in other words, lifelong loyalty has increasingly been replaced by lifelong demands.

Why citizens' relations to political parties have become increasingly marked by hesitation and doubt (Norris 1999, Dalton *et al* 2002, Dalton 2004) is obviously a question that is open for debate, but in this study it is argued that developments within the political system itself must be consid-

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[1] Although the identity of the voter remains a mystery—Birch has for example placed him in both Bristol (1960:19) and Birmingham (1998:90)—year and sex become clear in Cox (1986): behind it is a man, and the stout declaration was expressed at the 1951 election.

ered. In comparison with the situation fifty years ago, the environment for politics is simply marked by more uncertainty: due to "the twin forces of complexity and interdependence" (Dalton *et al* 2003:251) the possibilities for parties to control (steer) the development have decreased, whereupon political parties, consequently, have lost some of their previous importance as decision-making centres.

In sum, it shall be argued that factors within the political system alongside factors related to citizens' information costs should have led to an increased importance of individual political actors. That is, over time, political leaders should have become increasingly important—to politics, to citizens and, not least, to the news media.

Indeed, whereas a point of departure is that political leaders should have become more important with regard to political processes, the empirical chapters of this study deal exclusively with the news media coverage of politics. And with regard to this material, a central assumption is that the increased importance of individual political actors should have led to a news media coverage that is all the more preoccupied with individual political actors. That is, a central point of departure is that the news media coverage deals with actual and ongoing societal changes; whereas the news media certainly contribute to these changes, the news media themselves are not only (or even primarily) societal actors in their own right; news media output is dependent on events in a reality that exists outside of the news media.

To be quite clear about how this basic point of departure should be understood: on a theoretical level, the news media are in this study considered to be drivers as well as reflectors of change. Due to the increased importance of the news media—with regard to everyday life as well as public opinion—power, it is assumed, can no longer be exercised "outside" of the media; on a societal level, media has simply become an integrated aspect in the obtaining and exercise of power. Consequently, all studies on societal power must acknowledge the importance of the media; all studies on societal power need a media perspective.

This being said, to conceive of the news media as a central power broker must not lead to the conclusion that conditions in other subsystems are altogether determined by the (news) media—other subsystems accommodate to the news media, that much is true. But being a societal subsystem itself —that is, being a part of a larger whole—also the news media system is contingent on other subsystems, not least those of politics (the political system)

and economics (the economic system). In sum, no subsystem is an island; all subsystems are under the influence from other subsystems.

Moreover, in this study, it is the election coverage that is examined. This means that the study deals with a rather specific form of news coverage: since elections are cornerstones of democracy—or, more precisely, representative democracy—the examined coverage is one that over the years has become highly institutionalised. Hence, whereas situational factors remain important, the general idea behind elections has resulted in a coverage that, on a basic level, remains much the same year after year: for elections to be an adequate mechanism for democratic control, citizens need information; without this, the right to freely choose would, indeed, be of questionable value. An implication is that it is with the informative function in mind that the news media coverage is examined; to put it bluntly, the role that the news media are assigned is one where they are to enable citizens' informed choices.

1.1 One research question, three hypotheses

Then, more specifically, what questions will be asked—and what answers are there to expect? The overall research question is whether the Swedish news media focuses all the more on party leaders. In essence, this means that personalisation is empirically examined with regard to the news media's representations of politics; whether trends of personalisation can be detected with regard to, for example, political institutions and voting behaviour is not focused on in the empirical chapters.

Moreover, although I do examine whether the Prime Minister over time appears all the more frequently, this question is subordinate to that of increased party leader concentration. My reason for this is pragmatic: although these questions are theoretically close, the data that I rely on is simply better suited for the question of increased party leader dominance. In essence, since I rely on data from only one country, situational factors (personality, number of parties in government etc.) are likely to explain too much of the variance to make the question of increased Prime Minister dominance my primary task. Since I argue that structural factors should have resulted in more leader-oriented news media coverage, to examine party leader representation is simply considered to enable results with more validity.

This leads us to the question of the time period under study. What I examine is the coverage of ten subsequent elections between 1979 and 2010; that is, a period during which there is no "pre-television". Consequently, I do

not suggest that the explanations that I shall focus on (Chapter 5) are more important than that of television in the early 1960s; as a matter of fact, I would go as far as to say that over the last fifty to sixty years, no single technological innovation has had a larger impact on how politics is publicly presented than television—not least due to the fact that this medium implied a new form of visibility (Thompson 1995, 2005). Indeed, being a truly visual medium—the very meaning of the term is "seeing at a distance"—a most obvious consequence of the new medium is that news no longer is primarily read or heard; in contrast to both print media and radio, television provides citizens with a continuous flow of images—in essence, the new medium has enabled political actors to establish and maintain more personal relations with the voters (Manin 1997; see also Hart 1994).

But does the centrality of the (news) media really imply that there are no other important aspects to consider; is there not more to the picture than that which instantly meets the eye? I shall suggest that there are other factors to consider and, moreover, I shall suggest that the factors that I shall focus on hitherto have been largely overlooked.

Then, to be more precise, how shall I present my case? Having the importance of the news media as a central point of departure, I shall argue that there are long-term trends within the political system as well as within the citizenry that, alongside media aspects, should have given rise to a more personalised news media coverage. That is, while not suggesting that either politics or media "comes first", I shall suggest that there are reasons to believe that the news media coverage—over time and with regard to the period at hand—should have become all the more preoccupied with individual political leaders, their personal characteristics and their personal lives. The arguments that I shall provide for this must not be conceived of as hypotheses that are meant to be tested; in essence, they are what I hope to be logical and consistent lines of reasoning; that is, the function that they are to fill is to provide the reader with reasons for the thesis (of there being a news media coverage that is all the more personalised).

In order to deal with the question at hand—that is, do the news media over time focus more on party leaders—I shall "deconstruct" the overall concept of personalisation into three different parts (or dimensions). Firstly, I shall argue that there are grounds to believe that the news media focuses more on party leaders at the expense of other political actors. Thus, what the first hypothesis (H1) suggests is that the mediated political discourse

has become increasingly "leader-oriented"; in the coverage, party leaders are simply assumed to appear all the more frequently at the expense of other political actors. Secondly, I shall argue that there are grounds to believe that personal qualities have become all the more important. Thus, what the second hypothesis (H2) suggests is that the news media coverage has become all the more occupied with characteristics that can be related to the party leaders' skills and competences. Thirdly, I shall argue that there is reason to believe that attributes from the personal spheres of political actors have become all the more important. Thus, what the third hypothesis (H3) suggests is that the news media coverage over time has become all the more occupied with the party leaders' personal lives.

In sum, when empirically dealing with the research question (Chapters 7 and 8), I shall do this by testing three hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3). All three hypotheses can be traced to distinct dimensions of personalisation, and while it seems plausible to suggest that there should be a degree of empirical correlation between them—after all, they are all related to one and the same research question—the three dimensions are nevertheless theoretically and analytically distinct. (And due to this, the extents to which the provided arguments can be related to the three hypotheses differ. This will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5.)

All in all, this implies that the study deals with three dimensions of personalisation. These will be referred to in terms of *personification* (H1), *orientation towards personae* (H2) and *intimisation* (H3). With regard to all three, the question of change seen over time is central; hence, in this study, a time perspective is embedded in the very concept of personalisation itself.

1.2 Adding a piece to the puzzle

The general idea, that the news media in their output privilege individuals over ideas, is certainly not new; indeed, one can go as far as to say that the technique of personalising or personifying is inherent in the very logic of the media (Hernes 1978). However, with regard to the personalisation thesis, this kind of objection does miss the target. While the thesis for sure is concerned with the tendency to personalise, a most crucial aspect of it is that this tendency should have increased. Consequently, to talk of personalisation is to talk about changes over time, and what the study at hand shall deal with is the question of whether or not a *trend* of personalisation can be detected.

Moreover, whereas the study on the empirical level deals with the news media coverage of one specific country, the theoretical notions underpinning

it should be applicable to other late-modern, Western democracies. Far-reaching developments on a societal level, it is argued, have simply made steering models of high modernity increasingly outdated: as overall systemic uncertainty has increased, prospective policies should increasingly have given way to retrospective reactions; as nations have become increasingly interconnected, that which is to be handled should increasingly often be of an extra-national origin. And all in all, this development—be it with regard to Sweden, France, Denmark or the Netherlands—is one that should have resulted in an increased importance of individual political leaders. Consequently, whereas I deal with only one case empirically, the arguments provided should imply broad theoretical relevance; even though I deal empirically with only Swedish news coverage, the presented arguments should have validity with regard to most other Western (European) countries.

Then, more specifically, how does the study contribute scientifically? Firstly, on a theoretical level, the contribution I want to make is to explicitly relate personalisation to the concept of trust. As societies have become increasingly complex and interdependent, trust, I shall argue, has become an increasingly important aspect and determinant of social life; trust—as the media—is simply a prerequisite for functioning late-modern societies. But whereas the very importance of trust in no way distinguishes high modernity from late-modernity—trust should have been as central fifty years ago as it is today—there is, I shall argue, a most crucial difference: today, trust is of an increasingly personal character, something for the parties involved to "work at" (Giddens 1990:121). In a sense, then, the expected personalisation of the media coverage is assumed to mirror a profound change in how citizens relate to the political system and its actors. Over time, it is suggested, collective identities should have eroded and given way to relations of a more personal character—trust in individuals, that is, should over time increasingly have come to replace trust in parties.[2]

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[2] This line of thought—that trust in individuals to some extent has come to replace trust in parties—is a central aspect in Bernard Manin's (1997) much discussed "audience democracy". As Manin elegantly shows, the personalisation of trust implies, amongst other things, that the relation between elected representatives and those who they represent increasingly bears the mark of the era that preceded the era of party democracy (i.e. the era of parliamentarism). That is, once again the personal relation between voters and individual representatives is becoming central; once again personal trust is of crucial importance. While personal relations during the era parliamentarism were made possible by the fact that the right to vote was constricted, what today enables them is, of course, the news media. For a concretisation of what Manin himself addresses in rather vague terms, see de Beus (2011).

Secondly, on an empirical level, I shall try to provide a more elaborate account than those presented hitherto. Because whereas the dimension above referred to in terms of personification has been examined before—with regard to the Swedish case, see Asp and Esaiasson (1996) and Johansson (2008)—no other Swedish study has systematically examined the other two dimensions. This multi-dimensional understanding of the concept is, I shall argue, most needed—not least since the three dimensions are related to different theoretical notions: whereas the first hypothesis (H1) essentially springs from the idea that politics is increasingly top-steered, both the second and the third hypotheses (H2 and H3) have their origins in the notion that the very conditions for politics have changed.[3]

As a matter of fact, can an explanation of why commentators in the public debate often seem to hold the personalisation thesis for a non-disputable fact not be that they have the second and third dimension in mind, whereas researchers—who generally are more sceptical of the thesis—until now have dealt empirically first and foremost with the first dimension? Obviously, this would explain why so many, so often, seem to be so wrong; what public commentators (and citizens in general) have in mind is simply the other side of the coin—that is, the side that is most obviously related to the question of how politics is presented.[4]

To sum it all up: theoretically, my contribution shall be that I explicitly couple personalisation to the changing nature of trust. Empirically, my contribution shall be that I provide a more multi-faceted understanding of a much-discussed trend. Finally, on the meta-theoretical level, the study ends with a discussion on the power relation between news media actors and political actors—and here, I shall make use of an explicit systems perspective.

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[3] Behind H2 lies the idea that individual actors' qualifications should have become increasingly important, whereas H3, in contrast, is grounded in the notion that citizens' way of relating to the political system has changed. H3, in essence, suggests that aspects such as identification and likeability should have become increasingly important, and this at the expense of more instrumental relations (such as those grounded in the provision of material goods).

[4] While Asp and Esaiasson (1996) have shown that there with the introduction of television followed a trend of (increased) personification (H1), this development seems, according to the authors, to have come to a halt in the late 1970s. Also, with regard to the more recent of the two studies referred to above (Johansson 2008), the overall evidence of personification is weak.

Chapter 2

Exchange and trust in media society

In political communication, three groups of actors are central: political actors, news media actors and citizens. Consequently, if one (such as the author of this study) believes that public opinion to a large extent is shaped from above (Asp 1983a, Zaller 1992, Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996), news on politics can be conceived of as the result from interaction between political actors and news media actors. But since political actors and news media actors belong to different societal subsystems (the political and the news media system), their interactions are nothing that just occur or happen. Quite the opposite, political actors and news media actors interact since interacting serves some of their needs. Thus, since the relation serves actors within both systems, it is one of reciprocity. Consequently, what we have at hand can be conceived of as an exchange relation.

In this chapter, I will:

1. Define the concepts of a political actor and a news media actor and discuss the logics that these groups of actors are marked by.
2. Outline the exchange perspective that underlies the study.
3. Show that inter-systemic relations are marked by information asymmetry, something that fuels the importance of trust.
4. Outline how the concept of trust shall be understood.
5. Relate contemporary media society to the needs of information and trust.

2.1 Systems, actors and logics

The applied system approach is influenced by the works of David Easton (esp. 1965). Systems, thus, are considered to be open to influences from their environment; they are structured by relations and interactions, and, in the political as well as in the news media system, certain inputs are being converted to outputs—units of action are referred to as actors.

The criterion for political actors is that they are directly involved with the authoritative allocation of values (ibid). Consequently, in this study the concept will only refer to actors—be they collective or individual—within the sphere of party politics. Thus, there is a clear line of demarcation between those who belong to the political system and those who do not.[1]

Unfortunately, the news media system does not lend itself to simple definitions, and since it makes little sense to talk about an authoritative allocation of information, news media actors cannot be identified merely by their actions. It does, however, make sense to talk about a professional gathering and distribution of news—and in this regard, only working for an established organisation will count. Thus, the concept of a news media actor will only refer to people working for news organisations.

While the interaction between a political actor and a news media actor shall be conceived of in relation to certain needs, it would, however, be wrong to suggest that narrow goal orientation is all that explains what actions that are taken; political actors and news media actors are both—as systemic and organisational actors—marked by certain norms and routines. That is, while their actions are goal oriented, they are also constrained; the latter since actors within both systems are guided by what is considered to be appropriate (March and Olsen 1989). Consequently, decisions can in neither case be explained solely with regard to their expected outcomes (logic of consequentiality); especially in routine matters, established norms will serve as guidelines (and this holds true for collective as well as for individual actors).

Organisational principles—whether explicitly stated or not—are obviously important to all organisational actors, including those in leading positions. And while it seems plausible to assume that the leaderships generally wish for as much room for manoeuvre as possible, top actors will in both cases—with regard to the political system as well as the news media system—have to consider how different alternatives (courses of action) are evaluated by other organisational actors. In essence, while the leaderships are

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[1] That the term here is reserved for actors engaged in party politics does not imply that I believe the same definition to be applicable on a more theoretical level; various interest and pressure groups are but two examples of other groups of actors that can be conceived of as political actors.

assumed to be powerful, they are in neither case assumed to be omnipotent.[2]

However, the logic of appropriateness is not assumed to be of importance only with regard to actions on the organisational level; it is also assumed to have a bearing on actions and relations on the systems level.[3] Then, if this is the case, what relations are there?

With regard to the political system, I adhere to a view where there are two fundamental relations: actors-actors and actors-issues (Asp 1986). While the concept of an actor has been outlined above, the concept of an issue must be clarified. Following Sjöblom (1968), issues are here conceived of as questions that have become politicised, i.e. questions that have been *made* a matter for dispute. Obviously, with this view there are no issues without political actors; issues emerge as political actors politicise questions that are believed to serve their ends. Issues, thus, are conceived of as instruments (or tools) in the hands of strategic political actors. However, since the leaderships are assumed to need their followers, they cannot choose freely what questions to politicise, but must anticipate how their followers expect them to act—not least in cases where short-term goals (e.g. success in an upcoming election) may be in conflict with long-term goals (e.g. internal party cohesion).

With regard to the news media system, the main relations are instead believed to be those between actors and news events (actors-actors and actors-news events). The similarities between the political system and the news media system are obvious: in both cases relations are created and maintained as organisational actors (guided by organisational and transorganisational norms) relate to certain objects. Moreover, since the decisions taken serve as guidelines with regard to those that are to be taken, systemic

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[2] Of course, underlying this reasoning is the notion that the leaderships need the services that lower organisational levels provide. Had the wish for leeway outweighed the gains from the provided services, the leaderships would not have had to consider how members on lower organisational levels evaluate different courses of actions. Moreover, in contrast to Strömbäck (2007), I prefer not to conceive of the (news) media as a distinct arena for party political action. The reason why is that it is, in my view, rather unproblematic to relate the potential effects from news media exposure (increased or decreased public support) to the goal of the more traditional electoral arena (Sjöblom 1968). For discussions on goals and arenas with regard to political parties, see for example Hadenius (1979), Bergman (1995), Strøm and Müller (1999).

[3] Note: what I here call "systems" will sometimes—especially in Chapter 10—be referred to in terms of "subsystems". To use different vocabulary for one and the same thing is, of course, not altogether satisfying. There is, however, an explanation: when discussions are concerned with the societal level, the political and the news media system are both embedded in a larger system (society), and shall therefore be conceived of as subsystems (rather than systems).

patterns emerge. And while an external observer may perceive that these patterns are static, this is true only as long as the systems are observed from a distance. A closer examination makes it apparent that it really is only the main structures that are firm; individual relations are constantly being re-negotiated and reconsidered.

2.2 The relation between a political actor and a news media actor through a social exchange perspective

Above, the political system was conceived of as system that transforms po-litical inputs to political outputs. A similar conversion process is found also with regard to the news media system: media input (events) is transformed to media output (news content). With this in mind, the interaction between a political actor and a news media actor can be perceived of in relation to dif-ferent stages of news making, and while both parts are assumed to be influ-ential with regard to media input, the news media actor is assumed to have the upper hand when it comes to media output (Asp 1983b, Strömbäck and Nord 2006; see also Cook 2005, Niven 2005). Thus, the political actor is con-fronted with a delicate problem: having little power to frame the news, he or she has nevertheless an interest in "getting in the news".

An important consequence of the fact that both groups of actors are served by the interaction is that it can be conceived of as an exchange rela-tion—in other words, a situation of mutual dependency structured by the wishes and wants of rational actors (the political actor depends on the news media actor since the news media actor is in control of visibility; likewise, the news media actor depends on the political actor since the political actor is in control of information; cf. Hernes 1978, Asp 1986).

That the relation is one of mutual dependency does, however, not imply that it is one of equal dependency; equal dependency characterises a bal-anced relation (i.e. a relation in which power is equally distributed). If, for example, the exchange is balanced to the advantage of the news media actor, the relation is likely to be conditioned primarily by the logic that prevails within the news media system, meaning that the political actor will have to turn issues into events. In essence, then, he or she will have to adhere to a logic that springs from another system (Meyer 2002).

That information is exchanged for visibility is, however, a rather trivial claim; acknowledging that certain needs are being served by the relation opens up for a more thorough understanding—not least with regard to how various situations affect the overall power balance.

On a basic level, a distinction can be made between needs related to *influence* and needs related to *legitimacy*. Obviously, behind this distinction is the notion that power in democratic societies is not once and for all acquired; for acquired power to have some degree of durability, it must be approved of. Consequently, whereas the first group of needs is related to how societal power is obtained, the latter group is instead concerned with how it is maintained.

Furthermore, since influence power is dependent on needs related to *efficiency* as well as needs related to *credibility*, one can with regard to influence power distinguish between quantitative as well as qualitative factors ("how many are reached; to what degree are they made believe?"). And whereas the need for efficiency may come into play in different ways, it is essentially concerned with how to make best use of finite resources (a concern that political actors certainly share with news media actors).

In comparison, the need for credibility is closely related to qualitative aspects: given the means and conditions that are at hand, how do I best appear as trustworthy and reliable? In essence, how do I best form a message that is not only perceived of as many as possible but also believed by as many as possible? The above reasoning is illustrated in the below figure.

Figure 2.1: Basic needs underlying the exchange relation
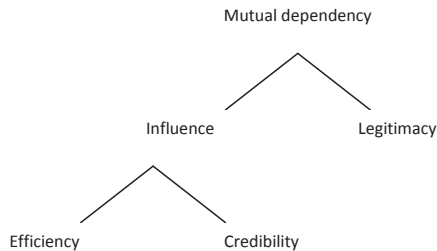
Comments: The figure is meant to clarify the above discussion and must not be understood as an attempt to provide a comprehensive or detailed picture.

Starting with the perspective of a news media actor, it is obvious that needs related to both efficiency and credibility are served by the relation. But whereas little has to be said about the former (a source that has an interest in appearing in the news simply implies less costs than a source that has no interest in appearing in the news; cf. Gandy 1982), the latter is somewhat

more complex. The overall argument is, however, straightforward enough: since a political actor knows the political system from within, a political actor should be able to provide a more detailed and correct view than an external actor. Reliance on a political actor implies, to put it simple, reliance on an authoritative source (Tuchman 1978, Gans 1980, Ericson *et al* 1989, Schudson 2002). Consequently, from the perspective of a news media actor, the relation serves a need for efficiency as well as a need for credibility. Then what about the political actor? What of his or her influence-related needs does the relation serve?

When distinguishing between needs related to efficiency and credibility, it is once again apparent that both kinds are being served. But whereas it is easy to see how a need for efficiency is being served, the reasoning behind the other proposition—that also a need for credibility is being served—must be clarified. Indeed, on the face of it many would probably say that the need for credibility is *not* served by the relation; on the contrary, they would say, the credibility of political actors is often undermined by the news media. A reason why the proposition at first may seem counterintuitive is, however, that we often neglect to consider that credibility is a relational phenomenon; for an actor to be able to appear as credible, he or she must have an audience. With this in mind, the proposition becomes logical: from the perspective of the political actor, the exchange results in a media text, a stage for public performances. Thus, since recognition is a prerequisite for credibility, political actors are dependent on the relation since it indirectly provides them with the means to create a public reputation.

Then, if we accept the proposition suggesting that the relation serves needs related to the obtaining of power, what about the needs related to the maintaining of power?

With regard to news organisations, a societal power position is often considered to be legitimate if the organisation in question serves a public need for information.[4] That is, in contrast to political actors, who can rely on formal procedures, the legitimacy of a news media actor is in the end de-

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[4] I prefer not to distinguish between a role as provider of information and a role as scrutiniser of societal power holders. My argument for this is simple enough: to scrutinise those in power is part of the informative role. In contrast, one could argue that a role related to an engaging function is distinct enough to be conceived of separately. The reason why I choose not to relate the question of legitimacy to an engaging function is because this function is related to a rather specific normative ideal. As discussed in the opening chapter, the news media are in this study attributed an informative function.

pendent on how his or her organisation is perceived; i.e. how well the organisations are perceived to perform the democratic function of providing the citizenry with reliable and relevant information. Obviously, this means that the exchange relation—from the perspective of a news media actor—serves the need for legitimacy. Then what about the political actor?

While legitimacy from the perspective of a political actor is partially derived by formal procedures (e.g. elections), this kind of approval is contingent on there being a possibility for the citizens to acquire the information that they believe to be necessary. An implication is that, unless other actors (or mechanisms) provide the citizenry with the relevant information, political actors are dependent on the news media in order for their power to be legitimate; it is by allowing the news media to scrutinise them that their power becomes legitimate.[5] The question of whether—from the perspective of a political actor—there are any alternatives to the news media will be addressed in the final chapter; suffice it here to say that the relation, indeed, serves a political actor's need for legitimacy.

In brief, the above discussion has aimed to illustrate how the relation between a political actor and a news media actor can be related to certain needs. And despite the fact that their needs may not be equally well met, it is here assumed that both parts can expect to benefit from the relation. In sum, this means that—from the perspective of both political and news media actors—there are rational grounds for the engagement; both parts are simply better off with it than without it.

Finally, a brief remark on the above discussed perspective. That relations can be conceived of in terms of exchanges is certainly not a new idea, yet a social exchange perspective is seldom used with regard to the news media coverage of elections. While this is partly explained by the fact that the perspective was developed for the study of interpersonal relations between individuals in small groups (see, for example, Blau 1964), its simplicity and basic ideas should nevertheless make it attractive—not least since it was developed in order to study relations of power.

Firstly, its basic notion is that two or more actors are engaged in a rela-

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[5] The reason why political legitimacy is said to be only partially derived from formal procedures is—as we later shall see—related to the idea that political actors' authority *de jure* increasingly has to be complemented with a kind of *de facto* authority (see Chapter 4). Here, it could also be added that the mere "being" in the news media serves a legitimising function; the news media is—in the words of Lazarsfeld and Merton—bestowed with a function of "status conferral" (Herbst 2003:448).

tion since the relation serves their needs. The different actors have various resources at their disposal; their resources are valued in accordance with how badly they are wanted by other actors and can therefore be conceived of as their power resources.

Secondly, power is conceived of according to a very simple formula: the power (P) that A has over B is equal to the dependence (D) of B upon A ($P_{AB}=D_{BA}$); that is, the power of one actor is directly related to the needs of another actor. Above, I argued that the power resource of a political actor is information, whereas the power resource of a news media actor is visibility. A relation balanced to the advantage of the news media actor is accordingly a relation where the political actor values visibility more than the news media actor values information.

Thirdly, the perspective is dynamic in that it explicitly deals with the question of power shifts. While different ways of changing the relation have been suggested, one of them is concerned with the question of what happens when new actors (or participants) enter the scene.

For example, imagine that A and B at t are engaged in a two-part relation. The power resource of A is his (her) control of x (be it an object, a skill etc.), whereas the power resource of B, in contrast, is his (her) control of y (be it an object, a skill etc.). Since B values (needs) x more than A values (needs) y, A has an advantage over B. Then, at t+1, C enters the scene, and to the annoyance of A, also C can offer B some x. Moreover, since C values (needs) y as much as B values (needs) x, C will offer B his (her) x to a lower cost than A. Obviously, what happens is that the power that A used to have over B diminishes; that is, since B can get x from C, B's dependence upon A has become reduced.

This very basic idea is illustrated in the figure on the opposite page.

Figure 2.2: How the entrance of a new actor affects the original power relation

Power relation at t

x ——— A ————————— B ——— y

Power relation at t+1

x

C

x ——— A – – – – – – B ——— y
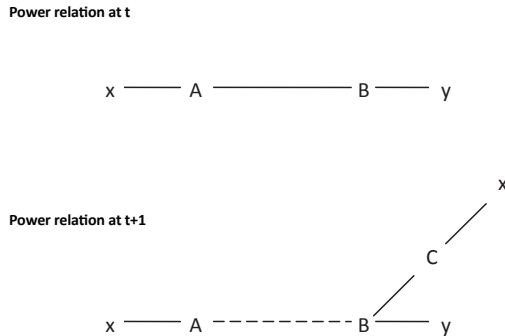
Comments: The above figure illustrates how the original relation between A and B (power relation at t) weakens as another actor enters the scene (power relation at t+1). Essentially, the reason why the original relation becomes weaker is that B at t+1 has more options than at t.

Since my empirical data comes from content analyses, the social exchange perspective will not be applied in discussions on strictly empirical results. However, since I will discuss my empirical results in relation to an (alleged) shift of power—the news media are said to have become all the more powerful at the expense of the political actors—the social exchange perspective will be a recurring theme in the more theoretical parts (not least in the final chapter).

2.3 Information asymmetry and trust: the relation between the citizenry and actors within the two systems

Until now I have discussed relations within as well as between the two systems. Leaning on the work of, amongst others, Easton (1965), Sjöblom (1968) and Asp (1986), the political system was suggested to be a system made up of the relations that result from "the patterned interactions of its component parts" (Sartori 2005:39). The main relations, it was suggested, are those between (political) actors and issues (actors-actors and actors-issues); and, most importantly, issues were considered to emerge as political actors choose to politicise certain questions.

While this picture in no way should be controversial—indeed, an objection might be that it with regard to politics is only too traditional—a similar perspective was suggested to be applicable to the news media. Consequent-

ly, the news media system was suggested to consist of (news media) actors and (news) events (actor-actor and actor-news event). Also in this case, relations were believed to be established by the actors; news events (or news), thus, emerge as news media actors relate to certain events (and in this way, it can certainly be argued that news is a social construction).

While I above have focused on the relations within and between the two systems, these relations are, of course, not all that there is. As a matter of fact, until now the most important group of actors has been altogether overlooked—now, however, it is time to introduce the citizens.

As was made clear in the introduction, the time period that this study deals with is that of late-modernity; that is, a period that in a very obvious way is marked by the "twin forces" of complexity and interdependence. Indeed, a situation of advanced differentiation and complexity is the very background against which I shall present my case: as social beings, citizens in late-modern societies, I shall argue, are more than ever marked by situations of uncertainty; as societies have become increasingly complex and interdependent, actions and decisions that may have a bearing upon citizens' lives have simply become harder for the citizens themselves to oversee—and consequently, over time, the issue of trust should have become increasingly central.

Then, what is trust? And in whom (or what) are the citizens to trust?

Starting with the first of the two above questions, trust shall be conceived of as a "mechanism for the reduction of social complexity", a "power-saving device" (Luhmann 1979, Offe 1999:54). Trust, in this sense, shall *not* be thought of as irrational; to the contrary, in order for human beings to efficiently handle uncertain and contingent environments, trust is absolutely vital. Another way of putting it is that trust is reversely related to information; as a mechanism that enables active participation, trust becomes crucial when the needed information is hard—or impossible—to acquire. Consequently, trust should be a most central aspect to consider in situations of information asymmetry; that is, in (principal-agent) situations in which the needed (or wanted) information is unevenly distributed (e.g. Offe 1999).

Then, in whom (or what) are the citizens to trust—or, perhaps more correct, in whom are the citizens *forced* to trust?

With regard to political information, the answer is two-fold: on the one hand, citizens must rely on information from the decision-makers themselves (that is, the political actors); on the other hand, citizens must rely

on information gained through their links to the decision-makers (that is, the news media actors). Consequently, with regard to both of the systems outlined above, the situation of the citizens is one of dependency. Had the citizens themselves been closer to the decision-making centres, the situation would, of course, have been different. The way it now is—with elected representatives and party political engagement on decline—the citizens are, however, condemned to trust (and, consequently, trust cannot be considered to be irrational).

In sum, the relations between the citizens and the two systems (or more precisely, between the citizens and actors within these two systems) can be conceived of as principal-agent relations. In both cases, the relations are marked by information asymmetry, with citizens (the principals) being further away from the decision-making centres than both the political and the news media actors (the agents). Obviously, citizens have never been in a situation with perfect information about their rulers, but over time I nevertheless suggest that the question of trust should have become increasingly important. The argument is straightforward: while there today is more information on political matters, the complexities of the political system have increased even more, a development that fuels the information gap between the citizens and their rulers (Ferejohn 1999).

Consequently, given that the cost of being fully informed has increased, it makes good sense for citizens—who are assumed to be rational and cost-aware—to let their choices be increasingly guided by questions of trust. As one reflects upon it, a somewhat paradoxical implication is that citizens today may be more informed, but—in relative terms—know less than previous generations did. Indeed, the following passage, by political scientist Mark E. Warren, nicely illustrates the point that I have tried to make:

> As societies become more complex, more differentiated, and more interdependent, individuals increasingly confront a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the developments can, and often do, generate expanded life-choices—choices resulting from greater efficiencies, pluralisation, and mobility. On the other hand, increasing interdependencies extend the vulnerabilities of individuals, while increasing complexities reduce the chances that individuals can monitor the vulnerabilities to which they are subject. [...] To be sure, individuals never could have had full confidence in the institutions and interdependencies to which they were subject, since that would have implied that they could have known the universe of their vulnerabilities. Today, however, the gap seems unbridgeable between the

cognitive resources of individuals and their abilities to know and judge the contingencies that bear on their lives. Individuals do bridge the gap, however. In most cases, they do so not by knowing their vulnerabilities but by trusting others, institutions and systems, with their fortunes.

Warren 1999a:3

Hitherto, I have discussed trust in a rather unspecified manner; instead of focusing what trust "is", I have discussed its function and what it is not (irrational). In the following, I shall attempt to more precisely outline a "positive" understanding of trust.

2.4 Personalisation of trust

Being a central and much discussed concept in the social sciences, my ambition in this section is not to give a comprehensive overview of how the concept of trust has been conceptualised over the years (for this, see Norén Bretzer 2005). Instead, I shall try to outline only the most basic distinctions and the meaning that the concept shall have in the study at hand.

Then, since my arguments primarily shall be concerned with vertical and specific support, what blueprints are there? Writing this in 2012, it is somewhat ironic that I once again shall prefer to lean against the writings of David Easton (1965, 1975). But acknowledging that this decision to some extent is pragmatic—the abundance of scientific work on the concept of trust makes one wonder where to start—Easton's nearly half a century old conceptualisation has an obvious advantage over many of its more recent elaborations: whereas the type of support (or trust) in many of these (e.g. Norris 1999, Norén Bretzer 2005) is assumed to coincide with the object for support (level), Easton argued that distinctions between different kinds of support should be made with regard to all levels of abstraction. In essence, in Easton's accounts, the form of trust (support) is not determined by the level.

Since trust, as I conceive of it, essentially is an *attitude*, I believe that Easton is right when he asserts that there are two kinds of trust, no matter the level (object for trust). Consequently, I shall follow Easton and conceive of trust as a concept with two dimensions: on the one hand, there is what Easton refers to in terms of specific support (what I shall call *cognitive trust*); on the other, there is what Easton refers to in terms of diffuse support (what I shall call *affective trust*). And most importantly, specific and diffuse

support (cognitive and affective trust) are both at play with regard to all levels (objects for support).

Then, to get to the point; how shall the notions of specific (cognitive) and diffuse (affective) trust be understood? Starting with the former, Easton (1975) writes that:

> [Specific support is] directed towards the political authorities and authoritative institutions. It assumes that members have sufficient political awareness to be able to associate satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the perceived behavior of these authorities, whether the behavior is in the form of identifiable actions or some attributed general performance. Specific support is possible only under conditions in which the culture permits the members to entertain the notion that the authorities can be held responsible for what happens in the society. Finally, this kind of support varies with perceived benefits or satisfactions. When these decline or cease, [specific] support will do likewise.
>
> Easton 1975:439

In the above passage, there are a number of aspects to consider. Firstly, the impression that Easton gives here is that specific support only comes to play with regard to the most concrete level, that of political authorities and institutions. While this in no way shall hinder the case that I wish to make—indeed, what I shall deal with is only this level—it is in conflict with the argument that the kind of trust (support) is independent of the object for trust (support). While this is unlucky, it is in Easton's earlier work (1965; compare with Dalton 1999) obvious that he believes that both kinds, at least indirectly, are at play at all levels.

Secondly, whereas Easton writes that "members [of the political community should] have sufficient political awareness to be able to associate satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the perceived behavior of [the] authorities", he has in the very same text (p. 437) underlined that "this […] does not mean that members [of the political community] must be able to identify individual authorities". Indeed, in Easton's words (ibid), "it is enough that the members have knowledge of the authorities as a class or undifferentiated group even if they cannot name names or describe functions". Hence, whereas it is fundamental to Easton that citizens must conceive of a connection between inputs and outputs—that is, authorities must be possible to hold accountable for the outputs—Easton underlines that it is not of fundamental importance that citizens are able to correctly attribute actions and deci-

sions to certain specific actors. Given the theoretical reasoning underlying this study—that societies over time have become increasingly complex and interdependent—this is a most important remark. Consequently, as Easton writes, the possibility to associate output satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with "some attributed general performance" should be enough.[6]

Thirdly, specific support varies with the perceived quality of the outcomes; it is "directed to the perceived decisions, policies, actions, utterances or the general style of [the] authorities" (ibid:437).

As has been outlined above, whereas Easton prefers to call the discussed form of trust specific support, I shall refer to it as cognitive trust. My reason for this is twofold: on the one hand, to use the term specific support would indicate that my understanding of trust is altogether based on Easton—and this is not the case. Whereas it should be obvious that my point of departure can be found in ideas that originally were put forth by David Easton, I shall allow myself to use these ideas quite freely.

On the other hand, my reason for preferring to use the term cognitive trust is that I believe that this term better than specific support (trust) indicates what this form of trust is about: essentially, specific trust—be it with regard to the political community, the regime or the authorities—is about *evaluations* (Dalton 1999). That is, in contrast to diffuse support—which we shall discuss later—specific support (cognitive trust) is concerned with the question of output-satisfaction and, in this way, it should be the result of *cognitions* ("the matching between expected and perceived outcomes").[7]

Until now, I have only discussed cognitive trust. This form is however only one side of the story; alongside cognitive trust is affective trust. Then, if this is the case, how shall this form of trust—what Easton refers to in terms

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[6] As Easton writes (ibid:439): "Especially in large-scale societies, where the nexus between social cause and effect is almost impossible even for the professional social scientist—let alone the average person—to unravel, great freedom in allocating blame and responsibility is afforded to everyone. Evaluations may therefore turn on the assessment of the perceived general performance of he authorities. This support is still of a specific kind since its extension or withdrawal is contingent on the authorities presumed behavior."

[7] The terms of cognitive and affective trust are also used by Warren (1999b). In Warren's words (p. 330), "the literature on the psychology of trust typically distinguishes trust that has cognitive origins […] from trust that has affective origins in love, friendship, relations between children and parents, or other such attachments. While affective trust almost always has a cognitive component—a child learns from experience that his parents are trustworthy, for example—it is important that the affective relationship itself is often a shared interest that merges with a shared identity between truster and trusted, parent and child, marriage partners, etc. […] For the same reason, trust with cognitive origins (what some call 'rational trust') is more appropriate for relationships that occur at distance and lacks this affective coincidence of interest, such as when one trusts professionals, authorities, political representatives, or institutions."

of diffuse support—be understood?

Once again turning to Easton (1975:444), "the briefest way of describing the primary meaning of diffuse support is to say that it refers to evaluations of what an object is or represents […], not of what it does". Thus, when compared to cognitive trust, affective trust is more durable; whereas satisfaction with output delivery may cause cognitive trust to increase or decrease quite briskly, affective trust is a form that increases or decreases only slowly. In essence, affective trust denotes a form of *attachment;* an emotional bond between subject and object (compare with the notion of identification). Obviously, the higher the level of abstraction, the more the degree of overall trust will be grounded in the degree of affective trust; but theoretically—and this since trust essentially is an attitude—both cognitive and affective trust should exist with regard to all levels of abstraction.

How trust-relations between citizens and political actors are believed to have developed is illustrated in table 2.1 (next page). Since, in this study, I shall deal only with the most concrete level, it should be quite possible to make a distinction between two categories of actors (collective and individual actors), and with regard to both of these, two different kinds of trust should be at play: on the one hand, there is affective trust; on the other hand, there is cognitive trust.

Consequently, table 2.1 is one that consists of four cells: 1) affective trust with regard to collective actors; 2) cognitive trust with regard to collective actors; 3) affective trust with regard to individual actors; and 4) cognitive trust with regard to individual actors. Whereas a plus sign (+) indicates increased importance, a minus sign (−) indicates decreased importance. Equal to zero (≈0) indicates that no fundamental changes are suggested to have occurred.

Table 2.1: Personalisation of trust

	Categories for trust	
	Collective political actors (parties)	Individual political actors (party leaders)
Dimension of trust Affective trust	1 –	3 +
Cognitive trust	2 ≈0	4 +

From a quick glance at the above table it should be obvious that I suggest that individual actors should have gained in importance. In essence, I shall argue that there is a *personalisation of trust*; over time, individual political actors (party leaders) have become more important for citizens' overall trust—or confidence—in the system. Obviously, that individual political actors are said to have become more important does not imply that citizens' trust in individual actors have increased. What it does imply is only that citizens' overall feelings of trust—trust is "a summary variable", a "net outcome" of its different dimensions (Easton 1965: 154, 168)—over time have become more determined by (contingent on) trust in individual actors.

That individual political actors should have become more important is, however, but half of the overall picture. The other side of it is, of course, that collective actors should have decreased in importance (with regard to citizens' overall trust in the system). However, whereas this certainly should be true with regard to the dimension of affective trust—above described as feelings of emotional attachment and identification—I shall not argue that the same holds true with regard to the dimension of cognitive trust. On the face of it, this may seem paradoxical: if cognitive trust in individual political actors has become more important, should not cognitive trust in collective actors have become less important?

In relative terms, the objection is correct: since the importance of individual actors' competences and abilities are said to have increased, the relative importance of collective actors' competences and abilities should have decreased. However, what we have at hand is not a zero-sum game. Since I argue that competence and ability have become more important in general, there is no contradiction in the suggestion that cognitive trust in individual

actors have become more important, meanwhile its importance with regard to collective actors remain roughly the same. Given the fact that cognitive evaluations are assumed to over time weigh heavier in the overall calculation, there are simply more "units" of cognitive trust for cells 3 and 4 to be filled with.

In sum, table 2.1 illustrates what I shall refer to in terms of a personalisation of trust. As outlined above, this process implies, all in all, that individual political actors have become more important as determinants for overall levels of trust; and to this development, there are two sides: on the one hand, cognitive trust in individual political actors should have become increasingly important; on the other hand, affective trust in individual political actors should have become increasingly important.

Finally, the two sides of this development are directly related to two of the hypotheses presented in Chapter 1: whereas increased importance of cognitive trust shall be related to the hypothesis suggesting that the news media has become all the more occupied with the party leaders' skills and competences (H2), increased importance of affective trust shall be related to the hypothesis suggesting that that the news media has become all the more occupied with the party leaders' personal lives (H3).

In the above discussions, three propositions have been central. Firstly, trust is not irrational but necessary; it is only through trust that relations beyond the familiar can be established and maintained. Secondly, trust has a cognitive as well as an affective component. Thirdly, cognitive trust—as I have conceived of it above—is the result of evaluations. In essence, while we cannot choose whether to trust or not, we can—and do—choose in whom we trust.

2.5 Bridging the information gap? The role of the news media

Then, if citizens need political information in order to be able to make informed political choices, how is this information acquired? Theoretically, Asp (1986) has argued that there are four ways that citizens can acquire information about the political world (here: political system). Firstly, citizens can rely on their *own experiences*; that is, information and knowledge that they have acquired by interacting with political actors. Secondly, citizens can acquire information by means of *interpersonal relations*; examples of this could be conversations with politically engaged family members and workmates. Thirdly, citizens can rely on information brought to them via *mediating institutions*, and here, the news media are central. Fourthly, citizens can

retrieve previously acquired information and, via *cognitive processes*, provide it with modified (and in this sense "new") meanings. An example of this could be when old convictions (e.g. ideological leanings) are being intellectually reconsidered, with the result of there, in the end, being somewhat different convictions.

Whereas all four ways should be important, I shall here suggest that the news media have become an increasingly important source of political information. That is, in order to be able to make informed choices on political matters, citizens must more than ever rely on the news media; in contemporary late-modern societies, citizens are in a situation of (news) media dependency.[8]

Then, if the news media have an important democratic function, exactly what is it that the news media do? Or, somewhat more precisely: in what ways do the news media enable politics in contemporary societies to be democratic; how does the news media enable a steering form in which the consent of citizens is crucial?

Here I shall not be concerned with the question of what kind of information the news media shall provide to the citizens; in fact, I shall go beyond the question of "what" and instead focus on the question of "how". More precisely, in answering the above questions I shall lean against the works of John B. Thompson (1995, 2005; see also Meyrowitz 1986) and suggest that a most important feature of the media is that they enable *meaningful relations with distant others*.[9]

At the very core of Thompson's account is the notion that the rise of media society has enabled "symbolic forms" to "spill far beyond the shared locales of daily life" (1995:2). In this way, the rise of media society has resulted

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[8] The reason why the first two ways should have decreased in importance is obvious: since party political engagement is declining, the number of encounters between citizens and political representatives should, over time, have decreased. Consequently, whereas the decreased importance of one's own experiences is a direct effect of the development of decreased party political engagement, the decreased importance of interpersonal contacts should, indeed, be an indirect effect of the same development. And although the fourth way for citizens to acquire political information over time may have become increasingly important— in the light of an all the more educated and politically "free-floating" citizenry, this does seem plausible—it would be far-fetched to suggest that the diminishing importance of personal encounters—be they direct or indirect—is altogether counterbalanced by increased contemplation on political matters.

[9] Since Thompson (1995) outlines a social theory of the media—not of the news media—I shall in the following have the implications of the media in its wide sense in mind. Moreover, here I shall focus only on those aspects that are most important with regard to the matter at hand; that is, the relation(s) between citizens and their rulers.

in a profound change of human interaction patterns: since the media have enabled there to be relations without common spatial and temporal frames of references, the media have by their very basic function become drivers of social change. Consequently—and as I have argued above—all studies on power in contemporary societies must acknowledge the importance of the (news) media. Since the (news) media to some extent have become actors in themselves, all studies on power that neglect to consider the importance of the media are, at best, incomplete.[10]

Although Thompson convincingly argues that contemporary (Western) media society has its root as far back in time as the Middle Ages, he has nevertheless a special interest in the society that has emerged with the rise of telecommunications. Consider for example the following passage:

> Prior to the advent of telecommunication, the extension of availability of symbolic forms in space generally required their physical transportation: with a few notable exceptions (for instance, semaphore) significant spatial distanciation could be achieved only by transporting symbolic forms from one place to another. But with the development of early forms of telecommunication, such as the telegraph and the telephone, significant spatial distanciation could be achieved without physically transporting symbolic forms, and hence without incurring the temporal delays involved in transportation. The advent of telecommunication thus resulted in the uncoupling of space and time, in the sense that spatial distanciation no longer required temporal distanciation.
>
> Thompson 1995:32

While most modern readers should consider the "uncoupling of space and time" as something altogether natural, the sensations that this possibility aroused some generations ago are today hard to imagine. For the first time in human history, space was no longer directly coupled to time; for the first time in history, humans could now be timely co-present with family members and friends that—temporarily or permanently—were far away.

Then, what were the implications of telecommunications for the relation(s) between the citizens and their rulers?

Here I shall leave interpersonal communication forms aside and fo-

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[10] Since the development towards increasingly interdependent and complex societies have implied that coordination has become an increasingly important task, "network society" (or multi-level models of governance) would not have been possible had it not been for the media. For a discussion on the role of journalism in network society, see Ørsten (2004, 2007).

cus only on the mass media; and with regard to these, I shall suggest that there are three closely related consequences that are of central importance. Firstly, in a very obvious way the introduction of telecommunication media meant that the means for receiving information (symbolic forms) have multiplied. Whereas citizens during the era of print were condemned to rely on written information—in the early 20th century, newspapers were concerned with words, not images (Becker 2000)—telecommunication media has allowed citizens to both listen to and look at their leaders. Thus, with the introduction of telecommunications there followed a "new visibility" (Thompson 2005).

Secondly (and closely related to the new visibility of political leaders), with the rise of telecommunications there followed new possibilities for the cultivation and maintenance of more personal relations with distant others. While this suggestion shall not be understood with regard to the degree of directionality—early telecommunication media were marked by the one-to-many characteristic to a higher extent than the press—it is nevertheless a fact that telecommunication media in other ways resembled interpersonal communication: on the one hand, political leaders could now be both heard and seen; on the other hand, with telecommunication there followed the possibility of a direct appeal (Manin 1997).

Whereas little has to be said about the former, I shall allow myself to go somewhat deeper into the latter. Because with the rise of telecommunication media, political leaders could for the first time in history address their subjects without having to rely on the mediation of news media actors. Sure enough, they could not themselves handle the productions and techniques, but in a way that previously was impossible, they could now address their subjects with their own words and gestures—that is, whereas they before had had to rely on being correctly cited and described, they could now act directly in front of their audiences. Consequently, with the rise of telecommunication media, the political actor was more than ever turned into a performer (e.g. Jamieson 1990, Schmuhl 1992, Hart 1994).

Thirdly, since the early print media had enabled relations with distant others, and since telecommunication media had facilitated personally grounded appeals, the rise of media society ultimately fostered a "politics of trust" (Thompson 2005:46).

Since Thompson himself discusses what I above have referred to in terms of a personalisation of trust, I shall allow myself to cite him at length.

Whereas he starts by describing the effects of the decline of class-based politics—after all, Thompson is first and foremost a sociologist—he soon moves on to relate "politics of trust" to trust in individual leaders:

> With the decline of the old ideological politics, many people feel increasingly uncertain about how best to tackle the enormously complex problems of the modern world; the world appears increasingly as a bewildering place where there are no simple solutions, and where we have to place more and more faith in our political leaders to make sound judgements and to protect our interests. It is in this context that the question of the credibility and trustworthiness of political leaders becomes an increasingly important issue. People become more concerned with the character of the individuals who are (or might become) their leaders and more concerned about their trustworthiness, because increasingly these become the principal means of guaranteeing that political promises will be kept and that difficult decisions in the face of complexity and uncertainty will be made on the basis of sound judgement. The politics of trust becomes increasingly important, not because politicians are inherently less trustworthy today than they were in the past, but because the social conditions that had previously underwritten their credibility have been eroded.

> Thompson 2005:46

To sum up the above discussion, I have strongly relied on the writings of John B. Thompson and suggested that the news media, by their very basic function, enable long-distance relationships. Whereas citizens in prior époques were condemned to relations with the "near and dear", citizens in media society can (and do) have meaningful relations also with their distant leaders. Consequently, all in all, the rise of media society has enabled relations of mutuality between rulers and ruled, and in this way—and especially after the introduction of telecommunications—media society has fuelled the development towards a politics of trust.

2.6 Mediatisation: a theory on the accommodation power of the media

Over the last couple of decades, the concept of mediatisation has become something of a buzzword in political communication literature. Since I have previously argued that studies on power must today acknowledge the importance of the media, this awakened scholarly interest is, all in all, most welcome. However, while nobody should regret the development, a claim that most researchers should be ready to accept is that widespread use

tends to make once clear and stringent concepts more ambiguous (as we later shall see, this is a risk that also the concept of personalisation faces).

Having said this, I shall here prefer to focus on how the concept of mediatisation was originally outlined by Kent Asp (1986; see also Hjarvard 2008 and Strömbäck 2008). As we soon shall see, mediatisation is here *not* outlined as a theory on the media (or, for that matter, on media content). Instead—and in this way it resembles John B Thompson's "social theory of the media"—mediatisation is a theory on how the rise of the news media as an autonomous and omnipresent institution has had consequences with regard to societal power relations.[11]

At the core of the concept is, very briefly, the notion that actors within other institutions (have had to) increasingly accommodate to the norms and routines that characterise the (news) media system. In this way, power is not being actively exercised; instead, it comes to play as actors within other institutions recognise that they have become increasingly dependent on the (news) media for their functioning (and act thereafter). Consequently, mediatisation theory is not a theory on the (news) media. Instead, it is a theory on how the importance attributed to one societal subsystem (the news media system) gradually transforms and alters the logic—or *modus operandi*—of other societal subsystems (for example, the political system).

Then, if mediatisation theory is essentially a theory on the increased accommodation power of the (news) media, what processes are central and how is this power shift assumed to (have) come about? In the words of Stig Hjarvard:

> Mediatisation is to be considered a double-sided process of high modernity in which the media on the one hand emerge as an independent institution with a logic of its own that other social institutions have to accommodate to. On the other hand, media simultaneously become an integrated part of other institutions [...] as more and more of these institutional activities are performed through both interactive and mass media. The logic of the media refers to the institutional and technological modus operandi of the media, including the ways in which media

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[11] An implication of this is that mediatisation—as pointed out by Krotz (2007)—has similarities with meta-concepts such as globalisation and individualisation. And whereas we are all, quite obviously, free to use any of these concepts in whatever way we want, references to mediatisation in empirically oriented studies are often made rather perfunctorily. This is unfortunate for one basic reason: used in all kinds of contexts and in all sorts of ways, concepts that become too popular and embraced run the risk of losing both their distinctiveness and original meaning.

> distribute material and symbolic resources and make use of formal and informal rules.
>
> Hjarvard 2008:105

Let us briefly pause and consider the different elements that can be distilled from the above excerpt. Firstly, mediatisation resembles personalisation in that it is an inherently longitudinal concept (Strömbäck and Esser 2009). Consequently, a time perspective is embedded in the very definition of mediatisation itself.

Secondly, the news media emerge as an important power centre of their own as other institutions become increasingly dependent on the news media for their functioning. In this process, power comes to play as other institutions start to adapt to the logic of the news media; in other words, the institutionalisation of media logic is the "specific mechanism" (Schrott 2009:47) on which the process of mediatisation relies.

Thirdly, in a final stage, media logic has eventually become incorporated and internalised; that is, very much like a young cuckoo, a previously alien logic has now turned another institution to its natural home.

If, indeed, the above points provide us with a basic understanding of the most important features of mediatisation theory, let us now look at how well this theory fits with the reasoning and perspectives that underlie this study.

Since a time-perspective is embedded in both personalisation and mediatisation, the relevance of the latter appears to be obvious (especially since one of the characteristics of media logic is a focus on individuals). Moreover, underpinning mediatisation theory is the notion that actors within other subsystems have become increasingly dependent on the (news) media, and as we shall see, this notion is indeed a most central feature in the overall reasoning of this study.

However, whereas the overall reasoning of the study at hand certainly is in debt to mediatisation theory—as shown above, an exchange perspective and a systems perspective underlie both the study at hand and that by Asp (1986)—I shall when arguing for the hypotheses (Chapter 5) try to provide a somewhat different perspective. And here, the reason is not that I believe media-oriented explanations to personalisation to be "wrong"; what I hold against them is only that they often tend to be rather one-sided: stressing the importance of the (news) media, they tend to neglect the importance of political structures; when stressing the dynamics of the news media system, the

political system is conceived of as rather static.

Another reason why the provided arguments do not lean against mediatisation theory is that I am not altogether at ease with the notion of there being a single (news) media logic (cf. Lundby 2009). As will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 10, the accuracy of this is, of course, dependent not only on how closely one looks but also how the concept itself—media logic—is defined. Whereas the notion of a single logic may have been less problematic in the mid 1980s—as discussed above, mediatisation theory was first outlined by Asp as a response to the emergence of a TV-society (see Asp 2011a)—both the number of actors and the degree of competition have since then grown considerably. In essence, as the news media system is marked by increased turbulence and fragmentation (and this due to both commercial imperatives and deregulation) it should simply have become increasingly difficult for a single news media logic to prevail.

Indeed, had this study dealt with personalisation during the 1960s, the 1970s or the 1980s, mediatisation theory would probably have turned out to be the single most important framework against which the case was to be made. However, in both Asp (2011) and Strömbäck (2008), a stage of adaptation (accommodation) is followed by a phase in which media logic has become incorporated (see also Schulz 2004, Hjarvard 2008). Consequently, having in this final stage become fully internalised, media logic can no longer be conceived of as something that acts *upon* the political system; in late-modern societies, media logic is a part of the very environment in which political actors are to act.[12]

Summing up the above discussion; whereas mediatisation is a most important theory for understanding the historical development of the relation

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[12] The above idea—that something that has become internalised no longer can be conceived of as external—is discussed by Strömbäck and Esser (2009). Referring to a remark by Silverstone—that "the media are becoming environmental"—Strömbäck and Esser write (p. 211): "Silverstone's expression that the media have become environmental is enlightening: The environment is always present, and human beings cannot be perceived as being located outside of the environment. Just as birds are dependent on air and fish are dependent on water, the human being lives in and interacts with the environment, and it does not make much sense to ask what the effect of air is on birds, of water on fish, or of environment on human beings." Whereas processes of mediatisation certainly may be at work with regard to everyday behaviours within other societal institutions (e.g. the educational and the judiciary systems), the notion that the political system has incorporated media logic should—at least to me—imply that one can question the suitability of mediatisation theory with regard to actions and behaviours of contemporary politicians. The way in which mediatisation theory still may be of relevance with regard to this sphere is discussed in Chapter 10; suffice it here to say that I shall suggest that mediatisation theory—in order to remain relevant with regard to contemporary politics—should be applied on the systems level and not the organisational level.

between political actors and news media actors, I shall—when arguing for the hypotheses—prefer to instead emphasise large-scale structural developments within the political system itself. In essence, whereas mediatisation theory suggests that accommodation to (news) media logic is the engine of change, I shall argue that changes within the political system also must be considered. Indeed, whereas this is not to provide an altogether different picture, it is to provide a somewhat different frame.

2.7 Summary

The chapter has aimed to provide the overall theoretical framework for the study. Essentially, it has been argued that late-modern societies are societies where the citizens are marked by two kinds of vertical dependencies: on the one hand, the citizens are dependent on their elected rulers for the "authoritative allocation of values"; on the other hand, they are dependent on the news media for information on their rulers' actions, wants and wills. Consequently, late-modern societies depend on vertical trust for their very functioning—in order not to be paralysed under the yoke of uncertainty, citizens in late-modern societies are essentially forced to trust.

Moreover, it was argued that there is a gradual personalisation of trust. In essence, what this development implies is that trust in individual actors has become an increasingly important determinant for citizens' confidence (trust) in the political system. Whereas collective and group-based identities have not become altogether replaced, there is a development in which personally grounded relations have become increasingly important. In essence, as there is an individualisation of society at large, there is an individualisation of citizens' relations to the political system and its actors.

Chapter 3

What is known?

In Chapter 2 it was suggested that political organisations and news organisations are expected to largely rely on established norms and routines; both kinds of organisations were assumed to be reluctant to change. An obvious but yet important consequence is that the coverage of elections should look much the same year after year. Certainly, there will be differences in what issues that are prioritised; how they are framed; who is ahead and who is behind. But on an overall level much can be expected to change rather little; the coverage itself has become institutionalised. Or, in other words: to some extent the way elections *have been* covered set the frames for how they *will* be covered.

The research overview that is to follow will focus on three kinds of studies. Firstly, I shall look closer at previous studies on personalisation; secondly, I shall provide an overview of what we know from Swedish election studies; and thirdly, I shall briefly summarise the main findings from three Swedish studies on presidentialisation.

Due to the research question at hand, most attention will be given to previous studies on personalisation—and with regard to these; certain aspects will be focused on.[1] One such aspect is the *conceptualisation*. In essence, how have researchers conceived of and defined personalisation; what analytical models are there; what do they have in common and how do they differ?

But an elaborated conceptualisation is but a start; to be able to provide empirically grounded answers the concept must also be successfully *operationalised*. And here I shall argue that an important explanation of the lack of clarity that still surrounds the concept can be found: in many studies that deal with personalisation, the very operationalisations can be questioned; an often used empirical indicator—explicitly or not—is for example the existence of game framing. This, I shall argue, is unfortunate, not least since it obscures the actual meaning of the concept.

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[1] Here, the concept of personalisation will refer only to studies on the coverage of politics. When other forms of personalisation are discussed (e.g. behavioural, institutional), this will be specified in the text.

Another theme shall be that of *explanatory factors*. As will be obvious, a certain set of factors are often conceived of as the driving forces behind personalisation; and, quite naturally, the importance attributed to them differs. While, for example, one study points out the trend of media commercialisation as the most important, another highlights changes in the political system. Consequently, after initially having discussed the driving forces on a rather general level, I will continue by focusing on to what extent personalisation is conceived of as a media-generated or politically co-determined process. While the latter perspective is not in conflict with the notion of a mediatisation of politics, it stresses that political actors should not be conceived of as passive victims. In contrast, a unifying idea for the studies in this category is that political actors have learnt how to use the news media (and its logic) for their own ends.

Finally, the *main results* of the examined studies will be presented. In sum, this means that the overview that is to follow is thematic: firstly, I shall present how personalisation has previously been conceptualised; secondly, I shall examine how it has been operationalised; thirdly, I shall focus the explanatory factors, and fourthly, I shall present the main results.

Before looking closer at the discussed themes I will start by summarising the main findings in a recent research overview on the subject. Since the article does not deal solely with media personalisation, it effectively illustrates the different branches of an overall research question.

3.1 Personalisation of politics—a critical review by Adam and Maier

Adam and Maier (2010) have presented not only one of the most recent research overviews, but one that is both comprehensive and critical (at least with regard to the presented empirical evidence). The two researchers, who are both from the admittedly broad field of political communication, start by stressing that personalisation is "regarded as an increasing phenomenon in politics, and its analysis thus requires a longitudinal perspective" (p. 215). Although I very much agree with the claim that personalisation requires a longitudinal perspective, it should be admitted that it effectively restricts the scope of the authors'—and my own—endeavours: studies without a systematic time perspective are altogether excluded. Moreover, Adam and Maier decided only to include studies with quantitative results, and also this is a decision that I shall follow. In sum, this means that the studies discussed by Adam and Maier (and later on, by myself) all fulfil two conditions: the

studies are 1) longitudinal and 2) present quantitative results.

After having briefly discussed the research tradition—"neither the concept itself, nor research related to it are new phenomena" (p. 215)—Adam and Maier focus on how personalisation has been defined. And while they claim that "there is no consensus on the exact definition" (p. 216), they nevertheless identify two "propositions":

> On the one hand, personalisation refers to a stronger focus on candidates/politicians instead of parties, institutions, or issues. On the other hand, the personalisation hypothesis claims that it is not only individuals per se, but it is their personal, non-political characteristics that become more relevant. The first form of personalisation thus identifies the main development from institutions and issues to people; the second form refers to a change in the criteria for evaluation of politicians from features regarding their professional competence and performance to features concerning non-political personality traits.

> Adam and Maier 2010:216

As we shall later see, the double-sidedness that the authors above point at is acknowledged by most students of personalisation: on the one hand, personalisation denotes a development where individual actors are assumed to have become increasingly important; on the other, the term is used in order to refer to a development where personal matters are assumed to have become increasingly important. While I fully agree that personalisation is a concept with two different sides, it shall be argued in Chapter 4 that distinctions must be made also between different personal matters (or personality traits).

Having suggested that two propositions can be identified in the literature, the authors continue by identifying three areas for which the propositions are relevant: personalisation of election campaigns, personalisation of media reporting and commentating and personalisation of voting behaviour. And after having scrutinised the existing studies—both propositions are examined with regard to all three areas—the authors conclude that "there is only one area of politics where the empirical state of research supports [the personalisation thesis]: media coverage" (p. 584). Adam and Maier summarise their findings in a table:

Table 3.1: Empirical evidence for personalisation according to Adam and Maier

Proposition (or dimension)	Area		
	Campaigns	Media	Voting
Proposition 1: Institutions/issues → individuals	-/+*	+	-
Proposition 2: Political → non-political traits	-/+*	-*	-

Comments: A plus sign indicates that the personalisation thesis generally is supported whereas a minus sign indicates that the personalisation thesis generally lacks support. An asterisk (*) indicates that few studies are available. The table is adopted from Adam and Maier (2010).

If studies on campaigns are excluded—with regard to this area, few studies are available—it becomes apparent that the above table consists of more minuses than pluses. Consequently, with regard to all three areas, the overall evidence is hardly overwhelming. Moreover, since the media coverage is considered to be the one positive case, it is somewhat surprising that the result for this area is considered to be mixed: proposition one is supported while proposition two is rejected. So what explains the conclusion drawn by Adam and Maier? How can media coverage be considered to be supportive to the thesis when there is one case for and one case against?

To answer this, one must read between the lines: with regard to the second proposition, only *five* studies are examined; with regard to the first proposition, the number is roughly fivefold. Therefore, while it may be correct to consider the media coverage to be supportive with regard to proposition one, the rejection with regard to proposition two rests on a basis that is utterly small.[2]

Finally, I would like to point at two aspects that Adam and Maier addressed: firstly, surprisingly little research on personalisation is concerned with images (i.e. photos, visual representations of politicians). Secondly, in many cases the distinctions between political and non-political characteristics are ambiguous.

With regard to the first of these two points, the study at hand will look closer at the photographs of party leaders. I will not only study the extent to which party leaders appear, but also how they appear (e.g. what clothes they

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[2] The need for more empirical studies with regard to the second proposition is also pointed out by the authors themselves, as it is suggested that "the data base regarding the longitudinal development of the relevance of non-political traits is […] in need of further developments" (p. 229).

wear, gaze direction etc.). And with regard to the second point, I fully agree that the distinctions between political and non-political traits are problematic. An obvious reason for this is that the increased importance of the (news) media has rendered "non-political" traits political. Not in the sense that media skills alone determine the outcomes of negotiations in the traditional arenas of politics (e.g. the parliament), this would be to put matters to extremes. But, as discussed in Chapter 4, a notion underlying this study is that communicative aspects over time have become more important for a political actor's standing in public opinion. And since the standing in public opinion can be assumed to affect the bargaining power of individual political actors, media skills will indirectly affect the decisions that are made.[3]

Then, if political characteristics have become increasingly inseparable from non-political characteristics, what should one do? An obvious answer is that one should avoid relying on this kind of distinction. Consequently, in Chapter 4 I shall suggest that a more viable distinction can be made between inner traits and external attributes. While also the suggested model has its problems, it should nevertheless have an advantage in that it is less affected by factors such as time and space. Given that time is central to the concept itself, the reason why robust categories are preferred should be apparent: in order to reliably measure changes over time, we need a yardstick that is fixed.

3.2 Studies on personalisation

While it would be a lie to claim that there are no Swedish studies on personalisation, most of the existing studies have an altogether empirical focus. Consequently, since I prefer to start by examining studies that are relevant from a theoretical perspective, the great majority of the studies discussed—as a matter of fact, all but one (Johansson 2008)—are from other countries. Then, after having discussed the conceptualisation, operationalisation and explanatory factors in a number of selected studies, I will continue by focusing on empirical results. At this latter stage, studies with a narrow empirical focus will also be included. Moreover, since the empirical focus of this study is on the case of Sweden, I prefer to primarily discuss studies on countries that, with regard to the political and the news media system, are similar to

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[3] An actor's media skills are assumed to be an important determinant of his or her "media capital", i.e. his or her ability to obtain access to the media (Sheafer 2001).

Sweden. This means that studies from the group of European democratic cor-poratist countries (Hallin and Mancini 2004) will be given priority. And among this group of countries, studies from other Nordic countries will be prioritised.

3.2.1 Conceptualisations

In order to be able to present illuminating results, one has to have a clear idea of what one studies. So how have other researchers defined their object of research? How is personalisation conceived of; what do different authors mean when they refer to the concept?

Starting with Karvonen (2010), the definition provided is problematic since it is too vague to be clarifying. According to the author (ibid:4), "the core of the personalisation hypothesis is the notion that individual political actors have become more prominent at the expense of parties and collective identities." Certainly, Karvonen is definitely not wrong; that individual ac-tors have become more important is not at odds with any of the two proposi-tions discussed above (or, for that matter, the three dimensions that will be suggested in Chapter 4). But all in all, Karvonen does not pay much attention to the more qualitative dimensions; and while he sure adds that there also may be a shift towards the characteristics of individual politicians, this shift appears in Karvonen's account to more or less be a result of the shift from collective actors to individual actors. In the words of Karvonen:

> The way politics is presented to the citizens may stress the role of individual poli-ticians. Electoral campaigns and political propaganda may centre increasingly on individual candidates and leaders instead of parties, their platforms and the col-lective interests that they claim to represent. The focus of the mass media may similarly shift to individual politicians and their characteristics and qualities.

> Karvonen 2010:5

While Karvonen explicitly stresses that personalisation in one research area (e.g. the news media coverage) need not coincide with personalisation in other research areas (e.g. voting behaviour), an orientation towards indi-vidual actors seems in the above excerpt to more or less automatically co-incide with a more personal coverage. This is unfortunate, not least since it obscures the double-sidedness of the concept and indirectly places the two dimensions in a hierarchical order. Moreover, by referring to party platforms it becomes apparent that Karvonen believes there to be a connection be-tween issue-orientation and the importance of collective actors—that is, if

issues are of diminishing importance, individual actors (and their personal characteristics) must be of increasing importance. Clearly, this need not be the case. While there may be an empirical correlation between issue-orientation and the tendency to portray collective actors, the two are not connected on a more theoretical level.[4]

The vagueness in Karvonen's conceptualisation may, of course, be explained by the fact that the study—an analytical research overview—covers different areas of personalisation (although it primarily deals with personalisation in the political arenas, e.g. institutions, election systems, voting behaviour). Thus, while Karvonen himself does stress the importance of the news media, his study is first and foremost concerned with questions that are of interest from a political science perspective.

In contrast to Karvonen (2010), Langer's (2006) study focuses on the question of news media personalisation. Yet another reason why it is important is that the concept of personalisation here is treated as truly multi-dimensional. Since Langer's study primarily focuses on coverage of Tony Blair, a first distinction is made between, on the one hand, presidentialisation and, on the other, "personality politics":

> The concept of the personalisation of politics is most commonly used to refer to two associated but distinctive processes: "presidentialisation" and "personality politics". Presidentialisation alludes to the process by which individual political figures become the centre of the decision making process, displacing other political actors, especially political parties and collegiate forms of government. [...] For the sake of conceptual clarity, I shall refer to this first phenomenon as the "presidentialisation of power". [...] The idea of "personality politics", in contrast to presidentialisation of power, focuses on the increasing importance of the character and personality of leaders in political discourse and their potential impact on electoral behaviour.
>
> <div align="center">Langer 2006:20 (on presidentialisation) and 23 (on personality politics)</div>

After having made this first distinction, Langer goes on to separate traits that are directly related to the role of political leaders from traits that "have to do with the personal sphere of the individual and [therefore shall] not be considered essentially political" (p. 26). As we later shall see, although there

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[4] Notably, also Adam and Maier (2010) seem to suggest that a decreased issue orientation implies an increased importance of individuals (see proposition one).

are important differences with regard to the grounds for distinction, Langer's model has obvious similarities with the model that will be presented in Chapter 4.

Moreover, Langer's decision to refer to the latter form of "personality politics" in terms of "the politicisation of private personae" is a deliberate choice. According to Langer, the concept suggests that "the personal is incorporated into, but does not replace, the 'truly' political in leaders' public personae", whereas the opposite (i.e. "the privatisation of political persona") "gives a strong indication of everything 'truly' political being hijacked and replaced by the personal" (p. 27). In essence, this means that Langer—like myself—questions a view in which more personally oriented coverage is automatically condemned. The way Langer conceptualises personalisation is illustrated below:

Figure 3.1: Personalisation according to Langer
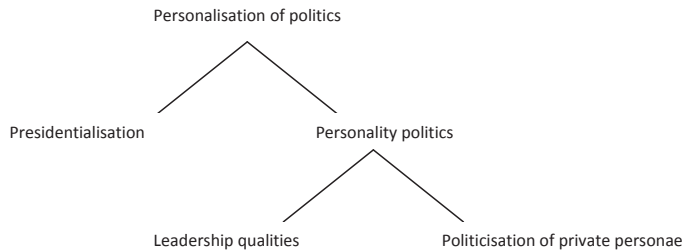
Comments: The figure is adopted from Langer (2006:27)

While it from the perspective of this study is confusing that Langer uses the term presidentialisation, Langer explicitly states that the term, in her use of it, denotes a general shift in which collective actors lose in importance compared to individual actors.[5] And, it is important to note, also Langer stresses that there need not be a one-to-one connection between various areas of personalisation; a "'contagious' effect might be expected but cannot—and should not—be assumed" (Langer 2006:94).

The way that Langer conceptualises personalisation has similarities

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[5] Since presidentialisation "touches upon the differential distribution of power, highlighting a change in relation to which and how many actors that are involved, and with how much power and influence, in both decision and policy making" (ibid:20), "importance" is to be understood from a power perspective.

with the conceptualisation posited by Rahat and Sheafer (2007). In a typology the two authors first distinguish between three general types (or areas) of political personalisation (institutional, media, and behavioural); and with regard to the media, they continue by distinguishing between personalisation in the "unpaid media" (i.e. news media coverage) and personalisation in the "paid media" (i.e. political advertisements). While the types themselves are unproblematic—as a matter of fact, they are similar to the those discussed by Adam and Silke (2010) and Karvonen (2010)—it becomes, however, somewhat confusing when the authors, in their "conceptual map", suggest that media privatisation should be conceived of as "a specific form of personalisation" (Rahat and Sheafer 2007:67). Obviously, what is problematic here is that the authors, intentionally or not, mix forms (or dimensions) with types (or areas). However, according to the authors, what distinguishes media personalisation from media privatisation is that:

> In media personalisation, which refers to heightened focus on individual politicians and a diminished focus on parties, the focus is usually on the political characteristics and activities of individual politicians. Therefore, while media coverage centers on political leaders, it still remains political. Media privatisation, on the other hand, refers to a media focus on the personal characteristics and personal life of individual candidates.
>
> <div align="right">Rahat and Sheafer 2007:68</div>

While Langer explicitly avoids the normative grounds that are central in Rahat and Sheafer's conceptualisation, there are nevertheless similarities between her model and that of Rahat and Sheafer since intimisation (politicisation of private persona/media privatisation) in both cases is conceived of as a specific form of personalisation. In contrast to Langer, however, Rahat and Sheafer do not conceive of increased orientation towards "leadership qualities" as a specific form of personalisation; in their account, the tendency of the media to focus all the more on the competences and qualities of political leaders is *not* separated from the tendency of the media to focus all the more on individual political actors; both are referred to in terms of "media personalisation".

I believe this grouping to be unfortunate. Not only because the two dimensions are theoretically different, but also because the question of individual suitability is a most central theme in the notion of there being a personalisation of trust (compare with the writings on the emergence of "leader

democracies"; e.g. Körösényi 2005, 2007, Pakulski and Higley 2008, Edward Green 2010; see also Mughan 2000, Helms 2005, Poguntke and Webb 2005).

All in all, however, the three studies above have all put efforts into defining what personalisation really "is about". Subsequently, the conceptualisation of more empirically oriented studies will be discussed.

In Johansson (2008), personalisation is conceived of as one of two aspects of popularisation (the other being dramatisation). In Johansson's view, there are three different ways of defining personalisation:

> One way [...] concern how politicians are framed, for example, how different attributes are connected to politicians or to what extent the media focus on their private lives. Another aspect of personalisation concerns to what extent journalism focuses on politicians instead of political parties; a third could be how much attention party leaders receive as compared to other politicians.
>
> Johansson 2008:183

While it is apparent that Johansson conceives of personalisation as a multifaceted concept, the last two of the aspects that are discussed are actually quite similar: in the first, the importance of individual actors is compared to that of collective actors; in the second, the importance of party leaders is compared to that of other politicians. As I understand it, these aspects can however both be the related to the notion that (mediated) politics is becoming increasingly top-steered (-oriented); there is certainly a difference between them, but whether this difference is important enough to call for a conceptual distinction can be debated.

This remark notwithstanding, it should be noted that Johansson also conceives of a more qualitative dimension: one aspect, he suggests, is "how different attributes are connected to politicians or to what extent the media focus on their private lives". Consequently, the way Johansson conceptualises personalisation is diametrically different from the way Langer conceptualises it—where Langer conceives of one dimension, Johansson conceives of two; and where Johansson conceives of two dimensions, Langer conceives of one.

In Kriesi (2010), personalisation is quite simply defined in the same way as in the overview by Silke and Maier (2010). Consequently, on the one hand there is a shift from parties, institutions and issues to individual politicians; on the other, "non-political" traits are becoming more important at

the expense of "features regarding their professional competence and performance" (p. 2). As has already been discussed, whether a decreased issue-orientation *per se* implies a trend of personalisation can certainly be questioned; while there may be a correlation, there is certainly no theoretical connection.

In yet another cross country comparative study—although one that is very different from Kriesi's (2010)—Mayerhöffer and Esmark (2011:2) suggest that the concept "can be defined rather simply as an orientation of political campaigning, media reporting and voters towards political personalities, i.e. the personality of individual politicians". Obviously, personalisation is here conceived of in a quite different way than in Karvonen (2010), although the authors—it should be admitted—also discuss the shift from collective to individual actors as a form of personalisation.

Finally, in Reinemann and Wilke (2007), personalisation is used to denote "a development in which politicians become the main anchor of interpretations and evaluations in the political process. [...] Personalisation can appear as a stronger concentration on candidates and/or a stronger emphasis of personal or appearance characteristics". Thus, while it is clear that Reinemann and Wilke conceive of two different dimensions, no attempts to theoretically distinguish between these are being made.

As should have been made apparent by the above overview, most (if not all) researchers refer to two quite distinct aspects: on the one hand, there is the "hard side" (the trend of individualisation); on the other, there is the "soft side" (increased importance of personal matters and characteristics). But whereas most conceive of personalisation as a complex phenomenon, there are, of course, differences in the degree to which the multi-dimensionality of the concept is stressed. In table 3.2, only studies that stress the multi-dimensionality are categorised as multi-dimensional studies.

Table 3.2: Conceptualisations in previous studies on personalisation

	One-dimensional	Multi-dimensional	Dimension(s)
Karvonen (2010)	X		Shift from collective to individual actors
Langer (2006)		X	Presidentialisation, orientation towards leadership qualities, politicisation of private persona
Rahat and Sheafer (2007)		X	Media personalisation, media privatisation
Johansson (2008)		X	Shift from collective to individual actors, focus on personal characteristics
Kriesi (2010)		X	Shift from parties, institutions or issues to individual actors; shift from political to non-political traits
Mayerhöffer and Esmark (2011)	X		Focus on personal characteristics
Reinemann and Wilke (2007)		X	Concentration on candidates and/or an emphasis of personal or appearance characteristics

3.2.2 Operationalisations

As was shown above, different authors have conceptualised personalisation in somewhat different ways. Therefore, in this section I shall not look for the similarities and differences between different studies; instead, I shall focus on how well the operationalisations fit with the way the concept is defined. In essence, do the authors deal with personalisation in a way that is consistent with how it was outlined? Here, I shall focus also on what representational forms that are studied; do previous studies examine written/oral as well as visual representations? In essence, on what material are the conclusions grounded?

Since Karvonen's (2010) study relies heavily on secondary data, I will only focus on the study where Karvonen himself appears to be the author—and while the study is discussed in a chapter devoted to the media coverage of politics, it should be pointed out that it deals with campaign advertisements (in *Helsingin Sanomat*, Finland's biggest newspaper).[6]

In Karvonen's study, the examined campaign advertisements are

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[6] With regard to political institutions, Karvonen (2010) has undoubtedly conducted the most comprehensive study on personalisation thus far. Unfortunately, however, the chapter devoted to the news media is not nearly as comprehensive as the other parts. Besides the study conducted by Karvonen himself, only two other studies are discussed with regard to the news media coverage (Langer 2006 and Johansson 2008).

divided into three groups: 1) party advertisements, 2) other collective advertisements, and 3) individual advertisements (i.e. ads that contain the name, candidate number or picture of a single candidate). Examining the advertisements of four years (1962, 1975, 1991 and 2007), personalisation is quite simply operationalised as the total share of individual advertisements: if the share of individual ads has increased, a trend of personalisation is detected; if there is no increase, then there is no trend of personalisation.

In table 3.2 it was shown that Karvonen conceptualised personalisation in a rather one-dimensional way; personalisation was conceived of as a shift from collective to individual actors. Thus, Karvonen's way to empirically deal with the concept is very much in line with how he defined it. However, since the analytical unit is entire ads, no distinction between different components is being made; consequently, whether there are, for example, more images of individual candidates cannot be answered.

In contrast to Karvonen's study on campaign ads, Langer (2006) studied news media coverage; what the author deals with is the question of how British Prime Ministers (from 1945 to 2002 but with a focus on Tony Blair) are referred to and mentioned in the national press. While the study is conceptually elaborated —without doubt, Langer's (2006) is the most comprehensive study this far—it is nevertheless unfortunate that no separate analyses of images are made; with regard to all three dimensions, the unit of analysis is entire articles. Moreover, since appearances by the Prime Minister are not put against appearances by his (her) party, nothing can be said about whether the news media increasingly focus on individual actors *at the expense* of collective actors. However, all three dimensions that Langer discusses are properly operationalised— at least if the question of power is downplayed with regard to the dimensions of presidentialisation.

From England, we go to Israel and Rahat and Sheafer (2007). In this study, personalisation appears simply to have been measured by studying the news articles' "focus". In the words of the authors:

> A coding system was devised to measure various alternative definitions of media personalisation and media privatisation. [...] The most important of these are, first, the focus of the news item on candidates compared with its focus on parties, measured as the percentage of news items that focus mainly on the party, the can-

didates, or both, and second, the focus of the news item on candidates' personal traits compared with its focus on the candidates' political performance.

Rahat and Sheafer 2007:72 (first part) and 78 (second part)[7]

Since the unit of analysis also in this study is entire news articles, all analyses are conducted on an "aggregated" level (whereupon smaller changes easily are missed).[8] But while the operationalisations are crude, both dimensions that were identified are nevertheless examined. Once again, however, images appear to have been altogether overlooked; what the authors have coded is only the "focus" of the articles that are examined.

The three studies discussed above are all studies where the authors have dealt with the concept in a more problematising way. And with regard to how well the operationalisations match with the conceptualisations, it is obvious that the overall result is positive: in all three studies, the concept has been operationalised in a way that is consistent with how it was defined. In what follows, studies that are more empirically oriented will be discussed.

Johansson (2008) is of central interest not only since it is a Swedish study, but also because Johansson has used data from the time-series that in this study will be used with regard to the dimension of personification.[9]

Going back to table 3.2, it is apparent that Johansson conceives of personalisation as a concept with more than one dimension: on the one hand, personalisation denotes a shift from collective to individual actors; on the other, personalisation denotes an increasing focus on personal characteristics. However, when dealing with the concept empirically, Johansson deals properly only with the first of these; the way that Johansson *indirectly* approaches the question of a more personal type of coverage is not satisfying.

Then, looking closer at the one dimension that is being operationalised, what variables are actually being used? In the time-series that Johansson relies on, main subject and main object are coded as *separate* variables, but one of Johansson's tables shows "how often party leaders are positioned as one of the main actors in the news story" (p. 187). Consequently, what Jo-

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[7] The second part is a footnote that follows directly after the first part.

[8] Although also Langer uses the entire article as her unit of analysis, her approach appears to be less problematic since she relies on a large number of different variables.

[9] As will be discussed more thoroughly in the empirical sections, the data used in the study at hand comes from two primary sources: 1) data from the *Swedish Media Election Studies* (SMES) at Gothenburg University (i.e. second hand data) and 2) data based on own content analyses.

hansson refers to in terms of "main actor" appears to be a constructed variable where two variables (main subject and main object) are merged into one ("main actor"). Moreover, since the units of analysis for these are entire articles, the figures that are presented can only come from data on the aggregated level—from what it appears, no examination of individual segments seems to have been made. However, in contrast to the previous three studies, Johansson made a separate analysis of images; the visualisation of party leaders is investigated for the period between 1979 and 2006.

Kriesi (2010) conducted an empirically oriented cross country study where personalisation, as previously shown, is conceived of as multi-dimensional: on the one hand, Kriesi conceives of a shift from parties, institutions or issues to individual actors; on the other, personalisation is said to denote a shift from political to non-political traits. However, since only the first of the two dimensions is actually being operationalised, the overall answers can—as in Johansson (2008)—only be partial. Moreover, the only representational form that Kriesi examines is written text—that is, once again the material under study is newspaper articles and once again, no analyses of images are made.

Another comparative study is Mayerhöffer and Esmark (2011), and whereas all the other studies discussed are content analyses, Mayerhöffer and Esmark use standardised quantitative interviews to answer whether leading political journalists and political actors *perceive* that there is a trend of personalisation. Consequently, whereas Kriesi (2010) and Mayerhöffer and Esmark (2011) are similar in that both are comparative cross-country studies, the two are completely different with regard to data. In Mayerhöffer and Esmark's study, the respondents are asked to evaluate the accuracy of five propositions (indicators), whereupon the result—an index of personalisation—is related to various systemic factors. The propositions concern:

1. The extent to which journalists are perceived to (increasingly) focus on the private lives of politicians.
2. The extent to which journalists are perceived to (increasingly) concentrate on the tactical aspects of politics rather than its substance.
3. The perceived impact of the media on political careers.
4. The importance of demonstrating personal knowledge and experience as a reason for politicians to seek media publicity.
5. The perceived efficiency of a personal appearance in talk shows to create public awareness for political issues.

Looking closer at the five indicators, it is apparent that the way personalisation has been conceptualised corresponds best with the first indicator. Once again, however, it can be noted that a decreased issue-orientation (second indicator) is used as an operational indicator for personalisation; as previously discussed, this is something that certainly can be questioned.

The last study that will be discussed with regard to operationalisation is that of Reinemann and Wilke (2007). On the one hand, the authors have analysed references to individual actors ("candidate is mentioned, explicitly evaluated, seen on photo" [p. 96]); on the other, the authors have studied "the criteria by which candidates are judged in evaluative statements [...] and the overall tone of an article regarding the candidates" (p. 96f).

However, with regard to the first dimension, the authors have *not* studied how often the candidates are mentioned in relation to how often collective actors are mentioned. Consequently, no conclusions can be drawn about the tendency of the newspapers to increasingly focus on individual actors *at the expense* of collective actors; what one gets to know is only whether individual actors (here: Chancellor candidates) have become more frequent. Of course, since the authors themselves do not explicitly suggest that personalisation is a trend where individual actors gain in importance at the expense of collective actors, their operationalisation is not at odds with how they conceive of the first dimension of the overall concept. Generally, however, personalisation is conceived of as a trend in which individual actors have come to *replace* collective actors.[10]

Also their other operationalisation (i.e. the one considering the more qualitative dimension) can be discussed. While they conceptually suggest that "personalisation can appear as [...] a stronger emphasis of personal or appearance characteristics" (p. 101), what they empirically investigate is only whether personal or appearance characteristics have become more important as grounds for evaluations. Personal characteristics and attributes may obviously become more emphasised without there being a corresponding trend where they are increasingly important as grounds for evaluations.

An important contribution is, however, the image analysis: in Reinemann and Wilke (2007), a separate analysis is conducted on the photographs in *Frankfurter Allgemaine Zeitung* between the years of 1949 and 2005.

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[10] Notably, since the authors talk of a "stronger concentration on candidates" (p. 101), this idea can be traced also in the way Reinemann and Wilke conceptualise personalisation.

Having above discussed how previous studies have empirically dealt with the concept, two general conclusions deserve to be highlighted. Firstly, whereas personalisation often is conceived of as being multi-dimensional, it is often empirically dealt with as if were it one-dimensional. Echoing one of the conclusions in Adam and Maier (2010), it is quite obvious that the more qualitative side of the coin often is overlooked. Secondly, separate analyses on the images have been made in only two of the discussed studies. Together, an implication is that most empirical results are concerned with only one dimension—and this with regard to only one representational form (written text).

3.2.3 Explanatory factors

Looking closer at what factors that are suggested to cause personalisation, I initially prefer to discuss more general themes. After having done this, I will try to specify whether personalisation is understood to be a media-generated or a politically co-determined process.

First of all, it is worth underlining that the personalisation thesis suggests that there have been *recent* changes in the way politics is presented. Langer, for example, writes that "the personalisation of politics is characterised as a relatively new process and it is considered as having consistently grown, in strength and significance" (2006:16). This means that the personalisation thesis shall be seen against the shift from modern to late-modern societies, but also that this large-scale transformation can only be conceived of as one that has paved the way for a personalisation of politics. Whereas modernisation is the meta-process against which personalisation shall be understood, there are—in a scientific vocabulary—other explanations that are closer to the dependent variable.

For example, whereas Karvonen (2010) conceives of personalisation "as a consequence of the structural transformation of Western societies" (p. 1), he continues by identifying four interconnected processes: the overall individualisation of social life; socio-economic and technological modernisation; the dealignment vis-à-vis traditional political and social organisations; and finally, the emergence of the media as the dominant channel of political information and propaganda. Thus, Karvonen couples personalisation to the rise of, for example, catch all-parties, post-materialist values and mediatisation. Personalisation is not conceived of as the result of developments in any single societal segment—in contrast, personalisation is believed to be explained by a set of interrelated factors.

The factors highlighted by Karvonen very much resemble those suggested by Langer (2006). Although in a slightly different vocabulary, also Langer stresses the importance of an individualised society, the decline of party identification and the overall decreased importance of clear-cut social cleavage lines. To this, Langer adds the fragmentation and supra-nationalisation of power and the growing complexity and competence of the state, factors that Karvonen did not discuss. However, while Karvonen and Langer seem to agree on the factors that are behind personalisation, they nevertheless—as will be discussed more thoroughly below—seem to conceive of the process in slightly different ways.

In contrast to Karvonen and Langer, where the explanations are of a general character, the explanation discussed by Rahat and Sheafer (2007) is more specific. According to the authors, "institutional personalisation leads to personalisation in the media, which in turn leads to personalisation in the behaviour of politicians" (p. 65). Consequently, whereas Karvonen and Langer both provide explanations that are of a *cultural* character, Rahat and Sheafer argue that the explanation is *institutional*. That is, instead of stressing the importance of the news media as an engine of change, media personalisation is conceived of as a mediating variable:

> Our hypothesis suggests that an institutional change—the opening up of candidate selection methods […]—is the first link in the chain of personalisation(s). The democratisation of candidate selection methods changed the ways that the mass media covered politics, making them increasingly interested in individuals and less interested in parties […]. In response, politicians changed their behaviour, putting more effort into promoting their personal image and working less as team players.
>
> Rahat and Sheafer 2007:70

Notably, in Rahat and Sheafer's account, politics obviously comes "first" (cf. Patterson 1993), and an institutional explanation is certainly interesting to consider with regard to the Swedish case: since the 1998 elections Sweden has a system of optional preference voting and while it would be a lie to suggest that the campaigns have radically changed, it is nevertheless a fact that

the country no longer has a closed-list system.[11]

Now to the question of whether personalisation is conceived of as a media-generated or a politically co-determined process. Since most studies conceive of changes in both systems as being important factors behind personalisation, the categorisations that shall be made are in no way self-evident. Starting with Langer (2006), the notion of a politically co-determined process is, however, explicit:

> It would be utterly mistaken to regard politicians as passive recipients of "external" changes […] [since] there are strong incentives for politicians, as well as risks, to try to make strategic use of their private lives for the construction of their political personae. As a matter of fact, the potential benefits of exploiting personal disclosure have become such conventional wisdom that this strategy has grown to be seen as an indispensable tool and perquisite for electoral success.
>
> Langer 2006:30f

With the above passage it is apparent that Langer does not believe it to be right to conceive of political actors as passive recipients of the change, quite the opposite: since political actors are assumed to try to use their private lives strategically, personalisation can clearly not be conceived of as something that just "happens" to them. Personalisation, in this view, can from the perspective of a political actor be conceived of as a strategy that is used to attain certain goals; personalisation is an instrument that political actors may decide to make use of.

In the words of Langer:

> Politicising the private can perform several crucial functions in the construction public personae and in the pursuing and preservation of political power. Firstly, a seemingly virtuous private, and especially family, life is said to contribute to building up a reputation of reliability and integrity. […] Secondly, to "humanise" politicians can help to make leaders appear more personable, more like the ordinary

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[11] An even bigger lie would be to suggest that the political consequences are evident. According to Karvonen (2010), twelve out of 349 were elected to the Swedish parliament in variance with list order in 1998; the corresponding figures for 2002 and 2006 were thirteen and six. In the last election covered in this study, the election of 2010, the figure was eight. However, as has been argued by Folke and Rickne (2012), it can be questioned whether studies of the above kind really capture the indirect effects that may have occurred: as it appears, the number of personal votes may be quite important for a political actor's standing within his or her own party. All in all, due to changes in the electoral law, in the 2014 election it will be easier for individual candidates to be elected at variance with the party list.

person, and thus seemingly closer to voters, as well as helping to generate sympa-
thy and some kind of emotional bond [...] Thirdly, by being weaved into political
programmes and policy, the personal can help to simplify complex political issues
and perform the strategic role of reducing the distance between abstract policies
and people's concrete experiences as well as helping to reach citizens, who are
less interested in formal politics.

Langer 2006:31[12]

Thus, echoing Herbst (2003; see Chapter 4), Langer stresses that there are
incentives for politicians to go personal (or even private), and as a con-
sequence, political actors should not be considered as victims. This view,
which is also embraced by, for example, Corner and Pels (2003), is what I
have in mind when I use the term politically co-determined process. Crucial
to it is the notion that imperatives of the news media system no longer act
upon political actors; having had decades to learn the language of the media,
political actors have become media performers themselves.

In a very obvious way, then, to conceive of personalisation as a politically
co-determined process is to recognise that the process of mediatisation has
reached a staged in which media logic no longer is an external force—and
due to this, (media) personalisation shall be conceived of as a politically co-
determined, rather than a media-generated, process. That there are other
views is apparent in, for example, Karvonen (2010):

The logic of the media favours persons over abstract issues and interests. Of cru-
cial importance is the central role of television. More than printed media, televi-
sion automatically focuses on persons and personalities. [...] The predominance
of television has forced parties to select leaders and candidates who make a fa-
vourable impression on television, and this focus on individual politicians has in
turn strongly conditioned the way citizens view politics.

Karvonen 2010:4

Notably, Karvonen's view differs from that of Langer in that personalisation
is believed to be a result of something (media logic) that acts upon the politi-
cal system. Political parties are forced to choose a certain type of leader; the

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[12] The view of certain functions can be found also in Holtz Bacha (2004). Here, four separate functions are
identified: humanisation, simplification and distraction, emotionalisation and the striving for celebrity
status.

political system (and its logic) is being hijacked, and this is to the detriment of both politicians and citizens (cf. Meyer 2002).

Moreover, while also Rahat and Sheafer adhere to a view where at least one form of personalisation (privatisation) is perceived of in terms of deterioration, their view differs from that of Karvonen since institutional personalisation is assumed to precede media personalisation (institutional personalisation → media personalisation/privatisation → behavioural personalisation). Thus, also in Rahat and Sheafer (2007), personalisation is clearly conceived of as a politically co-determined process; changes in the political system lead to changes in the media coverage, which in turn lead to behavioural changes (among voters as well as politicians).

Obviously, the way in which the process of personalisation is co-determined by factors within the political system differs from Langer's ideas (whereas Rahat and Sheafer focus on hard-core institutional changes, Langer discusses changes in political culture), but since changes in the political system itself are stressed in both studies, it nevertheless makes sense to categorise them together.

Yet another study where institutional factors are stressed is the cross-country comparative study by Kriesi (2010). In contrast to Rahat and Sheafer, however, Kriesi does not focus on changes but structures (an unfortunate consequence of this is that the time perspective is being downplayed; comparisons are, essentially, between levels rather than years). Both structures within the political system and the news media system are, however, discussed, and to categorise Kriesi in either of the groups (media-generated process or politically co-determined) seems impossible.

This is not the case with Johansson (2008). Having his point of departure in the mediatisation thesis, Johansson conceives of personalisation as a means by which the news media try to capture (or keep) the attention of their audiences. Consequently, without much ado, Johansson can therefore rather straightforwardly be put in the same group as Karvonen.

The same can certainly be said with regard to Reinemann and Wilke (2007). While the provided explanation is very different from that in Johansson's study—the introduction of televised debates is believed to have caused content changes in press coverage—the main explanations are, in both cases, found within the media.

And, finally, if Johansson (2008) and Reinemann and Wilke (2007) are both examples of studies where personalisation is conceived of primarily

as a media-generated process, the opposite is true with regard to Mayer-höffer and Esmark (2011). Since two of their indicators (indicator four and five, see above) are grounded in a notion that political actors are co-players in the process of personalisation, Mayerhöffer and Esmark clearly belong to the group of authors that conceive of personalisation as a politically co-determined process.

All in all, whether personalisation is conceived of as a media-generated or politically co-determined process is summarised in table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Personalisation as a media-generated or politically co-determined process

Karvonen (2010)	Media-generated
Langer (2006)	Politically co-determined
Rahat and Sheafer (2007)	Politically co-determined
Johansson (2008)	Media-generated
Kriesi (2010)	Not applicable
Mayerhöffer and Esmark (2011)	Politically co-determined
Reinemann and Wilke (2007)	Media-generated

As becomes apparent in the above table, three of the studies discussed above put more emphasis on factors within the political system than the others. Notably, two of these—Langer (2006) and Rahat and Sheafer (2007)—have previously been said to conceptualise personalisation in a way that is similar to how it shall be conceptualised in this study (see Chapter 4). Whereas there certainly are differences with regard to the theoretical reasoning—Rahat and Sheafer's study echoes of a rather orthodox understanding of what politics ought to be about—both studies stress the double-sidedness of personalisation (both conceptually and empirically).

3.2.4 Results

In what follows, the empirical results of previous studies will be examined. While the question of personalisation is central to all of the above studies, I will here include studies where personalisation is a more peripheral matter of concern. Due to their similarities with regard to the political as well as the news media system (Allern and Blach-Ørsten 2011, Strömbäck *et al* 2008; see also Arter 2004, Sundberg 2003), studies from the Nordic countries will be prioritised. The studies are categorised into three different groups: studies where the results support the thesis; studies where the evidence is mixed; and, finally, studies where the empirical results reject the thesis.

3.2.4.1 Studies that support the thesis

Given that media coverage is the one area where, according to Adam and Maier (2010), there is strong evidence for the thesis, surprisingly few studies can be placed in this group.

Starting with Karvonen (2010), there is a decrease of party advertisements and an increase of individual candidate advertisements. But, while the decrease of party advertisements is linear, the share of individual advertisements has been rather constant since 1975 (the years that are examined are 1962, 1975, 1991 and 2007). How is this possible? Karvonen has used *three* categories (party ads, other collective ads, and individual ads), and if the two categories of collective ads are grouped together, the decrease of collective ads came to a halt in 1975. Therefore, Karvonen's study is—at best—only modestly supportive: an increase of individual ads can certainly be detected—but only if the comparison is made between the two endpoints.

In Langer (2006), three dimensions of personalisation were investigated: overall visibility ("presidentialisation"), orientation towards leadership qualities, and orientation towards private personae. While it should be kept in mind that the study deals with the coverage of British Prime Ministers exclusively, the overall results are supportive with regard to all three dimensions (although Langer herself considers the support with regard to the second dimension to be insignificant):

> Firstly, there are the findings in regard to leaders' overall visibility. Although there has been a clear positive trend in the absolute number of articles that mentioned the Prime Ministers, the strength of this trend is weakened when page inflation is accounted for. [...] Moreover, Prime Ministers' visibility and salience within the articles have shown (within the overall positive trend) a fair degree of fluctuation, depending on leaders' styles and political circumstances. [...] Secondly, in regard to leadership qualities, there was no sizeable evidence to suggest that references to traits such as strength and competence have progressively become a more salient issue in the stories referring to the Prime Ministers. [...] In contrast, the analysis of the same longitudinal data has shown a steeper positive trend in the references to leaders' personal lives during the last twenty years, both nominally and proportionally.
>
> Langer 2006:251f

Thus, while Langer's result is clearly supportive, an important aspect that

must be borne in mind is put forth in the above passage: due to which persons are in leading positions, an underlying trend of personalisation may be reinforced as well as hampered. That is, the degree of personalisation is not a phenomenon that can be explained only by taking structural factors into account, situational factors must also be considered (see also ibid 2010).

That rather small changes may be relevant is also suggested by the study of Reinemann and Wilke (2007). According to the authors, "the introduction of the televised debates […] seems to have stabilised the level of personalisation insofar as they constitute a fixed campaign event that completely focuses the media attention on the candidates themselves" (p. 102). Consequently, while there is certainly no linear trend, the average level of personalisation is roughly ten percentage points higher when the period after 1980 is compared to that between 1949 and 1976. Moreover, if absolute figures are taken into account, readers of the German press "were never before confronted with as much media coverage about the candidates as in 2002 and 2005" (ibid). However, the televised debates implied not only a quantitative increase, they also changed the grounds for candidate evaluations:

> Especially striking is the enormous increase in the importance of appearance and looks of candidates […] Taking into account the absolute number of statements published, this means that the newspapers published sixteen times as much evaluative statements about the 'performance' qualities of the candidates than in 1998.

> Reinemann and Wilke 2007:103

Finally, since I have decided to prioritise studies from the Nordic countries, a study on Danish radio news showed that "there is a clear tendency toward increasing the focus on electoral consequences in the coverage […], though this is not mirrored in the coverage of non-election periods" (Skorkjær Binderkrantz and Green Pedersen 2009:180). Once again, however, it can be questioned whether a more process-oriented coverage really is an adequate indicator of a more personalised coverage.

3.2.4.2 Studies where the evidence is mixed

In Johansson (2008), coverage on the party leaders is discussed in relation to three aspects: 1) main actors in the news stories, 2) actors in images, and 3) the existence of a dramatised frame (i.e. various game-frames). With regard to the first of the three, Johansson states that "based on an analysis

of the eight election campaigns since 1982, support for the hypothesis pre-dicting an increasing tendency for media to focus on party leaders must be considered mixed" (p. 187). Moreover, with regard to different news media, Johansson notes that "there is no change at all" for the broadsheets but that "there seems to be a trend toward more party leader personalisation [here: personification] in the tabloids during the past three elections (1998, 2002 and 2006), compared to those in the late 70s and early 80s" (ibid; for televi-sion news, "no clear pattern can be detected").

However, while empirical support with regard to the first aspect is weak, it should be borne in mind that Johansson appears to have merged two variables into one, whereupon any possible developments with regard to the original variables, quite naturally, cannot be detected. As I shall dis-cuss in Chapter 4, this means that a very important aspect of the overall question remains unanswered: in essence, has the *ways* in which the party leaders appear in the news media changed? Do party leaders over time play a somewhat different role; have they increasingly come to serve as passive fix-points rather than active political actors?

With regard to the second aspect that is investigated—actors in imag-es—Johansson shows that a trend of personification can be detected for the tabloids but *not* for the broadsheets. Johansson writes that:

> At the beginning of the 80s, party leaders were portrayed [in images] almost as of-ten in the morning press [broadsheets] as in the tabloids. But since the end of the 90s, there is a significant difference between the tabloids and the morning press. In the national morning papers, about 40 percent of the pictures of politicians portray party leaders. This has not changed since the 1980s. But the tabloids have changed; when politicians are portrayed in tabloids during the last campaigns, somewhere between 60 and 70 percent are pictures of the party leaders.
>
> Johansson 2008:188

Finally, with regard to the share of dramatised frames, Johansson shows that non issue-oriented frames have become more common in the articles and news stories where party leaders appear. In this case, the trend is strong; Johansson writes that there is "a clear change in the way party leaders are framed during the past 30 years of election campaigns" (p. 189). Howev-er, what this result shows is first and foremost that the *overall* framing has changed, not that there is a trend of personalisation. As has now been re-peated over and again, the tendency to use game frames is, at best, a rather

arbitrary proxy for personalisation.

Also in Rahat and Sheafer (2007), the overall result is mixed. On the one hand, an increase of the media coverage that focuses on individual candidates is detected; on the other, no trend of "media privatisation" is found. Consequently, in contrast to the results presented by Johansson, the results presented by Rahat and Sheafer can be related to two different dimensions of the overall concept: whereas the results support the personalisation thesis as far as there is a trend of individualisation—individual politicians have increasingly replaced parties—they reject the thesis with regard to the suggestion of there being a coverage that is increasingly oriented towards ("non-political") personal traits.

Yet another study where the evidence is mixed is Kriesi's (2010). Since this is a cross-country study, a first distinction that has to be made is that between different countries. As it turns out, in longitudinal analyses of the election coverage during the 1970s, the 1990s and the 2000s, only in one case out of five is the overall result clearly affirmative (the affirmative case being the Netherlands, the other countries being France, Germany, the UK and Switzerland). Worth keeping in mind is, however, that the levels for the 1970s are higher than those for the 2000s in all five countries but France (a semi-presidential democracy).

Secondly, with regard to different formats, there is no trend with regard to the broadsheets, whereas the tabloids move slightly in the direction predicted by the personalisation thesis. However, in all of the countries except the UK and Switzerland, the difference between the broadsheets and the tabloids is rather small. Consequently, although the importance of format must not be overestimated, an overall conclusion to be drawn from Kriesi's study is that a trend of personalisation should be apparent first and foremost with regard to tabloids (cf. Johansson 2008).

Finally, since priority is given to the Nordic countries, modest support can be noted in a study by Rappe (2004). However, since there are only eight years between the two endpoints (1991 and 1999), the importance of this finding shall not be exaggerated.

3.2.4.3 Studies that reject the thesis

Interestingly, among the negative cases are two studies that have used data from the *Swedish Media Election Studie*s (SMES), i.e. the same set of data that I will use in order to examine whether a trend of individualisation (H1) can be detected. Both studies are parts of Government Commission Reports and

have altogether empirical focuses; Bennulf and Hedberg (1993) wrote in relation to the introduction of a system of preferential voting, while Asp and Johansson (1999) wrote in relation to the discussions that followed upon the implementation of this system. In the words of Bennulf and Hedberg:

> The news media focus on individuals. During the last three election campaigns [1985, 1988, 1991] the share of individual political actors is high—for example, roughly two thirds of the actors that appear as main subjects are individuals. However, the coverage is elite-oriented, and party leaders predominate.
>
> Bennulf and Hedberg 1993:115 (my translation)

While the above passage provides an overall picture, it adds nothing to whether there is a trend of personalisation. However, as the authors focus on three variables in the data set—main subjects, main objects and actors in images—the results that are presented in no way indicate that party leaders are becoming increasingly dominant. As a matter of fact, in the one case where a trend can be detected, the trend is *negative*: between 1985 and 1991, the party leaders appear not more but less frequently as actors in the images.[13]

Also in Asp and Johansson (1999), the overall picture is negative. Over the years that were examined (1985-1998), the authors show that party leaders (as a group) make up over 60 per cent of all candidate appearances. However, while this figure certainly is high, it is more interesting to note that it remains rather stable. Consequently, also the results presented by Asp and Johansson must be considered to go against the hypothesis.

The above discussions on empirical results are summarised in table 3.4 (next page).

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[13] However, when the authors look closer at data from the very last ten days of campaigning, a more positive trend emerges: between 1956 and 1991, the appearances of the party leaders in the news media increased by more than 20 percentage points. Yet, this increase can be traced in entirety to the first 20 years, whereas after 1976 no increase can be detected whatsoever. Consequently, in table 3.4 I shall consider the result provided by Bennulf and Hedberg to be against the hypothesis.

Table 3.4: Empirical results in previous studies on personalisation

	Supports the thesis	Evidences are mixed	Rejects the thesis
Karvonen (2010)	X		
Langer (2006)	X		
Reinemann and Wilke (2007)	X		
Binderkrantz and Green Pedersen (2009)	X		
Johansson (2008)		X	
Rahat and Sheafer (2007)		X	
Kriesi (2010)		X	
Rappe (2004)		X	
Bennulf and Hedberg (1993)			X
Asp and Johansson (1999)			X

As an observant reader may have noticed, Mayerhöffer and Esmark (2011) have not been included in the above table. The main reason for this is because the study differs from the others in that it is not a content analysis; the analysed data comes from a survey. This, obviously, does not mean that the presented results are of little interest, quite the opposite: since the study examines whether politicians and political journalists *perceive* that there is a trend of personalisation, it adds a fundamentally different perspective. Consequently, the study by Mayerhöffer and Esmark is discussed below.

The countries that are examined are Denmark, Germany, Austria, Spain, and, most fortunately, Sweden. Two research questions are put forth: 1) can differences in perceived personalisation be traced back to structural factors, and 2) does perceived personalisation have an effect on the perceived quality of democracy? Here, I will prefer to focus on the former.

With regard to overall levels, the authors suggest that "taking all indicators together, it becomes visible that the [...] strongest perceived personalisation of political communication can be found in Finland, followed by Denmark, while the remaining countries are quite comparable in their overall assessment of the different personalisation indicators" (p. 11).

Although levels, of course, are of less interest than trends, it is somewhat surprising to note that Finland and Denmark stand out as the countries with highest perceived levels of personalisation. (When systemic factors are compared, Denmark, Sweden and Finland—in that order—are countries where the degree of personalisation ought to be low.) And, as far as Sweden is concerned, one noteworthy finding is that the value is relatively high with regard to the item that deals with the journalists' tendency to focus on the private lives of politicians. Moreover, by means of principal component analy-

ses (PCA), the authors manage to show that the initial five indicators can be grouped into two factors (or groups); one suggesting personalisation to be a *media-generated phenomenon* (below: mediatisation), the other suggesting personalisation to be a *politically co-determined phenomenon* (below: professionalisation). In the words of the authors:

> Differences between the included countries become more pronounced when looking at the two [factors] separately. While the Nordic countries, in particular Denmark and Finland, fare comparatively high on the mediatisation dimension, personalisation as a professional dynamics outweighs the mediatisation dynamic in the remaining three countries [...]. In particular, the question of whether journalists increasingly focus on politicians' private lives yields very different responses: whereas the Nordic countries are in agreement on the tendency of the media to focus more on the private lives of politicians, Germany Austria and in particular Spain appear more reluctant to confirm this tendency.

<div align="right">Mayerhöffer and Esmark 2011:11</div>

Having above discussed the results of ten studies on personalisation, two general conclusions can be highlighted: firstly, although personalisation in the public debate often appears to have the status of a non-disputable fact, the empirical evidence thereof is, indeed, quite unconvincing. As was briefly touched upon in the introduction, a reason why may well be that research this far has largely dealt with only one side of the concept, namely that suggesting that there is a trend of individualisation. Moreover, when more qualitative aspects are taken into consideration, this is often done by using the existence of game-frames as an empirical indicator. This is unfortunate since it implies that personalisation becomes embedded within a theoretically different field.

Secondly, as should have been made apparent in the research overview, previous research on personalisation has to a large extent been concerned with written texts. Consequently, few studies—Johansson (2008) is an exception—have dealt with television coverage; and with regard to studies on newspapers, separate image analyses are utterly rare. That content analyses regularly tend to deal with newspapers may be understandable from a practical point of view, but this preoccupation with newspapers is problematic for at least two reasons: firstly, television is the most important medium for political communication; secondly, there are reasons to believe that personalisation should be more

pronounced in television than in other media formats.[14]

3.3 Swedish studies on election campaigns

In the following, an overview of studies focusing on Swedish election cover-
age/campaigns will be provided. While studies of this kind have been con-
ducted since the mid-1950s I prefer to focus on studies from 1990 and on-
wards. A basic distinction is made between studies with a campaign per-
spective, a power perspective and a content perspective.[15] After initially
having discussed the studies separately, I will conclude by summarising the
main findings with regard to each group.

3.3.1 Studies with a campaign perspective

In Brandorf *et al* (1995), the overall account is affirmative; the information
provided by the parties "meet fairly well with the expectations that can be
put on a well-functioning political institution" (p. 2, my translation). Howev-
er, while neither the election manifestos, nor the final debates, have become
less issue-oriented, the same cannot be said—according to the authors—
with regard to the news coverage (the period under study is 1902-1994).
On the contrary, "much indicate that the news coverage of campaigns have
become more focused on the political game at the expense of the essential
issues" (p. 5).

Another important result is that both the election manifestos and the fi-
nal debates over time contain more issues. According to the authors, a trend
towards more issues is *not* what could be expected given an overall trend of
mediatisation. A trend that could explain the increasing number of issues is,
however, the development towards a more heterogeneous electorate: since
the parties over time must appeal to more divergent groups, they must—the
authors claim—go to elections with increasingly diversified issue profiles.

All together, the authors conclude that "Swedish election debates are
and remain issue oriented. Over the entire 20th century, the parties have in

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[14] See section 2.4, where it was argued that the rise of telecommunications (and especially television)
enabled intimate relations with distant others. In section 2.4, I leant strongly against the writings of John
B. Thompson (1995, 2000, 2005). Other important contributions have been made by, for example, Joshua
Meyrowitz (1986) and Roderick Hart (1994).

[15] Studies with a campaign perspective focus on the actions and strategies of the parties; studies with a power
perspective focus on the relation between political actors and news media actors; and studies with a content
perspective focus on the content in its own right. As was the case with regard to studies on personalisation, I
will prefer to focus on longitudinal studies.

their main documents spent much more time on issues than on questions about persons, strategies and power. The often discussed mediatisation of politics has in this respect had surprisingly little consequences" (p. 27).

Also Esaiasson (1990, 1991) has undertaken studies with a focus on the campaigns. And while Esaiasson in the first of the two studies goes all the way back to pre-democratic times (the period under study is 1866-1988), focus in the latter is on the period after World War II (i.e. the period under which the mass media emerged as power brokers). However, since the empirical results are based on the same set of data, I will here prefer to focus only on the latter study—and here, two results are especially interesting: 1) Esaiasson shows that party leaders over time undertake *more* campaign performances. Consequently, if party leaders over time become more frequent in the news media coverage, part of the explanation may simply be that they have become more active campaigners.[16] 2) "Since the early 1970s, the party leaders have made greater use of 'media events', keeping up the high number of press conferences" (p. 274). Thus, party leaders have not only become more active in a general sense; they have also become more active in their relations to the news media.[17]

In Nord (2006), the data used came from interviews with party secretaries and campaign officials of the seven parties then residing in the Riksdag. In contrast to the studies above, this study does not deal with campaign issues but campaign techniques. According to Nord, "the adaptation of global campaign practices in Sweden faces limits. Swedish democracy is based on a multiparty parliamentarian system, where the party traditionally has been more important than the candidate in national elections" (p. 67).

Nevertheless, an interesting finding is that the share of the parties' personnel that work with political marketing tripled between 1993 and 2003. Nord writes that "the interviews with the party secretaries generally confirm a widespread use of advanced marketing tools during the last decades. Media and opinion activities still do not occupy most people working within the party organisations, but the situation is gradually changing" (p. 71).

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[16] According to Esaiasson, "the number of campaign performances has increased more or less constantly, reaching an all-time high […] in the 1988 campaign" [i.e. the last year of the period that Esaiasson studied] (p. 272).

[17] Note: Esaiasson's conclusion is that media events are becoming increasingly important in the early 1970s. While it is true that a steady increase can be detected since then, it could well be argued that the figures that Esaiasson leans against indicate that the trend started roughly a decade earlier (i.e. in connection to the election of 1960, which is often referred to as the first "TV election").

While the above account makes no claims of being complete, it nevertheless points out some important insights:

- Swedish parties may be increasingly professionalised but they are still far behind American parties (Petersson *et al* 2006, Strömbäck 2007).
- Since the campaigns are less centered on a few dominant issues, it has become increasingly difficult for the voters to make "fully informed" decisions (Brandorf *et al* 1995).[18]
- During the period investigated by Esaiasson (1866-1988), party leaders became more active in the campaigns.

3.3.2 Studies with a power perspective

While the grouping of the studies is in no way self-evident, those with a power perspective have at least one thing in common: the news coverage is believed to be a result of interaction, and therefore the question of power must be addressed. An important study with this power perspective is Asp and Esaiasson (1996).

Having its point of departure in the fact that election campaigns have become increasingly important, the authors identify three central modernisation processes: 1) an individualisation of politics, 2) a professionalisation of politics, and 3) a mediatisation of politics. In essence, the study is concerned with major societal trends; changes in the election coverage are related to trends in the electorate, the political system and the news media system.

With regard to the electorate, one trend is highlighted: class voting and party identification are of diminishing importance, while ideological voting and issue voting are of increasing importance. "A conceivable consequence", the authors suggest, "might be for the campaigns to come closer to the American situation, with candidate-centered politics" (p. 76). Somewhat surprisingly, however, this suggestion is dismissed by the authors themselves quite authoritatively: "no such tendencies toward Americanisation can be noted

[18] From a more theoretical perspective, an equally important consequence of the proliferation of issues is that it has become more difficult to know exactly what policies have acquired public support. Obviously, this means that a central notion behind the "mandate conception of representation" (Manin, Przeworski and Stokes 1999) is under challenge.

in the Swedish election campaigns" (ibid).[19]

With regard to the authors' empirical findings, I would like to highlight two important passages (both can be found on p. 84):

1. Party leaders are political actors who have not been losers in the media. The concentration on party leaders as central actors in election campaigns has increased strongly during the past thirty to forty years. Notable changes did take place in the exposure of party leaders in the newspapers on two oc- casions. During the 1964 elections, the portion of coverage given to party leaders relative to the total coverage of the parties in the city newspapers increased to 25 percent from barely 15 percent in the mid-1950s. The next change occurred in the 1976 elections, when the focus on party leaders in- creased to about 35 percent. […] A further increase has occurred since then, but not a particularly large one.

2. A qualitative change occurred at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s […] in the sense that there has been a focus on party leaders as private persons. Previously, party leaders appeared mainly as spokesmen for their parties. With this personification of political parties, intimacy has been in- troduced into media coverage of the political leadership.

The above two passages are certainly relevant with regard to two of the hy- potheses of this study (H1 and H3). Two caveats should, however, be kept in mind: 1) the above claims are not easy to evaluate since the authors here are unduly economic with information on their data; and 2) the article was written as early as 1996. Consequently, any developments that may have oc- curred after the 1994 election are, quite naturally, left uncovered. As will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 5, there are reasons to assume that Sweden's membership in the EU should have had consequences with regard to how elections are being covered.

Having their point of departure in the same power perspective as Asp and Esaiasson (1996), Esaiasson and Håkansson (2002) are nevertheless different since the materials under study here are the special election pro-

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[19] Later in the text, however, the authors explicitly refer to changes that can be thought of in terms of "Americanisation". For example, according to the authors, "attempts to personalise campaigns have been the main strategy for tackling the complicated requirements of today's campaigns" (p. 79). The confusion increases further as it is also claimed that "party campaigns are coming to a breaking point. […] The influence is, of course, from the United States, but Sweden is also picking up impulses from France, Great Britain, Germany, and even smaller European countries" (ibid).

grammes (both radio and television are studied; the last year that is included is 1998). Using content analysis the authors' aim is to study how the relation between journalists and politicians has evolved historically; the point of departure is put forth in a dramatic manner:

> Something strange has happened over the last decades—a revolution in the quiet. [...] What we are referring to is the change that has turned journalists into political actors. Certainly, the mass media were influential before, but then primarily as mediators between those in power and their audiences. Nowadays, journalists are independent actors [...], what we are witnessing is probably one of the largest power shifts throughout the 20th century.

> Esaiasson and Håkansson 2002:15 (my translation)

Having their point of departure in a view where power is understood to be relational, the authors choose to focus on three journalistic techniques: 1) polarisation, 2) concretisation, and 3) simplification. And what about the results? While it would be wrong to claim that no developments are found, the changes are, all in all, surprisingly small. According to the authors, "the content of the election programmes has not developed in the way that could be assumed given all discussions on the shortcoming of a mediatised journalism. In some cases, the entry of [independent] journalists has had no impact whatsoever. In other cases, the changes have been opposite to what could have been expected. Only in a small number of aspects [...] critical notions have been empirically supported" (p. 197).

Yet another study with a power perspective is Strömbäck and Nord's (2006). Three research questions are put forth: 1) to what extent do politicians figure as sources in Swedish political news journalism; 2) to what extent do Swedish journalists colour the news stories by employing their own interpretations and analyses; and 3) who, in the opinions of Swedish journalists, politicians and citizens, are the most powerful, journalists or politicians? Whether the assumption behind the first question—"the more politicians figure as sources, the more likely it is that politicians are leading the tango" (p. 153)—is altogether reasonable can be debated; the empirical result is that "politicians frequently figure as sources" (ibid).

Moreover, in a comparison between the coverage of 2002 and that of 1998, Strömbäck and Nord show that the politicians' quotations have become shorter. While this should not suggest any far-reaching conclusions—after all, the time period stretches only over four years—it is nevertheless

interesting to note that the space/time that politicians are allotted have shrunk. As far as changes in journalistic style are regarded, the differences between the years that are compared are rather small. An interpretative journalistic style (in contrast to a descriptive journalistic style) has become more common in four out of seven news media organisations; in three cases the figures have gone in the opposite direction.

Finally, since "perceptions of power can have great impact upon actual power" (p. 156), the authors studied what power the different groups of actors (citizens, journalists and politicians) are ascribed (by citizens, journalists and politicians respectively). Unfortunately, in this case the authors have no longitudinal data.[20] Interesting to note, however, is that the share of politicians that agree to a statement where journalists are suggested to be powerful societal actors are larger than the share that agree to a statement where politicians are suggested to be powerful. (Perhaps not so surprisingly, when journalists are facing the same statements, the result is the opposite: the share of journalists that agree when politicians are said to be powerful is larger than the share that agree when journalists are said to be powerful.)

As was the case when studies with a campaign perspective were discussed, the picture here provided makes no claim of being complete. But some important results that have been discussed were:

- There are indications of an ongoing mediatisation.
- Attempts to personalise campaigns have been made.
- With regard to the party leaders, Asp and Esaiasson (1996) have discussed trends of personification and intimisation. These, however, seems to have peaked in the late 1970s.

3.3.3 Studies with a content perspective

While the focus in Ekström and Andersson's study (1999), part of a Government Commission Report, is on the election of 1998, comparisons are made to the elections of 1960 and 1979. Methodologically, this study is somewhat different from the studies by Asp in that the qualitative aspects (e.g. narra-

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[20] For longitudinal data on the agenda setting power of the news media—as perceived by journalists as well as citizens—see Asp and Johansson (2007, 2012).

tives and frames) are of primary concern.[21] To some extent it also stands out as more critical to the news coverage than the studies that were discussed above. Obviously, an explanation for this may well be differences in overall research questions. (To Ekström and Andersson, the overall research question is to shed light on how the coverage of the election of 1998 may have contributed to the decrease in voter turnout.)

In their concluding remarks the authors highlight two characteristics of the coverage of 1998: 1) politics were often framed in a negative way, and 2) different political alternatives were portrayed as ambiguous and unclear. With regard to the latter of these points, the authors write that "in 1979, the political debate was characterised by ideological differences, conflicts around issues and clear-cut competition for government. In 1998, an election coverage that lacked distinct government alternatives and significant political conflict lines was instead characterised by flame wars, distrust and recurring scandals" (p. 66, my translation).

Theoretically, the authors depart from the same notion as Asp and Esaiasson (1996); to some extent, the increased accommodation power of the news media has turned politics into a part of an "image culture". In a passage that is quite illustrative, the authors write that:

> In the debates that are staged by the news media, the personalities of the party leaders appear to become all the more decisive. Politics is personalised. Political sympathies become a question about identification with persons, their personalities and styles, their authenticity and rhetorical skills, a matter of likes and dislikes. Obviously, the phenomenon is not new. In elections campaigns the appearances of party leaders have always been important. But mediatisation accentuates a tendency to personalise.[22]
>
> Ekström and Andersson 1999:23

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[21] In the *Swedish Media Election Studies* (SMES), the news media coverage of every national election since 1979 has been investigated. However, since focus in the reports (e.g. Asp 2002, 2006, 2011) is always on the most previous election, these studies will not be discussed.

[22] In an interesting discussion on the consequences of mediatisation, the authors suggest that television has both turned elections into ritualised ceremonies and had a secularising effect. Conceived of in terms of a two-step process the suggestion seems plausible: at an early stage, television turned elections into celebrated national events; to vote became something with a strong symbolical value. At a more recent stage, however, the consequences of mediatisation are likely to be negative: politics is no longer treated as something "important"; the logic of the news media implies that politics is treated with suspicion and cynicism.

While the discourse, all in all, has become more negative, an interesting result is that the political actors themselves appear to be less confrontational than before (cf. Esaiasson and Håkansson 2002). Ekström and Andersson suggest that an explanation may be that political actors have "tried their best not to make the political debate an arena for squabbling and accusations" (p. 49). A more cynical way to put it is that political actors tend to avoid polemics since they know that this may reduce their own attractiveness and appeal. Political actors—I have previously argued—have now *learnt* how to speak the language of the media, and to try to stand above fusses and petty accusations may well be a better option than to attack (cf. Asp 2002 and Strömbäck 2008 on the fourth stage of mediatisation).

Finally, four studies that compare the Swedish election coverage with that of other countries will be discussed: Strömbäck and Aalberg (2008; where comparisons are made between Sweden and Norway); Strömbäck and Dimitrova (2006; where comparisons are made between Sweden and the US); Strömbäck and Luengo (2006; where comparisons are made between Sweden and Spain); Strömbäck and Shehata (2007; where comparisons are made between Sweden and the UK).

As an observant reader should have noticed, Strömbäck is co-author of all four studies, and since the Swedish data in all four cases comes from the 2002 election, I shall prefer to sum up the results by focusing on the similarities and differences between Sweden and the other three countries. The variables that I shall focus on are: the contextual frame; the metaframe of politics; the horse-race frame; the political strategy frame; the individual frame; and journalistic style.

Maybe not so surprisingly, when these six variables are compared, the country that turns out to be most similar to Sweden is Norway (differences are insignificant with regard to three of the examined variables). Most different are, on the other hand, the US and the UK (where no significant differences can be detected in only one case).

Another way to compare the different countries is to focus on individual variables. That is, instead of looking at the number of variables where there are significant differences, we look at the number of cases where there are significant differences with regard to one specific variable. As it turns out, this way of comparison implies that Sweden stands out with regard to two variables: the metaframe of politics (where an issue-metaframe is more common in Sweden in three out of four cases) and the political strategy

frame (which is less common in Sweden in three out of four cases).[23]

That Sweden stands out as a country marked by an overall issue-oriented framing is not very surprising; more intriguing is the fact that the "individual frame" is more common in the Swedish case than in the American.[24] Essentially, what this finding points at is that Sweden, with regard to personalisation, seems to be a country very much like most other (Western) European democracies; whereas things once may have been different, Sweden appears today to be a rather typical case.

Summing up the studies with a content perspective, some of the results that have been discussed stand out as more noteworthy than the others:

- In an international comparison, the Swedish coverage stands out as issue-oriented.
- Over the years an interpretative journalistic style has become more common while ideological metaframes have become less common.
- With regard to the share of "individual frames", a comparison between Swedish and American election coverage shows that there really is no significant difference between the two countries.

Then, what about the overall picture? What do we know about Swedish election coverage and campaigning? On a fundamental level, it can be concluded that researchers generally tend to be positive about how the news media cover national elections. As Kent Asp, supervisor of the *Swedish Media Election Studies* (SMES), puts it:

> Swedish news media in general, and the public service broadcast media in particular, fulfil the demands […] to a considerable degree. On balance, after nearly thirty years of empirical study in the *Swedish Media Election Studies* project, my assessment of the performance of Swedish news media is largely positive.
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> Asp 2007:31

Given the central standing of the news media in late-modern democracies,

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[23] As a matter of fact, issue-metaframes are more common in Sweden than all the other countries, but the difference between Sweden and Spain is not statistically significant. With regard to the political strategy variable, political strategy frames are least common in Sweden, but here the difference between Sweden and Norway is not statistically significant. The significance is in all four cases determined by χ^2 tests.

[24] The term "individual frame" is used to denote frames where politicians are portrayed as individuals, i.e. "persons with different attributes, characters, and behaviours rather than as spokespersons for certain policies" (Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2006:138).

the fact that a majority of those who have systematically examined the election coverage are affirmative is, of course, nothing to lament, quite the opposite. But, nevertheless—*why* is the overall verdict affirmative; what *role* is the news media generally assigned?

I should dare to say that a notion underlying most of the studies is that citizens' choices are to be grounded in issue-proximity; whether it is explicitly stated or not, researchers seem to subscribe to a model of prospective mandate giving. Obviously, leaning on this normative ideal, issue-oriented news coverage is something "good", whereas news coverage concerned with aspects related to the game becomes something "bad".

However, whereas this straightforward conclusion at the face of it seems altogether reasonable, a strictly fact-oriented election coverage is not necessarily "good" election coverage; to be "good", it could be argued, the coverage should not only be informative but also engaging (cf. Johansson 2006, 2008 and Petersson *et al* 2006). Because, if one thinks about it, what is the value of precise and detailed information if nobody cares to take it into consideration? In order for the information to have *practical* utility it must be consumed (and, preferably, it could be added, reflected upon). Consequently, in addition to the normative functions that are traditionally pointed out by those who adhere to the above model—to inform the citizenry and scrutinise power-holders—it could be argued that the news media also should be allotted an *activating* function. However, to provide coverage that is not only informative but also engaging is harder than to provide coverage that is purely informative—and when attempts are made, the former is often being downplayed to the privilege of the latter: whereas it certainly sounds fine to be serving democratic values, money talks—whereupon infotainment wins.

Moreover, it can be questioned whether the prospective and party-centred model really is a viable option in a time with rapidly increasing levels of complexity and interdependence. Because, whereas this model rests on the assumption that political actors can present prospective plans for action, few should today disagree with the notion that political actors over time have lost some of their ability to steer the development. Certainly, the political system remains important (after all, the binding decisions are still made by political actors) but given meta-processes such as globalisation few should dispute the notion that the capacity for political actors to control the development should have decreased (Innerarity 2010).

In the section that is to follow, I shall look closer at three studies that

examine the evidence of Sweden being marked by a trend of presidentialisation. While there are obvious similarities between the presidentialisation-thesis and the personalisation-thesis—as we saw above, Langer (2006) for example chooses to refer to one of the dimensions of personalisation in terms of presidentialisation—I have chosen to here discuss studies on presidentialisation separately. This, as we shall see, is explained by the fact that studies on presidentialisation focus, first and foremost, on the question of a power-shift.

3.4 Swedish studies on presidentialisation

While claims of presidentialisation are not new, they were heard increasingly often during Göran Persson's last tenure. However, for the thesis to be more than a theme in the public debate it must also be empirically investigated. Below, three studies that deal with the question will be discussed.

A proponent of the thesis is found in Aylott's study (2005). While no systematic time perspective is employed and only secondary data is used, the author nevertheless concludes that "the general data do suggest that the media, particularly television, now dominate political communication; that the media, led by television, focus more on party leaders; and that the parties have responded by increasing the emphasis that they place in their campaign strategies on their leaders. These might be seen as presidential developments" (Aylott 2005:189). The study, however, lacks first-hand data, and yet more problematic is that it altogether focuses on Göran Persson's time as Swedish Prime Minister (the title is "President Persson—how did Sweden get him?").

Since Sundström (2009) approaches the question of presidentialisation by examining the six most recent Social-Democratic single-party governments, the time perspective is much better established than in Aylott's study. In order to deal with the question, a wide range of documents is used; and analytically, a distinction is made between the forming and the working of government. With regard to the second of the two aspects—arguably the most important—Sundström writes that "the conclusion here is that the collegial elements of the work of government have diminished. Fewer and fewer issues are settled in collective meetings and more and more issues in informal, bilateral meetings" (p. 22). However, as regards the Prime Minister's leadership style, focus is once again largely on the last of the studied governments.

All in all, with regard to the overall research question, the author concludes that:

> The presidentialisation thesis gains only some support in the investigation. The way the Swedish government is composed and the way it works shows a considerable degree of inertia. Old ingrained working methods clearly influenced the way Olof Palme, Ingvar Carlsson and Göran Persson formed and led their governments. [...] However, the development has not only been marked by stability but also change. These changes relate foremost to issues connected with the government's forms of working and less to issues connected to forming a government.
>
> Sundström 2009:166

In sum, if Aylott (2005) was in clear support of the thesis, Sundström (2009) is more ambivalent; there is a change, but only with regard to the actual workings of the government.

Compared to both Aylott (2005) and Sundström (2009), Bäck *et al* (2007a; see also 2007b) strongly question that there is a trend of presidentialisation. Moreover, while Bäck *et al* (2007a) focus on Sweden, the developments are also studied in nine other parliamentary democracies, whereupon the authors authoritatively conclude that "the alleged transformation of parliamentarian democracies towards a presidential form of government seems to be exaggerated" (p. 95, my translation).

The study is theoretically interesting since it addresses the question of structural factors. Among the factors that are discussed are the internationalisation of politics; the mediatisation of politics; the expansion of the state, and the decreased importance of social cleavage lines. Notably, these factors are similar to those that both Langer (2006) and Karvonen (2010) suggest should have contributed to a personalisation of politics. Unfortunately however, Bäck *et al* (2007a) do not (empirically) address the news media coverage, and what the study effectively rejects is therefore the thesis of a political presidentialisation.

3.5 Summary

Notwithstanding claims and convictions in the public debate, it was above shown that the overall evidence for the thesis of personalisation is quite weak. To some degree, it was argued, this may be the result of there being few studies that deal with the softer side of the concept; until now, researchers have tended to focus on the question of whether, over time, there are more individual actors in the coverage. Another reason, it was argued, may be that studies on personalisation have hitherto tended to neglect the visuals.

Moreover, with regard to studies on Swedish election campaigns it was

concluded that most researchers—despite an increasingly dramatised coverage—tend to be quite content with the way the Swedish news media cover elections; despite a long-term trend of Americanisation, the coverage, in large, remains, issue-oriented. Thus, while the campaigns certainly have become more professionalised—between 1993 and 2003, the share of party personnel that work with political marketing tripled (Nord 2006)—Sweden is, in this case, still far behind the Anglo-Saxon countries (not least the US and the UK).

Chapter 4

The concept of personalisation and the analytical model

As was discussed in Chapter 3, personalisation is a double-faceted concept that often is empirically dealt with in a rather arbitrary way: a trend of individualisation of politics is often treated as more or less synonymous with a trend where personal characteristics are becoming more important; and together, they are both referred to in terms of personalisation. Certainly the two trends *may* go in tandem. The point here is that they do not have to do it. As a matter of fact, there may well be a trend of individualisation without there being a trend where personal characteristics are becoming more important—and, likewise, there may be a trend where personal characteristics are becoming more important without there being a trend of individualisation. To make my point as clear as can be: in order to remain relevant, the concept of personalisation must be used in a more rigorous manner; to conceive of the tendency of the (news) media to rely on game-frames as a proxy for the tendency of the (news) media to personalise is to stretch the concept's actual meaning.

Moreover, as was shown in Chapter 3, previous research on (media) personalisation has spent much time on investigating newspaper texts. Whereas this is understandable from a practical point of view, it is nevertheless unfortunate from a scientific point of view: as most researchers should agree, images are a most central feature of political communication, and to examine only written text is therefore to overlook a most important domain. It could also be added that empirical research has hitherto tended to examine only the articles' focus. Obviously, this way of measuring personalisation implies that only the most obvious developments can be detected.

In this chapter, I will:

1. Identify three different dimensions of personalisation and present the analytical model that is to be used.
2. Suggest that it is important to distinguish appearances as subjects from appearances as objects.

3.   Introduce two central notions; 1) strategic projection of personae and attributes and 2) media-derived authority.

4.1 Personification, orientation towards personae and intimisation. Introducing the analytical model

Above, I expressed criticism of how the concept of personalisation often is used. Consequently, here I shall outline a model with three different dimensions: 1) personification, 2) orientation towards personae, and 3) intimisation. Whereas this model is similar to the one presented by Langer (2006; see Chapter 3), there are important differences with regard to the grounds for distinctions. However, before these differences are discussed more thoroughly, the model advocated shall be presented.

Let us start with the dimension that is most easily described, that of *personification*. Basically, personification is when a person embodies something that he or she literally is not (be it an idea, principle or entity). For example, when Romeo says "Juliet is the sun", he does not mean it literally. Romeo believes that his beloved Juliet embodies certain qualities of the sun, such as beauty, but in no way does he confuse her with the sun. Likewise, the claim that "Reinfeldt is the (New) Moderates" should not be taken literally; Fredrik Reinfeldt may be the most prominent representative of the party, but the two—Fredrik Reinfeldt and his party—are still separate entities.[1] Thus, both Juliet and Fredrik Reinfeldt personify something that they, literally, are not—whereas Juliet personifies the sun, Reinfeldt personifies his party.

Certainly, it can be argued that the tendency to personify is inherent in the logic of the news media (Altheide and Snow 1979), but the notion here is that this tendency of the news media should have *increased*. Therefore, what we are interested in is not whether the news media personify, this is something that we can be sure of. What we are interested in is whether the news media are personifying more often than before (or, to use the terminology of Karvonen [2010], if politics was less personified at t than it is at t+1).

Whereas both of the above discussed forms of personification may be found with regard to mediated politics—over time, a Prime Minister may

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[1] Compare with the discussion on representation in Pels (2003:59): "a representative or spokesperson is always a different person who takes the place of […] the represented in order to mediate their views and interests. There is always a fault line representation: only through distance is the representer able to represent. But representation simultaneously implies resemblance and proximity, since the representer embodies the represented and speaks in their name."

increasingly have come to personify the state as well as his or her party—it is the latter that will be made the matter for empirical examination here. Thus, in the following, personification shall denote the tendency of the news media to refer to individual actors more frequently than before. And since personification—as the concept has been outlined above—essentially denotes a trend of individualisation, what particularly interests us is whether individual actors appear more frequently at the expense of collective actors; that is, whether the *relative* importance of individual actors has increased.

But, whereas we now have moved closer to a viable definition, one important clarification remains to be made: developments of individualisation may be of two kinds: on the one hand, there may be a general trend of individualisation (individual actors as such become more frequent); on the other hand, there may be a form where only certain individual actors appear all the more often (van Aelst *et al* 2011). In this study, I shall deal with the latter of the two—and since party leaders constitute the group of individual actors that is assumed to appear more often, personification shall here denote a development towards increased *party leader concentration*. Essentially, this means that the term of personification only shall be used in order to refer to the first dimension of the overall concept; in itself, personification is only concerned with the question of who (what).

In contrast, the concepts of *orientation towards personae* and *intimisation* are both concerned with the question of whether there is a trend towards more "personality politics" (Langer 2006). Acknowledging this basic similarity, orientation towards personae and intimisation should nevertheless be conceived of as two separate dimensions: although both concepts are concerned with the "softer side" of personalisation, orientation towards personae is to denote increased attention to *inner traits* whereas intimisation is to denote increased attention to *outer attributes*. Whereas inner traits are "truly" personal (as they reside within a certain individual), outer attributes are less so (as they appear in an actor's environment—or personal sphere—rather than within him or her as a "physical entity"). Moreover, whereas inner traits are of a certain durability and can be conceived of as part of an actor's authentic self, outer attributes are transient and open to manipulation

(they can more easily be acquired or given up than inner traits).[2]

To be clear about how the distinction is to be used, let us use some concrete examples. A news paragraph that comments on the rhetorical skills of a political actor ("Mrs. Green certainly has a way with words") is to be understood as a paragraph that deals with a political actor's inner traits: the political actor in question is said to be a skilled rhetorician; that is, the information provided is concerned with certain competencies of the political actor. Other examples of comments on inner traits are those dealing with the convictions or beliefs of a political actor ("Mrs. Green has been passionate about gender issues all her life"), and while information on sociability may intuitively seem to be concerned with an actor's outer attributes, I will consider such information to be about inner traits. A paragraph in which we are told, for example, that "Mrs. Green is known to be a warm and friendly person" is, I argue, essentially telling us something about Mrs. Green's mental disposition, i.e. characteristics that reside deep within Mrs. Green; that are of certain permanence and are not easily manipulated. (That Mrs. Green certainly may want us to believe that she is a warm and friendly person—and therefore chooses to act in a certain manner—is an altogether different issue. The point here is that Mrs. Green can hardly manipulate how she actually feels about being among other people.)

Then what is an outer attribute? Suggest we are being told that "Mrs. Green is now divorced"; in this information segment we get no information about Mrs. Green's inner traits, instead we get to know something about her marital status; the information provided is on Mrs. Green's outer attributes. (Had the paragraph carried the information that "although Mrs. Green is a strong advocate of traditional values she is now herself divorced", then we would have been provided information about her inner traits [Mrs. Green's advocacy of traditional values] as well as information on her outer attributes [Mrs. Green is divorced]). Other examples of information on outer attributes

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[2] In an influential article from 1986, Miller, Wattenberg and Malanchuk used factor analysis to identify dimensions in the comments on individual candidates made by respondents in the NES studies. All in all, five categories were detected: 1) competence, 2) integrity, 3) reliability, 4) charisma, and 5) personal aspects. As will be apparent in the following, the first four can be thought of in terms of a political actor's inner traits, whereas the fifth—personal aspects—can be thought of in terms of outer attributes. Whereas Miller and colleagues only conceived of the first three as "performance-relevant criteria" (p. 521), it will in the following be obvious that I do not believe this view to be correct: the ability to act, I argue, is contingent not only on an actor's authority *de jure*, also his or her authority *de facto* must be considered. And to claim that this latter form of authority can be separated from charisma and personal aspects is, I believe, somewhat naïve (see more in section 4.4).

are, for example, comments on looks, clothes, hobbies and interests. Thus, if we get to know that "Mrs. Green has, since her young years, been a warm admirer of the music of Bach", then we are provided information on her outer attributes (what we get to know is, somewhat simplified, something about what Mrs. Green likes, not who she "really is").

But while the categorisation of information on music taste may seem to be a straightforward matter, what if we instead are provided the information that "Mrs. Green has long been a member of Amnesty International"? Indirectly, one could argue, this passage tells us something about Mrs. Green's convictions: as a long time member of Amnesty International it is altogether reasonable to assume that Mrs. Green has a strong belief in universal human rights; information that—in accordance with what has been said above—should be categorised as information on inner traits. That Mrs. Green is a convicted supporter of the organisation's beliefs is however an indirect conclusion of the information provided; in itself the above information segment tells us nothing about the degree of her commitment, all we get to know is that she long has been a member of the organisation. Thus, only information that *explicitly* tells us something about an actor's beliefs shall be treated as information on inner traits. The distinction between inner traits and outer attributes is summarised in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Inner traits and outer attributes

	Dimension of personalisation	Defining characteristics	Examples
Inner traits	Orientation towards personae	Enduring, resides within an individual and is hard to manipulate	Competence, integrity, convictions, mental disposition
Outer attributes	Intimisation	Acquired and temporary, to be found in an individual's environment	Clothes, looks, family, interests, tastes, religion

But since the sheer possibility of distinguishing between inner traits and outer attributes is not a good argument for sidestepping more conventional alternatives (such as those grounded in the dichotomy of public versus private and relevant versus irrelevant information), what are the advantages of the here suggested alternative?

To this I will answer that the distinction between inner traits and outer attributes has at least one advantage to the alternatives mentioned above: the categorisations run less risk of being affected by cultural factors that are

contingent on space and time. Take for example the distinction between a public and private sphere; essentially this distinction is a cultural construction, many manners that previously were tolerated only in the private sphere are now accepted in the public sphere. And to believe it to be possible to distinguish relevant from irrelevant information is, I believe, directly naïve. Because what information should be relevant for whom and why? Obviously, the answer will differ. Indeed, to suggest that only information on, for example, policies and performance is relevant information reflects a belief that citizens relate to the political system in an altogether instrumental way, but in an era where post-materialist values are becoming increasingly important (Inglehart and Welzel 2005) citizens' relations to the political sphere (and its actors) may well be all the more personally grounded (Blondel and Thiébault 2010; see also Caprara 2007).

All in all, while the model presented here is little different from that of Langer (2006) with regard to the theoretical reasoning—neither of us discards the notion that some personal characteristics are more role-near than others—it is my belief that a distinction between inner traits and outer attributes is less ambiguous than one relying on the distinction between different spheres.[3]

Consequently, although other distinctions are more conventional, I shall prefer to use the distinction between inner traits and outer attributes as grounds for the analytical model. Below, this model is presented.

Figure 4.1: The analytical model: three dimensions of news media personalisation

Media personalisation

Personification   Orientation towards   Intimisation
                              persona
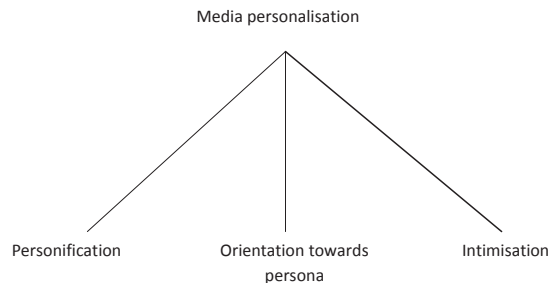
Figure 4.1 illustrates that the concept of personalisation should be under-

_____

[3] For a thorough discussion on the practical problems of distinguishing the public from the private sphere, see Rosenblum (1987); for a discussion on the many meanings of the concept of privacy, see Solove (2002).

stood with regard to three analytically distinct processes: 1) personification, 2) orientation towards personae, and 3) intimisation. And while both orientation towards personae and intimisation denote trends where personality politics is becoming increasingly important, it should be obvious that there are important differences between them. In the words of Ana Ines Langer:

> Personality traits might be directly related to their [=political actors'] role as political leaders or, on the contrary, they might have to do with the personal sphere of the individual and then not be considered as essentially political. A single concept is too vague and universalising to describe or make sense of this diversity.
>
> Langer 2006:26 (compare with van Aelst *et al* 2011)

Notably, the concept of intimisation refers in this study not only to information on the most intimate matters (e.g. family life), but includes information of a less intrusive kind (e.g. interests and hobbies). While this usage of the term intuitively may seem confusing, it is very much in line with how, for example, Thompson (e.g. 1995) and Meyrowitz (1986) have previously used it. In their accounts, the rise of telecommunications—and especially television—has enabled there to be more personal relations between followers (audiences, citizens) and followed (e.g. TV celebrities, political actors); this since the introduction of telecommunication media has new forms of quasi-interaction.[4]

4.2 Subjects or objects?
Above I claimed that the concept of personalisation has often been used rath-

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[4] Outlining a research project on the "intimization of journalism", Hirdman *et al* (2005:109f) write that: "What is considered intimate is, like the concept of 'private life', closely related to how the public sphere is constructed. But, whereas 'private' can be defined in spatial terms, as a place apart from public arenas, 'intimate' is more complex [...]. As we conceive of it, intimacy is both a place within private life, the home (the intimate sphere), and an act constituted by social relations and a form of medial address." Thus, what the concept refers to in this study is really quite different from what it refers to in the project by Hirdman *et al*. Whereas Hirdman and colleagues relate their project to an alleged development of "pervasive sexualisation in the media" (p. 109; see also Boling 1996), the way it is used in this study is instead related to the development in which marks of authority and subordination gradually appear as all the more outdated; in this way "the fall of public man" (Sennett 1992) comes hand in hand with the "lowering of the political hero" (Meyrowitz 1986). In essence, by "humanising" political leaders, the rise of telecommunications has implied a "new visibility". By enabling for the back regions ("warts and all") of political leaders to be inspected, the (news) media has simply made it harder for political leaders to maintain an aura of greatness (Thompson 2005; cf. Helms 2008). Consequently, in order to be able to rule, political leaders have to work increasingly hard to appear to be "one of us"; persuasion of equals has, to put it bluntly, replaced coercion of subordinates.

er arbitrarily. Another reason to why the picture remains fuzzy is that little attention has been paid to the question of different appearance forms: on the one hand, party leaders (or whatever group of actors in question) can appear in the news media by way of a variety of different means (texts, pictures etc.); on the other, party leaders can appear as either subjects or objects.

While the first is concerned with different presentation techniques and need little clarification, the second is theoretically interesting since it is related to normative ideas about what political leadership should be about: if the "political" is about action (Arendt 1958, compare with Mouffe 2005), party leaders should forcefully present their arguments, mobilise their supporters and criticise their opponents; party leaders should—quite literally—be those who lead. Consequently, in contrast to models that stress the value of representation, this model emphasises the value of accountability. While the consent of the citizens certainly remains central, too much listening to the public (and groups thereof) implies that the question of responsibility gets blurred; in order to efficiently sanction performances, citizens must simply be able to (correctly) couple outcomes to the intentions and actions of different leaderships. Thus, at the crux of this understanding—be it elite- and action-oriented or not—is the notion that political actors shall present clear government alternatives, try to implement the advocated policies and bear the responsibilities thereof. In other words: in order to be judged, politicians must be able to act; and in order to appear as true (or autonomous) actors, politicians must appear as subjects.

Writing on the concept of positive freedom, a distinction between subjects and objects is made by Isaiah Berlin. Whereas the context here is altogether different, I nevertheless believe the below excerpt to be illustrative to the case I want to make:

> I wish my life and decisions to depend on myself, not on external forces of whatever kind. I wish to be the instrument of my own, not other men's, acts of will. I wish to be a subject, not an object; to be moved by reasons, by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside. I wish to be somebody, not nobody; a doer—deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role, that is of conceiving goals and policies of my own and realising them.
>
> Isaiah Berlin, cited in Lukes 2006:57

The above excerpt highlights a most central difference between a subject and an object: whereas subjects are their own masters, objects are, essentially, at the mercy of others. With regard to the news media coverage, the consequence is obvious: only actors that have the possibility to speak for themselves (be it in order to present ideas or themselves) can be thought of as subjects; in cases where the conveyed image is determined by others, the actor appears as an object.

Then, if this can be theoretically grasped, how can we empirically—and with regard to media coverage—deal with the distinction?

The answer is: by coding individual paragraphs (or segments) of the news texts (stories). But whereas it is obvious that a political actor appears as a subject whenever he (she) appears in the form of a direct quotation, he (she) can also appear as subject in cases where an event is accounted for in an altogether impersonal manner; that is, in cases where there is no other actor than the reporter (who him/herself remains a de-attached and impersonal narrator of the story). The way the distinction between subject and object is operationalised is more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 7. Suffice it here to say, it is important since it couples information (messages) to a source (sender).

As a matter of fact, since no other study on personalisation has dealt with the distinction between subject and object, little has previously been said about who is behind the presented information. Indeed, whereas an assumption often seems to be that changes in output (news media coverage) can be traced to changes in how the news organisations prioritise news, this development may well emanate from the political actors themselves. Since old bonds and loyalties have eroded, it can be said that voters have to be won in increasingly unorthodox ways—not least by means of more personal appeals.

Suggest, for example, that a news paragraph tells us about a political actor's history of alcoholism. Intuitively, this seems to be an obvious example of the news media's tendency to personalise; an individual actor is being focused on and the information provided concerns what is normally considered to be a personal matter. But what if the actual sender (principal) is not the news medium but the political actor? What if the political actor has decided to reveal that he or she has a history of drinking problems and decides to use the media as an instrument? It is certainly true, in that case, that the content is personalised. But to presume that personalised content is always

explained by rules and logics that spring from the news media system is to overestimate the accommodation power of the news media; in processes of interaction, the interests of both parties must be considered (Mazzoleni and Schultz 1999). And while it is true that the increased importance of the news media has fundamentally altered society on all its levels, it may well be the case that on an empirical level there are explanations with "less distance between the independent and the dependent variable". And why cross the river for water? Instead of relying on external explanations, the drivers of change may come from within; rather than resulting from changes in the overall power balance, changes in the news content may well be the result of changes in how political actors want to appear.

4.3 Strategic projection of personae and attributes: a theoretical model

In Chapter 2, it was suggested that political actors should be conceived of as strategic actors whose actions are constrained by the norms of what is considered to be appropriate. Consequently, as cleverly as they can, political actors will try to make use of various resources to acquire the political goals that they strive for (Sjöblom 1968, Lewin 1989, 1996). In the following section it will be suggested that one such resource—and this to an increasing extent—is personae and attributes.

However, before we proceed, it should be established how different spheres of action are related to each other. The following figures are elaborations on a figure presented by John Corner (2003). While the first of them show the different spheres at t; the latter shows them at t+1.

Figure 4.2: Spheres of action at t
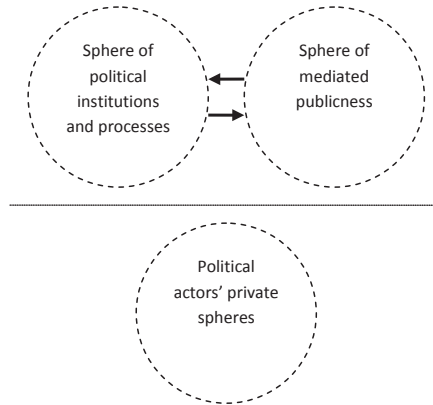
The first thing to notice is that at t there is a line of division between pub-
lic and private spheres. The second thing to notice is that all spheres are
conceived of as discrete entities. And, finally, the third thing to notice is the
arrows between the sphere of political institutions and processes and the
sphere of mediated publicness. The arrows indicate that the two spheres are
under the influence of each other.[5]

But, as shown in figure 4.3, at t+1 the idea of clear boundaries between
the spheres is no longer valid; as the line of division has disappeared a former
separation of distinct spheres has now been replaced by a blurring and in-
termingling of spheres. Thus, at t+1 the model is no longer static; different
spheres are continuously closing up on each other, and while the private
sphere at t was isolated from the public spheres, there is now an arrow point-
ing from the private sphere into the sphere of mediated publicness. Thus, ac-
tions/manners in the private sphere have come to be increasingly important
to actions/manners in the sphere of mediated publicness (Corner 2003).

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[5] As discussed above, the concepts of public and private are quite problematic since their meanings and
definitions to a large extent are culturally determined. And while one way to distinguish between them is
grounded in the distinction between openness and secrecy (Weintraub 1997), the principle of distinction
here is more closely related to the notion of there being certain sphere-specific "manners of acting"
(Steinberger 1999:294). Thus, when I use the concepts of a public and a private sphere I do this with the
notion of there being two different logics (norms for what is considered to be appropriate). Obviously, this
does not imply that the discussed problems have been overcome, but in this context—where the presented
model is shown to serve an illustrating rather than an analytical purpose—the ambiguities inherent in the
concepts should be a negligible problem.

Figure 4.3: Spheres of action at t+1
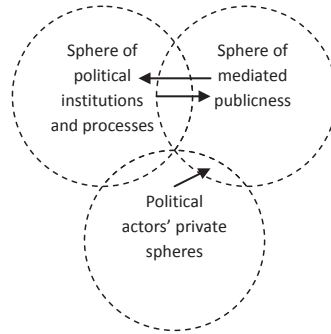
Yet another thing to notice is that the relation between the sphere of political institutions and processes and the sphere of mediated publicness has changed. While the arrows at t were of the same size (indicating equal influence), the arrow pointing from the sphere of mediated publicness into the sphere of political institutions and processes is at t+1 larger than the arrow pointing in the opposite direction. The implication of this is that the sphere of political institutions and processes has lost some of its previous autonomy and must accommodate to the logic of the sphere of mediated publicness (and, indirectly, the private sphere).

In essence, what the model attempts to show is how previously bounded norm-fields over time have become increasingly interwoven. Whereas actions in the sphere of institutional politics have always been influenced by actions in the sphere of mediated publicness (see figure 4.2), the importance of this influence has increased over time (see figure 4.3). And whereas I have not suggested that manners previously constricted to the private sphere should have a *direct* impact upon manners in the sphere of political institutions and processes—indeed, this could well be the case if political processes over time are increasingly marked by informality (Lundquist 2011)—there should nevertheless be an increased *indirect* influence of this kind. Since private manners have become more tolerated in the sphere of mediated publicness they should have indirectly become more tolerated with regard to the sphere of "pure politics".

Obviously, the above figures are crude and very schematic; but here, their purpose is not to explain but to illustrate. Previously separated spheres have over time come closer to each other; there is an increased intermingling be-

tween them and their previous distinctiveness is gradually reduced. That not all political actors (and certainly not all political scientists) are pleased with the situation should not obscure the fact that some political actors may be more tranquil about it. And if some political actors decide to make us of their own personae and attributes, other political actors will tend to follow, whereupon there is a gradual erosion of the barrier that used to prevent the personal and private from becoming political. A consequence with regard to the working of the system is that unwritten rules for what is appropriate are under stress; to put it somewhat bluntly, a traditional logic is increasingly under the sway of an updated version.

An important aspect to discuss at this stage is to what degree political actors are co-creators of the new situation. While mediatisation often is conceived of as a process that acts on the political system (e.g. Meyer 2002), it is suggested here that political actors should not be conceived of as passive victims. On the contrary, to a certain extent political actors are here considered to be the ones who enable the process. In the words of Corner and Pels:

> The 'styling of the self' in politics, the projection of political personae, is partly a matter of choice (a conscious 'branding' exercise designed to sharpen profile) and partly a required action to the terms of media visibility that now frame and interpret political action in many countries.
>
> Corner and Pels 2003:10; compare with Driessens *et al* 2010 and Kuhn 2011

Moreover, that the projection of personae and attributes can be seen through the lens of a social exchange perspective is obvious. For the sake of simplicity, let us assume that the process here can be conceived of in relation to the exchange between one political actor and one news media actor. At t their relation is marked by stability; the political actor provides the news media actor with information on issues and in return he or she gets visibility. But over time, the political actor increasingly provides the news media actor with information about more personal matters; the question here is why.

From a social exchange perspective there are two possible explanations: 1) in exchange for visibility the news media actor can at t+1 demand "more" from the political actor than at t; thus, from the perspective of the political actor, the perceived cost of visibility has increased; 2) the value that the political actor attaches to personal matters is at t+1 lower than at t; thus, from the perspective of the political actor, visibility can be acquired without there

being a rise in the perceived cost.

While with regard to real life there are obviously more factors to consider, the two alternatives effectively illustrate two quite different scenarios: whereas the first explanation rests on the assumption that the relation at t+1 is marked by a power shift to the advantage of the news media actor, no such assumption underlies the latter. In fact, if a shift of power here can be detected at all, this should be to the advantage of the political actor (given that the quantities remain the same, the perceived cost should have decreased from the perspective of the political actor).

In sum, while the question of which of the two alternatives that best explain (media) personalisation is hard to provide with a satisfying answer—after all, the question is not one of either-or and both explanations are likely to be at work—I have here wanted to briefly point at the possibility of there being a more personal coverage without there being a more powerful media. As we shall see in Chapter 5, also the political system must be conceived of as dynamic and open to change—and this, I shall argue, is not only due to factors that in a self-evident way can be coupled to the media. Two societal meta-processes that hitherto have been largely overlooked are, for example, those of increased complexity and interdependency on the systems level.

4.4 Media-derived authority

Furthermore, the intermingling of spheres and the "politicisation of private personae" (Langer 2006) brings the question of the grounds for authority to the fore. In a well-known tripartite typology, Weber distinguished between traditional authority, rational-legal authority and charismatic authority. While traditional authority has little to do with formal rules and competences ("authority [is] legitimated by the sanctity of tradition" [Blau 1963:308]), rational-legal authority is a form where legitimacy rests on impersonal principles, such as the law. And in contrast to legal-rational authority, the third form of authority outlined by Weber, charismatic authority, is to a large extent grounded in emotional bonds; charismatic authority "rests upon the uncommon and extraordinary devotion of a group of followers to the sacredness or the heroic force or the exemplariness of an individual and the order revealed or created by him" (Weber cited in Sennett 1993:21). Thus, while both traditional and charismatic authority point at a personal relation between leader and followers, legal-rational authority is a form where obedience is owed not to a person but to a set of impersonal principles.

Weber's thoughts on what legitimates authority are obviously of inter-

est with regard to the above discussion on a strategic projection of personae and attributes. If, as suggested by figure 4.3, the sphere of mediated publicness has become increasingly important to the sphere of political institutions and processes, an implication is that the grounds for political authority—to some extent—has changed: authority *de jure* is complemented with authority *de facto* (Hajer 2009; cf. Barker 2001), and the latter is increasingly achieved by a clever and skilful projection of personae and attributes.[6]

Then, if this is the case, what should this new form of authority be called? While it may be correct to use the concept of charismatic authority in cases where a far-reaching cult of the leader has emerged (Cavalli 1998), what has been described above is certainly not a process where only exceptional traits have gained in importance. What figure 4.3 suggests is merely that attributes of the private sphere—for example hobbies and lifestyle-markers—have increasingly found their way into the sphere of mediated publicness.

One way to approach the question can be found in Herbst (2003). Here, the author refers to a "media-derived authority"; "a sort of legitimation one receives through mediated channels" (ibid:489). Although the concept of media-derived authority is analytically different from the forms of authority discussed by Weber (Herbst's conceptualisation departures in the question of "how" rather than the question of "on what grounds"), it has certain similarities with Weber's notion of charismatic authority. As such, media-derived authority is not the result of deliberative processes; it is unstable and draws upon an actor's personae and actions; and finally, to some extent it concerns influence on people's thoughts and opinions.

Above I have suggested that the increased intermingling of previously distinct spheres should be conceived of in relation to a trend in which authority *de jure* to an increasing extent must be complemented with authority *de facto*. And it is with this in mind that the question of the accommoda-

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[6] Compare with Corner (2003:74): "The sphere of the public and the popular [mediated publicness] is the realm of the visibly 'public', the space of a demonstrable representativeness [...]. It constitutes the stage where, for instance, politicians develop reputations, draw varying levels of support, are judged as good or bad, undergo meteoric or steady advancement, decline or are sacked"; see also Thompson (2005). Whereas Easton (1965, 1975) certainly has no longitudinal perspective, the very notions of authority *de jure* and authority *de facto* appear in the author's discussion on legitimacy. In essence, what Easton outlines (1965:287, 1975:452) in terms of structural legitimacy of authorities—that is, "overflow from belief in structure to the incumbents of the authority roles"—should be quite comparable to what I have referred to in terms of authority *de jure*, whereas personal legitimacy of authorities—that is, "independent belief in validity because of their personal qualities"—on the other hand should be comparable to what I have referred to in terms of authority *de facto*.

tion power of the news media should be approached: to political actors, the news media—and especially the electronic news media—can be conceived of as an instrument in establishing a more personal relation to potential voters; an "intimacy at distance" (Meyrowitz 1986, Thompson 1995; see also Jamieson 1990). This function—or, more correctly, the importance of this function—should most certainly have increased as the question of personal trust has become increasingly important (a development that itself should be seen against the background of increased uncertainty and an overall diminishing role of political parties).

In essence, all in all this means that it is wrong to conceive of mediatisation as a process whereby the political system is being "colonised"; since authority today is acquired by the means of public performances, there is an incentive for political actors to adhere to the logic of the news media. To carry matters to extremes, one could even claim that political actors today need the media: without the media, there is no stage; and without a stage, there will be no performances.

4.5 Summary

The multidimensionality of personalisation is strongly reflected in the analytical model that shall be used; above three dimensions were identified and discussed: 1) personification; 2) orientation towards personae; and 3) intimisation. Notably, whereas there are similarities between the model at hand and that which Langer (2006) relies on, I shall prefer to make distinctions between inner traits and outer attributes. Moreover, whereas the term of intimisation often is coupled to the very most intimate sphere (e.g. that of sexuality; see for example Hirdman *et al* 2005), it here denotes a development in which outer attributes in general—be they "intimate" or not—are becoming all the more frequent.

Furthermore, it has above been argued that a crucial distinction to be made is that between (appearances as) subjects and (appearances as) objects. Whereas subjects appear in active roles, objects are in contrast awarded roles that are largely passive. Since distinctions of this kind have not been employed in previous studies on personalisation, the extent to which leader portrayals live up to an action-oriented normative ideal is a matter that has hitherto been altogether overlooked.

Chapter 5

Increased interdependence and complexity—decreased party identification

In Chapter 3 it became apparent that the question of whether there is trend of a personalisation is not as clear-cut as is often made the case (e.g. McAllister 2009). Moreover, it was also shown that a distinction can be made between studies where personalisation is conceived of as a media-generated process and studies where it is conceived of as a politically co-determined process. Whereas an analytical distinction of this kind, quite naturally, may be accused of providing an oversimplified picture, it was here considered to be useful (not least since it effectively highlights similarities between the studies by Langer [2006], Rahat and Sheafer [2007] and the one at hand).

Since a notion behind this study is that structural changes within the political system often are overlooked, I shall prefer to focus on aspects within the political—rather than the news media—system. As should be quite apparent, this decision comes not from the belief that aspects within the political system are more important than factors within the media system. As a matter of fact, with regard to the question of what explains most I shall have very little to say; changes within both systems obviously matter (Garzia 2011).[1]

Consequently, in the following sections, the hypotheses will be related to changes within the political system. And although the discussed changes are of a rather general kind, I will prefer to discuss them from a Swedish perspective. Three aspects will be central: increased interdependence, in-

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[1] Personally, I like to think of the arguments provided here as an attempt to twist the kaleidoscope; that is, to provide a somewhat different perspective. Because whereas studies on power and democracy certainly must take into consideration the role that today is played by the media, studies that deal with media coverage cannot neglect to consider that also the world that the media is to cover may have changed. In essence, since accounts on (media) personalisation tend to focus on factors within the media, I shall here prefer to focus on other factors—after all, neither the news media, nor the political system is static. For the "transformation of politics", see Innerarity (2010).

creased complexity, and the decrease of party identification.

In brief, in this chapter I will:

1. Show that a trend of increased interdependence can be assumed to lead to personalisation.
2. Show that increased complexity can be assumed to lead to personalisation.
3. Show that a decrease of party identification can be assumed to lead to personalisation.

5.1 Increased interdependence

First of all, the concept of interdependence must be defined. Here, it should be understood as a trend whereby actions and decisions in one arena have become increasingly dependent on (and interwoven with) actions and decisions in other arenas. Hence, interdependence, as the word is used here, implies that political actors have lost some of their autonomy; at t+1 they are more dependent on actions in other arenas than they were at t. And while it is important not to conceive of interdependence as something unique to our own time—capitalism is an international affair with its origins in the 16th century (Held 1995)—it is a fact that the pace of the development towards global interconnectedness has increased most rapidly during the last couple of decades (a prerequisite for this being the technological developments that enable the uncoupling of time and space; cf. Giddens 1990, Thompson 1995). As a consequence, the game that political actors play at t+1 is a game with more levels than the game that they played at t. The logic of two-level games has been discussed by Putnam (1988):

> The politics of many international negotiations can usefully be conceived as a two-level game. At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among these groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign.
>
> Putnam 1988:434

Thus, what I here argue is that decision-making in Sweden has become increasingly dependent on decision-making on the international arena. A rather recent development that exemplifies this argument is the integration of Sweden in the EU: being an EU member, decisions that were previously taken in the Swedish parliament are now settled after negotiations between ministers of the Swedish government and ministers from other member countries. That is, while the country remains sovereign (in the sense that national political actors still have the right to make binding decisions; cf. Goldmann 1999), it should be uncontroversial to suggest that the autonomy of its national political actors has decreased.[2]

There are, I suggest, at least two reasons why this development should have resulted in increased personalisation. Firstly, when dealing with ministers from other member countries, Swedish ministers will need a certain room for manoeuvre. Obviously, this argument is clearly related to Manin's (1997) claim that political leaders in late-modern societies need more discretionary power than those of previous times: as interdependence increases, so does uncertainty. And as uncertainty increases, so does the need for flexibility. And if it can be postulated that political actors generally wish to have a certain room for manoeuvre, how can flexibility and personal leeway be acquired? By the means of a more personal mandate—and one way to acquire a more personal mandate should be to increasingly project one's own personae.

Secondly, as certain individual actors (members of government) have come closer to the centre of the international decision-making process, it is logical for the news media to focus more on them and less on the collectives from which their power has been delegated. Thus, the argument here is that there has been an actual shift of power, from a collective actor (the parliament as a body, the various parties) to individual political actors. In essence,

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[2] Important to note: that national actors have lost in autonomy does not necessarily imply that they have lost in power; if power is conceived of in terms of capacity, an internationalisation of politics may instead imply that national political actors have become more powerful (Peters and Pierre 2000). Concerning the EU, Miles (2005:32) has for example suggested that "most national are predominantly pragmatic [...]. They are willing to accept the obligations arising from European integration provided that the Union delivers [political and economic] results that are no longer produced using traditional national strategies and policies. Hence, countries come to favour joining the Union not of some commitment to a vision of an integrated Europe, but largely because they see that there are substantial output benefits in being part of the Union and using supranational policy-making" (see also Scharpf 1999). Note that the discussions on EU only serve to exemplify the overall argument—that increased interdependence can be assumed to fuel personalisation.

joining the EU should have implied a *de facto* centralisation of power.[3] The two arguments are illustrated in figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: How increased interdependence leads to personalisation in the news media

Argument one

Increased interdependence → Increased need of discretionary power → Increased wish for a more personal mandate → Increased propensity to project one's own personae → Increased personalisation in the news media coverage

Argument two

Increased interdependence → Actual centralisation of power → Increased news media focus on individual actors → Increased personalisation in the news media coverage

Notably, both of the arguments rest on certain presuppositions. With regard to argument one, an underlying notion is that increased interdependence—here discussed in relation to membership in the EU—should lead to an increased need for discretionary power; with regard to the second argument, an underlying notion is instead that Sweden's membership has led to an individualisation (or centralisation) of power. The question is: to what extent can these notions be verified?

While I know of no study that has dealt with the increased need for discretionary power empirically, I nevertheless believe that this presupposi-

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[3] That a power shift—from the parliament to the government—has followed upon the Swedish membership of the EU is addressed by, for example, Blomgren (2005). And while it is obvious that the government (as a body) has become more powerful, a centralisation of power within the government is indicated by the fact that the number of people working at the Prime Minister's Office has grown rather steadily; from 49 (1995) to 177 (2008). One explanation is that there has been a gradual shift of responsibility concerning EU coordination, from the Foreign Office to the Prime Minister's office (Tallberg *et al* 2010, see p. 68 for figures; see also Miles 2005 and Johansson and Raunio 2010). A more theoretical account is provided in Lundquist (2011). In this study, it is suggested that the embedment of Swedish administration (within the transnational structure of the EU) has resulted in increased fragmentation as well as increased informality (with regard to how decisions are being made). Whereas Lundquist asserts that both formal and informal interactions are prerequisites for the steering of complex societies (cf. Misztal 2000), an increased importance of individual networks has—according to Lundquist—implied that the latter form has become increasingly important at the expense of the former. (Interactions between individuals—be it in individual-based networks or as individuals—are marked by informality; interactions between organisations and institutions are, in contrast, marked by formalised rules and procedures.) Hence, in Lundquist's account (and with regard to decision-making procedures within the political system) it is obvious that a trend of individualisation can be assumed to be concurrent with a trend of "informalisation". In essence, this implies a "refeudalisation" of societal power (p. 236f).

tion can be theoretically supported: in their negotiations with ministers from other member countries, ministers of the Swedish government can be conceived of as agents (the principal being, on the one hand, the Swedish parliament; on the other, the parties to which the ministers belong). Thus, when compared to foreign relations where ministers act as representatives of the state, they have in their relations with actors from the EU a clear responsibility downwards (i.e. towards members of the parliament and ultimately the Swedish voters).

But, it is important to bear in mind that responsibility downwards is not all that there is; individual ministers will also have a responsibility to act constructively in their relations with ministers of other member countries. Consequently, from the perspective of ministers of the government, there are both horizontal and vertical relations where a certain amount of discretionary power should be wished for. Firstly, when discussing the issue within the government as a body, the individual minister that is to represent the Swedish government must make sure that he or she is given a certain degree of flexibility. Since decisions in the Council of Ministers are taken after negotiations, the Swedish representative cannot be bound by detailed instructions; he or she must have a mandate to negotiate.

Secondly, an individual minister can be assumed to wish for a certain room for manoeuvre also in his or her meetings with the Committee on EU Affairs (where a minister is to get support for the government's standpoint). As he or she essentially asks for a mandate to pursue a certain course of action, the standpoint must not be formulated in a way where no alternative courses of action are left open. As pointed out above, an individual minister does not only represent the Swedish government and parliament; he or she has also a responsibility not to deadlock the negotiations in the Council of Ministers.

With regard to the second argument (see figure 5.1), support can be found in an article by Raunio (2002). According to the author "EU membership and the process of European integration consolidate centralisation of power and top-down decision through providing party leadership (as cabinet members) with an arena (EU) where the party organisations exercise little if any control over party representatives" (p. 410f; see also Tallberg *et al* 2010).

Hence, although Raunio discusses the consequences of delegation, the mechanism that explains personalisation is somewhat different: whereas

personalisation in the first case was believed to spring from political actors' (increased) need for discretionary power, personalisation is in the second case considered to be the result of a situation of (increased) information asymmetry. In Raunio's words, increased centralisation and leadership autonomy is fuelled by "the uneven participatory rights of national politicians in the EU political system" (p. 411). Consequently, in this case a personalisation of the coverage corresponds to an actual centralisation of power.[4]

If the overall logic behind the arguments can be accepted, some questions concerning their validity nevertheless arise. Firstly, to what extent can the arguments be applied to party leaders that are not part of the government? While this question certainly is motivated, I do believe that a satisfying answer can be provided: while the arguments in their own right are valid only for party leaders that serve as government ministers, it seems rather straightforward to suggest that there should be a diffusion effect: if there is a trend of a personalisation with regard to party leaders that are ministers, then there should most certainly be a trend of personalisation with regard to other party leaders. Why? Because the news media must treat the party leaders equally. During, for example, an election campaign, the news media cannot give more (or qualitatively different) coverage to certain party leaders since this would undermine their credibility as impartial conveyors of information.

Secondly, a more troublesome remark is that the effects of joining the EU may not be that relevant with regard to the coverage of national election campaigns (i.e. the empirical material of the study at hand). That the election coverage can be assumed to be different than the off-election coverage is true; as discussed in Chapter 1, the coverage of elections has over the years become highly institutionalised and follows a certain formula. However true this may be, a diffusion effect should come into play also here. That is to say, whereas a trend of personalisation certainly may be stronger with regard to the less institutionalised off-election coverage, the effects discussed here should have found their way also into the election coverage.

Thirdly, in the first of the two arguments, party leaders were believed to need more discretionary power than before; and consequently, they were assumed to be more inclined (or less reluctant) to project their own per-

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[4] For a study on how EU summits have lead to (increased) Prime Ministerial dominance within European governments, see Johansson and Tallberg (2010).

sonae and attributes. But is it reasonable to assume that more leeway (an increasingly open mandate) is acquired by a more personal coverage in the news media? Should it not be more plausible to suggest that personal leeway is acquired by a strong standing in the traditional political institutions (e.g. the parties, the parliament)?

To this I will answer that whereas an actor's standing in the political arenas, in this respect, may be more important than the way he (she) is portrayed in the news media, the two are definitely not at odds. Quite the opposite: in this study, media legitimacy is believed to be a factor that is of relevance also with regard to traditional political arenas. Authority *de jure*, it is argued, is increasingly complemented with—and indirectly dependent on—authority *de facto*.

Fourthly, to what extent are the provided arguments valid with regard to the different hypotheses?

With regard to increased interdependence, arguments for all three hypotheses are provided. Firstly, that joining the EU has led to a centralisation of power with regard to the national level appears to be quite apparent: on the one hand, there is the power shift from parliament to government; on the other, there is the power shift from the government as a body to individual ministers, especially the Prime Minister. While it certainly cannot be taken for granted that this shift is reflected in an increasingly personified coverage of national election campaigns (H1)—after all, the election coverage is highly institutionalised—this diffusion effect appears likely. (Not least if we can presume that effects from the EU membership not are constricted to the organisation of parties that are represented in the government.)

Secondly, whereas the arguments for H1 are quite direct, the arguments for H2 are more indirect (and, it must be admitted, to some extent left implicit). However, given that the importance of individual actors should have increased, does it not seem plausible to assume that the news media over time should have come to pay all the more attention to the party leaders' competences and qualifications? As a matter of fact, if individual actors have become increasingly important with regard to the political processes, is not a heightened focus on the competences and abilities of individual actors what can be assumed from a professional and well-functioning news media?

Thirdly, whereas increased interdependency in itself hardly can be coupled to an increased propensity of the media to focus all the more on the party leaders' outer attributes (e.g. their hobbies, clothes, marital statuses

and personal styles), I have above argued that the projection of outer at-
tributes may be a fruitful way for party leaders to acquire a more personal
mandate. Consequently, from the perspective of political actors, the pres-
entation of more personal selves can be thought of as a counterstrategy: as
room to manoeuvre over time has become increasingly constrained, politi-
cal actors should increasingly try to resist the development by projecting
themselves in more personal ways.

5.2 Increased complexity

Although the development towards increased interdependence is highly
entwined with the development towards increased complexity, I shall here
prefer to discuss them separately. The reason why is that with regard to the
latter I shall underline a notion that was discussed in Chapter 2—namely
the increased importance of trust. First of all, however, the concept of com-
plexity shall be clarified.

  The way that I conceive of complexity is similar to the view outlined by
Zolo (1992). Complexity, that is, "refers to the cognitive situation in which
agents, whether they are individuals or social groups, find themselves"
(ibid:3); and in this way, levels of complexity are directly related to changes
in an actor's environment: as the number of choices and variables that are
to be considered increases, so does the complexity; as interdependence be-
tween different variables increases, so does complexity; and finally, as over-
all instability increases, so does complexity.

  Below, I shall briefly discuss four reasons to why the complexity of the
political system should have increased. What I shall focus on is:

1. the number of levels and actors
2. the blurring of responsibilities
3. the proliferation of conflict lines
4. the connectedness of issues

Starting with the first, the national, regional and local levels are now (in-
creasingly) complemented by an international level. And whereas the EU
may be the most obvious example of a supra-national level, another, and
perhaps less obvious, is the WTO: since all countries that are members of
the organisation must respect the agreements that are made, the autonomy
of national governments, with regard to matters that fall under the jurisdic-
tion of the WTO, is effectively circumscribed. Moreover, since the EU has a
common trade policy for all of its member countries, the member states are

in the WTO represented not by national actors but the European Commission. Therefore, when compared to the delegation of power to the EU, yet another chain of delegation must be added: firstly, decision-making power is delegated from the national to the European level; secondly, decision-making power is delegated from the European to the "global" level.

Here, my argument is that the above cases in no way are unique; instead there is a general shift in which steering by the national government has increasingly given way to a system of multi-level governance.[5] And as the number of levels increases, so does the number of centres—and, unavoidably, the number of actors. In the words of Peters and Pierre (2001):

> The emergence of multi-level governance challenges much of our traditional understanding of how the state operates, what determines its capacities, what its contingencies are, and ultimately of the organisation of democratic and accountable government. [...] We could say that we are moving from a model of the state in a liberal-democratic perspective towards a state model characterised by complex patterns of contingencies and dependencies on external actors [...]. Political power and institutional capability is less and less derived from formal constitutional powers accorded the state but more from a capacity to wield and coordinate resources from public and private actors and interests.

> Peters and Pierre 2001:131; cf. Vifell 2006

The second reason listed above is that there is a development where the responsibilities tend to become increasingly blurred. In a way, this development (and the subsequent problems of accountability) is a direct consequence of the development where political actors have become increasingly dependent on actors who are formally outside of the political system (Sundström and Jacobsson 2007; see also Grande and Pauly 2007). Here, at least two different developments can be perceived: on the one hand, the traditional distinction between political actors and government officials can no longer be upheld (Wallin *et al* 1999, Jacobsson and Sundström 2007, SOU 2007:75); on the other, tasks that previously were carried out by govern-

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[5] Whereas the reasoning should be applicable to a large number of countries, I have—as previously indicated—had my point of departure in the case of Sweden. Consequently, "national government" is here written in the singular.

ment agencies have been delegated to private actors (Blomqvist 2004).[6]

A third reason to why the overall complexity should have increased is that there now are more parties and dimensions than before (Oscarsson 1998, Bjereld and Demker 2011). While a left-right scale long served as a much helpful tool, it is less efficient with regard to some of the issues that have emerged during recent decades (examples of such issues are nuclear power, environmental issues and the EU). In the words of Oscarsson (1998):

> The development towards a more complex political reality implies—ceteris pari-bus—decreased possibilities for the citizens to maintain a correct and coherent perception of the conflict structure of the political party system. Changes in terms of more parties, the erosion of traditional conflict lines, and the inclusion of new issues make it increasingly hard for voters to perceive of the ideological position-ing of the various parties. As it becomes harder for the voters to orient themselves ideologically, more efforts are needed in order to compare and evaluate the alter-natives.

> Oscarsson 1998:5 (my translation)

Finally, a fourth reason as to why systemic complexity has increased is that the relations that the political system consists of have become all the more complex. While the increased complexity of actor-actor relations can be di-rectly related to the fact that the number of actors has increased, the in-creased complexity of actor-issue relations is only partially explained by there being more issues—another reason is that political issues have be-come increasingly interconnected. Since I suggested in Chapter 2 that the fundamental relations are actor-actor relations and actor-issue relations, this assertion needs to be clarified.

That actor-actor relations and actor-issue relations are fundamental to the political system does not mean that there are no other relations; also the connections between issues can be conceived of as relations (Asp 1986). Take the relation between inflation and employment: in Sweden, full em-

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[6] Whereas an obvious consequence is that chains of responsibility have become more blurred, it is interesting to note that accountability appears not to have become less but more important to the voters (Kumlin 2003; cf. Blühdorn 2009, Mair 2009, Rothstein 2009; see also Lewin 2007). Consequently, what we have at hand is a somewhat paradoxical situation: on the one hand, there is the situation of a more demanding citizenry; on the other, there is the situation of an increasingly uncertain (complex) political environment. And what should be a logical consequence when these quite irreconcilable developments are put together? The answer is: relations (citizens-political actors) that are increasingly determined by trust.

ployment was long an overarching political goal, whereas levels of inflation were considered to be of minor importance. Then, in the 1990s, the situation changed; neo-liberal economic thinking was adopted and the previously downplayed goal of low inflation was now premiered at the expense of the goal of full employment. While the shift of policy norms was certainly debated, the question of whether there actually is a relation between levels of inflation and levels of employment was not what the controversy was about—instead, the core of the question was the strength of the relation, what goal to prioritise and how to achieve it. In the words of Lindvall and Rothstein (2006):

> The politics of macro-economic policy is often thought to result from the fact that while there is widespread agreement on the desirability of the main macroeconomic goals (low unemployment, optimal economic growth and low inflation), there is less agreement on their relative importance and on the best instruments for attaining them. However, a decision to change economic policy does not only have consequences for the pursuit of economic objectives in a narrow sense; it has also important implications for the government's capacity to pursue other policies, such as social programmes, which are often designed for an economy with a certain level of employment.

<div align="right">Lindvall and Rothstein 2006:57[7]</div>

That economic policies are related to employment policies may be obvious, but my point here is that the web of interconnected issues has become bigger: actions and decisions in one policy sphere have, over time, become increasingly dependent on actions and decisions in other policy spheres—and since the "issue-web" has grown, it has all in all become increasingly difficult for political actors to predict the consequences of their actions. Consequently, in late-modern societies, politics is to a great deal about handling unintended side effects. "Society is", in the words of Beck (1997:32), "changed not only by that which is seen and desired but also by that which is not seen and not desired. The side-effect, not instrumental rationality (as in the theo-

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[7] But why, one could ask, was the goal of low and stable inflation not given priority much earlier? The goal of low inflation was made the primary objective roughly a decade later than in most other European countries. According to Lindvall and Rothstein (2006:57), "the reason why politicians could now make this move was that the strong state was weakening, and the need to protect it was no longer a constraint on their room for manoeuvre" (cf. Blyth 2001). For a thorough account of the economic policy shift, see Lindvall (2006); compare with Bergh and Erlingsson (2008).

ry of simple modernisation), becomes the motor of social history."[8]

But whereas most commentators should quite readily accept the notion that overall complexity has increased, a question that begs an answer is why this development should have resulted in an increased importance of trust? Of course, one can always argue that increased complexity creates "functional pressures for trust" (Warren 1999a:3), but this would imply that the provided explanation becomes utterly sweeping. Consequently, we are interested in mechanisms that may explain why complexity can be coupled with trust. Below, three such mechanisms are pointed out.

Firstly, people are cognitive misers and tend to rely on various shortcuts (Lupia *et al* 2000). Obviously, the need for shortcuts increases with the degree of complexity; that is, trust as a mechanism for the reduction of social complexity (Luhmann 1979) should become more important as it becomes increasingly difficult to handle the information load. In essence, since increased complexity implies that the cost of making informed decisions increases, citizens should increasingly rely on trust as a cost-saving device (Offe 1999).

Secondly, the more complex a system becomes, the more difficult will it be for the principals to oversee (monitor) the actions and undertakings of the agents (Ferejohn 1999). Thus, with regard to the principal-agent relation central to this study—the relation between the citizens and political actors—the implication is that citizens' possibilities of acquiring complete information about the political actors' actions should have decreased. Notably, in contrast to the above point—which is about citizens' possibilities of *handling* complex information—this point is essentially concerned with the possibilities of *obtaining* full information.

Thirdly, since citizens are rational, they realise that increased complex-

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[8] A similar (but theoretically different) reason to why the complexity has increased is that the scope of politics has increased. Ultimately, the public services provided by modern welfare states (e.g. transportation, nursery homes, schools, etc.) are all regulated by political decisions; consequently, in modern welfare states, citizens will have more or less daily experiences with political output. And while it may be true that the scope of politics increased most dramatically during the 1960s and 1970s, the Swedish welfare state has not really been dismantled (Lindbom 2001). As a matter of fact, far-reaching reforms and dramatic cutbacks will today be hard to get through since a large number of people today are dependent on the arrangements and services provided by the welfare state; instead of having been dismantled, the welfare state has been institutionalised. In the words of political scientist Bo Rothstein (cited in Kumlin 2002:15): "Weber's view, that the output side is especially important for the legitimacy of the state, is probably even more valid in the modern welfare state than it was in his own time. The simple reason is that citizens' lives, to a greater degree than before, are directly dependent on public sector programs and schemes. We are born, we play, we are educated, we are nursed [...] and we finally die under the aegis of public administration."

ity implies more contingencies. Combined with the notion that individual political actors have become increasingly important (see section 5.1), a reasonable implication is that citizens pay all the more attention to individual actors' personal competences. For example, if citizens over time perceive that the risk of a severe financial crisis has increased, should they not have become increasingly concerned with the question of how efficiently individual candidates can be assumed to handle economic matters? Or, for that matter, if people believe that the paramount problem of our time is the climate, should they then not prefer to support candidates that are believed to have the capacity (and will) to act efficiently and resolute specifically with regard to environmental issues?

Notably, the last point differs from the above two since it not only suggests that increased complexity should imply that trust has become more important—what it also suggests is that increased complexity (in combination with a development in which individual actors have gained in importance) fuels a personalisation of trust. An implication of this is that complexity here is not only coupled to trust—it is also in a rather straightforward way coupled to (media) personalisation.

But whereas in the last case there is a rather obvious connection between trust and personalisation, this connection is much less obvious in the other two cases. Because, when it all comes about, trust is not important only with regard to relations between individuals—it also underlies the relations that individuals have to groups and collective actors. Consequently, in order to provide a satisfying answer to how an increased importance of trust can be coupled to a trend of (media) personalisation, we shall return to an idea that was introduced in Chapter 2—that is, over time, there is a personalisation of trust.

The overall reasoning is quite basic: since trust is an attitude, it should have a cognitive as well as an affective component. And whereas cognitive trust is determined by (perceived) outcomes and performances, affective trust is more enduring and can be thought of as an emotional bond, a form of attachment. Thus, coupling the two dimensions (or components) of trust to the two objects for trust (individual and collective political actors), four kinds of trust emerge: 1) affective trust with regard to collective political actors; 2) cognitive trust with regard to collective political actors; 3) affective trust with regard to individual political actors; and 4) cognitive trust with regard to individual political actors. In chapter 2, it was argued that trust

in individuals over time should have become increasingly important with regard to both dimensions—that is, over time, citizens' overall trust (or confidence) in the political system should have become increasingly contingent on their trust in individual actors. In other words, there is a personalisation of trust. The above three arguments are illustrated in figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2: How increased complexity leads to personalisation in the news media (through increased importance of trust)

Argument one

Increased complexity → Increased importance of shortcuts → Increased importance of trust → Increased personalisation in the news media coverage

Argument two

Increased complexity → Decreased possibility of principals to oversee agents → Increased importance of trust → Increased personalisation in the news media coverage

Argument three

Increased complexity → Increased uncertainty and importance of individual actors → Increased importance of trust → Increased personalisation in the news media coverage

As we have seen, an increased importance of trust underlies all three arguments that have been presented. Consequently, without the notion of there being a personalisation of trust we can only couple increased complexity to an increased importance of trust. In other words, without the idea of there being a personalisation of trust, we may certainly have a "risk society" (Beck 1992)—what we miss is how this is coupled to a news coverage that is more oriented towards personal matters.

Then, to what extent have arguments been provided for the different hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3)? Let us return to the three arguments—what they suggest is essentially that two things should have become increasingly important: shortcuts and individual political actors' personal qualifications.

With regard to H1, H2 and H3, an increased need for shortcuts can be seen as arguments especially for the first (H1) and the last (H3): whereas one kind of shortcut is the very recognition of an individual actor, another kind is that which comes into play as personal attributes of individual political actors are considered.

In contrast, the argument that suggests that individual actors' abilities should have become increasingly important is an argument that can most directly be related to H2 (that is, the assumption that party leaders' personal skills and competences over time shall be given all the more attention).

5.3 Decreased party identification

A long-term trend of decreased party identification is apparent in many, not to say most, (post-industrial) Western democracies. In, for example, Dalton (1999), it is shown that overall party identification has decreased in 17 out of 19 studied countries (Belgium and Denmark are the exceptions); and with regard to strong identifiers, all 19 countries are marked by decreases.[9] While the explanation behind this trend of partisan dealignment is complex and open to debate (see Berglund *et al* 2005), I am more interested in its consequences. And especially with regard to one question: how can decreased party identification be coupled to a trend of personalisation? That is, while a trend of all the more top-steered parties (Panebianco 1989, Katz and Mair 1994) would have been able to directly relate to a trend of personalisation, I am more interested in the indirect effect that may come from how parties are perceived of and evaluated.[10]

Then, why would decreased party identification lead to personalisation? One answer is similar to one of the arguments presented above: as the parties—as cognitive shortcuts—have lost in importance, the relative importance of other shortcuts should have increased. And one of those "other shortcuts" is identification with individual actors—for example party leaders.[11]

A somewhat different answer is that as the share of voters that identify with a certain party has decreased, the share of potential voters has in-

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[9] Interestingly, however, a decreased party identification does not imply that citizens have become less politically interested, or for that matter, less supportive of democracy (Inglehart and Welzel 2005)—what citizens turn their backs against is the political institutions.

[10] A reason why I choose to argue in terms of this indirect effect is that the notion of all the more top-steered has turned out to be hard to prove empirically. Amongst those who nevertheless have claimed that Swedish parties should have become more top-steered are Pierre and Widfeldt (1994), Gilljam and Möller (1996), Nord (2006), Strömbäck (2009), and Dahl (2011).

[11] Contrary to an often underlying notion in discussions on leader-effects, research has shown that leader evaluations have a stronger impact on the vote choice amongst politically sophisticated voters (Bittner 2008; see also Miller *et al* 1986). Note that party identification or, for that matter, the left-right scale still may be the single most important short cut; what I claim is only that the relative importance of other shortcuts should have increased.

creased. Thus, whereas election campaigns used to serve a mobilising function, they now serve a vote-winning function; and while an increased importance of campaigns does not *per se* imply an increased importance of individual actors, it does not seem far-fetched to assume that their increased importance has "forced" party leaders to become more active campaigners (cf. Esaiasson 1990).

A third answer is that decreased party identification opens up for there to be a different kind of relation between citizens and political actors: while the link between citizens and parties still may be stronger than the links between citizens and individual personalities, it seems reasonable to suggest that the relative importance of the latter should have increased. In the words of Blondel (2005):

> The time has [...] come to consider whether it is realistic to continue to regard as correct the view that social cleavages are the paramount, indeed the explanatory factor accounting for the relationship between ("modern") parties and their supporters or whether one should examine closely the extent to which personal ties also play a part, not just "exceptionally", but almost routinely, alongside these cleavages. If such an inquiry is needed, one also needs to determine the precise characteristics of the personal ties which are found to exist in "modern" Western (European) parties. Do personalities primarily help existing parties based on cleavages to survive and perhaps prosper? Do they also create parties?
>
> Blondel 2005:3; cf. Blondel and Thiébault 2010; see also Garzia 2011

What the above passage points out is that personalisation can have an indirect effect; in an era of partisan dealignment, individual personalities may be a way in to politics. Thus, from this perspective the question is not whether so-called "leader-effects" have become stronger; what matters is if individual actors have become increasingly important as linkages to the political system. Compared to before—that is, the era of industrial modernity—this perspective argues that group-based affiliations have become less important, whereas personal identification and trust, in contrast, have become more important (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001; see also Oskarson 1994, Bennett 1998). And while it is true that this development may gradually lead to an increased importance of the expressive dimension of (electoral) politics—whereby, due to charismatic leaders, voters may become more active in the campaigns (Mazzoleni 2000)—what it implies here and now is only that individual political actors should have become more important as ob-

jects of identification.[12] The three arguments are summarised in figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3: How decreased party identification leads to personalisation in the news media (through increased importance of individual actors)

Argument one

| Decreased party identification | → | Increased importance of other shortcuts | → | Increased importance of individual actors | → | Increased personalisation in the news media coverage |

Argument two

| Decreased party identification | → | Increased importance of election campaigns | → | Increased importance of party leaders as campaigners | → | Increased personalisation in the news media coverage |

Argument three

| Decreased party identification | → | Individual actors serve as objects of identification and trust | → | Increased personalisation in the news media coverage |

Comparing the above arguments with those that were presented in sections 5.1 and 5.2, it is obvious that the decrease of party identification most readily provides us with arguments for H1 and H3 (especially the latter). Whereas arguments one and three posit that individual actors—including their attributes, looks and personal styles—should have become increasingly important as shortcuts and as objects for identification (H3), argument two posits that a decreased party identification should result in party leaders becoming all the more active campaigners (a development that can most easily be related to H1).

All in all, a notion behind the above arguments is that citizens relate to the political system and its actors in a somewhat different way than be-

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[12] While there are similarities between what has just been discussed and the increased importance of individual actors as cognitive shortcuts, the mechanisms differ: whereas an increased importance of individual actors as shortcuts implies that individual actors have become increasingly important in terms of cost saving, an increased importance of individual actors as linkages implies that individual actors have become increasingly important as objects of trust and identification. The latter development can be summarised in a rather concise manner: whereas at t it was the party labels that served as guarantees for the trustworthiness and reliability of individual actors, it is at t+1 individual actors that serve as guarantees for the trustworthiness and reliability of the parties.

fore. Ultimately then, in these arguments it is changes in society that are assumed to fuel a trend of personalisation; by personalising their appearances, political actors respond to changes in the electorate. And whereas I have preferred to refer to personalisation in terms of a politically co-determined process, the above arguments show that the political system itself is assumed to be dependent on (and influenced by) its surroundings. After all, the political system is not disconnected from society but one of its component parts. This, all should agree, is most essential.

5.4 Summary

The arguments provided here have all been concerned with changes in the political system. In essence, three different kinds of arguments have been provided: firstly, as a consequence of structural transformations, individual political actors should have become increasingly important with regard to political processes themselves (there is a *de facto* centralisation). Secondly, another consequence of the large-scale transformations accounted for above is that political actors' need for discretionary power should have increased; that is, over time political actors should increasingly try to obtain a personal mandate (a behavioural change has followed the structural transformations). Thirdly, as a consequence of decreased party identification, individual political actors should have become increasingly important as cognitive shortcuts (the way that citizens relate to the political system has changed).

While I have not suggested that the provided arguments are more important than factors within (or related to) the news media system, it appears to me as somewhat naïve to suggest that without accelerating (news) media logic there would be no personalisation. Indeed, the purpose of the arguments is not to provide an altogether different story. Here, my intention is much more modest: in focusing on factors within the political system, my intention is to redirect attention to a part of the story that previous research has left largely untold. Because whereas the news media matter—so does politics.

Chapter 6

The elections under study

Although I have argued that a trend of personalisation shall be put against a background of structural changes within the political system, it is apparent that also situational factors must be considered (examples of such are how the parties are aligned; the personalities of the party leaders; how close the race is etc.). In fact, to presume there to be a steady and linear trend of (increased) personalisation is not only unrealistic but also ignorant: while an overall trend may be related to structural factors, knowledge of situational factors is needed if the overall trend is to be contextualised. That is, large-scale explanations may provide us with the picture at large—to get to grips with the details we must look closer at the setting of individual years.

In this chapter, I will outline:

1. How inter-party relations have evolved.
2. The decrease of trust in political institutions and party identification.
3. The most important developments with regard to the news media system.

6.1 Towards a two-party system

In terms of political culture, Sweden is often characterised as consensus-oriented: organised interest groups have traditionally held strong positions in the processes preceding political decision-making and major reforms have, traditionally, been decided on after settlements between the parties involved. This kind of "governing by inclusion" shall be seen against a background where coalition and minority governments have been the norm; as a matter of fact, during the post-war period Sweden has only once (after the 1968 election) been run by a one-party majority government.

However valid the picture of compromise and consensus has once been, its accuracy with regard to the present has become all the more questioned. On the one hand, the kind of participatory (or corporate) government that used to characterise the Swedish model has become less pronounced (Lewin

1994, Lindvall and Sebring 2005, Lindvall and Rothstein 2006; see also Her-mansson *et al* 1997); on the other, there has been a gradual development from a multiparty towards a *de facto* two-party system. In the words of Ay-lott (2007):

> The five old parties that comprised the classic Swedish "five-party system" […] could broadly be divided into two blocs: a "socialist" bloc, containing the Social Democrats and Left Party; and a "nonsocialist" or "bourgeois" bloc, containing the agrarian-based Centre Party, the Liberals and the conservative Moderates. This bloc identity had at times become fuzzy, and the system was further complicated by the arrival of two new parties, the Greens and the Christian Democrats, in 1988 and 1991 respectively. But, during the 2002-06 parliamentary term, the two blocs had acquired more coherence than ever before.
>
> Aylott 2007:623

Although Aylott after the 2006 election wrote that "further steps down that path are unlikely" (p. 632), the parties of the sitting government and the three major opposition parties appeared in the 2010 campaign as two clear-ly defined government alternatives (Asp 2011b). And since the parties in both coalitions remained distinct entities, a consequence of the develop-ment is that the citizens in the 2010 election were confronted with two dif-ferent choices: on the one hand, the election was—as always—a choice of party; on the other, the election was a choice of government. This, one could argue, is always the case; rather than being a way for the citizens to express their preferences with regard to policies, the election is a way for the people to select their leaders (Schumpeter 1975, Manin 1997). This remark not-withstanding, a unique feature of the 2010 election was that a pre-election coalition existed among the parties to the left. Whereas the Social Democrat-ic Party has a long history of post-election cooperation, the party had never before lined up with another party before the votes were actually counted. To understand this development (and to contextualise the elections that are under study) I will very briefly outline party relations between 1979 and 2010.

At the time of the 1979 election, the country was led by a Liberal minor-

ity government chaired by Ola Ullsten.[1] Of course, this was not the government that had come to power in the 1976 election: being a loose coalition between the Centre Party, the Liberal Party and the Moderate Party, the government that came to power in 1976 was the first non-socialist government for 44 years (the "vacation government" of the summer of 1936 excluded). However, due to disagreements on the controversial question of nuclear power, the three-party coalition was dissolved in October 1978.

In the 1979 election campaign the question of whether the three non-socialist parties would be able to form a stable and reliable alternative was a recurring theme (the relations between the leader of the Moderate Party, Gösta Bohman, and the leaders of the other two non-socialist parties appeared to be particularly fragile). On the other side of the party system, there were the Social Democratic Party and the Left Party (then the Left Party Communists). Since the Social Democrats could effectively rely on passive support from the Left, from their perspective there was really no reason to establish any form of cooperation with the Left Party; instead, it seemed more fruitful to be open to cooperation with the Liberals (indeed, cooperating with the Left Party would also have been difficult due to ideological differences). The outcome of the 1979 election was, however, that the task of forming a government was once again given to the leader of the Centre Party, Thorbjörn Fälldin.[2] Consequently, also after this election Sweden was run by a coalition government consisting of the (then) three non-socialist parties.

However, history seems to repeat itself: after a tax agreement between the other two government parties and the Social Democratic Party, Gösta Bohman of the Moderate Party resigned from his post as Minister of Finance little more than one year before the 1982 election. Since the government was troubled with unemployment and a large budget deficit, there were, however, also strategic reasons for the Moderate Party to distance itself from the government. Having increased their share of the votes by more than five percentage points in the 1979 election, the Moderate Party had replaced the Centre Party as the main opponent to the Social Democrats; the party was—so it seemed—on the rise.

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[1] Notably, in the form of negative parliamentarism practised in Sweden, a government can be formed unless a majority of the parliamentarians are actively against it. In the case of Ola Ullsten, all parliamentarians except those belonging to the Liberal Party voted against him or laid down their votes. Consequently, Ullsten became Prime Minister after getting the support of only 39 out of 349 parliamentarians.

[2] Fälldin had led the three-party government coalition that was dissolved in October 1978.

However, although the Moderate party did increase their share in the 1982 election, the most important outcome was that the country once again had a Social Democratic government. The turnout in the 1982 election was high, 91 per cent, and the campaign was dominated by the controversial question of establishing a wage earners' fund. From the perspective of the Social Democratic Party the issue was problematic: on the one hand, the idea came from the Swedish Confederation of Trade Union [LO], a traditionally close ally; on the other, the resistance from trade and industry—with which the party had always tried to maintain good relations—was fierce. Therefore, the fact that the Social Democrats after six years in opposition were back in government is best explained by how the party then was perceived of: capable of governing and strong on economic issues (Hadenius 1995). And very soon, both of these skills turned out to be important: after the election, the economic situation deteriorated and relations with the Soviet Union were—due to alleged submarine violations—worsening. Since there was also increased tension between the Soviet Union and the US, foreign policy was higher on the agenda than normally (ibid).

The 1985 campaign shall be seen against the background of three aspects: 1) the economy was improving; 2) polls showed that the Moderate Party would do well in the election, and 3) the efficiency of the public sector was openly questioned. Indeed, the last two points are closely connected: although Sweden had experienced as many as four non-socialist governments since 1976, the public sector had remained comparatively large. There are two primary explanations for this: 1) the non-socialist parties were anxious to show that they would not dismantle the welfare state; and 2) in the non-socialist camp, the dominant force had long been the two parties in the party political middle (the Centre Party and the Liberal Party). Thus, it was not until the Moderate Party appeared as the main challenger to the Social Democrats that welfare policies (and costs) were genuinely debated. Obviously, the neo-liberal turn of Swedish politics must also be understood against the background of what was happening internationally; in 1985, Margaret Thatcher was the UK Prime Minister and the President of the US was "the great communicator", Ronald Reagan.

However, the 1985 election result showed that the Swedish voters (in practice) were unenthusiastic about the idea of a drastic paradigm shift: since the Moderate Party did not repeat their success from 1982, the Social Democratic Party remained in power. Moreover, in 1985 the overall turnout

stayed at 90 per cent, which was a decrease by one percentage point when compared to the figure for 1982.

To most Swedes it should be quite obvious what most affected politics between 1985 and 1988: on February 28, little more than half a year after the 1985 election, Prime Minister Olof Palme was murdered. And as a consequence of the murder, much of the inter-party quarrels and open fights were temporarily put aside.

It is with this in mind that the 1988 campaign can be understood. In contrast to the elections of 1979 (nuclear power), 1982 (wage earners' fund) and 1985 (welfare vs. neo-liberalism), the 1988 election was not characterised by distinct conflict lines between the traditional parties. In essence, the main issue of the 1988 election—the environment—was one where no previous blueprints were valid—and, for the Greens, this implied that there was a room to be filled (Oscarsson 1998). Therefore, while the Social Democratic Party remained in power, after the 1988 election also the Greens acquired seats in the parliament. Also worth noting is that the turnout once again dropped, this time to 86 per cent. Compared to the figure for 1982, this implies a decrease of five percentage points.

Although the economy had not been an important issue in the 1988 election, it soon turned out that the country was facing severe troubles: since levels of consumption increased more than levels of production, inflation and wage increases followed. Consequently, in the government declaration of 1990 it was declared that "responsible economic policies shall be given precedence over other political demands" (Hadenius 1995:211, my translation). Obviously, this was controversial; in the 1980s, macro economic policies were still important tools when aiming for the goal of full employment (Lindvall 2006), and the Social Democratic government met fierce criticism from the unions. Eventually, in February 1990, when they did not get a proposition on a wage freeze through parliament, the government, led by Ingvar Carlsson, decided to resign. However, since the leader of the Moderate Party, Carl Bildt, believed it to be impossible to form a non-socialist government, the chairman once again turned to Ingvar Carlsson, and after negotiations with the Centre Party and the Left Party—where less severe belt-tightening policies were promised—Carlsson and the Social Democratic Party were back in charge. The economic situation remained, however, utterly difficult and in the autumn of 1990 it was decided that Sweden should apply for membership to the EU (then the EC). A primary reason why the Social

Democratic Party finally decided to open up for a more formal alignment with continental Europe was the break-up of the Soviet Union.

It is against the background of economic difficulties and the development of the international arena that the 1991 election can be understood. Together with the leader of the Liberal Party, the leader of the Moderate Party, Carl Bildt, signed an important debate article in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter*. In sum, the article aimed to point out a new direction for the country: market mechanisms were to be given more room; citizens should be given better possibilities to choose between different service providers, and the state-controlled shares of many enterprises should be sold on the market. In comparison with the 1976 election—when the non-socialist parties stressed continuity rather than change—the same non-socialist parties now appeared to be more confident.

Consequently, after the 1991 election Sweden was once again run by a non-socialist coalition where the leader of the biggest non-socialist party was assigned the role of Prime Minister. But whereas there certainly are similarities between the 1976 government and the government that was formed fifteen years later, there are also important differences: firstly, in 1976, the gravity of the government had been the party political middle (the biggest non-socialist party was the Centre Party, and the Moderate Party was only a little bigger than the Liberal Party). In contrast, in 1991 it was the Moderate Party that made up the centre. Secondly, in 1976 the non-socialist government consisted of three parties that together could rely on a parliamentarian majority. Although the government formed fifteen years later consisted of four parties—the Christian Democratic Party had now aligned with the three traditional non-socialist parties—it did not have a majority in the parliament.[3] Thirdly, whereas the economic situation in 1976 was tough, the economic situation of the early 1990s was catastrophic.

A detailed account of how the economic crisis was handled is a matter too complex to be dealt with here; suffice it to say that the ambition to pull through a far-reaching policy shift could not be upheld, and after a period of extreme financial uncertainty the government opened up for cooperation with the Social Democratic Party (see more on this in Teorell 1998).

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[3] The reason why the 1991 government had no majority in parliament is that yet another party had reached the four per cent threshold: New Democracy. In contrast to the Christian Democratic Party, which also got its first parliamentarian seats as a party after the 1988 election, New Democracy stressed that they belonged in neither of the two camps.

Moreover, in the summer of 1994, the Minister for Environment—Olof Johansson of the Centre Party—decided to resign due to disagreements on whether a bridge should be built between Sweden and Denmark. Thus, only a few months before the 1994 election, a non-socialist government was once again split up due to internal difficulties. (Yet another reason why the government seemed unstable was that Bengt Westerberg, party leader of the Liberal Party, openly announced that he was open to the idea of forming a government with the Social Democratic Party. His first and best alternative was, however, a new coalition consisting of the four non-socialist parties.)

Indeed, after the 1994 election a Social Democratic government was formed—but without Bengt Westerberg and the Liberal Party. The election campaign was dominated by questions concerning the economy; what was now wished for was stability and, in comparison to the campaign three years earlier, no far-reaching policy reforms were promoted. However, as Ingvar Carlsson—Prime Minister of the new government—decided to actively take stand for Swedish membership in the EU (then the EC), a most important decision was being taken *after* the election. And since a referendum was to be held in November 1994, the two main opponents—Ingvar Carlsson of the Social Democratic Party and Carl Bildt of the Moderate Party— teamed up on the same side only a few weeks after the election campaign.

Roughly two and a half years before the 1998 election (since 1994 the mandatory term is four, not three years), Carlsson stepped aside and was replaced by the Minister of Finance, Göran Persson. As a former Minister of Finance, Persson was convinced that struggles with the economy should be given number one priority; therefore, in the period up to the 1998 election a series of (among the citizenry) unpopular reforms were implemented:

> During the mandate period of 1994-98, a comprehensive recovery of state finances took place, which came to influence the conditions of the election campaign in several ways. Tax increases and cutbacks in the public sector were both instituted. […] The justification for the unpopular policy […] was that its ultimate purpose was to re-establish the primary of politics and safeguard democracy. "The borrower is server to the lender", preached Prime Minister Göran Persson.
>
> Möller 1999:263

That the ultimate purpose of the reforms was to "safeguard democracy" is, indeed, a dramatic way of expressing that the economic situation was difficult. However, since the economy gradually recovered, it is against

the background of the implemented reforms that the 1998 election shall be understood (the main issues were healthcare, education and social welfare). Notably, between 1995 and 1998, there had been an "institutionalised collaboration" between the Social Democratic Party and the Centre Party. According to Möller (1999:264), "the collaboration was so extensive that it was, in practice, an informal coalition government". Electoral turnout in 1998—the year when a system of optional preferential voting was introduced—stayed at 81 per cent (hitherto the lowest figure since the election of 1958) and the electoral share of the Social Democratic Party dropped by nine percentage points (from 45 to 36 per cent of the registered votes).

Having been used to shares regularly above 40 per cent, after the 1998 election the Social Democratic Party could form a government only after negotiations with the Greens and the Left. And since the party during the preceding term had had to rely on support from the Centre Party, it became all the more evident that a long period of strong Social Democratic dominance had gradually come to an end. Although the government formed in 1998 was once again a Social Democratic minority government, the party had increasingly come to appear as a party amongst others.

After the historic drop in 1998, a share of 40 per cent in the 2002 election was considered a Social Democratic success. Consequently, yet another Social Democratic minority government was formed—and once again it relied on support from the Greens and the Left Party.[4] Thus, although no formal coalitions have been formed, all three Social Democratic governments since 1994 have had to establish formalised forms of cooperation with parties outside of government. And although the party was used at having to compromise with other parties, especially the Centre Party, the situation had previously been somewhat different: with a non-socialist bloc that often experienced internal tensions and a small

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[4] A reason for the Social Democratic victory that cannot be dismissed—although researchers repeatedly claim that leader effects in Sweden are small—is that the Prime Minister, Göran Persson, was rather popular at the time of the 2002 election (see Oscarsson and Holmberg 2008). For example, between April 2000 and March 2002 the support for Persson (in terms of trust and as measured by Synovate) increased by as much as 32 percentage points (from 29 to 61 per cent; a month before the election, support had fallen only a little). Another factor that clearly cannot be overlooked when the 2002 election is to be explained is that the economy was strong; between the years of 1998 and 2002 the annual BNP increase was on average three per cent (own calculation based on data from Statistics Sweden).

Left Party, the Social Democratic Party had long been able to play a *de facto* role of a single dominant party (cf. Mair 1996). However, since the non-socialist parties had become better at toning down their internal disagreements, and since the Left Party had become bigger and more demanding, the Social Democratic Party could no longer act as omnipotent as they had before; the party had to adjust to a situation in which the supporting parties demanded something in return for their support.

Then what about the non-socialist parties? Having lost yet another election to the Social Democrats, the four non-socialist parties established during the term of 2002-2006 a form of pre-election cooperation that was more formalised and coherent than ever before. While the four would remain different parties, it was declared in the summer of 2004 that they would appear together as "the Alliance for Sweden" (later only "the Alliance"). As discussed above, the Moderate Party had in the 1980s replaced the Centre Party as the biggest non-socialist party, whereupon the leader of the Moderate Party, Fredrik Reinfeldt, soon appeared as the coalition's Prime Ministerial candidate. Consequently, in the 2006 election campaign the two blocs were more crystallised than ever before: on the one hand, there were the three parties to the left; on the other, there were the four non-socialist parties.[5]

Since the number of unemployed remained high despite strong economic growth, the most important issue in the 2006 election was that of employment. Since the Social Democratic Party has traditionally been perceived to be strong on the issue, from a historic perspective it is remarkable that the outcome of the election was a change of government. The apparent explanation for the result is that the Social Democratic Party had lost its ownership of the issue; over time, the issue had been taken over by the non-socialist alliance.

Is this it? Was it because of a lost profile issue—admittedly a very

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[5] While the forming of the alliance is the most decisive step towards a coherent non-socialist bloc, it shall be kept in mind that prior attempts—although more informal—had been made several times before (e.g. in 1991). Looking at how the voters have perceived the positions of the different parties in the party political space, it is also apparent that between 1994 and 1998 the Liberal Party and the Christian Democratic Party were perceived to be moving closer to the position of the Moderate Party (see Holmberg and Oscarsson 2004). Obviously, since it is the perceived position with regard to one specific dimension (the left-right dimension), the relative positions of the different parties shall not be given too much weight. Noteworthy, however, is that for each election between 1982 and 1998 the Greens were perceived to be moving closer to the position of the Social Democratic Party. Therefore, taking into consideration how the voters' perceptions of the parties have developed, the revitalised bloc system of the 2000s is not very surprising.

important one—that the Social Democratic Party lost the election? Having time and again repeated that leader effects are of little importance to the outcome of Swedish elections, political scientists Henrik Oscarsson and Sören Holmberg were less dismissive than before after the 2006 election:

> Party leader effects have been measured in the Swedish Election Studies since 1979. The results for the 2006 election indicate that the importance of the party leaders' popularity was somewhat bigger than before. [...] [As a matter of fact], the analyses of the election study suggest that the leaders' personal popularity may have contributed to the outcome.

<div align="right">Oscarsson and Holmberg 2008:324 (my translation)[6]</div>

Four years later, in the 2010 election, there was a coalition not only between the non-socialist parties; in this election, the Social Democratic Party, the Greens and the Left also campaigned as a coalition. In comparison to the non-socialist alliance four years earlier, there were, however, several important differences: firstly, whereas the non-socialist coalition had made sure of its support on lower party levels, the red-green coalition was long met with open scepticism among the rank and file. Secondly, although the Moderate Party did dominate the non-socialist alliance, it was not—in terms of public support—twice as big as the other parties together and could therefore appear as first among equals. In contrast, the Social Democratic Party had to choose: should they claim that influence should be decided by size (and appear as first *above* equals) or should they be generous and leave a disproportionately big room to its coalition partners? Thirdly, in comparison to the non-socialist alliance, the red-green coalition had no common ideological ground. Traditionally, the Social Democratic Party had been anxious to stay at arm's length from all that could be associated with communism and many of the party supporters were openly sceptical to the Greens. As four years ago, the issue that dominated the campaign was that of employment. According to Holmberg and Oscarsson (Statistics Sweden 2011:37), "the election of 2010 was to become an election

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[6] Notably, the above passage does not suggest that the leaders' personalities were decisive for the outcome, and in the opening chapter the two authors also declare that "repeated analyses have shown that Swedish party leader effects are limited and not of increasing importance" (ibid:13). While this conclusion may be correct given the data that Oscarsson and Holmberg have used—that is, data from surveys and interviews—I do not hold it to be impossible that a different methodology would provide somewhat different answers.

on trust" (my translation).[7]

So, how did it go? The answer is that the non-socialist government once again was given the task of running the country, whereupon the red-green coalition soon was dissolved. And whereas another red-green coalition—when this is written, in the autumn of 2012—appears to be far away, the coalition of non-socialist parties remains. Consequently, whereas in a thirty years perspective it is evident that *both* blocs have become more distinct, the question of how the red-green opposition can become a coherent alternative is—for the representatives of these three parties—still to be solved.

Summing up the 30-year perspective outlined above, three periods can be identified: 1) 1979-1988; 2) 1988-2002 and 3) 2002-2010.

Starting with the first, between 1979 and 1988 party-political competition was, essentially, between the Social Democrats and the three non-socialist parties (the Centre Party, the Liberal Party and the Moderate Party). However, while there certainly was a situation of two blocs—the Social Democrats could effectively rely on the support of the Left Party—it has been shown above that the relations between the three non-socialist parties were utterly fragile. Governments formed by these parties were, for example, dissolved both in 1978 and 1981, and the relations between the two parties in the party-political middle—the Centre Party and the Liberal Party—and the Moderate Party were often marked by tension and latent conflict. In essence, what then underlay the bond between the three non-socialist parties was what the parties were *not*—that is, socialistic.

As discussed above, the five-party model that had long structured Swedish politics started to lose its grip in the mid-1980s; and here, an obvious illustration of the development is the proliferation of new parties: in 1988, the Greens entered the parliament; in 1991, both the Christian Democratic Party and New Democracy entered the Riksdag. And whereas the Christian Democratic Party was effectively incorporated in the non-socialist coalition, neither the Greens nor New Democracy belonged clearly to either of the sides. That the non-socialist coalition during this period still was a loose construct is, however, indicated by the fact that between 1995 and 1998 there was es-

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[7] The share of voters that said that the party leader was "one of the most important reasons" for their choice of party was larger in 2010 than in 2006 (when even Holmberg and Oscarsson admitted that personal popularity may have contributed to the outcome). Moreover, between the years of 2002 and 2012 the share of respondents who stated that "competent people in the party" was a primary reason increased by 20 percentage points (from 31 per cent to 51 per cent). For figures: see Statistics Sweden (2011).

tablished cooperation between the Social Democrats and the Centre Party (and, as discussed above, in the campaign of 1994, also the leader of the Liberal Party had declared that his party was open to cooperating with the Social Democrats). Obviously, behind this inter-bloc cooperation is the development of decreased support for the Social Democratic Party; having once been "the party in charge", the Social Democratic Party had gradually become dependent on others. Consequently, the second period (1988-2002) is marked by a development in which 1) the number of parties increased and 2) the Social Democratic Party fell from grace.

What characterises the third period identified above (2002-2010) is first and foremost the emergence of an ideologically coherent alternative to the Social Democrats—that is, the forming and proliferation of an enduring non-socialist coalition ("the Alliance for Sweden" was formed in the summer of 2004). However, whereas the pre-election cooperation that first became formalised certainly was that of the non-socialist parties, it shall be borne in mind that a less formal post-election cooperation had existed between the Social Democrats and the other two of the "established" parties (the Greens and the Left Party) since 1998. Consequently, whereas it was not until the election of 2010 that the Social Democrats formed a pre-election coalition with the Greens and the Left, the origins of this coalition can quite easily be traced to the late 1990s.

Below, two tables are presented. Whereas the first summarises the above discussion, the latter shows the party leaders for the years under study.

Table 6.1: Periods of party-political struggle, 1979-2010

Period	Characteristics
1979-1988	Five-party model. Strong Social Democratic Party, loose and often turbulent forms of cooperation between the three non-socialist parties.
1988-2002	Proliferation of parties. Weakened support makes the Social Democratic Party increasingly dependent on other parties (first, the Centre Party, later the Greens and the Left Party).
2002-2010	Revitalisation of the bloc system, now with more formalised forms of cooperation than before. The emergence of an ideologically coherent alternative to the Social Democratic Party ("the Alliance").

Since there is indeed a long-term development towards two clearly defined alternatives; what implications are there with regard to the hypotheses of this study? When factors on a systems level are discussed, it is often pointed out that two-party systems are more likely than multiparty systems to give rise to trends of personalisation. In essence, the explanation to this is twofold: firstly, as the number of parties decreases, inter-party competition will increasingly bear

Table 6.2: Party leaders, 1979-2010 (only those coded in the SMES-studies are included)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
The Left Party	Lars Werner	Lars Werner	Lars Werner	Lars Werner	Lars Werner	Gudrun Schyman	Gudrun Schyman	Gudrun Schyman	Lars Ohly	Lars Ohly
The Social Democratic Party	Olof Palme	Olof Palme	Olof Palme	Ingvar Carlsson	Ingvar Carlsson	Ingvar Carlsson	Göran Persson	Göran Persson	Göran Persson	Mona Sahlin
The Centre Party	Thorbjörn Fälldin	Thorbjörn Fälldin	Thorbjörn Fälldin	Olof Johansson	Olof Johansson	Olof Johansson	Lennart Daléus	Maud Olofsson	Maud Olofsson	Maud Olofsson
The Liberals	Ola Ullsten	Ola Ullsten	Bengt Westerberg	Bengt Westerberg	Bengt Westerberg	Bengt Westerberg	Lars Leijonborg	Lars Leijonborg	Lars Leijonborg	Jan Björklund
The Moderate Party	Gösta Bohman	Ulf Adelsohn	Ulf Adelsohn	Carl Bildt	Carl Bildt	Carl Bildt	Carl Bildt	Bo Lundgren	Fredrik Reinfeldt	Fredrik Reinfeldt
The Christian Democratic Party	Alf Svensson	Alf Svensson	Alf Svensson	Alf Svensson	Alf Svensson	Alf Svensson	Alf Svensson	Alf Svensson	Göran Hägglund	Göran Hägglund
The Greens				Birger Schlaug and Eva Goës	Jan Axelsson and Margareta Gisselberg	Birger Schlaug and Marianne Samuelsson	Birger Schlaug and Marianne Samuelsson	Peter Eriksson and Maria Wetterstrand	Peter Eriksson and Maria Wetterstrand	Peter Eriksson and Maria Wetterstrand
New Democracy					Ian Wachtmeister and Bert Karlsson	Vivianne Franzén				
The Sweden Democrats									Jimmie Åkesson	Jimmie Åkesson
Average age	51 years	49 years	50 years	46 years	52 years	51 years	51 years	50 years	45 years	47 years
Years as party leader (average)	6 years	8 years	10 years	5 years	6 years	7 years	8 years	7 years	5 years	6 years

the mark of competition for government. Thus, when the citizens in a two-party system (e.g. the UK) are compared to those in a multiparty system (e.g. Sweden), the former are more likely to conceive of their voting decisions in terms of standpoints for or against a certain government. This means that British voters indirectly cast their votes for a certain Prime Minister to a higher degree than Swedish voters.[8]

Secondly, two-party systems often emerge as a consequence of majoritarian electoral systems in which the elected representative has a more personal mandate. Once again, the differences between the UK and Sweden are illuminating: although Sweden has had a system of optional preferential voting since 1998, the British system of "first past the post" fuels campaigns that are more personalised than Swedish campaigns. Whereas the British representative, essentially, has to fight for his (or her) own seat, the Swedish representative can often rely on the strength of his (or her) party (see more in Karvonen 2010).

Although Sweden certainly shall be conceived of as a multiparty system, there are—as outlined above—signs of a development towards a *de facto* two-party system. Certainly, due to the traditionally strong standing of the Social Democratic Party, Sweden has never fitted in well as a prototype of a multiparty system. But the argument here is not that the party political landscape in Sweden has changed dramatically. What I argue is instead that between 1979 and 2010 there is a long-term trend towards two delineated alternatives. And whether this development continues or not is, in this context, really not of relevance—it is with regard to the hypotheses of the study at hand that the described development shall be considered.[9]

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[8] As outlined above, from the end of the 1980s until the late 1990s, party political competition was less structured around two blocs than has normally (and especially recently) been the case. Consequently, with regard to the study at hand it could—everything else being equal—be argued that levels of personalisation should be low especially during the second period.

[9] An international tendency towards increasing bipolarism is discussed by Mair (2009:8). According to Mair, there is "a tendency for parties in multiparty systems to group together to offer alternative governments and pre-electoral coalitions, thus giving voters the opportunity to choose between alternative teams of leaders even within the context of fragmented multiparty politics. [...] Italy is the most obvious example of such a transformation, but the trend towards bipolarism—often in fits and starts, and also sometimes with reversals—has also been evident in Germany, Austria and France. Moreover, many of the new third- and fourth-wave democracies in Europe, beginning in Greece, Portugal and Spain, and moving more recently to Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, are also often bipolar in character, whether through two-party systems or through bipolar multiparty systems. Thirty years ago, bipolar systems were relatively rare; today, they are emerging as one of the dominant forms of party system."

6.2 Political trust and party identification

In 1999, political scientist Sören Holmberg wrote that:

> Trust in politicians has been plummeting more or less constantly for the past thirty years in Sweden. In 1968, 60 per cent of the respondents in the Swedish Election Study said that they did not believe that "parties are only interested in people's votes not in their opinions". Some thirty years later, in 1994, the same trusting answer was given by only 25 per cent of [the] Swedes. Similarly, in 1968, 51 per cent did not agree that "those people that are in the Riksdag and run things don't pay much attention to what ordinary people think". In 1994, the proportion of respondents disagreeing with the negative statement had gone down to 28 per cent. There is no doubt that political trust has decreased drastically among the Swedish public.

> Holmberg 1999:105

Although more recent studies (e.g. Oscarsson and Holmberg 2008, Holmberg and Weibull 2011, Statistics Sweden 2011) have shown that political trust during the last ten years has increased, there are—I believe—reasons to assume that citizens today are more sceptical than before to actors representing the political system. To understand how this is possible, one must distinguish affective trust from cognitive trust (see Chapter 2). Whereas the former is a reflection of deeply grounded beliefs (and therefore is rather stable), the latter is contingent on personal experiences and perceived outcomes (whereupon it, as a consequence, it is also more volatile). Thus, acknowledging that trust is an attitude (and therefore consists of at least two components), overall levels of trust may increase despite there being little (or no) change with regard to its more stable component.

Most notably, when Holmberg in 1999 wrote that "there is no doubt that political trust has decreased among the Swedish public", the situation was—as outlined above—extraordinary: in the mid-1990s, Sweden experienced severe economic difficulties and the citizenry was confronted with a series of rather tough cutbacks. Consequently, with regard to the different kinds of trust discussed above (and more thoroughly in Chapter 2), it seems plausible to suggest that *both* kinds were at low levels—that is, in the mid-1990s, low levels of affective trust should have existed alongside low levels of cognitive trust (the last data in Holmberg's article comes from 1994). In essence, that the overall level of trust since then seems to have increased may well be the result of a public that is more content with how they per-

ceive of political actors' *performances*. In itself, the recent increase is *not* an argument for the notion that relations between citizens and political actors today are little different than they were some thirty years ago.

With regard to affective trust—i.e. trust in terms of a general stance—there is today a body of scientific works suggesting that citizens in post-industrial societies have become more sceptical of political authorities and institutions. To put the argument here very briefly, it is suggested that the transition from high to late modernity corresponds with a shift of values: as citizens' physical welfare increases, so does the importance of post-ma-terialistic values. And as individual autonomy and self-expression become increasingly important, trust in authorities becomes more conditioned; to an increasing extent, trust now has to be earned.

In sum, my argument is that citizens during the last ten to fifteen years should have come to believe that they have better *reasons* to trust; in es-sence, citizens should have become more content with the way the system works. Indeed, whereas the cutbacks in the 1990s hit a large share of the population hard, the Swedish economy has since then been in a much better shape; and whereas recent reforms (e.g. various social insurance reforms) have certainly hit certain groups of the population hard, the population as a whole has not been affected in the same way as they were in the 1990s. Therefore, whereas trust (as the sum of its affective and cognitive dimen-sion) may be low among certain groups, it is not surprising to find that it has

increased in the population as a whole.[10]

The above discussion has stressed that trust is a complex concept: on the one hand, the degree of trust is contingent on the affective bond between truster and trustee (affective component); on the other, it is contingent on the perceived capability of the trustee (cognitive component). Notably, whereas the former is concerned with feelings, the latter is concerned with reasons. A plausible consequence of this is that affective trust on the aggregated level is correlated with feelings of identification—that is, if "blind trust" in politicians has decreased, it is logical to presume that the relations between truster and trustee have become more distanced. Looking at levels of party identification, we find the presumed result: between the years of 1968 and 2010, the number of party identifiers has decreased steadily.[11]

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[10] To be quite clear with what I mean, allow me to go somewhat deeper into the concept of political trust. Firstly, whereas some researchers argue that political trust is essentially one-dimensional (and therefore can be conceived of as a general assessment of political culture), others follow Easton and argue that the concept is multidimensional (Marien 2011). Although in the Swedish context it has been demonstrated that citizens do evaluate different institutions somewhat differently, principal component analyses (PCA) have shown that a distinct dimension concerned with representation can be identified (Holmberg and Weibull 2010). Thus, although the levels of trust may differ with regard to different institutions, I do not—with regard to the purpose of this study—believe it to be problematic to suggest that political trust can be conceived of in relation to political institutions in general (cf. the NPF-index used in Norén Bretzer 2005). Secondly, whereas I believe there to be little reason to distinguish between, for example, trust in parliament and trust in government, I have suggested that one should distinguish between different dimensions of trust. Having more thoroughly discussed this idea in Chapter 2, I above distinguished between affective and cognitive trust. Whereas the former can be related to the "structural transformation of public attitudes in liberal democracies" (Hooghe and Zmerli 2011)—i.e. the development towards more demanding and critical citizens—the latter can in contrast be related to perceived outcomes and deliveries (and, as a result thereof, the question of whether citizens believe that they have reasons to confidently trust). In sum, what I suggest is basically that long-term trends should be distinguished from short-term fluctuations. This idea is well summed up by Hooghe and Zmerli, who (2011:5) write that "it is not only the political culture in general that matters in understanding political trust, but also historical traditions and the way politics and economy work. The complex interplay of these elements makes it extremely difficult to deliver straightforward answers about the future development of political trust in European societies."

[11] Although this is not the place for a thorough discussion of why party identification has decreased, a reason that clearly cannot be overlooked is that voters believe that the ideological differences between the parties have decreased. The trend of (perceived) depolarisation is most evident with regard to the distance between the Social Democratic Party and the Moderate Party: as assumed by Downs' spatial model, both parties have over the years moved towards the party political middle (Oscarsson and Holmberg 2008).

Figure 6.1: Trust in politicians and party identification, 1968-2010 (per cent)
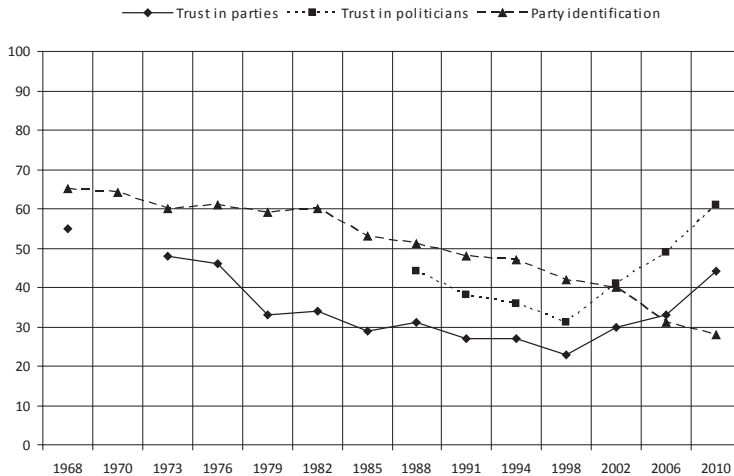
Comments: The above figure is an elaboration of data in Statistics Sweden (2011). Trust in parties is indicated by the proportion of respondents that disagree to a proposition suggesting that "parties are only interested in people's votes not in their opinions". Trust in politicians is indicated by the proportion of respondents that have answered that they, in general, trust politicians either "much" or "rather much". Party identification, finally, is indicated by the proportion of respondents that identify (either strongly or somewhat) with a political party.

To sum up the above argument: overall levels of trust are dependent on general and stable attitudes as well as personal experiences (be they direct or indirect). Since there is a long-term decrease of trust as a "default setting", the recent increase of aggregated trust is best explained by a change of how political actors are evaluated; to put it bluntly, citizens' output satisfaction should have increased.

As argued more thoroughly in Chapter 2, it is against a background in which trust has become increasingly important that the empirical results of this study shall be understood: as party identification has decreased, voting decisions can increasingly be conceived of in terms of trust. And in comparison to before, the object of trust (and identification) should all the more be an individual actor.

6.3 Living in a media saturated society
Late-modern liberal democracies are media saturated societies. And while it is true that media society has helped us to expand our horizons in a most

dramatic way, it is also a society marked by a surplus of information. In contrast to those who lived, let us say, two hundred years ago, citizens of late-modern societies need not look for information; since information is virtually everywhere, citizens are today practically drowning in information.

And what are the implications of this? A simple answer would be: given the abundance of media, how we conceive of ourselves (our dreams and aspirations) as well as how we conceive of, for example, love, politics, disease, terror, fame and fortune is, over time, likely to have become increasingly shaped by the media (and their representations). Sure enough, how we as individuals are affected by and respond to messages may differ. But since the media provide us with the messages as well as the frames for their decoding—what may be called "preferred readings"—they will indirectly shape not only our cognitions but also our feelings. Consequently, while it is true that the media has expanded our horizons, it is also true that they have caused less liberating effects.

In the empirical parts that are to follow, two kinds of figures will be used: absolute and relative figures. Whereas the reason for the use of the latter is obvious, the use of the former deserves more justification. To me, a central notion has been that absolute frequencies matter. In essence, what images we have in our heads—to once again refer to the late Walter Lippmann—is not only the result of how often they are projected in relation to other images; the sheer number of projections is also important.

Does this seem confusing? At first it sure may seem somewhat paradoxical: the idea behind the dimension of personification is that individual actors have become more important at the expense of collective actors, and intuitively we may therefore draw the conclusion that only relative figures are of importance ("ten per cent is ten per cent, no matter what"). Acknowledging this, I nevertheless believe that analyses entirely based on relative figures neglect to take one important aspect into consideration: as the number of variables (images, projections) increases, so does the need for selection. Thus, the basic idea behind why absolute figures are important is very simple: as humans, our mental capacities are limited; in contrast to computers, the information that we take in is

filtered.[12]

Then, why should this imply that sheer frequencies matter? In what way do frequencies affect how we filter information? The answer is pretty straightforward: a message (an image, a symbol) that we frequently confront is more likely to be perceived of as important (and/or easily connected) than a message that we seldom confront. In essence, there is a cumulative effect where the number of repetitions is central: the more often we are confronted with something, the more likely it is that this "something" is considered to be of importance.

This notion, that frequencies matter to the construction of our cognitive schemas, shall be related to the notion that the possibilities for citizens to identify with individual actors should have increased. As outlined above (and more thoroughly in Chapter 5), there is a steady trend in Sweden of decreasing levels of party identification. And since citizens here are assumed to be rational and cost-aware—and therefore will tend to increasingly look for other shortcuts—the claim that I make is that identification with individual actors should increasingly have come to complement identification with a party. That is, whereas parties may have served as *the* link between citizens and the political system, the relation between citizens and the political system should increasingly have come to depend upon the existence of a personal relation (Blondel 2005, Garzia 2011). And, obviously, for relations to emerge and endure, the question of frequency is vital: be they good or bad, relations that are not maintained will, indeed, tend to die.

In the chapter that is to follow I will present figures on how often party leaders and their different attributes appear in different news media. And while I certainly do not suggest that all results can be generalised to all other news media (or, for that matter, all other media), one has to bear in mind that the news media under study are part of a system that has grown considerably. In 1979, Sweden had two national TV channels (SVT1 and SVT2) and three national radio channels (P1, P2 and P3); thirty years later, Sweden had 38 national TV channels and 34 online ra-

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[12] By using the term "filtered" I am not suggesting that we always (or, for that matter, most of the time) make conscious evaluations of the information that we are confronted with; to a very large extent, the sorting of information is unconscious.

dio channels (Carlsson and Facht 2010).[13] And while the deregulation of the broadcast monopoly has first and foremost resulted in a dramatic increase of the total amount of entertainment, it is important to underline here that the public service media have *not* responded to the competitive situation by decreasing the amount of political information they make available. Quite the contrary: in the 1979 election campaign, 42 hours of special election shows were broadcast (Esaiasson 1990); for the 2006 election, the corresponding figure was 88 hours (see Asp 2006).[14]

Still, in Chapter 4 we learnt that the very discourse in the news media seems to have changed. For example, having compared the elections of 1960, 1979 and 1998, Ekström and Andersson (1999) could detect a development towards more negative coverage; in comparison to the coverage of 1960 and 1979, there were more signs of cynicism and mistrust in 1998. And whereas I shall not suggest that there is a single and straightforward link between how politics is represented and how citizens feel about politics, it is nevertheless intriguing to find that the development witnessed by Ekström and Andersson seems to correspond with the development in which trust was decreasing (for more on the relation between media representations of politics and feelings of trust, see Cappella and Jamieson 1997 and Strömbäck 2001).

Moreover, Ekström (2006) has also shown that the role citizens were assigned in the 1980s and 1990s was largely passive. As the party leaders all the more appeared as "traders in politics" (p. 24), the role of citizens was increasingly that of objects (or target groups) for campaigners to target. Having focused especially on the photographs, Ekström writes that:

> From the 1970s onwards, the position of journalism in relation to the all the more professionalised campaigns has changed. […] Journalism increasingly pictures the election campaigns as campaigns. The citizens are construed as objects for the campaigns by a kind of journalism that claims to side with the citizens against the power holders. In the news media, politics is less about a will to change society and more about strategies to achieve personal success. On the

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[13] TV channels broadcast from the UK (e.g. TV3, ZTV and Kanal 5) have not been included in the number of national TV channels available in 2010.

[14] Moreover, there is nothing that indicates that citizens over time appear less frequently in the coverage. In the material that is to be discussed more thoroughly in the next chapter, citizens appear as frequently in 2010 as in 1979 (and this holds true no matter the frame).

one hand, journalism creates conditions for a critical audience, an audience that over and again is reminded that it is there as an object for political strategies. On the other, journalism creates stereotypical notions about the citizenship and its relation to the political world. The readers are neither represented nor addressed as politically engaged citizens; instead they appear as potential voters that, with proper strategies, can be enlisted for the moment.

<div align="right">Ekström 2006:26 (my translation)[15]</div>

Whether or not this picture holds true for the more recent election coverage (the last year analysed by Ekström is 1991), it is obvious that the citizens in the 1980s and 1990s were portrayed in another way than that preferred by the Government Commission Report on democracy published in the early 2000s (SOU 2000:1).[16]

Indeed, the development accounted for by Ekström does point in a direction where the role of the citizenry is reduced to that of a jury. But, if this is a correct description, who leads the trial? Or, to use another metaphor, if the role that citizens are assigned has been reduced, who writes the script and directs the actual drama?

Whereas the expansion of the news media system on the surface of it almost *per se* should have implied increased accommodation power of the news media, we must be aware to not uncritically embrace a view where "more media" automatically implies "more powerful media". Because whereas this clear-cut conclusion ostensibly may seem sound, it is really quite problematic.

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[15] Indeed, the development was also commented on and discussed in the news media of that time. An illustrative example is found in *Aftonbladet* (14/9, p. 45, 1979). Here, the author, Jan Ekecrantz, writes that "in television politics is no longer [portrayed as] a popular concern and a struggle between different interests; instead [politics is portrayed as] something that occurs elsewhere, out of society, just like the TV business itself. There, in distant unreality, TV and politics merge into one, and to us as citizens, the roles of citizens and viewers turn out to be just the same." Notably, Ekekrantz was later to become a professor of media and communication studies.

[16] Although the Government Commission Report on power (SOU 1990:44) had pointed out several problems in Swedish society, there was an overall appreciation of the fact that the described development should enable a more independent and autonomous citizenry. In comparison to the view outlined in the Government Commission on power, the Government Commission Report on democracy (2000:1) was more concerned with the question of citizens' possibilities to actively partake in various input processes. Having identified several from this perspective problematic aspects (e.g. decreased voter turn-out), the authors wrote that: "In the light of the change that is likely to characterise the near future, we would like to both defend and revise the ideal of participatory democracy. This means that we reject a [view] where democracy is conceived of as an institutional arrangement by which the citizens can choose their leaders" (SOU 2000:1, p. 35, my translation).

Why is this the case?

The answer is simple: to presume that "more media" equates to "more powerful media" is to presume that the media system—or, for that matter, the news media system—can be conceived of as a single and coherent institution. However, if we instead conceive of the news media system in the same way as we normally conceive of the political system—that is, as a system marked by fierce competition between its component parts—an altogether different picture emerges. With this view, the proliferation of the news media system implies only that political actors have better possibilities to choose between different channels, formats and outlets; consequently, at t+1 political actors choices should be *less* circumscribed than they were at t.

Obviously, this is not the place where this question will be given an answer; suffice it to say that the overall development should have made the citizens increasingly dependent on the media. And although different media provide different possibilities for interaction, and although the citizens as media consumers are not reduced to a role of passive reception, the proliferation of the media system should have at least one consequence that we all can agree upon: the growth of the media system has enabled a situation in which the citizens' political engagement need not depend on the "sharing of a common locale" (Thompson 1995). Whereas citizens still can (and do) engage in political matters, a crucial difference when the present is compared to the past is that citizens today can be politically engaged without being physically present themselves. Politics in media society is politics—if not intimacy—at a distance.

6.4 Summary

The chapter has aimed to provide the reader with an understanding of how party political relations have evolved during the period under study. Most importantly, it was shown that party political competition—after a dip in the early 1990s—has become increasingly structured by a bloc-frame. Consequently, whereas the number of parties has increased in an obvious way, voters' perceived alternatives may actually have decreased (whereupon voting decisions increasingly bear the mark of votes for or against the sitting government). Indirectly then, it can be argued that there are grounds to assume that also the patterns of party political competition should have fuelled a long-term development of personalisation.

Chapter 7

The dimension of personification

Previous chapters have aimed to provide the necessary theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Consequently, in the two chapters that follow I shall deal with empirical data—and here, focus shall be on the data relevant to the three hypotheses. In brief:

- H1 suggests that party leaders over time appear all the more frequently at the expense of other political actors.
- H2 suggests that the news media coverage over time has become all the more occupied with characteristics that can be related to the party leaders' inner traits (e.g. competence and personality).
- H3 suggests that the news media coverage over time has become all the more occupied with the party leaders' outer attributes (e.g. objects and attributes in their personal lives).

As has already been outlined (see Chapter 4), H1 is concerned with a dimension that is quite distinct from the other two dimensions, namely personification. And due to this, I prefer to discuss H1 in a separate chapter (whereas the other two, in contrast, shall be dealt with in one and the same chapter). Consequently, what the chapter at hand shall deal with is only the question of whether the news media over time have focused all the more on *individual actors* (here: the party leaders).

Essentially, the question of whether the coverage is marked by a trend of increased personification can be approached in three different ways: a form-oriented; a media-oriented, and a party-oriented. In the first case, a primary concern is to investigate to what extent there is a trend of personification with regard to different appearance forms. To a researcher with this approach it is of central interest to distinguish between, for example, personification with regard to subjects and personification with regard to objects. As has been discussed above, this question is highly relevant since a result indicating that party leaders have become all the more prominent as objects but not as subjects would imply that the role played by political leaders is somewhat different from that presupposed by an action-oriented

normative ideal.

To a researcher with a media-oriented perspective, the question of primary interest is instead to what extent personification can be detected with regard to different media formats. In this case, the interest is grounded in the assumption that certain formats are more likely to use personification as a technique of presentation. Given that a tendency to personify can be related first and foremost to more commercial news media formats, it could, for example, be assumed that a trend of personification is more pronounced in tabloids than in the broadsheets (cf. Johansson 2008, Kriesi 2010).

And, finally, to a researcher that approaches the question of personification from a party perspective, a main question will be to answer whether a trend of personification is stronger with regard to certain parties (or groups thereof). One assumption for a researcher with this approach could, for example, be that personalisation first and foremost is a phenomenon that characterises parties within the liberal/conservative sphere (cf. Costa Lobo 2008).[1]

In this study, the hypotheses will be examined with regard to different news media formats; the focus, that is, will be on how the coverage of different media has developed. However, whereas the question of inter-media differences will be central, I shall prefer to make comparisons with regard to three specific appearance forms: 1) subjects, 2) objects, and 3) representations in images (photographs). An implication of this is that the question of personification shall be examined in a much more thorough manner than in previous studies. What I shall be able to answer is whether there is empirical support for H1 not only with regard to different news media formats—I shall also be able to detect developments with regard to the different forms in which a political actor can appear.

Below, I shall provide the most important information on the material and variables that shall be used. (For further information, see the Appendix.)

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[1] An equally reasonable assumption from this perspective is instead grounded in the presidentialisation thesis. From this point of view, what matters is not ideology but to what extent different parties have been involved in governments. Parties with a tradition of being represented in government should, from this perspective, be more likely to be marked by personalisation than parties without a government record.

Material[2]

With regard to newspapers, a rudimentary distinction is often made between editorial pages and news sections. While the editorial pages certainly are interesting objects for studies on content (see for example Nord 2001), the content here analysed comes from news pages exclusively—and here, the reason is altogether pragmatic: in the data series that I rely on, the editorials have simply not been included. (With regard to the broadcast media, the above distinction is obviously not relevant.)

But distinctions are normally done not only between editorials and news articles; distinctions are often made also between different news genres (e.g. news analyses, news stories, graphic illustrations). However, unless stated otherwise, I will here prefer *not* to distinguish between different genres. Thus, while certain genres occasionally are altogether excluded, it is—as a rule—figures for all the news material that is discussed.[3]

Finally, given the hypotheses under study, I shall here deal only with national news media. The individual news media that are investigated are: Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet, Expressen, Sveriges Television, Sveriges Radio and TV4. Generally, however, I will prefer to present the results with regard to the five formats to which these news media belong: broadsheets, tabloids, public service television, public service radio, and commercial television.

An overview of the material is presented in 7.1 (next page).

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[2] The original data set comes from studies within the *Swedish Media Election Studies* (SMES) at Gothenburg University. Under the supervision of Professor Kent Asp, every national election since 1979 has been coded (see Asp *et al* 2000, for coding principles). With regard to the dimension of personification, complementing data will be retrieved from the *Rapport* series. *Rapport* is the Swedish newscast that has the biggest audience and three interviewees have been coded with regard to each and every news item since 1979. The coding of *Rapport* has, as was the case with the data from the *Swedish Media Election Studies* (SMES), been conducted under the supervision of Professor Kent Asp.

[3] The reason why I will occasionally exclude certain genres is because I want to make sure that the figures presented are not contingent on the relative importance of certain news formats. Genres that, in the press, have become increasingly common during the last decades are, for example, graphic illustrations and tables.

Table 7.1: The material that is examined (personification)

News medium	Format	Programmes
Svenska Dagbladet	Broadsheet	
Dagens Nyheter	Broadsheet	
Aftonbladet	Tabloid	
Expressen	Tabloid	
Sveriges Television	Public service television	*Aktuellt* (21.00), *Rapport* (19.30)
Sveriges Radio	Public service radio	*Ekot* (17.45)*
TV4	Commercial television	*Nyheterna* (19.00)**

Comments: In 2010, it was the 16.45 broadcast that was coded. ** In 1991, 1998 and 2002, it was the 22.00 broadcast that was coded; in 1994, it was the 19.30 broadcast that was coded.*

Variables under study

As discussed above, the analyses are based on three main variables: appearances as *subjects*, appearances as *objects* and representations in *images* (photographs). Then, what do these variables actually measure?

Starting with appearances as subject, the variable is constructed to identify the actors either in entire news stories (articles/items) or in individual paragraphs (different units of analysis are discussed below). Thus, the variable is constructed to deal with the question of action, and underlying it is the assumption that it—from the perspective of political actors—is positive to appear as a subject. As subjects, political actors can put forth and address the issues they themselves prefer, what Sjöblom (1968) refers to in terms of "profit-issues".

If a person or group that does or says something is conceived of as a subject, then what is an object? The answer is pretty straightforward: the person or group that an actor—by action—relates to. Hence, an object is always in a relation that is established by an actor. For example, if A says that it would be a mistake to let B into government, A is coded as a subject whereas B is coded as an object. And while the relation between A and B in this case

is obvious, there are also situations where the relation is less explicit.[4]

Finally, while a distinction between subjects and objects can be made also with regard to images, this distinction has not been done with regard to the material that will be used here. Thus, what representations in images measure is essentially the visual presence of different actors. Moreover, in contrast to other variables, this variable is only used for the two newspaper formats (where a maximum of two photographs are coded for each article).

Units of analysis

Appearances as subjects and objects have both been coded on two different levels: on the one hand, information is coded on an *aggregated level*; on the other, information is coded with regard to *individual segments* (or paragraphs). Starting with the first, the unit of analysis is here the entire news story. Thus, in this case only the most dominant actors—one subject and one object—are coded. In the following I will refer to these as *main subjects* and *main objects*. As described above, the main subject and the main object are in a relation that always is established by the former; the main subject of an article or news report is the dominant actor (or acting unit), and the main object is the person (or group) that the main subject relates to. And although a main object can most often be identified, it should be acknowledged that there need not be one—one example is the news story where a party leader refers to no other actors but him- or herself.[5]

Then, what about the analyses of individual segments? Once again, it is useful to start by taking the concept of a subject under consideration. Above it was explained that the concept refers to the actor (or acting unit) that does or says something, quite simply "he, she or it that acts". In an article,

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[4] For example, if A comments on a government proposition but without mentioning the government, A will nevertheless put him-, her- or itself in a relation to the government. Since the proposition was put forth by the government, the comments of A (subject)—"I don't like it, it is weakly substantiated and altogether stupid"—will indirectly put A in a relation to the government (object). And while both of the discussed cases are examples of relations with an evaluative dimension—the objects in question are in both cases criticised— it should be pointed out that relations can exist without there being an evaluative dimension. With the above examples, it should be obvious that appearances as subjects—from the perspective of a political actor—are to be preferred: it is only by appearing as a subject that an actor can actively form the content. As an object, the image conveyed is altogether shaped by others. Notably, the theoretical reasoning behind this distinction is outlined more thoroughly by Asp (1986).

[5] According to the coding principles used, subjects cannot relate to or evaluate themselves. What they can— and often do—is, however, to relate to and evaluate the collectives to which they belong. Thus, whereas the coding does not allow for a party leader to evaluate him- or herself positively, he or she is allowed to relate to and evaluate his or her party.

however, there may well be more than one actor. If, for example, A criticis-es B for his economic policies and B responds by suggesting that A is al-together misinformed, then we have two segments of information: in the first—where A criticises B—A is a subject whereas B is an object; in the lat-ter—where B suggests that A is misinformed—B is a subject whereas A is an object. Notably, coding of individual segments implies much more detailed data than coding of entire news stories. Whereas the latter can only provide us with rather crude overall estimations, the former will, indeed, imply that also more peripheral actors are being coded.

However, although the number of information segments is theoretically unlimited, the number of coded segments has been restricted to ten. Thus, with regard to every news story, a maximum of ten subjects have been iden-tified; and since each subject can relate to a maximum of two objects, there is in every news story a maximum of twenty objects.

In the analyses that are to follow, I will focus on data from individual seg-ments (paragraphs). And while comparisons to the aggregated level will be made, there are three good reasons for focusing on data on the lower level: 1) it implies more data, 2) it provides more reliable data, and 3) it has previ-ously not been done.

Actors

With regard to the above-discussed variables, distinctions are made be-tween four categories of political actors: party leader(s), party (-ies), Prime Minister and government.[6] An important aspect to bear in mind is that all figures are based on analyses where only political actors are included. Due to this, any effects caused by changes in the relative distribution of actors belonging to other societal groups are controlled for. Consequently, what I study is news media personalisation within the party political sphere.

Starting with the most important, *party leader* is a category that consists of two sub-categories; individual party leaders and party leaders in group. While it is true that the latter in a technical sense not can be conceived of as a category of individual actors, my main argument for grouping the two sub-categories is simple: it is in relation to appearances of other party actors (including parties as collectives) that appearances by party leaders shall be

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[6] Whereas most attention will be given to the question of increased party leader dominance, the question of increased Prime Minister dominance will also be examined.

studied; whether they appear as individuals or are grouped with other party leaders is of minor importance. Yet another reason for grouping them together is, of course, that this will make the presentation more accessible.

Party is a category that consists of all political actors except party leaders. This means that there are individual actors as well as groups of actors also within this category. Although it is unfortunate that individual actors have been coded together with their parties, there is really nothing to do about it: while candidates for parliament have been coded separately, actors that represent a party but are not candidates for parliament have been coded together with their parties. Obviously, one solution would be to refer to candidates for parliament as yet another category of actors. There are, however, two reasons not to let candidates for parliament form a distinct category. Firstly, the fewer the categories, the clearer the picture; secondly, from my own experience of coding the variable I know that it is not always apparent whether or not the depicted representative is a candidate for parliament. Consequently, for reasons of simplicity and reliability I will not use candidate for parliament as a category.

In order to approach the question of presidentialisation, every party leader that appears in the role of Swedish Prime Minister has in a subsequent step been re-coded as *Prime Minister*. Between 1979 and 2010, Sweden has all in all had seven different Prime Ministers.

Finally, *government* is a category to which all government actors except the Prime Minister belong. An implication of this is that there—as was the case with other categories—are individual actors as well as collective actors within this category.

To avoid ambiguity, the four categories are outlined in the two figures on the next page.

Figure 7.1: The applied categories (increased party leader dominance)

```
                          Party actors
                 /                          \
         Party leaders                    Parties
        /          \                    /          \
Individual party    Group of      Individual party    Parties as collectives,
leaders             party leaders  members (including  government as a body
(including the                     candidates for
prime                              parliament, ministers in
minister)                          government etc.)
```
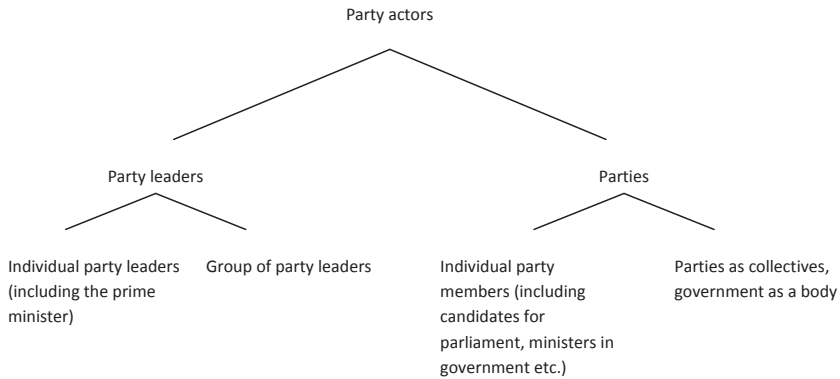
Figure 7.1 illustrates the distinctions of relevance with regard to the question of increased party leader dominance.

Figure 7.2: The applied categories (increased Prime Minister dominance)

```
                       Government actors
                 /                          \
         Prime minister                   Government
                                        /            \
                            Individual ministers    Government as a body
                            (including party leaders
                            who belong to the
                            government)
```
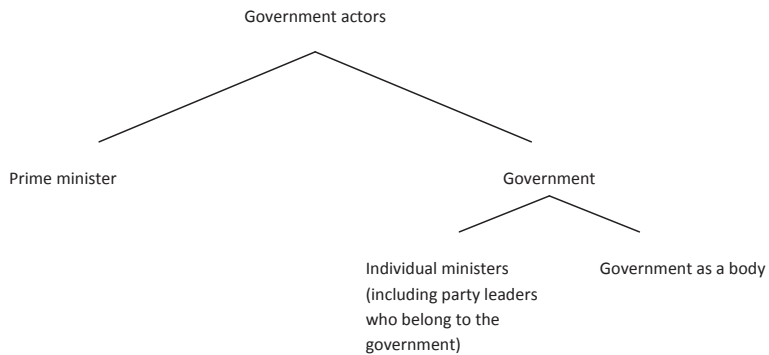
Figure 7.2 illustrates the distinctions of relevance with regard to the question of increased Prime Ministerial dominance.

7.1 Subjects

First, we turn to the question of appearances as subjects. Has the election coverage become increasingly occupied with the actions and endeavours of the party leaders; have party leaders—as commentators in the public debate often maintain—become all the more dominant?

A first way to answer the question is to look at appearances as subjects with regard to all news media formats. And while an answer relying on pooled data will be tentative, I nevertheless believe it to be worth a brief discussion. Because *if* commentators in the public debate are right; *if* a trend of (increased) personification is as strong as is often made the case, then we could quite safely assume there to be a trend of (increased) personification when data from all formats is examined together.

Figure 7.3: Party leaders as subjects in all news media formats (per cent)
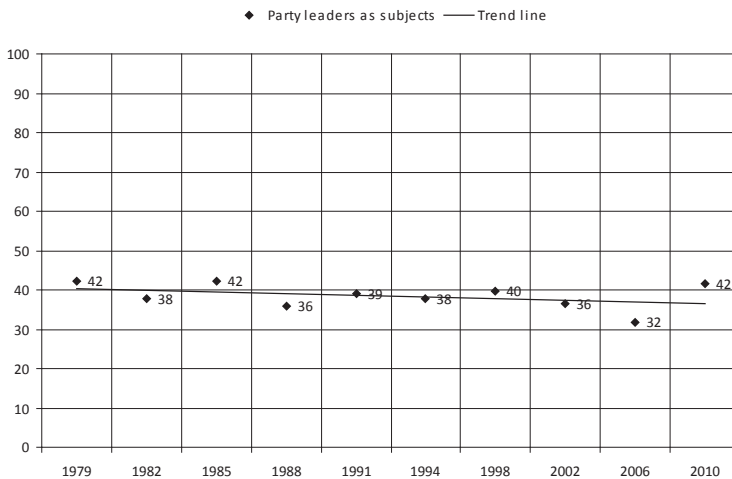
Comments: The number of subjects ranges from 4213 (2006) to 8272 (1988).

To those convinced that party leaders have become all the more dominant in the news media, the result presented in figure 7.3 should come as a surprise: contrary to the thesis, party leaders have in the coverage become not more but less common. And while there sure are fluctuations—there is, for example, an increase of ten percentage points when the figure for the election of 2010 is compared to that of 2006—the inserted trend line ruthlessly rejects

all notions of there being a clear-cut trend of increased personification: as subjects—and when data for individual formats is pooled—party leaders do not appear more but *less* frequently. (And this holds true also with regard to main subjects; i.e. when the unit of analysis is the aggregated level.)

But, while pooled data gives us an overall picture, the results for individual formats may, of course, differ. Therefore, the shares for individual formats are provided as follows.

Table 7.2: Party leaders as subjects (per cent)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	41	38	40	35	40	36	36	30	28	30
Tabloids	43	37	41	34	n.d.	n.d.	45	41	28	46
Public service television	44	39	50	41	34	45	41	49	44	50
Public service radio	45	41	60	41	48	42	43	48	38	45
Commercial television					30	39	52	62	44	35
N (total)	6052	6065	7096	8272	5553	5510	5518	5891	4213	5638

Comments: N (total) indicates the number of all subjects; n.d. = no data. Commercial television first appeared in the election of 1991.

As different formats are compared it becomes obvious that the trend of decrease is valid primarily with regard to the broadsheets. For this format, the party leaders' share decreases by roughly ten percentage points (1979-2010), and—it is important to note—the trend of decrease is rather steady. Obviously, this result is in direct opposition to a hypothesis suggesting that party leaders over time have become all the more frequent. However, with regard to other formats, the long-term trends are less obvious. For example, whereas with regard to the tabloids there is no clear-cut trend for the entire period, the figures for the latter half of it—with the exception of 2006—are all comparatively high. This is also the case with regard to public service television, whereas no trend whatsoever can be found with regard to public service radio and commercial television.[7]

Altogether, if all years are considered, no continuous trend of increased personification can be detected with regard to any of the formats; hence, that there is no unambiguous trend of all the more party leader dominance

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[7] That is, whereas a Kendall tau c test indicates that there is negative trend with regard to public service radio (-0.036, p<0.05), the significance is in this case the result of an exceptionally large share for one specific year (1985). In contrast, for commercial television there is no significant trend whatsoever.

is evident enough.

But is this the case only with regard to appearances as subjects? Or do the discussed patterns remain if we also examine appearances as main subjects? The answer is: while there are some small differences, the overall patterns are similar; that is, party leaders have on neither of the two levels of analysis become all the more frequent as subjects. (With regard to the broadsheets, the trend of decrease is even somewhat stronger when appearances as main subjects are examined.) And while the party leaders in the tabloids tend to appear as main subjects a bit more often than they appear as subjects, the overall trends are certainly similar; that is, the tabloids are, with regard to neither of the two variables, a very strong case for the thesis of there being a trend of personalisation.

In public service television, however, an interesting finding is that a rather evident gap has emerged: while the party leaders until the election of 2002 appeared as main subjects roughly as often as they appeared as subjects, they were in both 2006 and 2010 much more frequent as subjects. A possible explanation to this finding is that a *bloc-frame* has become more important: as two new actors ("the left" and "the right") have entered the scene, the number of participants has, in a coding-technical sense, increased. And since all established parties belong to one of the two blocs, it has—from the perspective of the news media actors—been rather unproblematic to let the main competition be between blocs rather than parties. Consequently, in the news media, it is now the blocs who attack each other, not individual parties or their leaders (Asp 2011b; see also Aylott and Bolin 2007).

From what has been written above it should be obvious that there is no trend of increased personification with regard to party leaders' appearances as subjects. Party leaders do not appear more often as subjects than they used to—as a matter of fact, the most evident trend is for the broadsheets, and here the trend is negative: over time, party leaders appear *less* frequently.

7.2 Objects

Then what about appearances as objects? Since there is no trend of personification with regard to appearances as subjects, one could easily assume that no trend of personification is to be found with regard to appearances as objects—party leaders, one could assume, have simply become altogether less important in the coverage.

Then, is this the case? As was the case with regard to subjects, we shall start our analyses with pooled data.

Figure 7.4: Party leaders as objects in all news media formats (per cent)
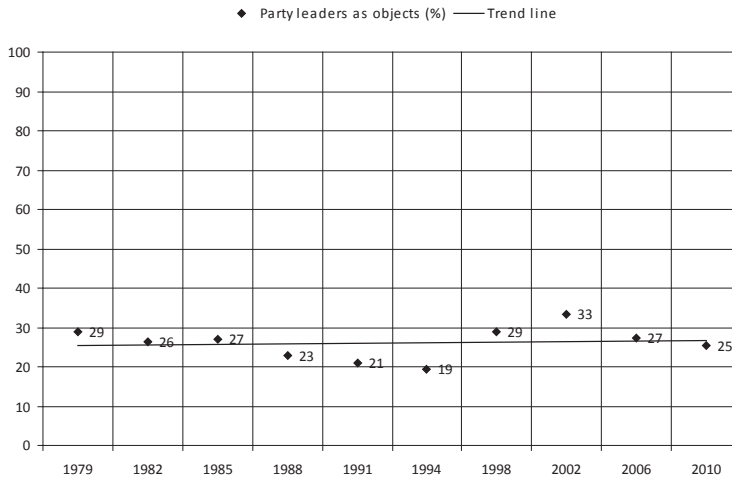
Comments: The number of objects ranges from 4752 (1979) to 11263 (1988).

When data from all formats is pooled, the overall trend is in line with the thesis of there being a trend of (increased) personification; over time, party leaders have become slightly more common in the coverage. But the development is certainly not continuous, and when the two endpoints are compared, the figure for 1979 is actually higher than that of 2010.

As a matter of fact, the figure for 1979 is higher than those for all except two years, 1998 and 2002, and the overall evidence for personification is therefore far from overwhelming. Then, why is the trend line positive?

In essence, the fact that the trend line is altogether positive is largely the result of the exceptionally high figures for 1998 and 2002; between 1979 and 1994, there is a rather continuous development towards all the lower figures. But what if shares for individual formats are compared?

Table 7.3: Party leaders as objects (per cent)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	25	19	22	19	21	19	19	24	20	17
Tabloids	38	41	38	30	n.d.	n.d.	45	46	43	36
Public service television	23	15	19	18	19	19	29	38	17	17
Public service radio	20	14	17	20	22	21	23	28	18	12
Commercial television					25	26	30	52	19	11
N (total)	4752	5107	7632	11263	6153	8240	9606	6507	6285	8547

Comments: N (total) indicates the number of objects; n.d. = no data. Commercial television first appeared with the election of 1991.

As was the case with regard to appearances as subjects, the trend for the broadsheets is not one of increase; only for the election of 2002 is the figure equal to that of 1979; in all other cases, the more recent figures are markedly lower.

But instead of focusing upon this, one should underline how stable the figures are: in the broadsheets, the party leaders' share is between 17 and 22 per cent in all but two elections. Turning our eyes to other formats, the year with the highest party leader share is for all formats but the broadsheets the year of 2002; the second highest figure—once again for all formats but the broadsheets—being the year of 1998.

And, as a matter of fact, the figures for the subsequent years are equal to the figures for these two years only with regard to the tabloids; in all other formats, the figures for 2006 and 2010 are markedly lower than those of 1998 and 2002. Consequently, what table 7.3 illustrates is, once again, that the positive trend line in figure 7.4 is, to a very large extent, explained by the high figures for 1998 and 2002. That is, rather than there being a strong and ongoing trend of increased party leader dominance, the figures suggest that the phenomenon first and foremost marked the years concluding the last and initiating the new millennium.

But, as pointed out before, relative figures are not all that matters; *absolute* figures must also be considered. Because if we for a moment leave the question of relative distribution aside and focus on absolute figures, all formats—at least if 2010 is excluded with regard to the tabloids—are characterised by a curvilinear pattern: between 1979 and 1988, the absolute figures increase steadily; between 1991 and 1998 they remain high, whereas from the election of 2002 and onwards they decrease.

An implication is that three periods can be identified: first, 1979-1988

is a period where party leaders in absolute terms become all the more frequent in the coverage; secondly, 1991-1998 is a period of status quo; and, thirdly, 2002-2010 is a period where party leaders become less frequent. Thus, for the beginning of the period an *absolute increase* comes hand in hand with a *relative decrease*.

Can the absolute decreases during the latter third of the period be explained by changes in how news is presented? In the above tables, all material is included. But what happens if journalistic genres such as graphic illustrations, overviews and tables are excluded? The answer is: not much. Notwithstanding the tabloids' coverage of the election of 2010, the curvilinear pattern remains; in absolute figures, party leaders appear in the news coverage less frequently at the end of the period.[8]

Then what about news that is given editorial priority? One way to empirically investigate whether party leaders appear all the more often in articles that are prioritised is to study the party leaders' share in articles with large headlines.

Table 7.4: Party leaders as subjects/objects in articles with large headlines (per cent)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	47/24	48/18	48/19	41/18	40/17	39/18	35/19	32/22	31/18	38/14
Tabloids	49/35	39/39	41/38	39/28	n.d.	n.d.	45/45	55/45	47/42	57/35
N (total)	3164	4028	5773	6354	3866	5639	5551	4667	3294	6170

Comments: N (total) indicates the number of actors (both subjects and objects) in articles with large headlines; n.d. = no data. For each year, two figures are given: the party leaders' share as subjects and the party leaders' share as objects. All in all, a third of the headlines have been coded as large, a third as medium, and a third as small.

With regard to the broadsheets, there clearly is no trend where party leaders have become all the more dominant, neither as subjects, nor as objects. Thus, for the broadsheets, the hypothesis of there being a trend of personification must once again be rejected.

In contrast, for the tabloids a rather interesting result is found with regard to the last two elections: when all articles were examined (i.e. the in-

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[8] With regard to the tabloids, 2010 stands out as the year when party leaders as objects are most frequent in the coverage. In relation to 1998, however, both 2002 and 2006 are years that are marked by decreasing figures. As will be discussed in Chapter 8, absolute frequecies are, of course, strongly dependent on how much attention the campaigns are given.

cluded articles were not only those with large headlines), 2006 and 2010 were both characterised by rather modest shares (especially with regard to subjects and the coverage of the election of 2006). But when only articles with large headlines are included, the figures for the last two elections differ little from those of 1998 and 2002. That is, if only prioritised articles are included, the last four elections are all marked by comparatively high figures. While this alone hardly proves the thesis of increased party leader dominance to be correct, it underlines that the figures for the tabloids are generally higher during the latter half of the period.[9]

Two out of three variables have been discussed thus far. With regard to appearances as subjects, it was concluded that the most evident trend is one of decrease (in the broadsheets); with regard to appearances as objects, the overall results were somewhat more supportive. Moreover, while there clearly is no continuous trend of increased party leader dominance, it was concluded that 1998 and 2002 do stand out as years when the levels are comparatively high (a result that is also valid with regard to appearances as main objects).

A question that begs an answer is what consequences these findings have for the *ratio* between appearances as subjects and appearances as objects. Do the results indicate that the party leaders—when they do appear—all the more often appear as (passive) objects? In the following, we start by looking at pooled data for all news media.

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[9] This is true also with regard to party leaders as main objects in the tabloids. While the variable was not studied in 1979, the shares (per cent) for the years thereafter are 37 (1982), 38 (1985), 27 (1988), 51 (1998), 55 (2002), 44 (2006), and 40 (2010). Hence, the figures for the last four elections are all higher than those at the beginning of the period.

Figure 7.5: Ratio for party leaders' appearances in all news media formats (subjects/objects)
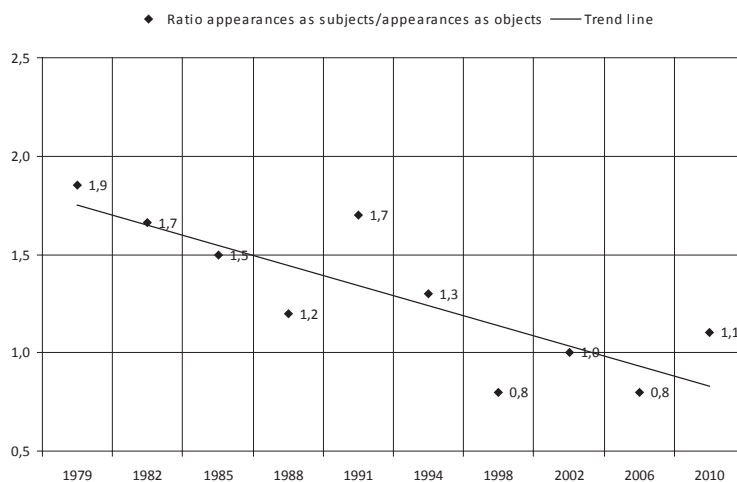
Comments: The ratio is based on absolute figures. Values above one indicate that party leaders appear as subjects more often than they appear as objects. The number of appearances (both subjects and objects) ranges from 3048 (2006) to 5537 (1988).

The result presented in figure 7.5 is really quite clear. When party leaders appear in the news coverage it is all the more often as objects. Therefore, a consequence that not seems all too far-fetched is that the average citizen—who is strongly dependent on the news media for information on the political system—over time will have a somewhat modified picture of what political role the party leaders play: during the period under study, party leaders have gone from the role of active political forces towards the role of "fix-points for politics"; from having been portrayed as active leaders, party leaders have increasingly often been assigned the role of objects.

Obviously, how the citizens conceive of the party leaders—as main representatives for the political system—is likely to have consequences for how they conceive of the political system itself: are political actors really actors in the true sense of the word? Or do they increasingly resemble celebrities? That is, actors that we read and hear about—but do not really listen to.

Worth keeping in mind, however, is that the above figures come from pooled data. The degree to which the overall development corresponds with the development of individual news media formats is addressed in table 7.5.

Table 7.5: Ratio for party leaders' appearances in all news media formats (subjects/objects)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	2,0	2,7	1,8	1,6	1,7	1,2	1,1	1,3	1,0	1,2
Tabloids	1,4	0,9	0,9	0,7	n.d.	n.d.	0,4	0,7	0,3	0,8
Public service television	2,5	3,1	2,1	1,7	1,7	1,9	1,2	1,2	1,8	2,5
Public service radio	3,3	3,1	3,6	1,6	2,2	1,8	1,4	1,2	1,9	4,0
Commercial television					1,0	1,1	1,4	1,1	1,7	2,0
N (total)	3937	3645	5050	5537	3462	3671	4976	4319	3048	4520

Looking at individual formats it becomes evident that a long-term trend of increased objectification can be detected in at least three out of five formats: while the trend certainly is most evident with regard to the broadsheets, it can rather easily be detected also for the tabloids and public service television (and, possibly, public service radio). That the ratio between appearances as subjects and appearances as objects has decreased is therefore a robust result that is valid to most—albeit not all—of the investigated news media formats.

Moreover, when the tabloids are compared to the broadsheets, and as commercial television is compared to public service television, it is interesting to note that objectification as a phenomenon appears to be most pronounced in the more commercial formats.

Last, but certainly not least, representations in images will be studied. For this variable, only articles in the press have been coded. As with the analyses above, those that are to follow are based on data from the *Swedish Media Election Studies* (SMES). A more refined analysis of images will be presented in the empirical part that is to follow.

7.3 Images

Against a background where most researchers stress the importance of style and looks, surprisingly little attention has hitherto been given to the images. Often—as became apparent in Chapter 3—no separate image analyses are made, and whether party leaders have become more important as visual objects is something that we consequently know very little about. Since images only have been coded for the newspapers, the first question to answer here is whether a trend of (increased) personification can be detected with regard to all four newspapers.

Figure 7.6: Party leaders in images, all four newspapers (per cent)
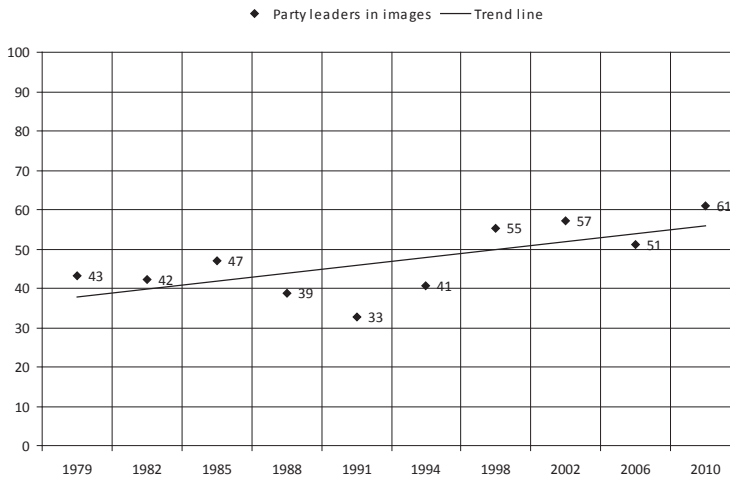
Comments: The number of images ranges from 180 (1991) to 1153 (2010). For 1991 and 1994, only the broadsheets are coded.

In contrast to the other two variables, representation in images is one where the result is clearly affirmative: while there is no continuous trend if all years are considered, four out of five measure points since 1991 (2006 is the exception) indicate increasing levels. And with regard to images, relative increases come hand in hand with absolute increases; from 388 in 1998, the number of images of party leaders increases to 452 (2002), 467 (2006), and 704 (2010). Then, what about individual formats?

Table 7.6: Party leaders in images (per cent)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	43	36	41	32	33	41	41	44	40	49
Tabloids	43	48	51	44	n.d.	n.d.	62	66	61	66
N (total)	789	979	892	932	180	256	702	789	915	1153

Comments: N (total) indicates the number of images; n.d. = no data.

As data for individual formats is analysed it becomes obvious that the positive trend in figure 7.6 to a large extent is explained by a trend of increased party leader visualisation in the tabloids: from a share of 43 per cent (1979),

the figure increases quite dramatically to 66 per cent (2010). Although the trends for both formats are significant at the 0.001 level (tau c), the increase is much more pronounced for the tabloids, whereupon a gap has emerged: from having been at equal levels in 1979, in 2010 there is a 17 percentage points difference between the two formats.[10]

Since all three variables now are examined, the overall findings can be discussed. Altogether, one case is for the thesis (images), whereas one is against (subjects) and one must be considered ambiguous (objects). Obviously, the evidence for a trend of personification is, at best, mixed.

But then again, this overall verdict is based on the findings for *all* news media formats. What if individual formats are examined more closely? Above, both tabloids and public service television have been suggested to be formats where the latter half of the period is marked by comparatively high levels. Starting with the tabloids, I will present results where all three variables are related to their mean values ($[value_{year}/value_{mean}]-1$). That is, different means will serve as reference points; positive values indicate that the share is higher than the mean whereas negative values indicate that the share is lower than the mean.[11]

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[10] However, if only large images are included, a gap already existed in 1979; party leaders were then portrayed in 51 per cent of the images in the broadsheets and in 64 per cent of the images in the tabloids.

[11] Following the formula presented above, 0,07 indicates that the value for the year at hand is seven per cent higher than the mean value, whereas -0,02 indicates that the value is two per cent lower than the mean value.

Figure 7.7: Party leaders in the tabloids. Reference points = mean values.

■ Subjects ☐ Objects ⊟ Images

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Subjects	0,07	-0,07	0,03	-0,05			0,13	0,03	-0,30	0,16
Objects	-0,02	0,05	-0,01	-0,23			0,17	0,19	0,12	-0,07
Images	-0,22	-0,15	-0,08	-0,22			0,12	0,19	0,09	0,19
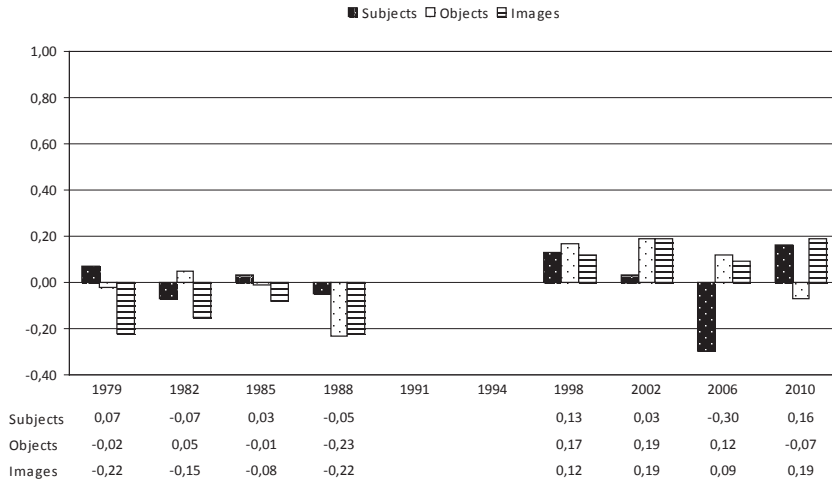
Comments: Three variables are included in the figure: subjects, objects, and images. For all three, the mean value serves as a fix point (=0). For subjects, the mean value is 40 per cent; for objects, the mean value is 38 per cent; for images, the mean value is 56 per cent. Unfortunately, no data exists for the years of 1991 and 1994.

That two periods can be detected becomes apparent in figure 7.7: if all three variables are considered, the figures for the period between 1998 and 2010 are positive in ten out of twelve cases. In contrast, for the period between 1979 and 1988 only three out of twelve cases are positive. And if we especially focus on the variables where the thesis has previously been given at least some support (i.e. objects and images), the only negative figure is that for objects in the 2010 election. Consequently, with regard to two out of three variables, we can safely conclude that commentators are right when they claim that the tabloids are marked by increased party leader orientation.

But, it is important to underline, the above figure also illustrates that claims of personification must be more nuanced than is often the case: as subjects, it is not altogether correct to say that party leaders in the tabloids appear more frequently; it is only as "passive actors" that party leaders have clearly become more important. And moreover, it is troublesome that with regard to the tabloids I have no data for the years of 1991 and 1994; theoretically, these two years may be marked by levels that are higher than those of the subse-

quent years. (I do, however, have data for 1991 and 1994 with regard to other formats, and the figures for 1991 and 1994 are, with regard to other formats, in no way extraordinary.) Then what about public service television?

Figure 7.8: Party leaders in public service television. Reference points = mean values.

Subjects ▢ Objects

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Subjects	0,00	-0,10	0,14	-0,07	-0,21	0,04	-0,05	0,13	0,01	0,15
Objects	0,13	-0,28	-0,09	-0,11	-0,09	-0,07	0,40	0,84	-0,19	-0,19
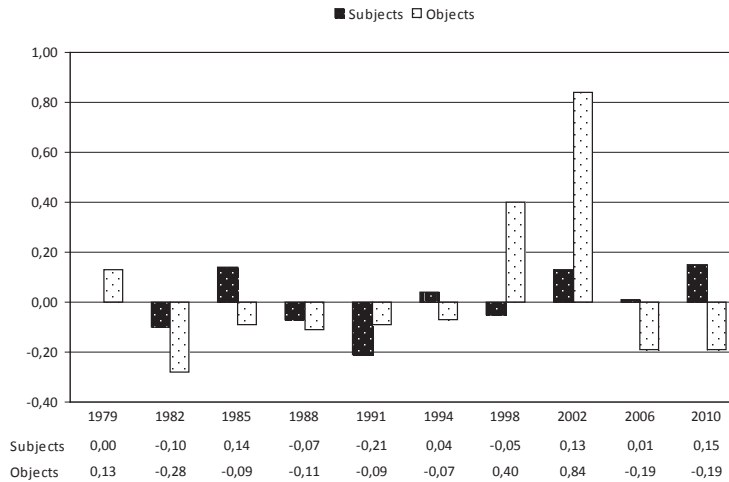
Comments: Two variables are included in the figure: subjects and objects. For both of them, the mean value serves as a fix point (=0). For subjects, the mean value is 44 per cent; for objects, the mean value is 21 per cent.

Figure 7.8 shows that the pattern found with regard to the tabloids can also be detected with regard to public service television. Sure enough, it is not as evident as with the tabloids, but drawing a line between the elections of 1991 and 1994 the latter half of the period is marked by positive figures in six cases out of ten; the former only in two cases out of ten.

However true this may be, the party leaders' share is markedly higher than the mean only in two cases (appearances as objects in 1998 and 2002), and while the share for subjects certainly is higher than the mean for the last three elections, it would be altogether wrong to suggest that, with regard to appearances as subjects, there is a clear trend towards all the higher levels.

Thus, a closer inspection of the two formats must lead to the conclusion that it is only with regard to the tabloids that the figures for the latter half of the research period generally support the thesis.

7.4 The framing of party leaders: game frames and evaluations

While the overall evidence for increased party leader dominance is weak, it is obvious that the coverage has changed with regard to its overall framing. In *all* formats, different kinds of game frames have become more frequent at the expense of traditional issue frames (and this result remains also if only traditional news stories are included).

For example, in the broadsheets the share of issue frames decreased from 80 per cent (1979) to 58 per cent (2010). In the tabloids, the corresponding fall is from 64 to 38 per cent, whereas the fall in public service television is one from 79 to 70 per cent.[12] And while the development for none of the formats is without interruptions—that is, there are years when issue frames become more frequent for all formats —the overall trend is strikingly evident: the use of issue frames has become less frequent, whereas the use of game frames, in contrast, has become more frequent.

Consequently, it should come as no surprise that game frames have become more common when party leaders are portrayed, and therefore the question to ask is not really *if* game frames have become increasingly common; a more relevant question to ask is *when* they have become more common. Therefore, for each year, table 7.7 shows two figures; the share of game frames when party leaders appear as subjects and the corresponding figure when party leaders appear as objects.

Table 7.7: Game frames when party leaders appear as subjects and objects (per cent)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	21/37	20/42	26/57	33/61	31/56	49/67	36/63	46/70	48/78	29/63
Tabloids	35/48	36/70	43/76	43/79	n.d.	n.d.	46/71	59/79	74/82	53/75
Public service television	17/36	22/54	25/68	42/71	38/62	38/76	33/62	26/56	44/82	26/46

Comments: For each year, two figures are given: the share of game frames when party leaders appear as subjects and the share of game frame when party leaders appear as objects (segments that have neither an issue nor a game frame are excluded). Game frames are frames that focus polls, the actors, the election as an event, its scandals and affairs, and questions on the government composition. Only traditional news stories are included; i.e. items such as graphic illustrations and overviews are excluded.

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[12] The figures are based on a dichotomous coding (issue frame or game frame) of individual information segments in traditional news items (news stories and analyses). Segments that have neither an issue nor a game frame are excluded.

Two things become strikingly apparent with table 7.7: 1) game frames are more common when party leaders appear as objects than when they appear as subjects; 2) over time, game frames become more frequent with regard to both appearance forms.

This is indeed an important finding: had game frames become more common only when party leaders appear as objects, the result would *not* have been possible to interpret in terms of a decreased reluctance of the party leaders to appear in relation to game frames. However, since game frames have become more frequent also when party leaders appear as subjects, a changed behaviour of the party leaders must be considered as a possible explanation.[13]

But while game frames have become more common, it is important to note that the trend started well before the commercialisation and deregulation of the Swedish news media system (which often is said to have started in the late 1980s or early 1990s). Thus, whereas game frames have certainly become more frequent during the era of a commercialised news media system, the development had, indeed, started well before deregulations were actually pulled through.

Moreover, the fact that game frames have become more common meanwhile evidence for increased personification is weak serves as an illustration for the argument that the tendency of journalists to use game frames must be distinguished from the tendency to personalise the coverage. Indeed, to let the proportion of games frames serve as an indicator of personalisation is to stretch the meanings of both concepts too far; in systems where the parties have a strong position, the race is not necessarily between individuals.

Then what about evaluations? Are party leaders criticised—or, for that matter, referred to positively—more often over time? The answer is: not really. Or, more correctly, it depends on what years that are compared: for the broadsheets, the tabloids and public service television, the trends are all curvilinear; the levels are relatively high in the beginning as well as at the end of the period, but markedly lower in the middle of the period. Notably, then, party leader evaluations are rare especially during the period under which the political system was marked by a weak bloc structure (see Chapter 6).

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[13] Obviously, this is not to say that the party leaders must be drivers of change; party leaders may certainly have to respond to a change that is induced by others, for example journalists.

In table 7.8, the result is illustrated in terms of percentages (evaluations/appearances as objects).

Table 7.8: The evaluation of party leaders (per cent)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	70	66	56	46	38	18	52	35	42	41
Tabloids	71	64	64	39	n.d.	n.d.	47	36	54	57
Public service television	85	66	64	45	48	27	41	46	46	46

Comments: Evaluations need not be explicit; for example, if a news story reports that polls have shown that the public has high (or low) confidence in a certain party leader, he or she has been coded as evaluated. Only traditional news stories are included; i.e. items such as graphic illustrations and overviews are excluded.

Whether the levels in table 7.8 shall be conceived of as high or low is not really the question; what matters is that there is no clear-cut trend where party leaders are being evaluated all the more often.

Moreover, given the often-heard claims of increasingly negative reporting it is interesting to note that the share of *negative* evaluations remains rather stable.[14]

7.5 Comparing with data from the Rapport series

A consequence of the fact that all of the above results rely on data from the *Swedish Media Election Studies* (SMES) is that all results are based on data from election periods (defined as the last 30 days before the election). However, with regard to one of the variables, appearances as subjects, the figures discussed above can be compared to those for off-election periods. This is important since the election coverage—due to its institutionalised character—is a kind of coverage where only minor changes can be expected to be found. Therefore, the question to be answered is whether party leaders appear as subjects more often on an all-year-round basis.

On the follwing pages, two figures are presented; one showing relative shares (per cent), and one showing absolute figures (frequencies).

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[14] That being said, when a party leader is evaluated, he or she is most often evaluated negatively. While this is the case roughly three times out of four in the broadsheets, and two times out of three in public service television, the corresponding figure is actually *lower* in the tabloids (where roughly half of the party leader evaluations are negative). That there is no clear-cut evidence of increased negativism in the campaigns is also found in Håkansson's (1999) longitudinal study of Swedish party propaganda (1948-1994).

Figure 7.9: Party leaders as interviewees in Rapport, 1979-2010 (per cent)
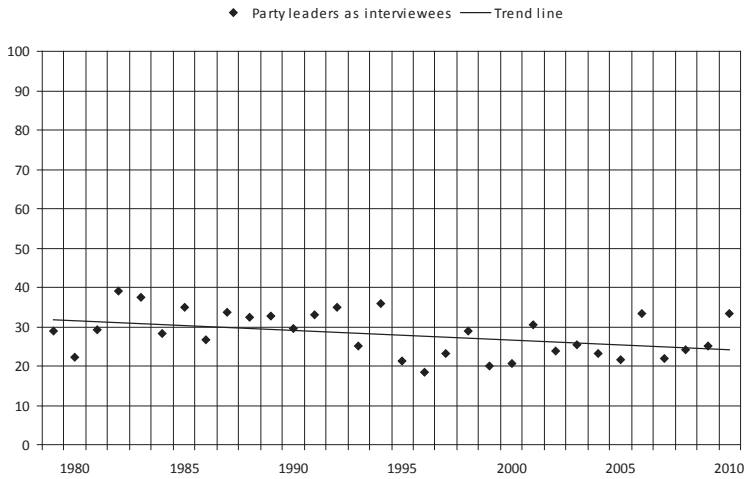

Comments: *Note that the presented proportions are based on party political actors.*

What is apparent with figure 7.9 is that party leaders—in relative terms—do not appear all the more frequently as interviewees in Rapport. And, important to note; with regard to the Rapport series, all years are included. In sum, this means that the result for election periods corresponds well with that for off-election periods—as subjects, the long-term trend is that the party leaders' share becomes smaller.

As discussed more thoroughly above, these findings can be related to an action-oriented understanding of what the concept of the political denotes. If the "political" cannot be decoupled from action, then it is worrisome that party leaders all the more often are portrayed as objects. To pose the critical question: if the "political" is about action and intentionality (Warren 1999c), can persons that largely appear as objects still be conceived of as political actors?

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Figure 7.10: Party leaders as interviewees in Rapport, 1979-2010 (frequencies)
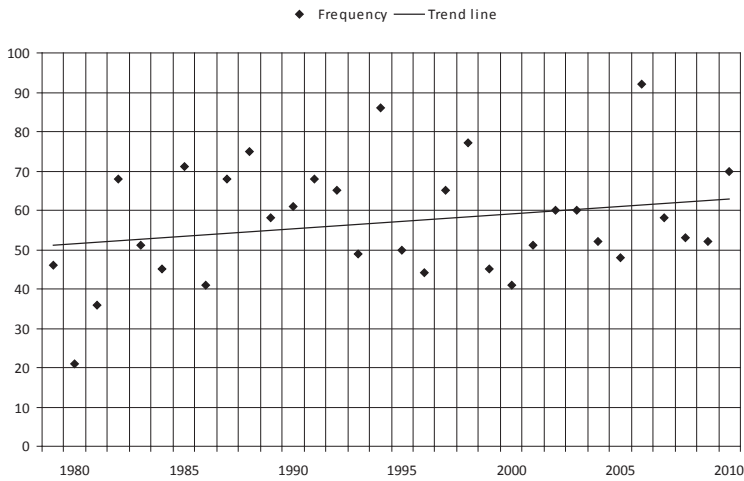
However, that party leaders appear less often as active forces is a one-sided interpretation of data; what figure 7.10 shows is that party leaders over time appear more frequently in *absolute* figures.[15] Consequently, while party leaders have not replaced other political actors, a regular follower of *Rapport* is indeed likely to meet the face of a party leader more often today than before.

Once again, this underlines that one cannot draw any far-reaching conclusions on relative figures alone. Moreover, since late-modern societies are saturated with information, the total information-load has most certainly increased. That there is no clear-cut trend of (increased) personification with regard to individual news media (or news media formats) does therefore not undermine the possibility that the average citizen today faces news

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[15] That party leaders appear all the more often as subjects if absolute figures are examined is, however, a finding that is only valid with regard to the (all-year) *Rapport* series: in the above-discussed election coverage, party leaders have as subjects become less common both in relative and absolute figures.

media representations of the party leaders more frequently.[16]

7.6 Increased Prime Ministerial dominance?

Then what about Prime Ministers? If evidence for personification is weak with regard to party leaders, is the evidence more convincing with regard to Prime Ministers? Notably, two out of the three arguments presented in Chapter 5 are equally valid—if not more so—with regard to Prime Ministers: both increased interdependence and increased complexity are developments that should have led to increased centralisation and/or an increased need of discretionary power for the Prime Minister.

Below, the question of increased Prime Ministerial dominance will be approached by examining whether Prime Ministers appear more frequently in relation to other governmental actors (government ministers, the government as a body). Obviously, this is exactly what the presidentialisation thesis suggests: over time, Prime Ministers should have become all the more dominant at the expense of other governmental actors.

Starting with appearances as subjects, does the Prime Minister—as subject—appear all the more often in relation to other government actors? Table 7.9 consists of ratios; the number of Prime Minister appearances has simply been divided by the number of appearances by other government actors (Prime Minister/other government actors).

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[16] Writing on the role of celebrities, Marshall (2001:58) stresses the importance of intertextuality; i.e. how information and images conveyed in one media is dependent on information and images in other media: "Although a celebrity may be positioned predominantly in one mediated form, that image is informed by the circulation of significant information about the celebrity in newspapers, magazines, interview programs, fanzines, rumours, and so on. [...] Without the domain of interpretative writing on cultural artifacts, the development of the celebrity personality would be stunted. The descriptions of the connections between celebrities' 'real' lives and their working lives as actors, singers, or television news readers are what configure the celebrity status." To the list of professions that Marshall provides, one could add that of politicians: how we conceive of individual political actors—and, for that matter, political actors as a collective—is the result of the narratives and images conveyed by cross-fertilising media. Consequently, whereas this study deals exclusively with the news media it should be stressed that narratives in the news media are increasingly shaped by narratives conveyed in other media formats (e.g. movies, talk shows etc.). This notion is often put forth by researchers who focus on the question of how politics is increasingly interwoven with popular culture (e.g. van Zoonen and Holtz-Bacha 2000, Street 2001, 2004, Richards 2004, 2007, Jones 2005, van Zoonen 2005, van Zoonen *et al* 2007, Mars *et al* 2010).

Table 7.9: Prime Minister as subject vs. other governmental actors as subjects (ratio)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	2,6	0,9	0,8	0,6	0,6	0,4	0,6	0,6	0,6	0,3
Tabloids	5,9	1,0	1,1	0,6	n.d.	n.d.	1,9	1,8	1,7	0,6
Public service television	2,3	0,8	1,2	0,7	0,5	0,7	0,6	1,4	0,7	0,6
Public service radio	1,3	0,4	1,1	0,6	0,8	0,6	0,6	1,0	0,7	0,6
Commercial television					0,5	0,5	1,4	1,5	1,0	0,5
N (total)	667	1069	1735	1681	1403	1789	1372	1123	731	1561

Comments: N (total) indicates the number of segments where the Prime Minister or another governmental actor (including the government as a body) appears as subject; n.d. = no data. Values below 1,0 indicate that the number of appearances by the Prime Minister is lower than that of other governmental actors. The lowest n-value for the entire period is 50 (commercial television, 2002).

Although the election of 1979 at a quick glance seems to have been the most "presidential" election, the high shares for this year are easily explained: after the coalition government between the three non-socialist parties was dissolved, Ola Ullsten formed a caretaker government less than a year before the election (see Chapter 6). Thus, that other government actors seem to have played a peripheral role in the coverage of the 1979 election is hardly surprising.

But evidence for increased Prime Minister dominance is weak also if 1979 is excluded from the analysis: excluding 1979, the figures at the end of the period are markedly higher than those in the beginning only with regard to the tabloids. Once again, thus, we find that a development in the supposed direction is most evident with regard to the tabloids. Then, what if we look at appearances as objects?

As was the case with regard to party leaders, the evidence for personification is somewhat stronger when objects are concerned. While there certainly is no continuous trend, the Prime Minister's shares, all in all, are somewhat higher at the end of the period.

However, as one looks closer at the figures for the latter half of the period it soon turns out that the only two elections with markedly higher figures are the years of 1998 and 2002. Therefore, only during Göran Persson's first and second election as Swedish Prime Minister does it seem altogether correct to talk of an apparent centralisation of news media attention. The ratios between Prime Minister as object and other governmental actors as objects are presented in table 7.10.

Table 7.10: Prime Minister as object vs. other governmental actors as objects (ratio)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	0,4	0,4	0,5	0,4	0,4	0,3	0,6	0,7	0,8	0,7
Tabloids	1,3	1,2	1,4	0,8	n.d.	n.d.	2,6	1,8	2,2	0,7
Public service television	0,5	0,4	0,4	0,4	0,3	0,3	1,1	1,5	0,6	0,2
Public service radio	0,1	0,2	0,3	0,3	0,4	0,4	0,6	0,5	0,5	0,2
Commercial television					0,6	0,6	1,4	2,1	0,9	0,2
N (total)	568	867	1581	1930	1008	1690	1643	1381	1129	1544

*Comments: N (total) indicates the number of segments where the Prime Minister or another gov-
ernmental actor (including the government as a body) appear as objects; n.d. = no data. Values
below 1,0 indicate that the number of appearances by the Prime Minister is lower than that of
other governmental actors (including the government as a body). The lowest n-value for the entire
period is 33 (public service radio, 1979).*

Images, finally, were the only variable where there with regard to party lead-
ers was a clear trend of (increased) personification. That the figures for the
Prime Minister are higher at the end of the period, at least with regard to
tabloids, is apparent in table 7.11.

Table 7.11: Prime Minister in images vs. other governmental actors in images (ratio)

	1979	1982	1985	1988	1991	1994	1998	2002	2006	2010
Broadsheets	29	1,3	1,2	0,6	0,3	0,8	1,0	1,1	1,0	0,4
Tabloids	18,5	1,1	1,9	0,7	n.d.	n.d.	3,3	1,8	2,3	0,8
N (total)	69	164	236	196	45	62	140	207	221	355

*Comments: N (total) indicates the number of images of the Prime Minister or another governmen-
tal actor (including the government as a body); n.d. = no data. Values below 1,0 indicate that the
number of images of the Prime Minister is lower than that of other governmental actors (includ-
ing the government as a body). The lowest n-value for the entire period is 30 (broadsheets, 1979).*

Altogether excluding the figures for the 1979 election—as mentioned
earlier, this year provides deviant figures due to situational factors—we
once again find a curvilinear pattern: whereas the figures are high in the
beginning as well as at the end of the period, the figures between 1988
and 1994 are all comparatively low. Hence, if the government has ever
been an arena for equals, this seems to have been the case *not* at the
beginning of the period, but during Ingvar Carlsson's tenure (1988 and
1991) and when the government has been comprised of various non-so-

cialist coalitions (1994 and 2010).[17]

7.7 The results compared to those of previous studies

In Chapter 3, three studies that rely on the same original data as the study at hand were discussed: Johansson (2008), Asp and Johansson (1999), and Bennulf and Hedberg (1993). Whereas with regard to the former there was some evidence of personification, the results of the two latter clearly reject the thesis (see table 3.4). Since Johansson (2008) is the most recent as well as the most elaborated, I prefer to focus on this study.

As in Johansson's study, the above results indicate that a trend of personification is most evident with regard to the tabloids. However, since Johansson has only studied "main actors" (main subjects and main objects have been pooled), the important differences with regard to appearance forms are altogether overlooked: whereas Johansson writes that "there is no change at all" with regard to the broadsheets (p. 187), I have been able to show that there is a clear trend with regard to the party leaders' share as subjects. However, as it turns out, this trend is in direct opposition to the thesis of increased personification—with regard to subjects in the broadsheets, personification decreases over time.

Moreover, while Johansson is right when he writes that "there seems to be a trend toward more party leader personalisation in the tabloids during the past three elections [1998, 2002 and 2006] (p. 187f.)", he fails to recognise that this largely is a result of the fact that party leaders appear more often as objects. And as far as representations in images are concerned, the trends discussed above are similar to those presented by Johansson—with one intriguing difference: in Johansson's study, the party leaders' share of image actors in the broadsheets increases with the election of 2006; above, 2006 was shown to be a year when the figure for the broadsheets decreased (see table 7.6).[18]

Finally, Johansson's overall research question was to study whether the election coverage had become more popularised, and with regard to the two dimensions that were used—dramatisation and personalisation—Johans-

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[17] The reason why the number of parties in government is a fundamental factor is obvious: when compared to single party governments, coalition governments will quite naturally tend to be marked by more inter-government competition. Therefore, the fact that the figures for 2010 are rather low in all three of the above tables should, when it all comes around, not come as a surprise.

[18] A possible explanation is that a regional newspaper, *Göteborgs-Posten*, is included in Johansson's analysis.

son drew the conclusion that a trend of dramatisation is apparent primarily in the broadsheets, whereas a trend of personalisation first and foremost is evident in the tabloids. While the above discussion supports his conclusion with regard to personalisation, it is more questionable as to whether a trend of dramatisation is most prevalent in the broadsheets (see section 7.4). But, more importantly, since Johansson has not distinguished subjects from objects he has not been able to detect whether there is a trend of more game frames in cases where the party leaders have an actual possibility of influencing the news (i.e. as subjects). As shown above, this is indeed the case. Therefore, while the news media well may be the drivers of change, we should take into consideration the fact that party leaders (as subjects) more often than before seem to discuss aspects that are traditionally not conceived of as political issues.

With regard to the question of presidentialisation, all studies discussed above except for Aylott's (2005) clearly focused on the question of "political" presidentialisation (i.e. the question of increased Prime Ministerial dominance with regard to the executive arena). Hence, while the analyses above are not directly comparable to those of previous studies, the findings can nevertheless be related to those of previous studies. Above, it has been shown that one Prime Minister in particular has appeared as first above equals—Mr. Göran Persson. This finding is clearly in line with the discussions in Aylott (2005) and Sundström (2009).

7.8 Summary

While a development of (increased) personification can be detected with regard to the tabloids, there is clearly no general trend of (increased) personification. Thus, having conceived of it in a most general form, H1 must be rejected.

However true this may be, it nevertheless remains a fact that the degree to which H1 is empirically supported varies between different variables; the single variable where H1 acquires most support being the images. With regard to this variable—which is regularly left out in international studies on personalisation—absolute increases (frequencies) come hand in hand with relative increases (shares). Thus, with regard to images, there is indeed strong support for H1.

Moreover, the analyses have also shown that it makes sense to talk of a development of (increased) party leader objectification: when party leaders appear in the coverage, it is increasingly often as objects—that is, as actors

that are discussed and commented on by others. An implication should be that party leaders in the coverage are increasingly often portrayed in ways that are at odds with an action-oriented normative ideal: instead of appearing as political forces, party leaders appear increasingly often as passive points of reference.

Chapter 8

Orientation towards personae and intimisation

In Chapter 7, the dimension of personification was under study. To stay with this would however be to provide a very one-sided account; orientation towards personae (H2) and intimisation (H3) are both indispensable parts of the concept of personalisation. And that these dimensions—together Langer (2006) refers to them under the conceptual umbrella of "personality politics"—are theoretically different from that of personification is obvious: in contrast to personification, orientation towards personae and intimisation are concerned with the question of how (rather than who); in contrast to personification, orientation towards personae and intimisation are concerned with how political actors are portrayed.

Moreover, since this study deals with the question of object-specific personalisation, H2 and H3 shall here be put to test against analyses of how party leaders are portrayed. In brief:

- H2 suggests that the news media coverage has become all the more occupied with the party leaders' inner traits.
- H3 suggests that the news media coverage has become all the more occupied with the party leaders' outer attributes.

Below, I shall briefly outline the material and the variables under study.

Material
With regard to H2 and H3, I will rely on data from only four of the elections studied above (1979, 1988, 1998 and 2010); and here, the period that has been examined is the last two weeks before the election.

The newspapers examined are, however, the same: Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet and Expressen. Moreover, in the following analyses I will—as was the case above—prefer to discuss formats rather than individual newspapers. An overview of how many articles that have been coded for each of the examined years is provided below.

Table 8.1: Number of coded articles (orientation towards personae and intimisation)

Format (medium)	1979	1988	1998	2010	All years
Broadsheets	204	147	143	144	638
Svenska Dagbladet	*112*	*76*	*56*	*75*	*319*
Dagens Nyheter	*92*	*71*	*87*	*69*	*319*
Tabloids	185	183	187	295	850
Aftonbladet	*93*	*94*	*94*	*141*	*422*
Expressen	*92*	*89*	*93*	*154*	*428*
N (total)	389	330	330	439	1488

Comments: The numbers of coded articles are 389 (1979), 330 (1988), 330 (1998) and 439 (2010).

Variables under study with regard to the written text[1]

Since only traits and attributes of the party leaders are examined, the criterion for coding an article is that at least one party leader is in focus (be it in the written text or in adjacent images). Two variables are focused on: the articles' *main theme* (dichotomous; whether focus is on personal characteristics or not) and what *traits and attributes* that are referred to (with a maximum of ten coded traits or attributes for each coded article). Notably, the units of analysis differ: with regard to the former, the unit of analysis is the entire article; with regard to the latter, the unit of analysis is individual references.[2]

8.1 Personal characteristics—have they become increasingly common?

Whereas it is important to distinguish orientation towards personae from intimisation, a first step should be to clarify whether personal characteristics— be they inner traits or outer attributes—have become increasingly common altogether. Is there, to use Langer's vocabulary (see also Hart 1994), a trend of all the more personality politics?

In the figure on the next page, no distinction is made between traits and attributes. Consequently, what the figure shows is the average number of references to a party leader's personal characteristics per coded news article.

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[1] Here I will only provide the most essential information on the variables. For further information, see the Appendix.

[2] I have chosen not to study unique references; that is, if the text on three separate occasions refers to a certain trait or attribute, all three have been coded. For a justification of this, see the Appendix.

Figure 8.1: Personal characteristics per coded news article, all four newspapers
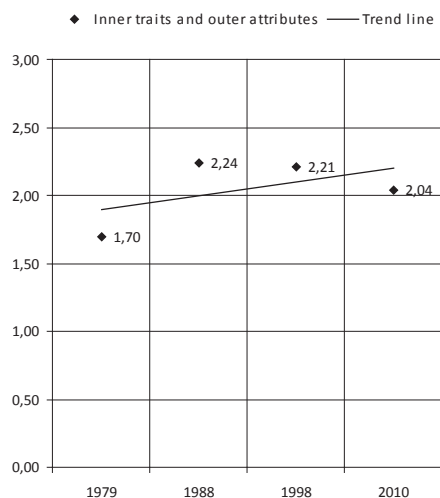
Comments: The numbers of coded articles are 389 (1979), 330 (1988), 330 (1998) and 439 (2010).

Despite there being a long-term positive trend, nothing appears to have happened since 1988; already then there were little above two personal characteristics per coded article. But while this conclusion appears as altogether reasonable, it is, indeed, incomplete: given that the number of articles focusing on a party leader has increased, the *total* number of references to personal characteristics is in 2010 considerably higher than the corresponding figures for 1979, 1988 and 1998.[3]

And to make the matter even more delicate: there is a positive trend with regard to the variable that is coded on the aggregated level; over time, that is, personal characteristics are increasingly often a coded article's main theme: in 1979, personal characteristics is the main theme in eight per cent of the articles; in 1988, 1998 and 2010 the corresponding figures are sixteen, fifteen and seventeen per cent. Consequently, although the most significant change seems to have appeared already in the 1980s, in 2010 the number of articles focusing on personal aspects is higher than ever before.

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[3] In 2010, a total of 896 characteristics were coded; the corresponding figures for 1979, 1988 and 1998 were 661, 739 and 729.

However, whereas over time there are more personal characteristics in absolute figures, it remains a non-disputable fact that there is no continuous increase of the overall mean (personal characteristics per coded article). Consequently, how should this finding be interpreted; what plausible explanations are there?

Looking at figure 8.1 one must keep one thing in mind: what the figure shows is the number of *references per coded article*; for practical reasons I have not taken into consideration how informative or long the articles are. That is to say, if there is a development towards a decreased text-image ratio (or if the articles over time have become altogether shorter), a reasonable interpretation may well be that the *relative* importance of references to personal characteristics has increased. Therefore, what do we know about how different components (e.g. headline, body text, images) have developed; have certain components—in terms of space—become more important, and this at the expense of others?

Comparing the election coverage of 2010 to that of 2006 and 2002, Asp (2011) has shown that it makes sense to talk about a *visualisation of politics*. Partially a consequence of tabloidisation (here to be understood as a format change), the ratio between written and visual components has decreased; that is, between 2002 and 2010 images became more dominant at the expense of written text.[4]

And in the light of this, the figures provided in figure 8.1 can indeed be seen in a somewhat different way: since the number of personal characteristics remains the same *despite* the visual turn in news article compositing, the status quo can be considered to be a finding that is in line with the thesis. Indeed, given the decrease of the text-image ratio, the fact that there still are two personal references could well be taken as a sign that the relative importance of personal matters has increased—in other words, that there is a personalisation of the coverage.

Moreover, figure 8.1 relies on pooled data. What if we instead look at individual formats and newspapers?

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[4] Whereas the finding by Asp in itself can be related only to a rather recent stage of this development, it is well in line with previous findings by Hård af Segerstad (1974): between 1900 and 1970 there is a general visualisation of the press coverage (see also Becker 2000 and Ekström 2006); during this time-span, Swedish newspapers became increasingly visual—and this at the expense of the written text.

Table 8.2: Personal characteristics per coded news article, different formats and newspapers

	1979	1988	1998	2010
Broadsheets	0,99	1,60	1,46	1,14
Svenska Dagbladet	0,79	1,64	1,14	0,85
Dagens Nyheter	1,23	1,55	1,67	1,45
Tabloids	2,48	2,75	2,78	2,48
Aftonbladet	2,16	2,57	2,46	2,53
Expressen	2,80	2,94	3,11	2,44
N (total)	389	330	330	439

First of all, given that the human touch is more pronounced in the tabloids than in the broadsheets it is not surprising to find that the levels for the tabloids are higher than those for the broadsheets—tabloids humanise, that is it. More interesting to note is that the trends for the two formats are similar: between the measure points of 1979 and 1988, personal characteristics become more common, but since then very little appears to have happened. Consequently, the trend presented in figure 8.1 is valid with regard to both formats; between 1988 and 2010 there is no evident trend of all the more "personality politics" (measured in terms of references per coded article).[5]

However, while a straightforward conclusion of this kind is not altogether wrong it is, once again, utterly partial. Because if we take into consideration that the number of articles focusing on a party leader varies, a somewhat different picture emerges: with regard to the *total* number of references to personal characteristics, both tabloids are marked by all the higher figures. This development is illustrated in figure 8.2 (next page).

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[5] Looking at individual newspapers, we find—not so surprisingly—more fluctuating levels. As a matter of fact, it is only with regard to the first two measure points that the same development can be detected with regard to all four newspapers; between 1979 and 1988 personal characteristics become more common. Moreover, an altogether different way of approaching the question of whether or not personal characteristics have become more common is to look at the shares of articles where no references to personal characteristics are being made. In this respect, the highest figure for both formats (and all four individual newspapers) is that of 2010 (where personal characteristics are absent in 43 per cent of the articles). While the differences between the years shall not be exaggerated, the finding nevertheless shows that the answer is contingent on how the question is formulated.

Figure 8.2: Total number of personal characteristics (frequencies)
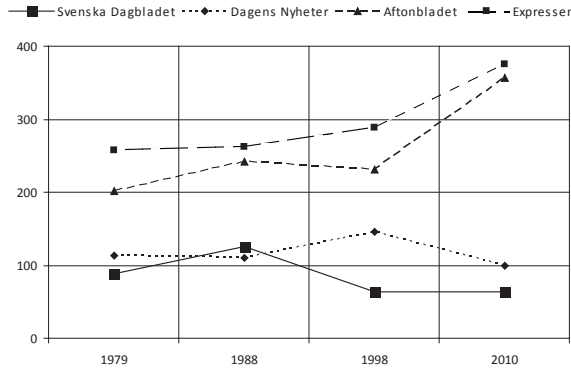
However interesting it is to examine whether or not personal characteristics have become increasingly common, the development with regard to specific personal characteristics is even more exciting. And whereas commentators that stress the importance of citizens' possibilities of making reasoned choices need not find it problematic if more of the information is concerned with individual actors' competence and reliability, they will most certainly be uncomfortable with a development where more of the information is concerned with outer attributes.

Consequently, in the section that is to follow we will look closer at the question of what personal characteristics are being focused on.

8.2 Orientation towards personae or intimisation?

First of all, it is worth repeating on what grounds the distinction between traits and attributes are made. I have chosen to rely on a distinction between characteristics that can be said to reside *within* an actor and characteristics that can be said to be part of his or her *environment* (or personal sphere). Whereas the former are hard to manipulate (or change), the latter are more open for manipulation (or change). Without wishing to get too deeply into the question of what is biologically determined, I would suggest that the former—what I will refer to in terms of inner traits—to some extent are characteristics that one is born with.[6]

Of course, in contrast to the group of characteristics that are inherited is the

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[6] Sure enough, no individual is born with, let us say, (political) competence. But it is my belief that some individuals are born with a disposition that makes it more likely that they, in mature age, will be perceived of as politically competent. They are, to put it openly, blessed with certain qualities that make them apt for politics.

group of characteristics that are acquired. Here, I will refer to the latter in terms of outer attributes. And while it is obvious that no-one is born to live with a certain partner or to have a certain hobby—of course, there are always exceptions—I am most willing to admit that other examples are less easily categorised (two examples being physical looks and religion). Therefore, what the distinction aims to do is separate the characteristics that are malleable from those that are more enduring, permanent and fixed (for an overview, see table 4.1).

Starting with the question of whether inner traits in general have become increasingly common (H2), we will later look closer at the developments with regard to different traits. As previously discussed (Chapter 5), the notion that party leaders' inner (or personal) traits have become increasingly common shall be related to the notion that the political system is marked by increasing interdependence and complexity.

Figure 8.3: Inner traits per coded news article, all four newspapers
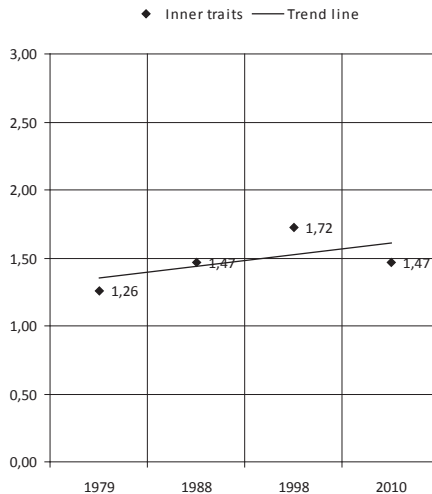
Comments: The numbers of coded articles are 389 (1979), 330 (1988), 330 (1998) and 439 (2010).

Given the result presented in figure 8.1, the result in figure 8.3 is not very surprising: there is a slightly positive trend; the investigated newspapers do indeed comment and refer to individual actors' inner traits somewhat more often over time. And, it is important to stress, even those who most persist-

ently underline the importance of a public discourse of reason and rational-
ity should find it hard to categorically criticise this development: over time,
citizens are provided with more information about the party leaders' per-
sonalities, competences and morality—and what can be so wrong with that?

Indeed, since I have argued that there are grounds to believe that indi-
vidual actors have become more important in political processes, is it not
reasonable that the information conveyed is more concerned with individu-
al leaders' abilities, morals and beliefs? I would certainly say so. Given that
the degree of uncertainty has increased (see Chapter 5), individual political
actors can today rely less on traditional and unilinear steering models (e.g.
Bang and Esmark 2009; Crozier 2010), and a consequence thereof, I sug-
gest, is that political actors must be all the more ready to rely on their own
intuition, competence and performative skills. While politics has always, to
some degree, been about acting, it is now all the more about acting without
a prewritten script—in essence: the art of politics has all the more become
the art of improvisation.[7]

Then, more specifically, what inner traits have become increasingly
common? And are there differences with regard to the two formats?

Table 8.3: Share of various traits, all four newspapers (per cent)

	1979	1988	1998	2010
Competence	26	32	29	36
Conviction and moral	28	13	30	22
Mental disposition	46	56	41	41
Total	100	101	100	99

Comments: The total numbers of coded traits are 491 (1979), 484 (1988), 567 (1998) and 646 (2010).

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[7] Of course, the notion here is not that' public performances generally are less rehearsed than before; this
would go against what has previously been argued. Instead, the argument is similar to the thesis put forth
by Daniel Innerarity; that developments implying both higher pace and increased complexity have made
political decision making increasingly difficult. In his thought-provoking book *The transformation of politics*
(2010), Innerarity writes (p. 13) that: "Lamenting on the poor functioning of politics is understandable
enough: this is a very difficult art where, more than anywhere else, we have to manage uncertainty, where
we deal only with probable and contingent events, all while only having limited time and information. And
this difficulty is even more sensitive when politics does not give itself over to a simplification of traditional
ideologies which has made society a manageable and predictable object. [...] The competence of the politician
lies in this particular ability to make collective decisions in a highly complex environment. Politics is a realm
where we innovate, not just manage." In Innerarity's words (ibid:29), politics is "the art of making do in a
given situation".

For all four measure points, we find that the inner traits that the newspapers most often refer to are those belonging to the category of mental disposition. From a strictly rationalistic perspective this is bad news: neither whether the party leaders are likeable nor how they feel are aspects that a hardcore rationalist considers to be relevant. However, the good news is that there is no trend of more references to these matters. Then what happens if we compare the two formats?

With regard to the broadsheets, traits associated with competence have in relative terms become somewhat more frequent, whereas traits associated with conviction and morality are referred to somewhat less frequently. More importantly, however, there is no tendency of more references to temper, mood and likeability (i.e. mental disposition).

Then what about the tabloids? The answer is that the general pattern remains. Traits that belong to the category of mental disposition are, for sure, those that are referred to most often but there are no indicators that these traits have become increasingly important. As a matter of fact, the figures are remarkably stable; only with regard to 1988—when traits sorted under the category of conviction and morality are rare—can any important deviations be detected.

In sum, whereas little happens with regard to the relative distribution of specific inner traits, traits as a category have, over time, become increasingly common. Consequently, whereas H1 in its general form was rejected—indeed, only with regard to the tabloids could a more general trend of personification be detected—there is more support with regard to H2. Evidently enough, the support is not overwhelming and a qualitative content analysis would probably lead to a somewhat different conclusion.[8] Nevertheless, as stated above and here examined, H2 can clearly not be rejected.

Then what about outer attributes? Whereas the development accounted for above first and foremost shall be related to the notion of increased interdependence and complexity, the assumption that outer attributes have become increasingly frequent (H3) shall in contrast be related to the development of decreased party identification (see Chapter 5). As was the case with regard to inner traits, we shall start by looking at the average number of references per coded article for all four newspapers.

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[8] Obviously, given the employed methodology, the above analysis sheds no light on the question of how traits are being discussed; what is examined is only how often they appear. Consequently, it is not being suggested that discussions and references to traits have become more detailed or thorough; this, indeed, is a question that has not been systematically examined.

Figure 8.4: Outer attributes per coded news article, all four newspapers
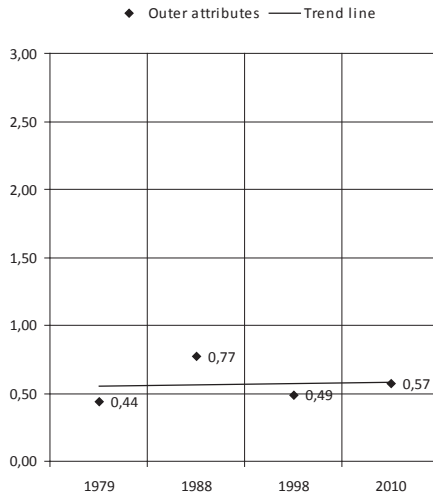
Comments: The numbers of coded articles are 389 (1979), 330 (1988), 330 (1998) and 439 (2010).

In contrast to the development with regard to inner traits, references to outer attributes are—much surprisingly—*not* becoming all the more frequent. As a matter of fact, the only figure that clearly deviates from the others is that for 1988.

Does this imply that claims suggesting the news coverage has become all the more preoccupied with superficialities are wrong? Not necessarily. Since the text-image ratio has decreased it can indeed be argued that outer attributes appear all the more often in relative terms. Therefore, what figure 8.4 signals is first and foremost that recurring claims of trivialisation are exaggerated—while there may be a difference of degree, there is certainly no difference of kind.

If this is the case, can any changes with regard to specific attributes be traced?

Table 8.4: Share of various attributes, all four newspapers (per cent)

	1979	1988	1998	2010
Looks	37	32	30	20
Lifestyle	41	43	35	36
Family	18	16	28	40
Religion	4	8	7	3
Total	100	99	100	99

Comments: The total numbers of coded attributes are 170 (1979), 255 (1988), 162 (1998) and 250 (2010).

Table 8.4 makes one development apparent: with regard to the four years under study, the relative importance of references to family and family members has increased quite dramatically (tau c=0.142; p<0.001). And, it is important to note, references to the party leaders' families are increasingly common in the tabloids as well as in the broadsheets. Whereas in 1979 there was a gap between the two formats, the family references in 2010 are as common in the broadsheets as in the tabloids (in relative figures that is; measured in absolute figures, family references are still much more frequent in the tabloids).

In contrast to family, looks is a category with decreasing shares. That attributes related to party leaders' physical appearances in relative terms are referred to less frequently must, obviously, be put against the fact that family is a category that is referred to more frequently. Despite this, is the finding—contrary to the claims that reports on politics have become all the more concerned with style and image— not rather surprising? Indeed, for the entire research period the absolute figures for looks are—with regard to both broadsheets and tabloids—highest for the coverage of the 1988 election. A concrete example illustrating that looks were a part of the election coverage already in the 1980s is provided on the next page spread.

Expressen, 14 September, 1988.

In the article the readers are told that "the most colourful element of this year's election campaign has not been sparkling arguments or brilliant political proposals. No, what has been most colourful is the party leaders' sweaters." A few lines later, the focus is on one specific garment that one specific party leader has worn: "Has anybody missed 'Olle's olle'; that is, Olof Johansson's peppery cardigan in environmentally green and with leather buttons? It is cable patterned and moss stitched and was bought at NK, the brand is Josef Sachs." The article ends with a discussion on whether it is the sweaters that will determine the outcome of the election: "Is it the sweaters that will seal the election – and in that case: what style do we as voters prefer?"

VAL-EXTRA

Carl Bildt har i sitt tröjval tydligt demonstrerat att han inte anser sig oavbrutet behöva framtona i mörkblått. Han drar sig inte ens för att uppträda i motståndarlägrets röda färg. Just denna tröja har han köpt på Island.

OLLES OLLE
— koftan som startade det stora tröjkriget

De färgstarkaste inslagen i årets valdebatt har icke haft med gnistrande argument och lysande politiska utspel att göra.

Nej, färgstarkast har partiledarnas tröjor varit. Dessa sticketyg har stuckit oss i ögonen från enorma valaffischer och piggat upp bilder från trista torgmöten.

Det är framför allt de borgerliga partiledarna som bländat oss med sina djärvt mönstrade skapelser och sina flätstickade cardiganer.

Är det någon som missat Olles olle, Olof Johanssons ettrigt miljögröna kofta med läderknappar? Den är både flätmönstrad och mosstickad och ursprungligen inhandlad på NK inför annonskampanjen, märket är Josef Sachs.

Denna tröja har väckt enorm uppmärksamhet och den vänligaste frågan i centerns valstugor har icke handlat om kärnkraft eller marginalskatter utan lytt:

— Finns det stickmönster till Olles olle?

— Det finns nu. Mönstret kan avhämtas i alla c-märkta valstugor och valbyråer.

Suckar lite uppgivet

Man har döpt den till herrcardigan "Fyrklöver" och beskrivningen gäller storlekarna 44 till 58.

— När vi fotograferat Olof i tröjan — som han tycker är lite för grön till och med för en centerpartist — suckar han lite uppgivet och säger ...

hade på sig eller Gösta Bohman?

Och det är inte medias fel att det blivit på det här sättet, politikerna har själva bidragit till att de är på väg att bli någon sorts levande klippdockor.

— Min ambition är att klä mig så att ingen lägger märke till vad jag har på mig, säger Bengt Westerberg som vi haffade vid ett besök på Farsta sjukhus. Han var då klädd i den typiska politikergrå kostymen, i ett snitt som håller modemåttet just nu. Men även han har statat i den andra tröjan ljusigare än den andra de här senaste veckorna.

En turkos och en gul

— Jag har två tröjor, säger han, en turkos som jag köpte förra året och en gul som jag köpte i år.

— Är det någon som vill veta vilar jag köpt dem, så kommer bägge från MAN-butiken i Kungälv. Det beror på att jag passerade Kungälv på väg till Marstrand förra året och på vägen hem kom jag ihåg den eny tröja. Och eftersom de hade vad jag ville ha då så återvände jag även i år.

Så Westerberg som heller icke ville tillått att han björjat vännlägga sig extra om klädseln i röstvärvarnit.

Men Carl Bildt då, han har ju visat upp den ena ...

tröjan stiligare än den andra på sistone. Vilken "imagemaker" har skaffat honom dem, tro?

Fick tag på hans presssekreterare Chris Heister i en buss på väg till Linköping och hon berättade att den marinblå och den vita tröjan är moderatröjor. Den vinröda med trianglar på och den grå som är likadan, dem köpte han på Island i fjol, alldeles själv.

Och så har han en mycket vacker tröja med björnar och den har folk faktiskt ringt och velat få mönstret till, men det har icke gått. Hans hustru Mia hade köpt den åt honom i Helsingfors.

— Han har tröjor när han besöker skolor och bevistar torgmöten, det är trevligast att vara klädd som dem man talar med. Till hösten i riksdagen blir det kavaj och slips igen för hela slanten.

— Om han har någon rädgivare i klädfrågor? Jag vet inte, jag brukar inte vara med när han klär sig på mornarna.

Carlsson då, hur har han det med tröjorna? Han är nog den partiledare som ...

lyckats bäst med att klä sig som Westerberg tycker en politiker ska så att ingen egentligen reflekterar över vad han har på sig Har han någon gång satt på sig en iögonfallande solgul tröja, ja då kan man vara säker på att hitta något socialdemokratiskt lämpligt firmatryck eller en stiliserad liten ros på den.

Avgör de valet?

Den centrala politiska frågan just nu lyder således:

Är det tröjorna som kommer att avgöra valet och i så fall, vilken typ föredrar vi väljare? Den naturligt flärdfria politikerlooken eller partiledaren som klippta ur ett glassigt modereportage?

Är det flärdfriheten som är utslagsgivande, så tar Lars Werner hem spelet Är det den trendigare glassigheten som avgör i år, då vinner Olof Johansson valet. Eller rättare sagt hans annonsbyrå.

Cecilia Hagen

MITT I VALRÖRELSEN

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Se så rar Bengt Westerberg ter sig, i troskyldigt havs-grön tröja, klappande små barn. Hans baktanke när han köpte tröjan var givetvis att han skulle te sig just så rar.

Här är den, Olles olle, som nu föreligger i centerns valstugor som stickbeskrivning under beteckningen "herrcardigan Fyrklöver". Vinner den valet åt de ursprungsgröna eller har den illiga färgen skymt det politiska budskapet?

Ingvar Carlsson har inte excellerat i tröjor i samma utsträckning som de borgerliga ledarna. Att han tagit på sig den här tröjan beror inte på att den klär honom, den är tillåten också. Det står "Vi servar dig, Handelsanställdas förbund" på den.

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Whereas, with regard to traits, I have stressed the similarities between the past and the present, I would with regard to family references instead wish to underline the differences. The rather stiff and detached tone that marked the beginning of the research period has, over time, come to be increasingly replaced by references that signal intimacy, warmth and love; from having been portrayed as men *backed up* by their wives—for the research period, three out of four party leaders are men—the party leaders are all the more often portrayed as men *side by side* with their wives. Increasingly often, party leaders are also portrayed as warm and caring parents. Some pictures illustrating this trend of intimisation are provided on the page spreads that follow.

Before presenting a more systematic analysis of the images, it makes sense to briefly summarise the above findings:

1. The number of personal characteristics per coded article increased between 1979 and 1988; since then, however, the number of characteristics (per article) has remained roughly the same.
2. Inner traits have become more common over the periodin its entirety; with regard to the hypotheses, an implication is that there is empirical support for H2.
3. Whereas outer attributes as a group have not become more common, references to family have over time become much more frequent. An implication is that whereas H3 in its general form must be rejected, there is a strong trend of a specific form of intimisation: over time, the party leaders are increasingly often referred to as partners and parents.

Aftonbladet, 16 September, 1979: Olof and Lisbet Palme.
Headline: "Lisbet on the train to Stockholm last night: You can be satisfied now, Olof"
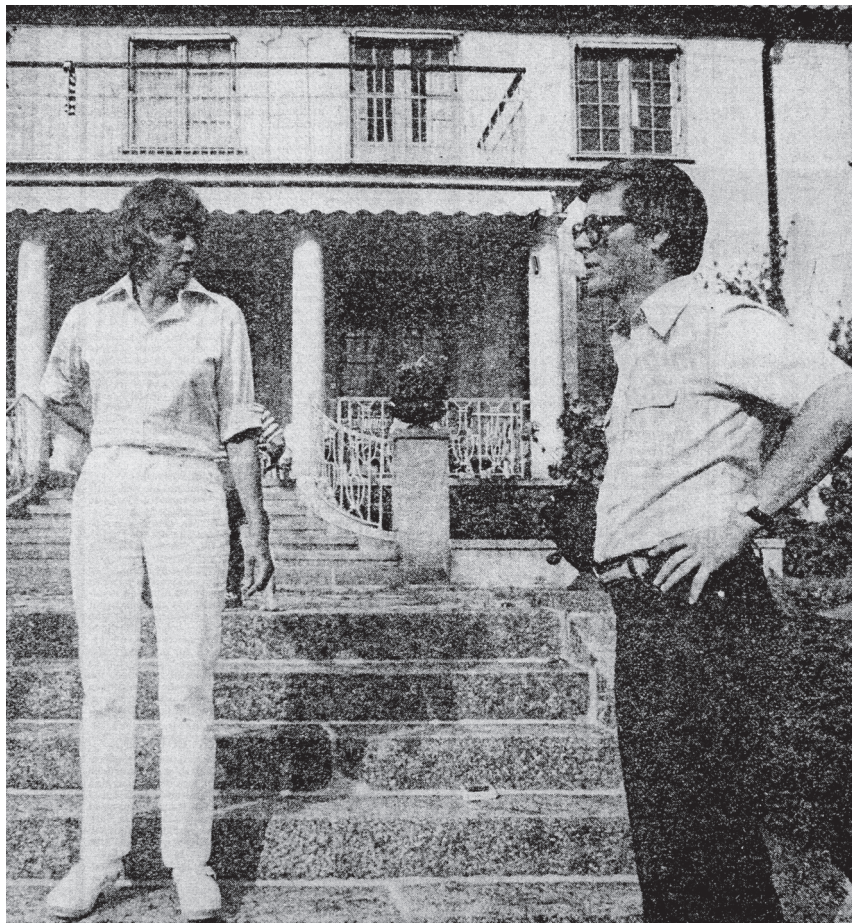
Expressen, 2 September, 1979: Ola and Evi Ullsten.
Caption: "Evi Ullsten, 48, the Prime Minister's wife, at Harpsund. Normally, she works as a chemical engineer on the laboratory at Huddinge sjukhus. She lives in a townhouse in Skärholmen and has been married to Ola for 18 years."

Expressen 2 September, 1979: Gösta and Gunnel Bohman.
Caption: "Here is Gunnel Bohman, 66, listening to Gösta campaigning on the square in Boden. Having recently retired, Gunnel Bohman worked in the parliamentary library for 41 years. She has been married to Gösta for almost as long."

**Expressen 8 September, 1998: Alf, Sonja and Mikaela Svensson.**
Headline: "Welcome home to Alf's Sweden"
Caption: "The leader of the Christian Democrats, Alf Svensson, at the dinner table with his wife, Sonja, and daughter, Mikaela. This is Alf's vision of Swedish society. All of the family members that are at home gather for a joint dinner below the crystal chandelier."

Dagens Nyheter, 18 September, 2010: Fredrik and Filippa Reinfeldt.
Caption: "The Moderate leader spent Friday on a bus tour to the industrial cities of Eskilstuna and Västerås with his wife Filippa."
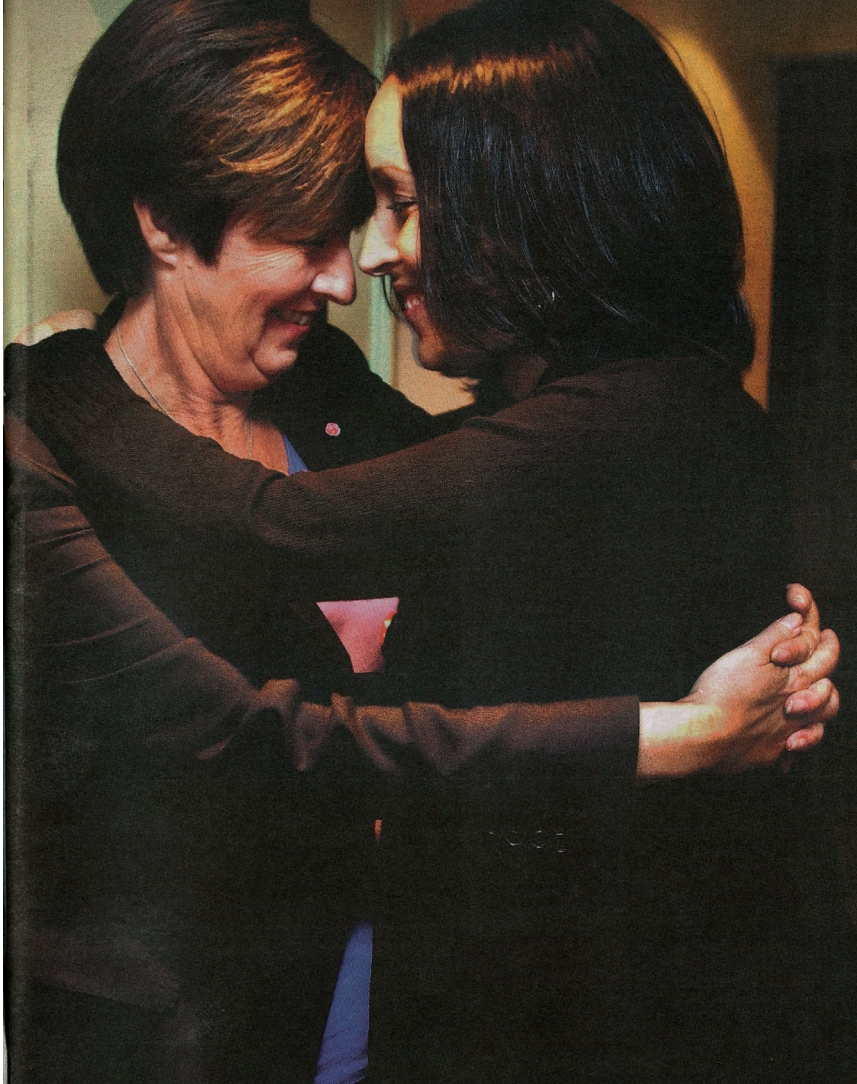
Aftonbladet 19 September, 2010: Mona Sahlin and Ann-Sofie Sahlin Cox.
Headline: "Goodnight, mom"
Caption: "Ann-Sofie Sahlin Cox lives in the US and mother and daughter seized all opportunities to spend some time together, despite the franticness during the last days of campaigning. 'It is cool to be able to vote for one's own mom. It is something I will never forget', says Ann-Sofie. Tonight Ann-Sofie's mom can become Sweden's first female Prime Minister."

8.3 Party leaders in images: the variables and why they are studied

Whereas a political actor can be assumed to be quite influential with regard to news media texts, it seems uncontroversial to suggest that it is the news media actor who has the upper hand when it comes to the images (Adatto 2008; see also Olsson 2000, Ekström 2006, Kroon Lundell 2010). Sure enough, if the wanted image depends upon the political actor's cooperation—the journalist or the photographer may, for example, ask the political actor to strike a certain pose—then the news media actor is forced to enter the game of negotiated interaction and exchange. But since a majority of the images are not the result of conscious arrangements, political actors are, with regard to visual representations, much at the mercy of the news media actors. With regard to newspaper images, that is, there is less room for the political actor to influence the output than there is with regard to words; with regard to images, the power of the news media actor looms large.

Then, why are images of central interest to this study?

First of all, although there today are many empirical studies on personalisation, visual representations remain largely overlooked. Thus, a pragmatic answer is that we still know very little about the visual manifestations of personalisation (e.g. Adam and Maier 2010).

Secondly, if it is true that image-making and style have become increasingly important for political success, a straightforward reason for the analyses is that images have become increasingly important for political communication as a practice (e.g. Grabe and Bucy 2009, Schill 2012).

Thirdly, in section 5.3 it was suggested that the relation between political actors and citizens should have changed; what matters in contemporary politics is not only what political actors can provide in terms of "material goods", also the degree to which they can serve as likeable objects of identification is of importance. And if this is true, then the question of how political actors are visually portrayed becomes crucial. While the first two reasons for the following image analyses need little clarification, point three, in contrast, deserves a more thorough argumentation.

The core of the argument was introduced in section 5.3: whereas instrumental, class-based relations may have characterised high modernity, citizens under late modernity are linked to the political world (and its actors) in a less materialistic and more personal way. In late-modern societies, collective affiliations grounded in interest are all the more supplemented with

individual relations based on identity and affection. In the words of Blondel and Thiébault (2010):

> Since such sentiments [e.g. loyalty, respect, love, dislike] are known to play a part in everyday life […], it is only natural that the same should be expected to apply to parties. […] In the end, what is meant by the existence of such 'potential' personal feelings with respect to parties is that, in a number of cases, the attractiveness of the groups or of the party will be increased (or on the contrary decreased) because of the sentiments which the individual may have about the group. It is in this way that 'appearance' also plays a part in the relationship between citizens and the parties they support alongside the view which the citizens are likely to have about whether the party which they support is 'good for them' in policy terms.
>
> Blondel and Thiébault 2010:56f

And if, indeed, likeability and identification have become increasingly important, what consequences can we expect there to be with regard to visual representations of political actors? With regard to both likeability and possibilities of identification it seems quite uncontroversial to suggest that there must be a relation. In essence, a political actor must open out and let the audience know that he or she is aware of its existence. And one way of letting the audience know that it is recognised is, quite obviously, to establish eye contact. Therefore, a first hypothesis is that party leaders increasingly often are portrayed looking straight into the camera.

In contrast to gaze direction, which can be coupled to likeability as well as identification, other aspects are more easily connected to either of the two. One aspect that first and foremost seems to be concerned with the question of likeability is mood (temper). As above, the argument is pretty straightforward: we like people that we believe will treat us in a friendly manner, and despite the fact that not all friendly people are happy, happy faces should generally signal friendliness, not hostility. Thus, a second hypothesis is that party leaders are increasingly often portrayed when they appear to be in a good mood (at ease).

Whereas up to now there has been little reason to take the readership into consideration, notions about the readers are, of course, crucial with regard to aspects that can be related to physical appearances and looks. Therefore, what can people in the audience be assumed to have in common? What characterises those that are addressed by the visuals?

Two things have come to mind: firstly, a majority of them should have little personal experience of the traditional settings of mediated politics (e.g. parliament, press conferences, and public political meetings). Secondly, a majority of them should spend more time in jeans and Adidas than in tailor-made costumes (skirt-suits) from Milan. Thus, with regard to the first point, the notion is that the average citizen will find it easier to identify with political actors that are portrayed outside of the traditional settings for politics; with regard to the second point, the notion is that the average citizen will find it easier to identify with political actors if they are less formally dressed. Consequently, a third hypothesis is that party leaders all the more often are portrayed in non-traditional political settings (e.g. private livings rooms, restaurants, in nature); and a fourth hypothesis is that party leaders all the more often are portrayed wearing casual clothes.[9]

Finally, a point that also should be important is the perceptions of physical distance. Obviously, the notion here is that it is easier to identify with people that are physically close; the more remote an actor appears to be, the harder will it be for him or her to serve as an object of identification (Grabe and Bucy 2009).

On the opposite page, we start by looking closer at developments with regard to gaze direction, mood and distance (for coding principles, see the Appendix).

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[9] In the words of Grabe and Bucy (2009:171): "Casual and sports clothing (jeans, sports shirts, and shorts) more directly signals that a candidate is an everyday citizen. Coupled with athletic activities or depictions of physical work, populist framing establishes empathy with common folk and presents the candidate as one of us." That facial similarity (voter-politician) is of importance for how political actors are evaluated is, for example, illustrated in experiments by Bailenson *et al* (2008).

Figure 8.5: Gaze (into camera), mood (happy/at ease) and distance (close-up), all four newspapers (per cent)
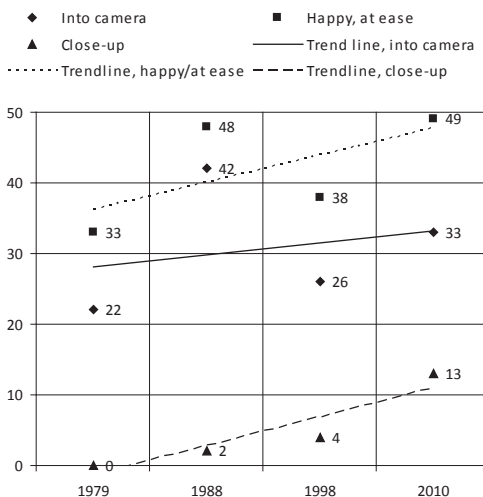
Comments: The numbers of coded images are with regard to all three variables 233 (1979), 211 (1988), 221 (1998) and 448 (2010).

What figure 8.5 shows is that there are slightly positive trends when data from all four measure points are considered—that is, party leaders are increasingly often portrayed in an apparently good mood; from what appears to be a close distance; and when they are looking straight into the camera.

However, as we look closer at the figures for individual years, we once again find that the detected trends are largely explained by the development that took place between 1979 and 1988. Consequently, the conclusion can only be that figure 8.5 provides the above hypotheses with modest support.

But, then again, a more spectacular picture emerges if *absolute* numbers are considered: since the number of images between the last two elections has increased quite dramatically, the number of images showing happy party leaders (mood) and party leaders looking into the camera (gaze direction) have both increased by almost 160 per cent. Moreover, with regard to close-ups (distance), the development is even more dramatic: here, the increase is more than five-fold. Therefore, an important conclusion is once again that the overall answer is strongly dependent on what figures are considered: using relative figures, the hypotheses gain only weak support; using

absolute figures, the support is more robust.

Whereas I have suggested that the three variables investigated above can be coupled to identification as well as likeability, the two variables investigated below are most easily related to identification.

Figure 8.6: Arena (non-traditional arena) and clothes (casual clothes), all four newspapers (per cent)
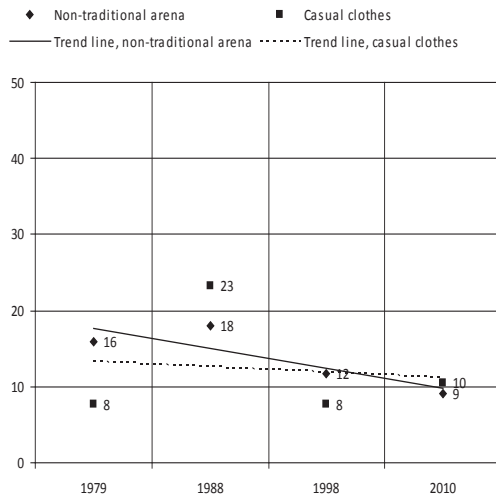
Comments: The numbers of coded images are with regard to both variables 233 (1979), 211 (1988), 221 (1998) and 448 (2010).

Somewhat surprisingly, neither portrayals in non-traditional arenas nor casual clothes have become more common. Once again, however, the figures for 1988 stand out: from having been portrayed in casual clothes in less than one image out of ten, the proportion of images portraying party leaders in casual clothes had in 1988 increased to roughly one out of four. Notably, it has above been shown that 1988 was a year when the coverage in relative terms was extraordinarily preoccupied with outer traits.

How should this finding be interpreted? Although the concept of time is crucial to this study I have on several occasions argued that also situational factors must be considered. Therefore, what specific circumstances should be borne in mind when the coverage of 1988 is examined?

Two closely related features come to my mind: firstly, the election of

1988 has become known as "the environmental election" (Bennulf and Holmberg 1990). Never before—and certainly never since—had the national news media been as preoccupied with the environment issue. And a consequence of this, I suggest, is that in 1988 there were comparatively good possibilities for the news media to portray political actors in non-traditional political settings.

Secondly, 1988 was the year when the Greens first entered the parliament. And started as an organisation that was to stand in contrast to the traditional parties, those who represented the Greens were eager to show that they were not a part of the political establishment; in symbolic contrast to those representing the traditional parties, people representing the Greens could easily appear in the news dressed in worn-out jeans and pullovers.

In contrast, that representatives of the Greens today are portrayed very much like representatives of any other party is apparent in table 8.5.

Table 8.5: Arena (non-traditional) and clothes (casual) in the images where a spokesperson for the Greens is portrayed, all four newspapers (per cent)

	1988	2010
Non-traditional arena	33	10
Casual clothes	75	20
N (total)	24	41

Comments: N (total) indicates the number of coded images of spokespersons representing the Greens. 1998 is excluded due to a low number of images.

Although the number of images that the above figures rely on is low, I nevertheless believe the conveyed picture to be illustrative: in 1988, the spokesperson representing the Greens appeared in a non-traditional arena in every third picture, and in as many as three out of four pictures, the portrayed spokesperson was casually dressed. In contrast, the corresponding proportions for the party leaders representing "the traditional five" are as low as one per seven (non-traditional arena) and one per six (casual clothes). Consequently, in the images conveyed the representatives for the Greens really did seem different. In contrast, if we do the same comparisons for 2010 it is only with regard to how the party leaders are dressed that a small difference remains.

Therefore, in sum: the election campaign of 1988 was different from other campaigns, partially because of the importance given to the environ-

ment, and partially because a new party was about to enter the scene.

And, as discussed in Chapter 2, if the political system is conceived of as a web of relations (actors-actors and actors-issues), is it not logical to presume that the success of the Greens should have consequences for the decisions taken by other actors? Since opinion polls indicated that the Greens would do well, other actors should have become more ready to adopt the Greens' formula (a more informal style, less "briefcase politics", and a more down to earth way of campaigning). Not least since this approach, for obvious reasons, is in line with how the news media prefer to cover politics.[10]

All in all, with regard to the five hypotheses that were tested it must be concluded that the overall support is mixed. In only one case the support was clear (distance); in two cases the support was modest (gaze, mood); and in two cases there was really no support at all (arena, dress).

8.4 Summary

While it has been shown that there is rather clear support for H2, the question of whether H3 is empirically supported is more complex: on the one hand, the number of outer attributes per coded article has not increased; on the other, since news articles over time are of an increasingly visual character—there is a long-term decrease of the text-image ratio—it could well be argued that the relative importance of outer attributes should have increased. However, as the hypotheses have originally been formulated it must be concluded that there is general support for H2 whereas H3, in contrast, has a lack of general support.

Nevertheless, a significant increase was detected with regard to references to one specific outer attribute, namely that of family and family members. Consequently, whereas it has not been suggested that the period under study is marked by intimisation in general, it remains a fact that references to the most personal spheres have become increasingly common.

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[10] Three other factors that shall be borne in mind with regard to the 1988 election is that 1) the average age of the party leaders was rather low (46 years); 2) the average time that the party leaders had been leading their parties was comparatively modest (5 years), and 3) against the background of the assassination of Prime Minister Olof Palme, the mandate period of 1985-1988 was marked by low levels of inter-party competition and conflict.

Chapter 9

Putting the findings against a theoretical relief

In the preceding two chapters, the empirical results of this study were presented. Firstly, it was concluded that there is no general support for H1; to talk of a trend of personification turned out to make sense only with regard to the tabloids. Secondly, concerning H2 and H3 it was shown that there is general support only with regard to the former; H3, in contrast, has a lack of general support. Thirdly, a strong trend of increased leader-orientation was detected for the images.

In this chapter, it is my intention to focus on some of the findings from a more theoretical perspective. Consequently, here I shall discuss:

1. How personalisation can be related to a trend of societal emotionalisation
2. How objectification can be related to the role of late-modern celebrities
3. Why increased distance between political leaders and citizens can be assumed to fuel personalisation
4. How party leaders increasingly often are portrayed as affectionate and caring human beings
5. The importance of absolute figures
6. Why previous research suggests that party leader effects in Sweden are small

9.1 Entering the world of emotions, celebrities and fame

The study has addressed the question of personalisation from an explicitly longitudinal perspective. This means that the most central question has been whether or not a trend of personalisation can be detected; and with this approach, developments over time are clearly more interesting than levels. Therefore, while comparisons between different formats have been made, the primary question has not been to provide an assessment of the degrees to which different news formats personalise their coverage—focus

has simply been on overall trends.

Nevertheless, the first finding that shall be discussed here is the fact that a trend of personalisation is most evident with regard to the tabloids. How should this finding be interpreted?

Finding 1: tabloids and the emergence of a celebrity frame

When presenting the results, I have on some occasions related the findings to discussions on the role of fame and celebrity in late-modern societies. A central notion has been that politics has become increasingly interwoven with popular culture and entertainment.

Of course, what the parallel suggests is not that mediated politics has come to play a largely entertaining function; for this, citizens in late-modern societies have plenty of other opportunities. Instead, what the parallel suggests is that the formula for presenting political actors over time has become harder to distinguish from the formula for presenting film stars, musicians and celebrities; and since this "infotainment" formula (Brants 1998) should have been quite unproblematic for the tabloids to adopt it is indeed not much of a surprise that the tabloids are more marked by personalisation than both the broadsheets and the public service media.

For an example of this emerging celebrity frame, take a look at the picture on the opposite page. What it illustrates is not a movie star appearing at the Oscars, but Maria Wetterstrand, spokesperson for the Greens, at the 2009 Nobel Prize award. Indeed, whereas the Greens may once have appeared to be a party first and foremost for idealistic environmentalists, the packaging of the party is today little different from the packaging of other parties. Today, the Greens do not campaign in local costumes, beak boots and Fjällräven rucksacks; today representatives for the Greens are as elegantly wrapped-up as any other party political actors.

It could certainly be argued that one example hardly proves a trend, but whereas political actors previously appeared at galas and prize ceremonies every now and then—not least as prize distributors—they have now become regular and much noticed guests at these kinds of arrangements. Notably, the adjacent image of Wetterstrand was published less than two weeks before the election—a week earlier, Wetterstrand had together with the Foreign Minister Carl Bildt appeared as a prize distributor at a gala for

Aftonbladet, September 8, 2010.
Maria Wetterstrand, spkokesperson for the Greens, at the 2009 Nobel Prize award.

Aftonbladet, September 9, 2010.
Fredrik and Filippa Reinfeldt in Stockholm City Hall.

Swedish musicians.[1]

And in order not to stay with this example, let us take a closer look at the picture on the previos page spread. What it illustrates is not an upper-class woman seductively outstretched in an armchair with the butler some metres away; instead, what is shown is Fredrik and Filippa Reinfeldt, the Swedish Prime Minister and his wife, waiting to meet crown princess Victoria and Daniel Westling in Stockholm City Hall the day before their wedding.

Indeed, what is interesting in this picture is that it portrays the couple in what appears to be a private moment; the photographer has here been allowed to portray the Reinfeldts "behind the curtains". Consequently, as readers we are to decode the picture as evidence of what the Reinfeldts are like when the camera lights are switched off; the image very cleverly provides us with a narrative of what the two are like as authentic personal human beings (cf. back-region behaviour in Goffman 1990).[2]

Obviously, this is exactly what the notion of a strategic projection of personae and attributes implies: by sharing this moment with the readers (voters), Reinfeldt cleverly conveys a picture of what he wants us to believe that he as a private person is like; and here, the conveyed picture resonates well with the picture that, during his time in office, he has made great efforts to establish: "I

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[1] Somewhat surprisingly, a forum where Wetterstrand has not yet been seen is the weekly talk show of *Skavlan*. As it seems from the guest list, this show is otherwise on every leading politician's "must-do list": between January 2009 and March 2012, *Skavlan* was visited by as many as nine top politicians (Göran Persson, Carl Bildt, Mona Sahlin, Anders Borg, Margot Wallström, Gudrun Schyman, Thomas Bodström, and Håkan Juholt). Of these, two appeared not once but twice (Carl Bildt and Fredrik Reinfeldt). However, only one politician has been on the show three times—Mona Sahlin. Moreover, the intermingling of politics and popular culture becomes even more evident if we look at the persons that have appeared alongside with the mentioned politicians. Among those that Carl Bildt has appeared together with are Titiyo (musician), Kajsa Bergqvist (high jumper), and Noomi Rapace (actress); among those that Mona Sahlin has appeared with are Erica Jong (author), Timbuktu (musician) and Carolina Klüft (long jumper); Fredrik Reinfeldt, finally, has appeared with, for example, Nina Persson (musician), Lykke Li (musician), and Susanna Kallur (runner of 60 and 100 metre hurdles). It is certainly true that the situation in Sweden is still very different from that of the US (and, to use a case that is discussed less often, Finland); with some exceptions, stars and celebrities from other spheres have not themselves become politicians (for an account on "celebrity politicians", see Street 2004). Acknowledging this difference, the phenomenon of celebrity endorsement is nevertheless a most regular feature of today's campaigns. Among the musicians who participated in political meetings or took an active political stand before the 2010 election are Wille Craaford (the Moderate Party); Marit Bergman (the Social Democratic Party); Carola (the Christian Democratic Party); Timbuktu (the Social Democratic Party); Miss Li (the Social Democratic Party); Anders "Moneybrother" Wedin (the Social Democratic Party); The Knife (the Feminist Initiative); Benny Andersson (the Feminist Initiative) and Mange Schmidt (the Moderate Party).

[2] As Kiko Adatto (2008:30f) so tellingly puts it: "In the early days of television, candidates had to learn how to pose for the television camera. Then they mastered the media event. In the wake of YouTube, MySpace, and Facebook, the best pose is to appear unposed."

am a reasonable man. I am a man that can listen. Indeed, I personify the very notion of a modern, compassionate conservative."

Then, against what metatheoretical background shall this development be understood?

One who has tried to provide an answer is Barry Richards (2004, 2007). What Richards suggests is, essentially, that there has been an emotionalisation of society. Due to the fact that popular culture—which according to Richard is "substantially about feeling"—has permeated society on all its levels, "we now seek certain kinds of emotionalised experience of politics that we have not done in the past" (ibid 2004:340). Consequently, "either politics, and especially the communication of politics to the public, begins to offer more of these experiences in tune with the concerns of popular culture, or it becomes increasingly alien to the preoccupations of the majority of the public, and the democratic deficit grows".

Thus, in Richards' view it is the very preconditions for politics that have changed. In order to remain politically powerful, political actors must now approach citizens in more personal and emotional manners than before. What I personally find as quite refreshing with this view—after all, it has obvious similarities to what I have previously argued—is that it puts notions of a golden past aside and focuses on the present: sure enough, there is much with the situation at hand that we have reasons to criticise, but what are the actual alternatives? If the very conditions for politics have changed, is it not inevitable that reality will be at cross with a rationalistic Habermasian ideal? Indeed, would a purely rationalistic discourse not imply that mediations of politics—much like politics itself—become a concern for a resource-strong few?[3]

A second main finding has been that the subject-object ratio has decreased. How should this finding be interpreted?

Finding 2: objectification of party leaders, commodification of politics

With an action-oriented understanding of the concept of the political, an obvious implication of the decreased subject-object ratio is that party leaders over time play less of a main role. Sure they are important, but not in

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[3] Moreover, whereas it is easy to see the shortcomings of the present, already before the era of telecommunications should the situation have been quite different from what is prescribed by a rationalistic ideal. Indeed, as far back as in 1933, political scientist Edvard Thermaenius argued that Swedish election campaigns had become "Americanised" (see quotation in Esaiasson 1985:180).

the same way as before, when they first and foremost appeared as subjects. Instead, party leaders have over time increasingly come to play the role of fix-points—that is, the role of objects that other, active agents can relate to. Therefore, with regard to how party leaders are portrayed, it does make sense to talk of a trend of objectification.

Once again, this empirical finding can be related to theoretical notions on the role that celebrities play. Marshall (2001), for instance, writes that "the [political] leader is reconstructed as a commodity to some degree as he or she enters into an election campaign couched in the discourse of consumption choice. [...] With the absorption of the commodity structure into the political system, there is also acceleration in the production of images of politics. There is a concurrent production of political leadership and production of new ways of presenting that leadership that parallel the circulation of commodities in other spheres" (p. 206; cf. Ewen 1988, Turner 2004; for a historical account of the emergence of a celebrity culture, see Ponce de Leon 2002).[4]

Leaving Marshall's explanations aside, the analogy that he makes is noteworthy: when party leaders appear in the news media it is—as shown previously—increasingly often as objects. And an implication of this is that the way political actors are presented (or packaged) has become increasingly similar to the way that celebrities are presented. In both cases, the portrayed actors can serve as objects for the projection of individual identities; in both of them, the focus is on feelings rather than actions—in essence, like celebrities in magazines, party leaders are increasingly portrayed as objects for consumption.

Moreover, actor-audience relations can in both cases be conceived of as mixtures between feelings of proximity (familiarity) and distance (peculiarity). As Marshall puts it:

> The modern politics of aura and distance is drawn into the constant search for the politics of the personal and the intimate, so that the portrayed image can somehow be matched by the 'real' activities of the individual candidate. In the same way the film celebrity is constructed between his or her filmic aura and how that intersects with his or her everyday behaviour, the political leader becomes the object of scrutiny not so much on policies but almost in terms of personal habits.
>
> Marshall 2001:230

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[4] Notably, with regard to the development in the Anglo-Saxon countries (especially, the UK, the US and Australia), Turner (2004:133) discusses the development in terms of a "celebritisation of politics".

Indeed, this paradoxical combination of proximity and distance is perhaps what most characterises contemporary mediated politics: at the same time that our political leaders all the more seem to be hovering above us—as a matter of fact, few of us go regularly to multilateral meetings in Brussels—we want them to be and act like were they one of us. In essence, while we want our leaders to be strong and forceful, we want them to be not too heroic—as a matter of fact, it could be argued that the kind of leader that we today look for is one that reminds us of our "good selves"; the kind of person that we entrust with the running of our tenant organisation; the kind of parent who we believe is most likely to protests if our kids are served cold food at school.

On the surface of it, the described development does seem contradictory: as the everyday lives of national political actors have become more different from that of ordinary citizens—in the early 1970s, you could still find the telephone number of the Swedish Prime Minister in the telephone book (Östberg 2009; Berggren 2010)—we seem to be all the more presented with information on their likes and dislikes; what they prefer to eat and drink, with whom, and when.

However, as one thinks about it, this paradox is not strange but altogether logical. Because if the perceived distance between citizens and power holders has increased, is it then not reasonable to assume that citizens—in order not to disconnect from party politics altogether—more frequently than before want to be assured that their power holders are men and women of flesh and blood? That is, in comparison to before, party leaders and other top politicians must work more actively to portray an aura of ordinariness. In sum: in order for party leaders and other political actors to remain authoritative, they now must accept a nivellation of their mediated personaes (Meyrowitz 1986).

Then, if this indeed is the case, how can it theoretically be connected to a trend of increased objectification?

Although I have suggested that political actors should generally have become less reluctant to project their own personaes, I have *not* suggested that they should be more willing to discuss aspects from within their personal sphere than, for example, journalists. Consequently, as "non-party leaders" increasingly often appear as subjects, the possibilities of "non-party leaders" to frame the news should have increased. And therefore, the crucial question is really quite simple: if the possibilities for other actors to shape the

news have increased, are there grounds to believe that the coverage should have become increasingly preoccupied with party leaders' personal lives?

I do believe so. Because although party leaders over time should have become less reluctant to use their own personaes, they should nevertheless be marked by the notion that proper politics is a collective affair concerning issues. Indeed, since an open use of personal characteristics still is regarded with suspicion, personalisation as a strategic decision can be conceived of as a double-edged sword: that which—if used cleverly—is considered to be an advantage can—if used excessively—also fire back (Thompson 2000). Therefore, it is indeed reasonable to assume that a trend of increased party leader objectification goes hand in hand with a trend of intimisation.

But, a critical reader will remark, has it really been shown that there is a significant increase with regard to references to outer attributes? Were we not, in contrast, told that the differences between the examined years, in this respect, were rather small?

To some extent this is true. Neither with regard to looks, nor with regard to lifestyle, can a trend of all the higher absolute figures be detected. However, with regard to references to family members, the increase is indeed substantial: from having occurred 30 times during the last two weeks of the 1979 campaign, references to family occurred 101 times during the last two weeks of the 2010 campaign. Therefore, although it would be incorrect to suggest that outer attributes have become increasingly common in general, the very most intimate, personal sphere—that of family and family relations—is, indeed, being referred to more often.[5] And this finding smoothly leads us to the next issue.

Finding 3: Passionate party leaders

A third main finding is that party leaders over time are increasingly often portrayed as affectionate family members. That is, family members do not only occur all the more frequently—the relations between party leaders and their families are also portrayed as warmer, sometimes even passionate.

Take, for example, the picture on the opposite page. What it shows is Lars Ohly, party leader of the Left Party, passionately kissing his partner, Åsa Hagelstedt.

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[5] In 1979, there were family references in less than one article out of ten; in 1988 and 1998, the corresponding proportion was in both cases one out of eight; in 2010, families were referred to in almost every fourth article.

Aftonbladet, September 16, 2010.

Indeed, the very context of this picture is quite absurd: as Lars Ohly appeared live on TV4, he seized the opportunity and tried to propose. Unfortunately for Ohly, however, air time was running out, whereupon he was quickly interrupted and the situation ended up being one of total confusion: what was it that he had tried to say; why on earth had he—in a party leader interview four days before the election—started to talk about his and Hagelstedt's personal relation?

Since Åsa Hagelstedt was not present in the studio, she was as confused as anybody: "People started to contact me on Facebook, did he ask you to marry him or what? I answered: how the hell could I know, I heard no more than anybody else", Hagelstedt later said to *Aftonbladet*'s reporters.[6]

Of course, party leaders have never been portrayed as altogether unemotional machines, but it is apparent that the objects for their passions to some extent have changed: from having been passionate about principles, policies and ideology, the party leaders are over time increasingly often portrayed in ways and situations signalling affectionate relations between them and the people within their personal spheres.

Compare for example the two illustrations on the opposite page. In the first, Olof Palme, the party leader of the Social Democratic Party, is portrayed with an ape, his wife and his son; in the latter, Bengt Westerberg, the party leader of the Liberal Party, is portrayed with his son.

Whereas Palme sure is looking at his son rather than the ape, he does so from a distance. Indeed, whereas both his wife and son tenderly stroke the back of the ape, Palme—with both hands in his pockets—appears not to be very emotionally engaged. Although he certainly seems to enjoy the situation, it is as if he finds it pleasant, or agreeable, first and foremost because the *others* do so. That is, in the above photograph Palme is portrayed *watching* his wife and son having fun; he himself is affectionate from a distance.

In comparison, in the picture to the right, Westerberg is portrayed as he smilingly carries his son on his shoulders. Despite the fact that he is rather formally dressed—wearing a shirt and tie below a pullover—Westerberg

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[6] Notably, whereas Ohly lost the election, he was fortunate enough to win the bride: by the means of a text message Hagelstedt's answer to what she assumed was a proposal was "yes". Moreover, an intriguing detail concerning the image is that Ohly and Hagelstedt were able to meet only after they had been separately interviewed by the news media. Consequently, what in the newspapers appears to be a snapshot was most probably an arranged picture: Ohly and Hagelstedt had agreed to let the media portray them entangled in a passionate kiss; having regularly been accused of a rather cavalier and arrogant attitude, Ohly obviously reckoned that it was time to change his personal image.

Expressen,
September 3, 1979.

Aftonbladet,
September 18, 1988.

manages to convey the impression that he is caught in what to him is a most ordinary situation; to be carrying his son on his shoulders is to him something natural; something that both he and his son enjoy. Moreover, his day started, the readers are told, by reading books of *Alfons Åberg*, and later the same day, Westerberg and his wife will be attending a friend's birthday party in Sollentuna.

Certainly, Olof Palme was one of the Swedish politicians that had first let the media portray him and his family in personal settings (already in 1967 photographers had portrayed him barefoot and playing with toy cars on the beaches of Fårö) but the claim here is *not* that intimate and emotional reports do not exist in the coverage of the 1979 election. What I do suggest is that these kinds of portrayals have become increasingly common.

And most importantly, it should be borne in mind that this development must be put against a background in which society on *all* of its levels has become increasingly occupied with feelings. Therefore, whereas it should be obvious that I do not share his aversion—at least not all of it—I do believe that Richard Sennett (1992) is "descriptively right" when he outlines the contours of "the intimate society":

> The reigning belief today is that closeness between persons is a moral good. The reigning aspiration today is to develop individual personality through experiences of closeness and warmth with others. The reigning myth today is that the evils of society can all be understood as evils of impersonality, alienation and coldness. The sum of these three is an ideology of intimacy: social relationships of all kinds are real, believable, and authentic the closer they approach the inner psychological concerns of each person. This ideology transmutes political categories into psychological categories. This ideology of intimacy defines the humanitarian spirit of a society without gods: warmth is our god.
>
> Sennett 1992:259; for a less critical view, see Misztal (2000)

In the two empirical chapters, results have been presented primarily in relative figures. The reason for this is that both the personalisation and the presidentialisation thesis suggest that individual actors should have become more important at the expense of collective actors. Consequently, from this perspective it is evident that relative figures are what matters.

Throughout the study, I have however argued that one cannot altogether disregard the importance of absolute figures, not least since the flow of information has increased dramatically: in 1979, Sweden had two national

TV channels; in 2010, the corresponding figure was 34. With this in mind, I suggested that the capacity of citizens to filter information should have become increasingly important: not all of the information (messages, images and symbols) that is out there will actually be conceived of; the possibility for messages to "reach through" is directly related to whether the information is believed to be important and easily can be incorporated into existing cognitive schemas.

Thus, it is with this very basic understanding of media perception that the presented results shall be understood.

Finding 4: sheer numbers matter!

A fourth main finding has been that the question of whether a trend of personalisation can be detected or not is partially contingent on what kind of figures that are being used. Whereas the overall evidence with regard to relative figures is weak, the thesis is provided with more support if one instead considers absolute figures.

So, all in all, what is it that matters—relative or absolute figures? Here, following an established scientific tradition, I will say that the question is not one of either-or; both clearly matter. Those who reject the personalisation thesis are right in that party leaders have not outnumbered other political actors; in relative figures, the evidence for personalisation is often weak. On the other hand, if we acknowledge that there is a dramatic increase in the total amount of information, it should be beyond dispute that citizens today are more likely than before to be confronted with information on party leaders.

Thus, having previously suggested that more information triggers the human need to filter information, a question to be asked is whether party leaders are generally filtered out or perceived of. Leaning on the fact that party identification has decreased, I do not believe it to be strange or peculiar to suggest that the relative importance of party leaders should have increased. Because whereas ideological self-placement appears to be a plausible alternative to party identification, this is the case only as long as the party system in question is marked by ideological polarisation. And in Sweden, ideological polarisation is perceived to have decreased (Åsard and Bennett 1997); today, catch-all parties are as common here as in other late-modern societies.

But, a critical reader would remark, can it not be that the very *need* for short cuts has decreased? In fact, this is what adherents of the modernisation

thesis would suggest; since citizens are increasingly educated, their reliance on short cuts should have dropped off; increased citizen competence, that is, should quite simply have led to increased self-sufficiency of the citizenry.

Unfortunately, however, I believe that the environment has changed even more radically than citizens' education levels; and consequently, citizens' dependence on short cuts should not have decreased but increased.

In essence, instead of suggesting that a more educated citizenry has led to a diminished importance of short cuts, I would say that a more educated citizenry has given raise to an increased importance of *other* short cuts—and here, frequently encountered flesh and blood people (let it be that we tend to see them only in TV sofas, campaign ads or glossy magazines) should indeed turn out to be an option.

But how do I then explain that party leader effects in Sweden are believed to be small and, more importantly, not of increasing importance (Oscarsson and Holmberg 2008)?

There is a great deal to say about this issue; here I will only discuss two important aspects. Firstly, Sweden was long known to be marked by a rather *collectivistic culture* (SOU 1990:44). Consequently, citizens' notions of what politics ought to be like can on good grounds be believed to be marked by ideals where parties as united and collective actors present their standpoints and ideas (whereupon the party that receives the greatest support—alone or in coalition—forms the government). As was discussed in Chapter 3, this is after all the long proclaimed model of what Swedish politics should be like, and since normative ideas wear down very slowly, it is not very surprisingly that evaluations of the party leader seem to be strongly correlated with evaluations of the parties. In the responsible party model, it is *parties* that act; party leaders are essentially agents without wills. Therefore, to really get to grips with the question of Swedish party leader effects, one simply cannot rely on a methodology where citizens are to indirectly evaluate how well they meet up with current democratic ideals; due to the normative charges, the question of Swedish party leader effects requires an experimental design.

Secondly, when discussing party leader effects, one must bear one thing in mind: whereas there can be *direct* as well as *indirect* effects (e.g. Esaiasson 1985, King 2002, Garzia 2011), political scientists tend to regularly study only the former (that is, the direct impact of party leaders on

party choice). Obviously, the importance of indirect party leader effects should also be considered when one discusses overall leader effects.

Below, two examples of indirect party leader effects shall be put forth: 1) indirect party leader effects with regard to media coverage and party evaluation, and 2) indirect effects with regard to party policies.

Consider the case of Håkan Juholt. During his tenure of less than a year as leader of the Social Democratic Party, Juholt got an enormous amount of "bad press". Here, the question is not whether he deserved it; what matters is that Juholt made it very hard for the Social Democratic Party to get "good press". Consequently, having for almost a year been described as a party in crisis, polls over and again indicated that previous supporters were turning their backs against the party; information that, of course, fuelled more—from a Social Democratic perspective—negative press.

Hence, indirectly the brouhaha around Juholt put the Social Democratic Party in an utterly difficult situation: with Juholt, the party had ended up in a spiral of negative news; between the party and positive media attention there was Håkan Juholt.

Whereas the importance of the news media is obvious in the above example, the role of the media is more sublime in that which is to follow.

In the election of 2002, the Moderate Party got only 15 per cent of the registered votes, a drop of seven percentage points when compared to the election of 1998. Obviously, to the party the result was a huge disappointment, and calls for a new party leader were soon to be heard. However, despite the fact that Bo Lundgren was considered by many to be a rather uncharismatic leader, the Moderate camp realised that the party needed not only a new leader but also new policies.

It is against this background that Fredrik Reinfeldt entered the scene. And after having been elected as party leader in October 2003, Reinfeldt had after a short period of time—really just a year or two—changed the Moderate Party profile considerably; from having been connected with taxes, defence, and law and order, the Moderate Party won two elections in a row campaigning on jobs and employment. Consequently, it makes sense to talk of an indirect leader effect: after the restyling that Reinfeldt pulled through, the Moderate party has widened its segment of potential voters; in an *indirect* way, that is, the election of Reinfeldt paved the way

for a more inclusive party.[7]

Can the above discussions explain why commentators in the public de-bate often seem to disagree with political scientists about the importance of party leader effects? Can it simply be that political journalists use the term in its broadest sense (direct and indirect effects) whereas political scientists most often use the term in its narrower sense (direct effects)? Obviously, this would explain why their opinions diverge. And whereas direct effects may be easier to study empirically—the above remarks notwithstanding—it can be questioned whether the narrower understanding of the term really is sufficient. After all, actors who are said to be important are likely to become important—no matter how unimportant they actually were when their im-portance first was proclaimed. That is to say: as long as the *media* conceive of party leaders as important, citizens are likely to do the same. And the more often the media stress the importance of the leaders, the more likely the citizens are to bestow the leaders with importance.

In essence, the images in our heads are often as important as that which is really out there. And, this, I would say, is essentially what makes abso-lute figures matter: due to the fact that the media permeate society, citizens will—unless they disconnect altogether, dig a deep hole or run off into the woods—simply have to accept party leaders as components in their every-day mediated realities. Party leaders, today, are everywhere.

9.2 Summary

Leaning against the works of Ewen (1988), Marshall (2001) and Turner (2004), some of the findings made it relevant to compare the coverage of party leaders to that of celebrities: over time, party leaders appear all the more as commodities for the projection of individual identities; increasing-ly often, they appear not as active agents but as objects for others' likings, aversions, hopes and dreams.

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[7] Compare with King (2002:4f): "[Indirect influence] is exerted indirectly via the party leader's influence on, typically, either his political party or his government or administration. The leader who succeeds in changing his party's ideology or modernizing its image is exercising influence in this indirect sense." Whereas it is obviously not Reinfeldt alone that has changed the party, he has certainly been a most central actor. But how, then, has this dramatic make-over been possible? Of course, the defeat in the 2002 election is what enabled it (cf. Harmel and Janda 1994) but without his strong personal standing, it does seem likely that Reinfeldt would have had to settle with changes much less far-reaching than those that have actually been pulled through. An illustration to the strong public standing of Fredrik Reinfeldt comes from the most recent of Swedish election studies: in 2010, 51 per cent of those who voted for the Moderate party stated that "one of the very most important reasons for their choice of party" was the party leader (Statistics Sweden 2011).

To put it briefly, the party leader of today is a star. And whereas it is true that the party leaders have always been the stars of the political system, they have increasingly come to have a certain star quality also when they are put next to stars and celebrities of a more traditional kind. (To give you a reminder: take a look at the image of Maria Wetterstrand on page 195. Does it really make you think of debates in the Riksdag? If it does, allow me to cite the adjacent caption: "Before the prize ceremonies of last December, the spokesperson Maria Wetterstrand was styled by designer Camilla Thulin; make up was made by Annika Stödberg." Still associating to the Riksdag? I did not think so.)

Moreover, as a consequence of the fact that neither the political system nor the news media system exist in a vacuum, it was further argued that one has to take into consideration the increased circulation of information. The public spheres of late-modern societies—few should disagree—are virtual cacophonies of competing images, voices, messages and sounds. In this context, relative shares are not all that matters; in a setting where much is filtered out, the question of absolute frequencies become crucial.

Against the above background, it was argued that it makes good sense to assume that party leaders have become increasingly important with regard to how citizens perceive of politics. That researchers have troubles in pinning down this empirically, well that is really an altogether different story.

Chapter 10

News media power, news media dependency

A notion underpinning this study is that the news media coverage can be related to questions of power. To put it bluntly: an actor with much power is assumed to appear more often than an actor with little power, and increased visibility is assumed to indicate increased power. Whereas this has been a fundamental point of departure, it has also been argued (and shown) that there may be differences with regard to different appearance forms. Indeed, whereas it has been shown that little has happened with regard to party leaders' overall visibility, the development with regard to the years under study is essentially one of increased party leader objectification.

Then, if party leaders all the more often are allotted passive roles, what (group of) actors appear all the more frequently as those leading the tango? The answer is, of course, the (group of) journalists. To get an idea of just how much more frequently they appear, take a look at figure 10.1.

Figure 10.1: Party leaders and journalists: subjects in all formats (per cent)
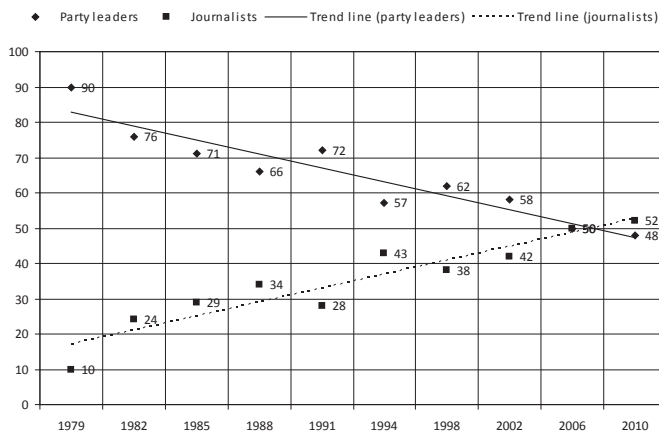
Comments: The group of journalists consists of reporters, columnists and news organisations. The number of subjects (party leaders and journalists) ranges from 2854 (1979) to 4557 (1988).

Figure 10.1 illustrates that something quite spectacular has happened: from having clearly outnumbered the journalists, the party leaders today appear as subjects no more often than the journalists—indeed, in 2010 the journalists appeared as subjects more often than the party leaders.[1] How can this finding be interpreted?

Since a basic notion has been that political actors should want to appear as subjects, a straightforward conclusion is that news media actors increasingly often appear in the role that party leaders should wish to appear in. Consequently, the power of news media actors should have increased, whereas the power of party leaders, in contrast, should have decreased.

But is this interpretation as self-evident as it at first may seem? Not really. Because a possible scenario is that the role of a subject over time has become *less desirable* to the party leaders: whereas they at t may have been eager to appear in active roles, they may at t+1 accept passive roles more readily than before. Obviously, if this is the case, the detected development cannot be taken as a sign of a power shift; political actors may simply have come to the conclusion that it is "to be spoken of that matters", not to speak oneself.

Moreover, even if we posit that party leaders do value the lead role as much as ever, does it not make more sense to consider the relation between journalists and politicians on the systems level? After all, it is on this level that overarching values and principles are to be found; and in the short run, the struggle for visibility is not between political actors and news media actors; what matters to political actors is first and foremost their exposure in relation to other political actors.

In order to approach the systems level, three things must however be resolved: 1) how can it make sense to talk of a single logic on the systems level given that notions of a single logic on the organisational level have been questioned (see Chapters 2 and 6); 2) what differences are there between the systems and organisational levels; 3) what does power on a systems level actually mean?

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[1] That news media actors increasingly often appear as subjects may seem somewhat strange: have journalists (and other news media actors) not always been those in charge of the stories? The increased visibility of journalists is, however, largely explained by one development: over time, journalists appear increasingly often as commentators and assessors rather than reporters (Djerf Pierre and Weibull 2008). A consequence of this, of course, is the increased visibility of journalists. Echoing Hallin (1992), what journalists say about the campaign has become more important than what political actors themselves say in the campaigns.

The answers to the first two questions are really quite simple: the meaning of the term is dependent on what level is discussed; whereas a single logic on the organisational level implies a common way of *"getting things done"* (Cook 2005:71), a single logic on the systems level is instead to be conceived of in terms of a sharing of *overarching values*. That is, whereas the former is concerned with what people do, the latter is instead concerned with what they think they should do; whereas the organisational level is concerned with everyday behaviours, the latter is concerned with the principles that guide these behaviours. And since practices here are assumed to be subordinate to principles, the notion of a single logic on the systems level—despite there being a multitude of logics on the lower level—is really not illogical: to have a user value, agreed upon principles must be applicable in everyday realities; and whereas ideas and principles may be shared, everyday realities differ.[2]

Then, if this can be accepted, how shall the question of systemic power be approached?

The kind of power that I have in mind comes to play as logics that used to be exogenous over time become adopted, incorporated and internalised. Thus, with regard to the two subsystems discussed here, a power shift should imply that *values* that used to mark the news media system are becoming all the more recognised and accepted within the political system. And since the shift is gradual and not forced through, it is best conceived of as one of gradually increased accommodation.

Does the above reasoning seem familiar? Of course it does; in Chapter 2 it was referred to in terms of mediatisation. Consequently, as I hope has been made clear, I have nothing against mediatisation theory; as a matter of fact, the above ideas are much in line with how Asp (1986, see also 2011a) has previously outlined mediatisation. What I do find problematic is when the concept in empirically-oriented studies—often in passing and without much ado—is applied on the organisational level; here, the process of mediatisation is, as I have previously argued, essentially completed. Today, political actors know how to stage a press conference for the media; today, they

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[2] To be quite clear about how this distinction shall be perceived of; values and principles related to roles are here understood to be higher in rank than the norms and routines related to practical tasks. Whereas values and principles (on the systems level) are related to how the game ought to be played, norms and routines (on the organisational level) can instead be conceived of as rules of thumb for the game that actually is played. For more on professional identities in the Swedish journalist corps, see Wiik (2010).

know the importance of easily grasped metaphors and hands-on symbolism. Where they still may have a way to go is on the *organising* level—that is, the level of principles and ideas.

In this chapter I shall:

1. Distinguish between news media power on an organisational and a systems level.
2. Relate discussions in previous chapters to the question of how the news media ought to portray politics.

10.1 Dependency on the organisational level, dependency on the systems level

Starting with the organisational level, it has become apparent that I am not at ease with the suggestion that all news media are marked by a single organisational logic. Sure enough, all news media are to some extent marked by similar conditions (e.g. criteria of newsworthiness, a 24-hours news cycle), but whereas different news media have much in common, a thorough inspection will allow us to perceive of differences where commonalities were believed to prevail.

Hence, since the answer to the question of whether there is a single logic is a direct result of how closely one looks, a better question to ask is whether we can conceive of a development in either direction—that is, have claims of there being a unitary logic over time become more or less plausible?

Whereas centripetal forces long may have dominated, I would say that the situation has now changed (cf. Blumler and Kavanagh 1999; see also Brants and Voltmer 2011). Thus, today the most notable trend should *not* be increased adherence to one and the same organisational logic; due to the proliferation of the news media system, the present trend should be one of increased differentiation and specialisation. Indeed, this is basic economics: as supply increases more rapidly than demand, inter-supplier competition increases, with specialisation as a consequence. (Expressed in somewhat different terms: since different news outlets over time should target all the more specific audiences, a consequence should be that the news media system as a whole is characterised by a proliferation of everyday means and methods.)

But, it is important to bear in mind, although different news media should be marked by all the more divergent *organisational* logics, it may still be the case that due to their common societal function they are distinct

enough to be conceived of as a single *institution*. In essence, this means that the question of increased news media power must be approached at two different levels: on the one hand, there are the dependencies that exist on the organisational level; on the other hand, there is the dependency that exists on the systems level.

Why is this the case? Why must one always be explicit with what level that is addressed? Because whereas individual news organisations may have lost some of their previous power, the power of the news media as a societal subsystem may simultaneously have increased. To illustrate how this is possible, let us return to the basic logic behind the social exchange perspective.

Above it was suggested that one with regard to the news media system should be able to distinguish between two periods (one dominated by centripetal forces; the other, in contrast, dominated by centrifugal forces). Thus, whereas the organisational logics of different news media at t were becoming all the more similar, they are at t+1 in contrast believed to become all the more different. Or, to put it in another way: whereas political actors in order to acquire visibility at t were all the more forced to adapt to a certain organisational logic, their possibilities of skirting around it and still acquiring media visibility should at t+1 have increased. Consequently, the notion of the present being marked by an increasing accommodation power of the news media makes sense only on a systems level; on an organisational level, the accommodation power of the news media should instead be decreasing.

Then, how do we get to grips with the question of dependency on the systems level? As suggested in Chapter 2, one way to approach the question is to ask what *needs* are being served. With regard to the actors here involved, two groups of needs were identified: those related to the wish for *influence power* (efficiency and credibility) and those related to *legitimacy*. Consequently, all in all there are three rounds to go.

While it should be quite uncontroversial to suggest that the news media still serve as the most efficient link, few should disagree with the claim that the number of alternatives has increased (a rather self-evident example is the possibilities brought about by the Internet). Once again, the logic is therefore simple enough: as the number of alternatives has increased, the former dependency upon the news media should have diminished. Consequently, with regard to the first of the parameters that are of relevance for an actor's influence power—the possibility to reach as many as possible—political actors should have become *less* dependent on the news media.

In sum, after the first round, politics is in the lead, 1:0.

However, an actor's influence power is not altogether explained by how many he or she can reach; the question of how many he or she can make believe (persuade, convince) is also crucial. And in this respect, I would dare to say that the news media, at least for the time being, are unthreatened. Because whereas alternatives such as YouTube certainly may provide political actors with a link to citizens as *individuals*, political actors are provided with a link to the citizens as a *public* by the news media. Moreover, since democracy *per se* demands a demos, the importance of channels for mass communication should, in a time marked by individualisation, quite simply have increased—that is, for the building up of a public reputation, political actors should, with regard to their need for public recognition and trust, have become *more* dependent on the news media.

In sum, after the second round, the news media have beaten back, 1:1.

Then what about the need related to legitimacy? A fundamental implication of the fact that democratic power cannot be exercised without the citizens' approval and consent is that political actors must accept not only competition, but also allow for their actions to be scrutinised—to political actors, the news media serve as examining magistrates.

Then, if a fundamental need for openness and transparency partially explains the need for visibility, are there, from the perspective of political actors, really no alternatives to the news media? Although the scrutinising function theoretically could be allotted to other actors than the news media—one example would be independent public authorities, such as national audit offices—this option is marred with at least one serious weakness: information must not only be available to the citizens, it must also be accessible to them. This being said, due to the complexity of late-modern societies; and due to the interconnectedness and interdependency between different subsystems, societies, countries, regions, economies, and markets, it seems plausible to suggest that citizens at t+1 are more dependent on professional interpreters (simplifiers of information) than they were at t. And as a consequence thereof, a conclusion must be that political actors with regard to needs related to legitimacy at t+1 are *more* dependent on news media system than they were at t.

Therefore, as the final bell tolls, the news media is the winner: 2:1.

All in all, the above discussion implies that with regard to the two levels there should be two different developments: whereas political actors should

have become less dependent on individual news organisations, they should have become more dependent on the news media system. But then again, what does this increased dependence on the systems level actually imply? As suggested above, a logical result would be that the political system over time has become all the more coloured by *values* that used to reside within the news media system. This is the theme of the section that follows.

10.2 Power on the systems level

Regarding research on mediated politics, I have expressed standpoints that some of my readers may find controversial. Firstly, I have suggested that media scholars sometimes seem to suggest that changes and developments within the (news) media system explain nearly everything; in essence, media scholars are often mediacentric. Secondly, since political actors are believed to have incorporated news media techniques into their own repertoires, I have argued that the notion of an ongoing accommodation is somewhat misleading; on the organisational level, the process of mediatisation is completed.[3] To be sure, this does not imply that I believe mediatisation theory to be outdated, quite the contrary. But in order to remain relevant, it should be applied on the *organising* level—that is, for mediatisation theory to be useful also with regard to the present, the appropriate level is that of principles, values and ideas.

Essentially, what I suggest is that accommodation on the systems level should make political actors *think* in a certain way. Take for example the journalistic obsession with the present, something that we can refer to in terms of journalistic *presentism*. Due to the values and principles embedded in the very notion of what journalism is about, journalistic presentism fuels a way of thinking in which the present (or immediate future) is *per se* more important than the past and the (distant) future. Consequently, if there is an ongoing process of mediatisation on the systems level, a plausible implication should be that the time-perspective of politics has become shorter; over

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[3] I have relied on a conceptualisation where power comes to play in the form of dependencies. A somewhat different view is that in which power is conceived of as the ability of an actor (A) to pull through something (actions, behaviours) against the will of another actor (B) (whereby A has power over B to the extent that A can make B do something against his or her will). Obviously, with this Weberian view it becomes even more confusing to suggest that on the organisational level there is an ongoing power shift to the advantage of the news media. Since political actors on the organisational level are assumed to have internalised news media logic, the idea that the news media can make political actors act in ways that are against their own wills appears altogether illogical.

time, political actors should simply have become more concerned with the present.

Or, to use another example, take the journalistic predilection for concrete figures and facts, what we here will call journalistic *facticism*. Can it not be that accommodation to this norm of simple objectivity in the long run turns "the art of politics" to be all the more about technicalities and details; that is, all the more about policies (means) and all the less about ideologies (goals)? If this is the case, what the future will bring is, essentially, a political system inhabited by political administrators—if means are given precedence over goals, the political actor has simply become an anachronism (cf. Innerarity 2010).

And what about the journalistic meta-logic prescribing lucidity and certainty; the idea that stories cannot be too complicated or multifaceted, but must remain simple and clear-cut in order not to burden readers and audiences with the task of thinking for themselves? Whereas this ideal of *straightforwardism* certainly is natural to journalists—indeed, their task is to reduce complexity—could it not be that accommodation to it implies that politics all the more becomes a world of right or wrong, friend or foe? And if such a development can be detected, would that really be consistent with ongoing developments on the societal level? Is a dichotomous worldview of certainty really in tune with the development towards increased complexity and interdependency?

Indeed, I would say that all three of the overarching values of the news media system that have been discussed above—presentism, facticism, and straightforwardism—imply a form of invisible barriers; in essence, accommodation to them implies that the process of politicisation (or agenda building) is contingent on values that are *not* endogenous to the political system. Together and individually, they reduce not only the ways that politics can be presented, but also what politics can be about (that is, the questions that can become politicised and open for public debate).

Certainly, the political system has never been a closed system and political actors must accommodate to other subsystems than that of the news media, not least those within the sphere of economics. However true that may be, it is really beside the point. What I am concerned with here is the relation between the political system and the news media system; and accommodation on the systems level is here problematic since it effectively reduces what politics can be about. In essence, an implication of it is that *normative*

questions are being replaced by *managerial concerns*; political actors, that is, have largely become replaced by political entrepreneurs. And whereas politics certainly cannot be without a certain amount of realism, politics concerned only with "that which is" will soon become an art deprived of its meaning. This leads us to the question of how late-modern news media ought to cover late-modern politics.

10.3 Should there be more leaders in the news media?

As I see it, normative discussions can relate to either actual situations or abstract ideals. And whereas both kinds are important, I shall here prefer to discuss what the news media should do given the situation at hand. Thus, in what follows my point of departure is the society that we today inhabit; the account presented shall be realistic rather than idealistic.

In Chapter 5, I argued that citizens are better educated and more informed than ever before. However, in the very same chapter it was also argued that late-modern societies are marked by increased complexity and interdependency. In essence, this means that the present is marked by developments that point at different directions: whereas both higher education levels and increased information accessibility should imply that the possibilities for citizens to make informed and autonomous decisions have increased, parallel trends of increased complexity and interdependency should imply that citizens' choices are marked by all the more uncertainty. Consequently, I suggested that a somewhat paradoxical result may be that citizens of today may be better informed but know less than previous generations did. And this, I suggested, should have fuelled the importance of trust.

Then, what could be a reasonable normative consequence of this? Since the power positions of news organisations are legitimate only as far as the organisations serve the citizens' need for information, the discussion shall have its point of departure in the question of what kind of information the public needs.

Essentially, I would say that the need for political information can be traced to two basic notions: firstly, citizens need information in order to shape public policies; secondly, citizens need information in order to decide whether to punish or reward those in power (Manin *et al* 1999). In essence, whereas the first kind of information is related to what ought to be done (and by whom), the second is concerned with how well this has been done (and by whom). Notably, whereas the former is concerned with intentions, the latter is more complex since intentions here must be put against a record.

And if we relate these two information-needs to previous discussions on trust, it is evident that, essentially, they are related to different kinds of trust: whereas the first is related to *moral* trust (i.e. a notion that people can and should be trusted; cf. Uslaner 2002), the second is closely related to what I have referred to in terms of *cognitive* trust (see Chapter 2). Consequently, having previously stressed the importance of cognitive trust, a first conclusion is that the news media ought to provide citizens with more information about *political actors' previous performances*.

But, it is important to stress, that the news media ought to provide citizens with more retrospective information does not *per se* imply that the news media ought to provide citizens with more information about individual actors. Although one theoretically could argue that accountability (as trust) is ultimately coupled to individuals, it remains a fact that mechanisms of accountability in parliamentarian democracies tend to leave little room for the sanctioning of individual actors' performances. Therefore, what about individual actors? Are there grounds to suggest that the news media ought to focus more on individual actors than before?

Notwithstanding the normative implications of news media coverage—indeed, I have stressed that the standpoints expressed shall be related to the societies that we inhabit rather than the societies that we would like to inhabit—I believe there to be good grounds to suggest that the news media ought to be more concerned with *individual* political actors. And an obvious reason to this is that I believe there to be grounds to suggest that individual political actors—here party leaders—have become increasingly important.

"More important to whom?" a critical reader will ask. "Have individual political become more important within the political system or within peoples' minds? Since importance is essentially a relational phenomenon it makes no sense to simply suggest that individual political actors have become more 'important'."

Consequently, I specify the above assertion and suggest that individual political actors should have become more important with regard to the political system *as well* as with regard to peoples' minds. Let us start with a clarification of the first; that individual actors should have become all the more important with regard to the political system.

Once again, our point of departure is that late-modern societies are marked by all the more complexity and interdependency. As I have suggested above, a consequence of this should be that late-modern societies are
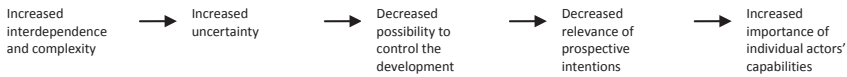
marked by more uncertainty than high modern societies were, whereupon also political actors' possibilities of controlling societal development should have decreased (Innerarity 2010).[4]

An implication is that collective units of action (i.e. parties) when compared to the situation thirty years ago should be less equipped to put forth detailed five-year plans for the economy (or, for that matter, ten-year plans for the building of a million new apartments). Indeed, since overall uncertainty has increased, the mere thought of detailed programmes for the distant future simply seems all the more absurd (Manin 1997); and being rational, informed and competent, citizens in late-modern societies will therefore increasingly ask themselves: "given that none of us can know anything about tomorrow, who is the person that I believe can best look after my interests?" (Or, as a Dutch parliamentarian—cited in van Zoonen *et al* 2011:155—expresses it: "If you know that a political programme will be dated after a year you need to be able to trust that the person you voted for will react more or less the same when new issues come up.") In essence, given that uncertainty has increased, consistency has become more important—and whereas party policies are perishable, personality types endure.

Consequently, what the suggestion points at is an altogether different paradigm: instead of asking themselves what parties intend to do, citizens should ask what individual actors are capable of doing (and here they should increasingly rely on information about what individual actors have actually done). All in all, a party-centered model for the steering of society should gradually be replaced by an individual-oriented model for the handling of the unforeseen. The above reasoning is illustrated in figure 10.2 (next page).

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[4] The situation that used to be is concisely outlined by Lindvall and Rothstein (2006:48): "From the 1930s to the 1980s, Swedish politics was based on the assumption that social change could be accomplished through a political and administrative process that unfolded in the following manner. Leading politicians at the national level decided the overall aims of policy in collaboration with leaders of major interest organisations, and then government commissions of inquiry engaged experts who compiled the available knowledge about the policy's target area. This resulted in a politically, technically and administratively feasible proposal that could be turned into law by parliament, whereupon a civil service department was given responsibility for implementation, and municipalities or other local authorities put the policy into effect. Major interest organisations generally supported this view of the political process, and frequently participated both in government commissions of inquiry and in the administrative implementation process. Beyond rationalism and planning, this political culture was based on consensus in the sense that wide political majorities and the support of interest groups were thought to be of great value."

Figure 10.2: How increased complexity and interdependency lead to an individual-oriented model for the handling of the unforeseen

Increased interdependence and complexity → Increased uncertainty → Decreased possibility to control the development → Decreased relevance of prospective intentions → Increased importance of individual actors' capabilities

In sum, having my point of departure in citizens' information needs, I believe that from a political system perspective there are reasons to suggest that the news media ought to provide the citizens with more information about individual political actors. My argument is straightforward enough: the news media ought to provide more information on individual political actors since there are grounds to believe that individual political actors have become more important within the political system.

Then what about the citizens? I previously asserted that individual political actors should have become increasingly important with regard to the political system as well with regard to peoples' minds; in what follows, I will focus on the latter.

Due to far-reaching institutional reforms during a span of roughly fifty years, citizens in Western societies have acquired greater possibilities to create and maintain their own identities (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2001). A consequence of this is that a party system that is grounded in class interests and social cleavage lines appears as all the more obsolete—in Sweden this is manifested in two ways: 1) whereas the five-party model long seemed to work well, the party system has become more fragmented since the 1980s; 2) since the mid-1980s, the number of party members has decreased dramatically.[5] What should be a plausible implication of this?

I would say that one implication should be that it has become more difficult for citizens to single out the best option in the way prescribed by adherents of a traditional rational choice perspective (Oscarsson 1998).[6] A consequence of this is that two alternatives should have emerged: either voters'

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[5] During the 1990s, for example, more than a third of the party members left their parties, whereupon in 2000 there were nineteen non-party members for every party member among those who were entitled to vote (Petersson *et al* 2000). Moreover, the party members' share of the voters should have become even smaller in 2012—not least due to the fact that the Social Democratic Party has lost roughly half of its members since 2000.

[6] To use the vocabulary of Zolo (1992): since more variables (dimensions, aspects to consider) have come with a larger set of choices (parties), the perfect match has simply become harder to achieve.

decisions should have become less instrumental, or voters should increasingly have come to rely on various short cuts. I have in the above discussions suggested that both alternatives should imply relations of a more personal character. Below, I will start by discussing the first.

In late-modern societies, where individuals seem to place much higher value on being able to "write their own biographies", it seems reasonable to assume that voters' choices should have become increasingly determined by factors that are of a personal rather than an instrumental character. That is, instead of being an expression of wishes and wants, the vote should have increasingly become an expression of identities.

In essence, this means that the act of voting can be seen as yet another way for late-modern citizens to express who they are: by giving their votes to a certain party (or by marking a certain individual on the list), citizens confirm, nurture and maintain their notions and images of themselves. Consequently, from having had an *outward* function (to influence public policies), the vote therefore has an increasingly *inward* function (underlining of identity). And since we know that party identification has long been on the decrease, individual political actors should have become all the more important with regard to the relations between citizens and the political system. Then, what about the other alternative?

In contrast to what has been suggested above, the second alternative need not imply that citizens' decisions have become less instrumental; at the voting booths voters may still be largely concerned with the question of what alternative will best serve their interests. However, due to the fact that it has become more difficult to calculate the net value of different alternatives, voters should be increasingly prone to relying on various short cuts. And once again, since there is a decrease of party identification and ideological polarisation, a short cut that ought to have gained in importance is that of individual actors.

Therefore, whether or not citizens relate to the political system in a different way than before is not really of fundamental importance; also if instrumental rationalism remains as important as ever, citizens' choices should, over time, have become more shaped by notions of individual political actors. Consequently, it can be argued that the news media ought to provide more information about individual actors also from a citizen perspective. The reason is simple enough: with the situation at hand, political actors are simply more important in citizens' minds than before.

10.4 What traits and attributes should be focused on?

In the above section, two conclusions have been put forth: firstly, there ought to be more retrospective information; secondly, there ought to be more information about individual political actors.

However, what individual actors have done (or tried to do) is but one issue that should have become more important; it could also be argued that information about enduring traits should have become increasingly important. Having previously distinguished between inner traits and outer attributes, an implication is that the news media over time ought to provide citizens with more information about the competence, convictions, and mental dispositions of political actors. In brief, since the environment for late-modern politics is assumed to be marked by instability, citizens should prefer information that is unswerving.

However, since I have argued that citizens may have come to relate to the political system in more personal ways, I do not rule out that the news media also ought to provide citizens with more information about individual political actors' outer attributes. Because although information on these matters often is considered to be "politically irrelevant", this idea springs from an understanding in which citizens relate to the political world in an altogether instrumental way.

In contrast, Gianpietro Mazzoleni (2000:327) has suggested that "the appeal of personalised political leadership may well induce citizens to participate in campaigns and elections for reasons that have to do with the expressive sphere of political choice". In the words of Mazzoleni:

> I suspect that the "politics of substance" may be a sufficient motivation for [...] support in the opinion polls but an insufficient factor to motivate people to leave their homes and go to the voting sites. This may especially true in contexts (such as the European one) where people increasingly distrust governments, political forces (including trade unions), and politicians. In contrast, appeals to symbolic politics, to political emotions and the deeper needs of personal and subcultural identification [...]—particularly when boosted by media hype and/or staged through marketing and show-biz techniques—may well be a sufficient force to drive substantial sectors of lukewarm electors to cast a ballot in favour of political players. This is especially true in the case of politicians who are skilled at using the tools of communication and have insights into voters' demands and feelings, and at a time such as the present when the declining influence of party politics and traditional ideologies has left a void in voters' allegiances. In effect, voters

have orphaned and look for new political "parents". In modern (or, if you prefer, post-modern) times, the successful leaders—strong personalities, mediagenic characters, communication wizards—seem to provide the answer to the many electorates' demand for leadership.

Mazzoleni 2000:328

Whereas I have stressed the informative function of the news media, Mazzoleni's point of departure is that also the engaging function shall be considered. And if this latter function is considered to be equally important—that is, if citizens are not only to be informed but also active—a coverage that is too preoccupied with standpoints, arguments and facts may, indeed, be counterproductive. Moreover, since the political system itself is not a sphere of reason only, why should a norm of strict rationality be imposed on those who are to scrutinise it?

The above discussion points at our next conclusion: whereas it is clear that there ought to be more information about inner traits, a corresponding increase of information about outer attributes may at the face of it seem more questionable. However, since citizens' relations to the political system may be all the more based on identification with individual actors, to altogether dismiss the relevance of a more intimate coverage—as this term has been used above—would be ignorant; outer attributes may have a connecting function.

Consequently, instead of asking ourselves the question of what it is that ought to be discussed, we may want to ask ourselves the question of how that which is discussed ought to be presented. All the shorter news stories, all the less space for thorough discussions and analyses—is this the actual problem of mediated politics in the 2000s? Whereas virtually all information may be of relevance, the relevance of all information is dependent on factors such as density, breadth and depth (Asp 2007). And from this point of view, maybe the problem is not the topics, but how they are presented?

10.5 Power, news media and trust

The empirical question of this study has been whether the news media coverage of Swedish election campaigns has become increasingly personalised. And to those who believe that the answer is as plain as a pikestaff, the presented results should have come as a surprise: there really is no univocal answer. All in all, an answer grounded in empirical data depends on three things: 1) what figures that are examined (relative or absolute), 2) what for-

mats that are examined (e.g. tabloids or broadsheets), and 3) what forms that are examined (appearances as subjects or objects, representations in images or in texts).

From a more theoretical perspective, another aim of the study has been to relate the concept of personalisation to changes on the societal level (changes that imply increased complexity and interdependence have been particularly focused on). Due to changes on the societal level, it has been argued that the very conditions for societal power holders (politicians) have changed: since it has become harder for politicians to steer the development, the *reactive* dimension of politics should have become more important. Essentially, this means that the role of politicians, in one way, has become increasingly similar to that of ordinary citizens: whereas the latter group reacts to policy proposals, the first group reacts to unforeseen events. All in all, against the background of ongoing developments on the societal level, two concepts have become increasingly central to late-modern citizens: news media and trust.

Indeed, against a theoretical background of increased societal complexity and interdependence it is my belief that all studies on societal power today must depart from the fact that late-modern societies are media societies. Because, without this as a point of departure, how could one for example approach the question of authority? In late-modern societies, authority is not once and for all acquired, but must constantly be maintained; late-modern authority is, to put it bluntly, constantly renegotiated and put into question.

Of course, the struggle for authority is not restricted to the news media, but is one that goes on in virtually all channels of communication (Castells 2009). Consequently, whereas I have investigated party leader representations in the news media during election periods, in future research it would be highly interesting to examine how other media are being used during off-election periods.

Then, if the news media are so central to late-modern democracies, is this necessarily something bad; would including democracies even be possible without the news media? Essentially, the problem is the old dilemma of choosing between quality and quantity (Dahl 1992, Blühdorn 2006), and to both of the above two questions, my answers are no; whereas the lack of efficient mechanisms for media accountability certainly is problematic, it is my belief that the very idea of a politically active citizenry would be nothing but sweet dreams had it not been for the news media. Indeed, if we want the

ruling of society to be a matter not only to a privileged elite, is not the price that we have to pay that the agendas are set from above?

The second concept that has been central to this study is that of trust; and also the importance of this concept is explained by developments on the societal level: since in our daily lives we are dependent on actors, institutions, technologies and processes that we can neither understand nor oversee, our choice is essentially one between trust and paralysis. And since this study deals with one specific relation, that between citizens and politicians, the kind of trust that I have discussed is one with obvious similarities to the concept of confidence; in essence, trust is conceived of as a "three-part relation" (Hardin 1999): A trusts (or distrusts) B with regard to x.

Given the background of all the more complex and interdependent societies, I have argued that trust should have become increasingly important with regard to citizens' relations to political actors. Consequently, it was suggested that from the perspective of political actors it should have become all the more important to establish and sustain a public reputation of trustworthiness; for political actors' authority *de facto* to persist, the importance of credible public performances should have increased (Hajer 2009).

Once again, this underlines a central notion of the study: in late-modern societies, political actors do not work against the news media; since they are dependent on these organisations, they work with them (Cook 2005). Therefore, in future research within the field of political communication, the question of how an aura of trust is created and maintained should be utterly central, and once again, future research should preferably not be restricted to the news media, but also include other media.

Indeed, to live in late-moderns societies is to live in uncertainty. And whereas it can be questioned whether late-modern citizens really are condemned to freedom, it should be utterly clear that they are condemned to one thing: reliance on trust.

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Appendix

I. The data

Two data sets have been used: 1) content analyses conducted at the University of Gothenburg between 1979 and 2010 (SMES), and 2) a content analysis conducted by myself in autumn 2011. Thus, whereas the first set is second hand data, the second set is first hand data.[1]

Essentially, the two sets have been used with regard to different dimensions of personalisation: whereas the first has been used in order to answer questions on personification (Chapter 7), the second has been used in order to answer questions on orientation towards personae and intimisation (Chapter 8).

Moreover, whereas every election between 1979 and 2010 is included in the first, the second consists of data from only four elections (1979, 1988, 1998, and 2010). Also the time span differs: whereas the first consists of data from the last month before an election, the second consists of data from the last two weeks before an election.

II. Sample of articles

With regard to the first data set, all news items (including analyses) dealing with national politics have been coded. In order to decide whether an item deals with national politics, a criterion for including it has been that it either 1) has at least one party political actor (subject or object), or 2) deals with issues that are clearly related to the election campaign.

With regard to the second data set, only news articles (including analyses) focusing on at least one party leader have been included. In order to decide whether a party leader is being focused on, a criterion has been that a party leader appears in either 1) headlines or preambles, or 2) adjacent images. An overview is provided on the next page.

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[1] The data set that originates from the *Swedish Media Election Studies* (SMES) has for this study been created from ten individual data sets; one for every year that has been examined. Since with regard to the individual sets there are differences with regard to the values attributed to different categories, I have for the aggregated set recoded some of the category values of the original data sets.

Data	Elections investigated	Period examined	Examined news media	Included news stories	Used
SMES	All national elections between 1979 and 2010	The last four weeks of campaigning	*SvD*, *DN*, *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen*, SVT, SR, TV4	All items on national party politics	Chapter 7
Own content analysis	The national elections of 1979, 1988, 1998, 2010	The last two weeks of campaigning	*SvD*, *DN*, *Aftonbladet*, *Expressen*	All articles focusing a party leader	Chapter 8

III. Units of analyses

As in all content analyses, the coding of the variables has with regard to both data sets implied certain degrees of interpretation. With regard to the first set of data, where I have personally participated only in the coding of the last two elections, I have chosen to first and foremost use variables that have been coded with regard to individual information segments. Whereas this does not imply that the coding is free from interpretation, it implies that the question of reliability should be less of a problem than otherwise. Moreover, Professor Kent Asp has personally supervised the coding of all elections between 1979 and 2010.

With regard to the second data set, the unit of analysis is individual references; what has been coded is every mention of party leaders' personal characteristics. Below I will start by clarifying the unit of analyses with regard to data from the SMES; after this, I will discuss the content analysis conducted by myself.

SMES: Basically, an information segment consists of the relation that becomes manifested as an actor (subject) by either statements or actions puts him-, her- or itself in a relation to a political question (issue). When doing this, he, she or it may also—directly or indirectly—put him-, her-, or itself in a relation to other political actors (objects). Since subjects in individual information segments can relate to only one issue, a new information segment occurs if either the subject or the issue changes.

Within one and the same segment, a subject can relate to two objects. A condition for coding two objects within the same segment is, however, that the issue in question remains the same. For each article, a maximum of ten information segments have been coded; that is, for each article a maximum of ten subjects, ten issues and twenty objects have been coded.

Own content analysis: With regard to individual references, every mention of a party leader's personal characteristic has been coded. That is, the principle has been that not only "unique" references have been coded; if, for example, a certain hobby is mentioned several times within one and the same article, the hobby has been coded every time (as "lifestyle", under "outer attributes"). Since coding of only unique traits would have made discussions on relative distribution impossible, I believe the choice made to be reasonable (given the purpose for the study at hand).

For each article, a maximum of ten references to personal characteristics have been coded. An implication of this maximum is that in some cases there are references that have not been coded. However, since the maximum has been reached only with regard to two (1988), three (1979, 1998) and five (2010) per cent of the articles, the problem caused should be neglectable.

IV. The variables and their categories
With regard to the data set that comes from SMES, a comprehensive technical report describes the different variables (Asp *et al* 2000). Therefore, I will here only provide the most essential information with regard to this data set; focus will be given to the content analysis conducted by myself.

SMES: A central notion for the *Swedish Media Election Studies* is that political actors always appear as either subjects or as objects. With this understanding of the political world, the subject is the actor that says or does something; the object being the actor that the subject relates to. Therefore, with regard to the news media coverage, subjects are assumed to be active co-creators, whereas objects, in contrast, play a role that is largely passive.
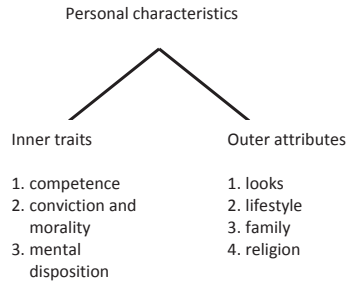
Since I have relied on variables that have been coded with regard to individual segments, the difficulties that can emerge on an aggregated level have—as discussed above—been reduced. With regard to images, no distinction has been made between subjects as objects; for each article, a maximum of two image actors have been coded.

Own content analysis: In the analysis conducted by myself, distinctions have been made on two different levels: firstly, personal characteristics are categorised as either inner traits or outer attributes. Secondly, with regard to inner traits, distinctions have been made between characteristics related to 1) competence, 2) conviction and morality, and 3) mental disposition;

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with regard to outer attributes, distinctions have been made between 1) looks, 2) lifestyle, 3, family, and 4) religion.

The basic idea is illustrated in the below figure:

Personal characteristics

Inner traits   Outer attributes

1. competence   1. looks
2. conviction and   2. lifestyle
   morality   3. family
3. mental   4. religion
   disposition

Since the subcategories have been discussed only briefly in relation to the results, I will here outline the theoretical reasoning behind them. Competence shall be understood as a category of various aspects related to leadership qualities. Thus, references concerned with ability, efficiency and reliability belong to this category. In essence, this means that the category is oriented towards aspects related to leadership and political action. In contrast, conviction and morality is a category that is related to values; aspects that fall under the umbrella of deeply held beliefs.[2] The last inner trait, mental disposition, is a psychologically-oriented dimension. References coded to this category are, for example, indications of personality (e.g. temperament, sociability).

With regard to outer attributes, the characteristics in question are less enduring and can more easily be acquired (or given up). Starting with looks, this subcategory is one that consists of remarks on physical appearance, for example, clothes, make up, and eye colour. Lifestyle assembles references that are related to what the party leader likes to do "off-politics"; two examples are hobbies and interests. (Also references to "lifestyle markers" are coded within this category, e.g. what car the party leader drives). When family and family members are referred to, the coded subcategory is, quite natu-

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[2] Since it is a subcategory to inner traits (i.e. personal characteristics that are stable and enduring), thoughts and opinions do not belong to this category. In order to qualify, cognitions must be core values to the party leader in question; that is, statements such as "I think it is important to consider environmental aspects" are not coded. In contrast, a statement such as "I think the environment is the single most important issue of our time" would be coded.

rally, family, and whereas it has sometimes been hard to distinguish between the two previous attributes—looks and lifestyle—that of family has generally been unproblematic. Religion, finally, is coded as an outer attribute since it is assumed to be something that a person can—to put it bluntly—"have or let go".

Notably, whereas conviction and morality (an inner trait), is a subcategory for values in general, religion is a subcategory for references of a strictly religious kind ("born the son of a clergyman, x himself has never been a frequent churchgoer").

As stated above, a maximum of ten personal characteristics have been coded, and whereas occasionally there have been difficulties with regard to the distinction between looks and lifestyle, the coding has, all in all, been rather unproblematic. Below, I provide two concrete examples of how different categories have been applied.

In *Aftonbladet* (p. 32), one could on September 19 (2010) read the following:

> "Nobody can doubt that Reinfeldt takes his assignment seriously. But in the SVT -interview, he looked sad as he simultaneously asserted that he was 'extremely pleased'. [...] [All in all, however], as the election has come closer, the Prime Minister has all the more often been seen smiling."

Below, I have underlined references that have been coded.

> Nobody can doubt that Reinfeldt takes his assignment (1) <u>seriously</u>. But in the SVT- interview, (2) <u>he looked sad</u> as he simultaneously asserted that he was (3) <u>'extremely pleased'</u>. [...] [All in all, however], as the election has come closer, the Prime Minister has all the more often been (4) <u>seen smiling.</u>

1. That it should be obvious to anyone that Reinfeldt takes his job seriously indicates something about his *mental disposition*. He is a sober statesman, not one to whom politics is about posing for cameras or flip-flopping; Reinfeldt is simply serious about what he does. Could the reference have been coded as anything else; could it, for example, not be coded as one on competence? Not really. That he is serious about his job says little about his abilities (with regard to the job). Consequently, the most reasonable subcategory is that of mental disposition.

2. The second reference is that asserting that Reinfeldt looked sad. Thus, what we are informed about is, essentially, Reinfeldt's physical appearance; con-

sequently, the reference is coded as one on *looks*.

3. In contrast, the third reference—that Reinfeldt himself asserted that he was "extremely pleased"—is not a journalistic interpretation based on his appearance. Consequently, as readers we are told something about how Reinfeldt feels, not how he—in the eye of a journalist—appears to feel. From what has been said above it becomes clear that this reference is therefore coded as one on *mental disposition*; essentially, it is information about Reinfeldt's personality.

4. The fourth reference—that over time Reinfeldt could be seen smiling all the more often—is, however, once again a reference on *looks*. Obviously, the difference between this reference and the one directly above (3) is that we in the latter don't get to know anything about how Reinfeldt actually feels. Certainly, he has been seen smiling, but he has thereby, in a strict sense, not been seen happy. Indeed, had the statement been that Reinfeldt has increasingly often been seen in a good mood, then it would have been coded as one on mental disposition, but the way it here is put, it is one on looks.[3]

For the sake of clarity, let's look at yet another example. In *Dagens Nyheter* (p. 6), one could on 15 September (1979) read the following:

"It is probably only in Sweden that the Prime Minister can stretch out in an ordinary first class compartment, take the Dior glasses off and slumber beneath a copy of Sydsvenska Dagbladet. Meanwhile, people continually pass his shoulder on their way to the beloved beer-serving restaurant compartment."

The coding of this excerpt would be:

It is probably only in Sweden that the Prime Minister can stretch out in an (1) ordinary first class compartment, take the (2) Dior glasses off and slumber beneath a copy of Sydsvenska Dagbladet. Meanwhile, people continually pass his shoulder on their way to the beloved beer-serving restaurant compartment.

1. That the Prime Minister (Ola Ullsten) chooses to travel in an "ordinary first class compartment" says something about his habits and lifestyle; when travelling by train, he chooses to go in a public compartment. Although one

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[3] This is not to say that party leaders always must be the ones who let us know about their feeling; a statement such as "it was a happy party leader that posed in front of the cameras" would be coded as one on mental disposition. While this, obviously, is a journalistic interpretation, the journalist here presents his or her interpretation as were it a fact; "it was a happy party leader".

could argue that the reader get to know about the mental disposition of the Prime Minister—despite, the Dior glasses, he appears to be a humble man—the first reference is coded as one on lifestyle.

2. In contrast, the second reference is more obvious: the Dior glasses tell us about the Prime Minister's physical appearance; this comment is consequently coded as a reference on looks.

From the above examples, it is obvious that coding of personal characteristics is not always as straightforward as it first may seem. However, since I have done all of the coding myself, I have been able to rely on a rather mechanical understanding of how the presented information ought to be coded. Consequently, whereas another researcher probably would end up with different figures, it is my belief that he or she would end up with the same conclusions as those presented above.

Roughly a year after the coding was completed, in October 2012, an intra-coder reliability test was performed. The extent to which there were differences between the two sets is illustrated below.[4]

	Employed data set	Reliability test
Personal characteristics are main subject (per cent)	15	18
Number of coded traits and attributes (1979)	124	128
Number of coded traits and attributes (2010)	174	207
Traits, 1979 (per cent)	78	75
Traits, 2010 (per cent)	67	67

Whereas the differences are small with regard to relative distribution, it should be noted that the number of coded traits and attributes is higher—at least as far as the 2010 election is concerned—in the reliability test set. With regard to the image variables, the correspondence between the two sets is as follows (next page):

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[4] For the reliability test, one week of *Aftonbladet* was coded for both 1979 and 2010. For 1979, the re-examined period was September 10-16; for 2010, the corresponding period was September 13-19.

	Employed data set	Reliability test
Arena: other arena (per cent)	13	10
Clothes: casual (per cent)	8	7
Gaze: towards camera (per cent)	31	27
Distance: close-up (per cent)	13	12
Mood: happy, at ease (per cent)	48	51

Also worth mentioning is the correspondence with regard to one specific subcategory; that of family. In the deployed data set, family references make up 11 per cent of all traits and attributes (the category was coded 32 times). The corresponding figure in the reliability test set is 12 per cent (the category was coded 39 times).

V. Images: variables and categories

Once again, since the principles with regard to the SMES-data have been comprehensively outlined in Asp *et al* (2000), I will prefer to focus on the image analyses conducted by myself. All in all, five variables have been used: 1) arena, 2) clothes, 3) gaze direction, 4) distance and 5) mood. Of these, the four first are dichotomous; the fifth, in contrast, is a five categories variable.
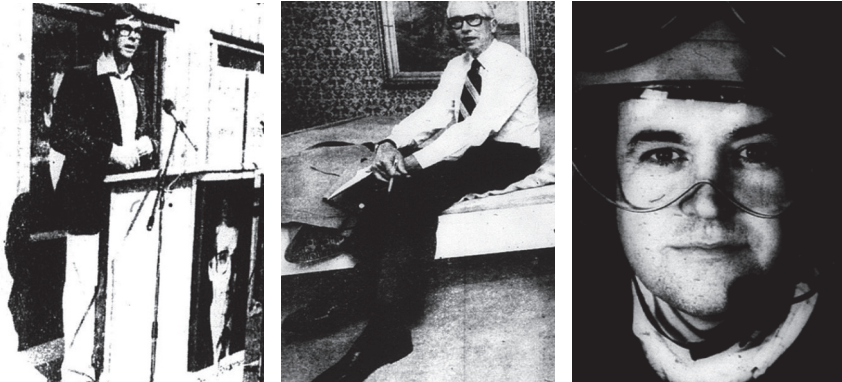
1. Arena: traditional or non-traditional arena (dichotomous). The arena has been coded as traditional if the party leader, for example, is portrayed within political institutions (e.g. in parliament), in public interaction (e.g. campaigning, giving press conferences), in a role as representative (e.g. working place visits, various ceremonies). The arena has been coded as non-traditional if the party leader, for example, is portrayed in a private setting (e.g. his or her home, on holiday).
2. Clothes: formal or casual (dichotomous). The clothes have been coded as formal if the party leader, for example, is portrayed wearing shirt and tie (for women: a dress) or if the party leader in an apparent way is "dressed up". The clothes have been coded as casual if the party leader, for example, is portrayed wearing a short-sleeved shirt or a t-shirt.
3. Gaze direction: into camera or other direction (dichotomous): Into camera has been coded only when the party leader looks straight into the camera. All other gaze directions have been coded as other direction.
4. Distance: Close-up or no close-up (dichotomous). Close-up has been coded only when the party leader appears to be less than a

metre away from the photographer. Whereas I have called this cat-
egory close-up, it might—perhaps more precisely—be referred to
in terms of extreme close-up. Consequently, all photos where the
party leader appears to be more than one metre away from the
photographer have been coded as non close-ups.

5. Mood: 1) happy, at ease; 2) upset, angry; 3) engaged, busy; 4) wor-
ried, troubled; 5) no mood can be detected (five categories vari-
able). Note: Whereas five categories were applied for coding the
variable, I have in the analyses treated it as dichotomous (happy=1;
all other categories=0). The reason is that distinctions between the
latter four categories turned out to be hard to uphold (in essence,
the third category [3] is also related to the "degree of activity" rath-
er than mood).[5] Happy (at ease) has been coded when the party
leader in question is smiling and/or appears to be relaxed.

Below, I provide a concrete example of how different categories have been
applied.

1. Non-traditional arena has been coded only for the image in the
middle. In the two others, the party leader appears in traditional
arenas. Whereas this should be obvious with regard to the image
to the left, the image to the right is coded as traditional arena since

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[4] Had not category 1, 2 and 4 trumped category 3, this would have been a problem. However, since engaged/
busy has been used only when none of the three others have been applicable, I have not missed coding the
mood where this has been apparent.

the party leader here is portrayed during a workplace visit.

2. Casual clothes have been coded only for the image to the right. In the two other, the party leader wears shirt (and tie).

3. Into camera has been coded only for the image to the right. Because if one looks closely at the image in the middle, it becomes apparent that the party leader is not looking straight into the camera; the point that is being focused on is—from the perspective of the party leader—to the right of the place where the photographer is standing.

4. None of the images have been coded as close-up. With regard to the image to the right, this may seem counter-intuitive; but the applied definition for close-up is, as outlined above, that the picture should be taken (or appear to be taken) from a distance of no more than one metre.[6]

5. Happy, at ease has been coded only for the image to the right.

From the above examples, it should be obvious that it has been essential to keep the different variables separated. For example, whereas Fredrik Reinfeldt—on the image to the right—is certainly casually dressed, he does not appear in a non-traditional arena. And whereas one from the context and setting could draw the conclusion that the party leader in the image in the middle—Gösta Bohman—is comfortable with the situation and at ease, this conclusion is altogether based on the "arena".[7]

VI. Validity

This leads us to the question of the study's overall validity. Firstly, what has actually been measured, and secondly, to what material should the overall findings be applicable?

Firstly, what has been empirically investigated is the question of in-

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[5] Obviously, an explanation of why over time there are all the more close-ups may well be that technological developments enable photographers today appear to be closer to their objects than they actually are.

[7] With regard to the content analysis conducted by myself—that is, the variables that have been discussed directly above—the coding has been done from microfilm. An implication of this is that the fifth subcategory (no mood can be detected) essentially consists of two sorts of images: on the one hand, there are images where the mood cannot be detected despite a high quality of the microfilm; on the other hand, there are images where the mood cannot be detected due to a low quality of the microfilm. However, for the four years analysed, the proportion of images within this category (no mood can be detected) is roughly the same: 38 per cent (1979), 28 per cent (1988), 35 per cent (1998) and 27 per cent (2010).

creased personalisation with regard to the news media coverage of national, Swedish election campaigns. Hence, although on a theoretical level I have discussed developments towards increased personalisation with regard to the political system, the provided results are valid only with regard to the news media coverage of politics.

Secondly, I have studied national news media; do I suggest that the presented results are valid also with regard to local and regional news media? Yes, in large I do suggest that. And the reason is evident: for their coverage of the national campaigns, local and regional news media are strongly dependent on material from central news agencies, especially TT. Consequently, whereas it is likely that there are differences, I would say that there are good reasons to assume that the main results should also have validity with regard to local and regional news media.

Moreover, if we look in particular at three of the main findings—the increased objectification of party leaders; the increased visualisation of party leaders, and the increased preoccupation with party leaders' family members—I would dare to say that these findings are likely to be valid also with regard to other countries (especially other Scandinavian countries). That is, whereas I certainly do not suggest that other countries would provide us with identical levels, I do believe there to be grounds to assume that similar developments could be found also for other countries. There are two reasons for this: 1) societal developments are similar with regard to many Western European countries, and 2) Sweden is a typical (rather than a critical) Western European case.

Categories for subjects, objects and image actors (contact the author for translation into English)

1. v
2. s
3. c
4. fp
5. m
6. kd
7. mp
8. nyd
9. De borgerliga partierna
10. De socialistiska partierna
11. sd

20. sd, partiledare
21. v, partiledare
22. s, partiledare
23. c, partiledare
24. fp, partiledare
25. m, partiledare
26. kd, partiledare
27. mp, språkrör
28. nyd, partiledare
29. övriga partiledare
30. De borgerliga partiledarna
31. Samtliga partiledare

33. S-regering
34. Borgerlig regering

41. Riksdagen
42. Statliga myndigheter
43. Landsting
44. Kommun
49. "Facket"
50. Arbetsmarknadens parter
51. LO

52. TCO
53. Saco
54. Arbetsgivarorganisation
55. Småföretagare (och deras organisationer)
56. LRF
61. Övriga organisationer
70. Storföretag
71. Forskare, expert
73. Enskilda bland allmänheten
74. Allmänhet, väljare, mötesdeltagare
76. Kändisar, samhällsdebattörer, intellektuella
80. Mediekändisar
81. Journalist i eget medium
82. Tidning
90. Opinionsinstitut
91. EU
97. Annan aktör
213. De socialistiska/rödgröna partiledarna
999. Övrig politisk aktör

Prime Ministers and party leaders in government (at the time for election)

1979: Ola Ullsten, Liberal Party (PM)
1982: Thorbjörn Fälldin, Centre Party (PM); Ola Ullsten, Liberal Party (Gov.min.)
1985: Olof Palme, Social Democratic Party (PM)
1988: Ingvar Carlsson, Social Democratic Party (PM)
1991: Ingvar Carlsson, Social Democratic Party (PM)
1994: Carl Bildt, Moderate Party (PM); Bengt Westerberg, Liberal Party (Gov.min); Alf Svensson, Christian Democratic Party (Gov.min.)
1998: Göran Persson, Social Democratic Party (PM)
2002: Göran Persson, Social Democratic Party (PM)
2006: Göran Persson, Social Democratic Party (PM)
2010: Fredrik Reinfeldt, Moderate Party (PM); Jan Björklund, Liberal Party (Gov.min.); Maud Olofsson, Centre Party (Gov.min); Göran Hägglund, Christian Democratic Party (Gov.min)

Note: Gösta Bohman, party leader of the Moderate Party, resigned from gov-

ernment before the 1982 election and has therefore not been coded as part of the government. Likewise, Olof Johansson, party leader for the Centre Party, resigned from government before the 1994 election and has therefore not been coded as part of the government.

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