
Do Politicians Lead the Tango?

A Study of the Relationship between Swedish Journalists and their Political Sources in the Context of Election Campaigns

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ABSTRACT

■ The relationship between journalists and their political sources is often described as symbiotic. Furthermore, political sources are often regarded as more powerful than journalists in this relationship. However, most of the research referred to in the international literature is done in the US or Britain. Therefore, the question regarding the relationship between journalists and their political sources, in terms of power, needs to be asked in other countries. This article examines the relationship between journalists and their political sources in Sweden during the National Election in 2002, and in so doing makes a distinction between the power over the process of news making and the media agenda, and the power over the content and the framing of news stories. The results show the importance of making such a distinction. They also show that, in Sweden, it is the journalists and not their political sources that lead the tango most of the time. ■

Key Words election campaigns, news sources, political communication, power, Sweden

Introduction

In a now famous quote, the noted sociologist Herbert Gans wrote that 'The relationship between sources and journalists resembles a dance, for

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sources seek access to journalists, and journalists seek access to sources. Although it takes two to tango, either sources or journalists can lead, but more often than not, sources do the leading' (Gans, 1980: 116). Thus, the relationship between journalists and their sources is viewed as 'symbiotic' (Sigal, 1973; Nord and Strömbäck, 2003; Gans, 1980; Sahlstrand, 2000), and it is argued that both groups are engaged in what political scientist Timothy Cook has termed the 'negotiation of newsworthiness' (Cook, 1998: 90). In this ongoing negotiation, both sources and journalists control key resources. Acting as gatekeepers, journalists are in control of visibility, the extent to which the sources should get the attention that they are seeking, and the tone of the news stories. Conversely, the news sources are in control of information, but also, if they are powerful, have the power to grant legitimacy to the news stories. Journalists need the information that news sources offer, and news sources need the attention and the visibility that journalists can provide (Sigal, 1973; McManus, 1994; Allern, 1997).

While there is no dispute about the fact that journalists and their news sources are dependent on one another, and that the relationship is symbiotic, the question about who leads the tango is still unresolved. According to Gans (2003: 46), it is the sources that lead: 'the journalists respect their official sources, reporting what these sources tell them'. In a similar vein, Manning (2001: 55) argues that the 'pressure of news deadlines and the importance of obtaining information rich in news values, encourages a dependency upon official sources'. The dependency of journalists upon their sources is also at the heart of Bennett's theory about 'indexing', according to which 'the press tends to index the range of political views in a story to the presence of powerful government actors in Washington who also share those views' (Bennett, 2003: 125). If the political elite shares a common view of an issue, and there is no political conflict, then the media is unlikely to report about that particular issue. If, however, the views of the political elite conflict, then the media are more likely to report on the issue. The underlying reason for this is that journalists and the media have become highly dependent upon official sources (Hallin, 1986; Schudson, 2003) and the views of the political elite. Hence, it is argued that it is the sources who lead the tango.

However, while there is mounting evidence that official and elite sources clearly dominate the news (Sahlstrand, 2000; Strömbäck, 2004; Gans, 1980; Bennett, 2003; Jönsson, 2004; Manning, 2001; Allern, 2001), it does not necessarily mean that it is the sources who lead the tango. What it does show is that in order to become a news source, one

ought to have power and be authoritative, but it does not in itself demonstrate that news sources have control over journalists.

As Timothy Cook notes, 'The negotiation of newsworthiness occurs simultaneously on several different levels' (Cook, 1998: 102). One level concerns the *process* of news making, where journalists and their sources negotiate and battle over when and where the interactions will occur. Another level concerns the *content* of the news stories, where the journalists and their sources negotiate and battle over what the story will be about and how it should be framed. Thus, it is quite possible that the news sources lead the tango when it comes to the process of news making, without necessarily leading the tango when it comes to the content of the news stories. As Cook (1998: 105) puts it:

In other words, official sources may instigate the news and direct the attention of the reporters toward particular events and issues, without controlling the ultimate story. Each side relies on the other in the negotiation of newsworthiness, and neither fully dominates, because officials and reporters alike hail from at least partially independent institutions that command important and unique resources.

The distinction between the power over the process of news making and over the content of news stories is important and useful. Another important distinction is between the ability to set the agenda – that is, the power to influence the salience and type of issues the media cover (Protest and McCombs, 1991; Dearing and Rogers, 1996; McCombs, 2004) – and the control over the framing of the news – that is, what the emphasis and the centrally organizing idea of the news stories will be (Entman, 1993, 2004; Iyengar, 1991; Price et al., 1997). Where agenda-setting and agenda-building is concerned with the question of *what* the media reports about, framing is concerned with the question of *how* the media reports about different issues, events and persons. Both forms of power are of great importance to politicians, since previous research shows that the media can exert significant influence over what the public think are important issues and how they perceive particular aspects of reality (Reese et al., 2001; McCombs et al., 1997; Iyengar and Kinder, 1987; Cappella and Jamieson, 1997).

Thus, one should divide the question about who leads the tango – journalists or their sources – into two: (1) Is it journalists or official and elite sources who wield the power over the process of news making and the media agenda? (2) Is it journalists or official and elite sources who control the content and the framing of the news?

To date, most research referred to in the literature has been done in the US and Britain. If results from these countries could easily be generalized to other countries, that would not be a problem. However, it is highly likely that the answer to questions regarding the relationship between journalists and their sources is country specific. Both the media system and the political system, for example the degree of political parallelism (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), matters, as do the history and culture in different countries (Semetko et al., 1991). Thus, the question of who leads the tango needs to be addressed in more countries than those usually referred to in the literature.

Sweden is one such country where the question needs to be asked, since it differs significantly from both the US and Britain when it comes to both political and media system. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), both Britain and the US are examples of the liberal model of media and political system, whereas Sweden is a typical example of the democratic corporatist model. Therefore, it is likely that the question about who leads the tango will yield a different answer in Sweden than in liberal model countries.

Research questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship, in terms of power, between journalists and politicians in Sweden, in the context of election campaigns. More specifically, the study sets out to answer three research questions.

Since one of the key resources that journalists control is visibility, one aspect of the power of politicians as sources concerns the degree to which politicians figure as sources in the content of news stories. Even though it is sometimes in the interest of sources to kill stories or to be anonymous, generally speaking and in the context of Swedish election campaigns, it can be assumed that politicians seek to gain visibility in the news by providing the media with information that is deemed newsworthy. Dominance of elite sources in the news has also been interpreted as evidence of the elite sources' power over the news, the implicit or explicit assumption being that the more elite sources figure in the news, the more powerful they are. Thus, the first research question is:

RQ1: To what extent do politicians figure as sources in Swedish political news journalism?

Being used as a source in the news is important for groups seeking to gain visibility. However, it does not in itself give them control over the

content or the framing of the news. Journalists can use politicians as sources and still retain power over the content and the framing of the news. One way the journalists can do that is by colouring the news stories through their own interpretations and analyses. Thus, the second research question is:

RQ2: To what extent do Swedish journalists colour the news stories by their own interpretations and analyses?

To fully understand the relationship between journalists and their political sources, one cannot just study the content of the news. It is also important to look at perceptions of power, since these can tell us more about the process of news making. The perceptions in themselves can also have behavioural consequences (Fiske and Taylor, 1991; see Schudson, 1995). Therefore, the third research question is:

RQ3: Who, in the opinions of Swedish journalists, politicians and citizens, are more powerful, journalists or politicians?

Research methods and empirical data

In order to answer the research questions outlined in the preceding section, a combination of research methods is necessary. Thus, this study draws upon three methods: a content analysis, an interview study and a survey. All three were conducted during the Swedish National Election held on 15 September 2002.

The first study is a quantitative content analysis of the four main national newspapers and the three main television news programmes in Sweden. The newspapers are *Dagens Nybeter*, *Svenska Dagbladet*, *Expressen* and *Aftonbladet*. The first two are broadsheets in style, if not in form. The last two could be described as 'newsstand tabloids' (Sparks, 2000). The television news programmes are *Rapport*, *Aktuellt* and *TV4 Nybeterna*. The first two are part of the public service broadcasting company Sveriges Television (SVT), whereas *TV4 Nybeterna* belongs to a commercial station (TV4). The main daily news broadcast on each channel was chosen for analysis. The content analysis includes all news stories during the last three weeks before Election Day that make reference to national politicians or national political institutions. The total number of news articles and news stories in the sample is 1154.¹ To an extent, the results from this study can be compared to a methodologically similar study of media coverage during three weeks prior to the National Election in 1998 (Strömbäck, 2001).

The second phase involved interviews conducted in November–December 2002, a few months after the election, with seven leading

political journalists² and the party secretaries of each of the political parties represented in the national parliament (Riksdagen).³ The journalists chosen for the interviews all held prominent positions within their media outlet at the time of the election, and were thus in a good position to answer questions about the election coverage of their respective newspaper or broadcast station. In the Swedish political system, the party secretaries are responsible for the campaigns and the party organization.

The third phase involved a survey of separate groups of journalists, politicians and citizens. All three groups received exactly the same questionnaire by post between August and November 2002. In the case of citizens, questionnaires and return envelopes were sent to a random sample of 2500 individuals between 16 and 80 years of age, and living in Sweden. The net sample was 2286 individuals, of whom 1147 completed and returned the questionnaire, giving a final response rate of 50 percent. Even though that was less than desirable, analysis shows that the respondents are representative with regard to sex and age. With regard to educational level, individuals with higher education are somewhat overrepresented. In the case of the journalists surveyed, questionnaires and return envelopes were sent to a random sample of 1000 individuals drawn from the membership list of the Swedish Union of Journalists, to which approximately 90 percent of all Swedish journalists belong. The net sample was 989 individuals, of whom 570 completed and returned the questionnaire, giving a final response rate of 58 percent.

Finally, in the case of politicians, questionnaires and return envelopes were sent to a strategic sample of 1228 leading local politicians. The reason for this difference in sampling, compared to the samples of citizens and journalists, is that there is no central register of politicians in Sweden. Therefore, we chose to send the questionnaire to a sample of politicians chairing local government committees with responsibility for children and education, chairing municipal councils, or being municipal commissioners. The net sample was 1210 individuals, of whom 907 returned the questionnaire, giving a response rate of 75 percent. In the case of all three populations, there were two follow-ups sent to those who did not return the first or the second questionnaire.

Results

The question of the power relationship between journalists and their sources can be investigated in several ways. One is to measure the extent to which politicians figure as sources in political news journalism, the

assumption being that politicians seek visibility by providing information that journalists deem newsworthy. Thus, the more politicians figure as sources, the more likely it is that politicians are leading the tango. However, the likelihood of this being the case should not be confused with what *is* the case. Politicians may figure prominently as sources, but journalists colour the news stories with their own interpretations of what the politicians say and do, or why they do it; so it is not in fact so clear cut as to who actually leads the tango (Semetko et al., 1991). As indicated earlier, the question has two parts. The first is whether journalists or politicians have the power over the process of news making and the media agenda, and the second is whether journalists or politicians have the power over the content, or the framing, of the news.

The first research question is addressed in Table 1, which presents the percentage of news stories in the 2002 election coverage that contained at least one politician as a source.

Even though it is always hard to determine what constitutes a high level in absolute terms, politicians frequently figure as sources, regardless of whether the newspapers are tabloid (*Expressen* and *Aftonbladet*) or broadsheet (*Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*), and regardless of whether the broadcast news is public service (*Rapport* and *Aktuellt*) or commercial (*TV4 Nyheterna*). The differences that can be found between different news outlets do not correlate to structural factors. Furthermore, with the exception of *Aktuellt*, the differences are mostly rather small. Therefore, it seems safe to conclude that politicians usually figure predominantly as sources in Swedish political news journalism.

However, how often politicians figure as sources is not, as noted previously, the only relevant aspect. The extent to which they are allowed to speak in their own words is also very important and an indicator of the discretionary power of the media (Semetko et al., 1991), as shown by the research about shrinking sound bites in US broadcast news (Hallin,

Table 1 News stories in the Swedish 2002 election coverage that have politicians as the source (in percentages)

	Dagens Nyheter	Svenska Dagbladet	Aftonbladet	Expressen	Rapport	Aktuellt	TV4 Nyheterna
News stories with politicians as sources (%)	73	69	70	65	66	53	77
N	325	214	170	161	103	108	73

Note: Percentages have been rounded.

Table 2 Extent to which politicians were quoted in the Swedish election coverage, 1998 and 2002

<i>Paper</i>	1998	2002
Mean number of sentences quoted per news article	13.7	11.7
Mean number of sentences quoted per broadcast news story	11.1	10.0
Median number of sentences quoted per news article	8	7
Median number of sentences quoted per broadcast news story	9	8

Note: Only news stories including at least one politician as a quoted source are included in the analysis.

1992; Lowry and Shidler, 1998; Just et al., 1999). Thus, Table 2 shows the extent to which politicians were quoted in both 1998 and 2002 coverage.

Clearly, the fact that politicians often figure as news sources does not mean that they control news content. The fact that the median number of sentences quoted from politicians have decreased to 7–8 in 2002, from 8–9 in 1998, indicates that the politicians are increasingly dependent on the context in which journalists quote them. That both the average and the median number of sentences have dropped somewhat between 1998 and 2002 also indicates that journalists do exert some power over the content of the news stories.

One question that might shed further light on the degree to which journalists have power over the content of the news stories is whether the journalistic style is interpretive or descriptive. As Patterson (2000a: 250) writes:

The interpretive style empowers journalists by giving them more control over the news message. Whereas descriptive reporting is driven by the facts, the interpretive form is driven by the theme around which the story is built. Facts become the materials with which the chosen theme is illustrated. . . . The descriptive style places the journalist in the role of an observer. The interpretive style requires the journalist to act also as an analyst. The journalist is thus positioned to give shape to the news in a way the descriptive style does not allow.

Drawing inferences from previous research (Djerf-Pierre and Weibull, 2001; Strömbäck, 2004), as well as research in other countries (Patterson, 2000a, 2000b; McNair, 2000; Semetko et al., 1991), one might conclude that interpretive political news journalism in the context of the Swedish national elections in 1998 and 2002 was rather common. The degree to which this is the case can be analysed in two different ways.

Table 3 Explicit 'news analyses' in the Swedish election coverage, 1998 and 2002 (in percentages)

	Aftonbladet	Expressen	Dagens Nyheter	Svenska Dagbladet	TV4 Nyheterna	Rapport	Aktuellt	Mean
1998	1	6	10	13	10	0	11	7
2002	12	14	3	9	10	3	12	9
N (1998)	179	174	201	189	72	107	101	
N (2002)	170	161	325	214	73	103	108	

Note: Percentages have been rounded.

First, one can study the extent to which the media publish so-called news analyses, i.e. articles published on news pages explicitly labelled 'news analysis' or a similar term, and their functional equivalent in broadcast news, where one journalist interviews another journalist cast as an 'expert' (see Table 3). Second, one can study the extent to which individual news stories are guided by the descriptive vs the interpretive style (see Table 4).

The results show that fewer than 10 percent of the news stories in 1998 and 2002 were explicit news analyses, i.e. openly interpretive. However, as noted earlier, the news stories can follow the interpretive style even though it is not so explicit to the readers or viewers. The news stories can look like 'straight news', but on closer inspection, be highly interpretive. In fact, this is the case in more than one-third of all news

Table 4 Descriptive vs interpretive journalistic style in the Swedish election coverage, 1998 and 2002 (in percentages)

	<i>Descriptive journalistic style</i>		<i>Interpretive journalistic style</i>		N	
	1998	2002	1998	2002	1998	2002
<i>Aftonbladet</i>	67	65	33	35	177	170
<i>Expressen</i>	70	48	30	52	166	161
<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	62	66	38	34	200	325
<i>Svenska Dagbladet</i>	66	56	34	44	189	214
<i>Rapport</i>	52	59	48	41	106	101
<i>Aktuellt</i>	63	48	37	52	100	108
<i>TV4 Nyheterna</i>	55	56	45	44	71	72
Mean	62	57	38	43		

Note: News stories that could not be categorized have been excluded from the analysis.

stories published in the weeks prior to the national elections in 1998 and 2002.

Taken together, the results so far seem to support Cook's (1998) view that while politicians may have the power to instigate news and direct the attention of the reporters towards particular events and issues, journalists retain ultimate control over the story. Clearly, Swedish politicians do often appear as news sources, and they are certainly doing their utmost to set the agenda, spin stories and control the framing of news. However, at the same time, it is Swedish journalists who ultimately write the stories, and decide what to include and what not to include.

Perceptions of power

As noted earlier, one cannot study the content of the news alone to fully understand the power relationship between journalists and their political sources. One should also study perceptions of power, since these perceptions in themselves will have behavioural consequences (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). If we believe that a particular institution, or a particular actor, has great power, we will behave differently than we would if we believed the institution or the actor to be powerless. Thus, perceptions of power can have great impact upon actual power (Schudson, 1995).

In the survey, therefore, we asked our samples of citizens, journalists and politicians to respond to the three statements: 'Journalists . . . /People . . . /Politicians have great power when it comes to influencing politics and society'. The respondents could choose between 'strongly agree', 'agree somewhat', 'disagree somewhat' and 'strongly disagree'. The results presented in Table 5 show the percentages of respondents agreeing 'strongly' or 'somewhat' with the statement.

The results show, first, that all three populations perceive journalists and politicians to be the most powerful actors. That politicians have great power when it comes to influencing politics and society was agreed with by 94 percent of people in general, 95 percent of journalists and 96 percent of politicians. With regard to the power wielded by journalists, the corresponding figures are 90 percent, 93 percent and 99 percent. As many as 78 percent of the politician respondents strongly agree with the statement that journalists have great power when it comes to influencing politics and society.

This points to a second result: journalists are actually perceived to be slightly more powerful by politicians than the politicians perceive themselves to be, whereas politicians are perceived as slightly more powerful by journalists than they perceive themselves to be. The

Table 5 Perceptions of power to influence politics and society (in percentages)

	<i>Citizens</i>	<i>Journalists</i>	<i>Politicians</i>
1. People have great power when it comes to influencing politics and society	38	33	64
2. Journalists have great power when it comes to influencing politics and society	90	93	99
3. Politicians have great power when it comes to influencing politics and society	94	95	96

Notes: Percentages have been rounded. The differences between the populations' answers are significant on the .01 level. The correlation between population and perceptions of the power of journalists (Cramer's V) = .25, the perceptions of the power of politicians = .13, and the perceptions of the power of people = .22. 'Don't know' answers have been excluded. N for citizens = 1099 (statement 1), 1038 (statement 2) and 1079 (statement 3). N for journalists = 560 (statement 1), 567 (statement 2) and 564 (statement 3). N for politicians = 897 (statement 1), 905 (statement 2) and 896 (statement 3).

differences are small, however, and it is obvious that both journalists and politicians are perceived to be very powerful among all populations studied.

A third result is that politicians perceive people in general to have power when it comes to influencing politics and society, whereas journalists tend to perceive people in general as relatively powerless. Journalists even perceive people in general as more powerless than people in general themselves do. For those who want journalism to empower people, like the proponents of public journalism (Rosen, 1999; Merritt, 1998), this suggests that they will first have to convince journalists themselves that perhaps people are not as powerless as journalists seem to believe.

Returning to the question of who leads the tango – journalists or their political sources – it is hard to tell from these results. What is clear is that it is the journalists and the politicians taking part in the dance, while the citizens are watching from the side, but it is still difficult to tell who is leading the dance.

The actors' view of the relationship between journalists and politicians

In the interviews, we questioned some of the most centrally placed and influential journalists and politicians in Sweden. If anyone does, these journalists and politicians should know what happens behind the scenes, and how the actions and reactions among journalists and politicians play

out. They should be able to cast further light on the question of power over the process of news making and the media agenda, and over the content and the framing of the news.

Regarding the power to set the agenda, many of the journalists interviewed believe that it is the political parties and their leaders who mainly decide what issues will become the most salient issues in the media. At the same time, they recognize that independence of the media from the political parties has increased significantly during the last 10–15 years, and that journalists' power over the media agenda has increased as a consequence. Most of the journalists interviewed also think that they themselves have more power over the media agenda in times of political calm, whereas they believe political actors wield more power over the agenda in times of more political intensity, in the weeks running up to an election, for example.

Compared to the journalists interviewed, the party political secretaries are less unanimous in their responses. Whereas some party secretaries say that it is the journalists who wield most power over the media agenda, others maintain that it is the parties themselves who have the power. One major reason for this difference might be the different sizes of the parties. Whereas the party secretaries of the smaller parties tend to believe that it is the journalists who control the agenda, Lars Stjernkvist, then party secretary for the biggest and also governing party, the Social Democrats, says that 'If the party wants something, it is hard for journalists not to follow suit.' That is, size does matter.

The same is true of the media: all journalists and politicians agree that some parts of the media and some journalists are more powerful than others. Among different media formats, almost everyone says that television broadcast news is more powerful than the press. Among the television news programmes, the public service broadcasts *Rapport* and *Aktuellt* are deemed most powerful. Of the newspapers, *Dagens Nyheter* is considered the most powerful newspaper. Some, among them the party secretary for the Social Democrats, believe that *Dagens Nyheter* is the most important and powerful medium of all.

If the journalists and the politicians interviewed have different perceptions concerning the power to set the media agenda, the unity in response is striking when the question concerns the power over the framing of the news. Without exception, journalists and politicians agree that journalists and the media are more powerful than politicians and the political parties when it comes to the framing of the news. It is the journalists who choose whom to interview, what facts to include and what not to include, what to emphasize, what the central organizing idea, or

angle, will be – in short, how the news will be framed. Even though several journalists note that the political parties have become more professional in spinning the news, arranging pseudo-events and adapting to the media logic, they still believe that politicians have a lot to learn if they want to gain control over the framing and the content of news stories. One of the journalists, Lena Mellin from the leading tabloid *Aftonbladet*, even says that ‘it is surprising how bad they are’ in understanding how the media work and what the media want.

One of the most important forms of power, which is also related to the framing of the news, is the power to frame the parties as ‘winners’ or ‘losers’. Since a large part of Swedish political journalism during election campaigns frames politics as strategy or a game, rather than as issues (Strömbäck, 2004, 2005), the choice to frame certain political parties as losers and others as winners can exert a significant influence over the final outcome of the election. This is something that both the journalists and the politicians interviewed recognize, even though the journalists tend to put the blame on the political parties (they receive the coverage they deserve), while the politicians tend to put the blame on the journalists.

Some politicians maintain that there is a consistent bias against their party, but most of them tend to believe that the problem is not an inherent ideological bias in the news. Rather, the problem they identify, as do some of the journalists, is the structural bias (Gulati et al., 2004) that manifests itself in the media’s drive for attention-grabbing stories. Since the media need stories that can catch people’s attention, they are quick to identify trends as well as events, stereotypes and aspects of reality that might make up an exciting, sensational and powerful story (Jamieson and Waldman, 2003; Nord and Strömbäck, 2003). This is part of the so-called ‘tabloidization’ of news (Sparks and Tulloch, 2000).

In this context, a political party that is dropping in the polls is cast as a loser, whereas a party that is gaining in the polls is cast as a winner. This tendency to pick winners and losers, and thereby exaggerate the movements and contribute to a self-fulfilling prophecy, obviously favours some parties over others. In the Swedish case at least, which party, or which parties, that are favoured by this tendency of the media varies from one election to another. There seems to be no consistency in how the media treat the political parties (Asp, 2003). Nevertheless, the power of who will be picked and framed as winner and who as loser is beyond the power of the parties, but not beyond that of the journalists. That is, the media and the journalists have more power than the politicians or the political parties in framing news. So it appears that it is the journalists who lead the tango, not the politicians.

Conclusions

It is easy to agree with Gans that the relationship between journalists and their sources resembles a dance, but his assertion that journalists report 'what the sources tell them' (Gans, 2003: 46) and that it is the sources who do the leading, is more questionable. Or so it seems in the Swedish case at least, restricting ourselves to the relationship between journalists and their *political* sources in the context of election campaigns specifically.

On the one hand, the results here show that politicians are frequently used as sources in the news stories. With the exception of *Aktuellt*, between 65 and 77 percent of the news stories contain at least one politician as a source. The survey also shows that politicians are perceived to be very powerful when it comes to influencing politics and society, among ordinary citizens as well as among journalists and politicians.

On the other hand, the fact that *Aktuellt* deviates from the other media in the percentage of news stories including at least one politician as a source suggests that the media have discretionary power and that the media decide the extent to which politicians should be included in the stories. The results also show that the median number of sentences quoted from politicians is fewer than 10 per news story, and this decreased between 1998 and 2002. This suggests that it is journalists, rather than politicians, who ultimately exert control over news content. The same is true of the results showing that more than 40 percent of the news stories follow the interpretive rather than the descriptive style, and that this percentage has risen since 1998.

The interviews carried out with leading Swedish politicians and journalists underline the importance of distinguishing between different forms of power. While the interviews suggest that at least politicians from the largest party (the Social Democrats) may have more power than journalists when it comes to the process of news making and setting the media agenda, they also show that it is the journalists who have the ultimate power over the framing and the content of the news stories. Thus, journalists and their political sources seem to share the power over the process of news making and the media agenda, whereas journalists seem to exert most of the power when it comes to the content and the framing of news. The fact that both journalists and politicians agree that the journalists have the ultimate power over the framing of the news is rather striking, especially in light of the discussion about the professionalization of political campaigning, spin-doctors and news management.

Together, the results presented in this article lead us to the conclusion that in the Swedish case, and in the context of election campaigns, it is the journalists and not the politicians that lead the tango *most of the time*. On the dance floor, the political actors are doing what they can to invite the journalists to dance, but ultimately, it is the journalists who choose who they are going to dance with.

If a politician is very powerful, comes from the governing party or can provide an attention-grabbing story, he or she will be an acceptable dance partner, but if not, he or she will probably be turned down. And even though some politicians are accepted as a dance partners, the results of the study indicate that it is still the journalists who decide when the dance should end, or when to change the tune.

Limitations and some suggestions for further research

The results and conclusions notwithstanding, the limitations of this study should also be noted. One limitation is that the empirical data are related to pre-election time. To what extent the results can be generalized to periods of political calm is therefore uncertain; thus, further research in this area should include periods of both political intensity and political calm. Another limitation is related to the empirical data; this is an area where participatory observation within news departments would enhance our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between Swedish journalists and their political sources. Finally, further research should also try to establish the links between the sources' efforts to influence the news, for example by issuing press releases and staging pseudo-events, and the content of the news.

Notes

1. In the case of the newspapers, supplements were excluded from the sample.
2. The journalists interviewed were: Lena Mellin (*Aftonbladet*), Henrik Brors (*Dagens Nyheter*), Per Wendel (*Expressen*), Lena Hennel (*Svenska Dagbladet*), Lena Smedsaas (*TV4 Nyheterna*), Kent Wännström (Sveriges Television) and Hanna Stjärne (Sveriges Radio).
3. The party secretaries interviewed were: Jöran Hägglund (the Centre Party), Johan Pehrson (the Liberal Party), Sven Gunnar Persson (the Christian Democratic Party), Johnny Magnusson (the Moderate Party), Håkan Wåhlstedt (the Green Party), Lars Stjernkvist (the Social Democratic Party) and Pernilla Zethraeus (the Left Party).

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