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Mediatization and Media Interventionism: A Comparative Analysis of Sweden and the United States

Jesper Strömbäck¹ and Daniela V. Dimitrova²

Abstract
Although mediatization as a term is commonly used in the academic literature, it is rarely defined well and there are almost no studies that explicitly seek to investigate the mediatization of politics. Drawing on the literature on mediatization, media interventionism, political news journalism and related areas, the purpose of this article is to develop indicators of the degree to which news content is mediatized, and test these in a comparative content analysis of how Swedish and US television news covered the 2006 Swedish and 2008 US election campaigns. The results show that election news on US television is more mediatized than that on Swedish television, as expected. However, few differences were found across commercial and public service television news within Sweden. The study also suggests that the mediatization of news content may be moderated by national journalism cultures, political news cultures and political communication cultures.

Keywords
mediatization, comparative research, election news, media interventionism

While mediatization as a term has been used for at least two decades (Asp 1986), only during the past few years has it become a key concept in research trying to understand the impact of media on various political, cultural, and social processes (Lundby 2009a). Although the term itself is often used, it is, however, rarely defined, and often no clear distinction is made between mediation and mediatization (Livingstone 2009). It is a concept referred to more often than used to guide systematic empirical research.

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There is however a growing consensus that mediation and mediatization should not be perceived as synonymous (Couldry 2008; Strömbäck 2008a). While the essence of mediation is the rather neutral act of transmitting messages through media (Mazzoleni 2008b), mediatization is a process-oriented concept, focused on increasing media influence (Hjarvard 2004, 2008; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). There is also a growing consensus that mediatization should be understood as a multidimensional concept (Lundby 2009b).

In the context of politics, Strömbäck (2008a) has proposed that the mediatization of politics should be conceived of as a process where four dimensions can be identified. The first dimension is concerned with the extent to which the media constitute the most important source of information and channel of communication, the second with the media’s independence from other social and political institutions, the third with the degree to which media content is governed by media logic or political logic, and the fourth with political actors and the degree to which they are governed by media logic or political logic.

The degree of mediatization can thus be expected to vary across time as well as countries, and the degree of mediatization should be perceived as an empirical question. However, looking at extant research there is a clear disconnect between research that explicitly focuses on the mediatization of politics and research that is relevant in this context: while there are a number of studies that are relevant in the context of the mediatization of politics (see Bennett and Entman 2001; Farnsworth and Lichter 2005, 2006; Hallin 1992; Kaid et al. 1991; Patterson 1993; Semetko et al. 1991), there are virtually no systematic studies that explicitly and systematically seek to investigate the mediatization of politics.

Against this background, the purpose of this article is to investigate the mediatization of politics in two countries that constitute highly different cases within the family of advanced, postindustrial democracies: Sweden and the United States.

While the article discusses differences and similarities between Sweden and the United States along the first and second dimension of the mediatization of politics, the empirical focus is on the third dimension of mediatization, that is, media content and the degree to which it is governed by media logic as opposed to political logic. As part of this, the article also, building off previous research, seeks to identify appropriate indicators of the degree to which the media intervene (Esser 2008) and shape the coverage according to media logic as opposed to political logic. Empirically, the study draws on a quantitative content analysis of how Swedish and U.S. television news covered the 2006 Swedish and 2008 U.S. election campaigns.

**Conceptualizing Mediatization**

Although it is during the past decades that mediatization has become a common term in political communication research, the term dates back to the early nineteenth century and the reorganization of the German states by Napoleon (Livingstone 2009). In that context, “Mediatization, defined broadly, is the subsumption of one monarchy into
another monarchy in such a way that the ruler of the annexed state keeps his or her sovereign title and, sometimes, a measure of local power” (Livingstone 2009: 6). From the beginning, mediatization was thus used to refer to a process where some increase their influence at the expense of others.

In political communication research, one of the first to use the term was Asp (1986: 359). In an analysis of the media’s impact on politics, he used mediatization to refer to “a political system that is highly influenced by and adjusted to the demands of the mass media in their coverage of politics.” More than ten years passed, however, before the concept gained ground in international research. The most widely cited article on mediatization was published by Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999: 250), according to whom “mediatized politics is politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media.” In 2004, Schulz published the second most cited article. He defined mediatization as relating to “changes associated with communication media and their development. The processes of social change in which the media play a key role may be defined as extension, substitution, amalgamation and accommodation” (Schulz 2004: 88). Around the same time, Kepplinger (2002: 973) published the third most cited article on the topic and one of few that empirically investigates the mediatization of politics. In his understanding, mediatization “refers to adaption of politics to the needs of the mass media.”

What these and other articles have in common is that ultimately mediatization refers to a social change process in which media have become increasingly influential (Asp and Esaiasson 1996; Hjarvard 2004, 2008; Lundby 2009b; Mazzoleni 2008b, 2008c; Strömbäck 2008a; Strömbäck and Esser 2009). Krotz (2007) even defined it as a metaprocess on par with other large-scale social change processes such as globalization and individualization.

Mediatization is however not the only concept used to denote a change process through which the media have become increasingly influential. Equally influential or perhaps even more common is the concept of mediation (Altheide and Snow 1988; Bennett and Entman 2001; Couldry 2008; Davis 2007; Nimmo and Combs 1983; Silverstone 2007). Generally, it appears as if scholars from continental Europe prefer the term mediatization whereas American and British scholars prefer the term mediation (Livingstone 2009).

Mediatization and mediation should however not be conceived of as synonymous. The main reason is that mediation, even in the context of media research, has two very different meanings. On the one hand, it refers to the rather neutral process of transmitting messages. In this respect, mediation is not synonymous with mediatization. On the other hand, when scholars use mediation to denote a larger process of media influence or “the overall difference that media make by being there in our social world” (Couldry 2008: 379), its meaning comes exceedingly close to mediatization. Using mediation to denote both meanings makes it more ambiguous, less precise, and hence less useful. To increase conceptual clarity, mediatization and mediation should hence be perceived as two different concepts (Mazzoleni 2008b; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Strömbäck 2008a, 2010).
If mediatization refers to a change process of increasing media influence, another key part of most conceptualizations is that media should be understood not as single organizations or formats. Rather, media should be understood as an ever-present social and cultural system of production and dissemination of symbols, signs, messages, meanings, and values. In terms of mass media, the media should be understood as a system or an institution (Cook 2005; Sparrow 1999). Different media organizations and their formats, operations, and content constitute the building blocks of this overall system, but within a given space the sum is greater than its parts, and the norms that govern the media overall are often more important than what distinguishes one form of media from another (Altheide and Snow 1979; Hjarvard 2008; Mazzoleni 2008c; Nimmo and Combs 1983).

An important part of conceptualizing the news media as an institution is the observation that different media share highly similar norms and practices. For example, what is considered as news seldom varies much across media within a given space; rather, different media tend to apply highly similar standards of newsworthiness (O’Neill and Harcup 2009; Schudson 2003; Shoemaker and Reese 1996).

In this context, the notion of media logic is crucial (Brants and van Praag 2006; Hjarvard 2008; Mazzoleni 1987, 2008a; Schrott 2009; Strömbäck 2010; Strömbäck and Esser 2009). According to Altheide and Snow (1979: 10), who first proposed the concept,

> Media logic consists of a form of communication; the process through which media present and transmit information. Elements of this form include the various media and the formats used by these media. Format consists, in part, of how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behavior, and the grammar of media communication.

Although this definition is elusive, media logic can be understood as a particular way of interpreting and covering social, cultural, and political phenomena. According to the theory, the various media formats, production processes, and routines as well as the need for compelling stories shape how the media interpret and cover public affairs. The media’s own formats and needs, rather than those of other social subsystems, take precedence and guide the media and their coverage.

This is one part of the story. A second and equally important part is that other social subsystems, as a consequence of the media’s independence and importance as sources of information for the public, have become increasingly dependent on the media and their logic. As noted by Schrott (2009: 42), “The core of mediatization consists in the mechanism of the institutionalization of media logic in other societal subsystems. In these subsystems, media logic competes with established guidelines and influences on the actions of individuals.” In political contexts, media logic thus competes with and, hypothetically, becomes more important than political logic (Mazzoleni 1987; Meyer 2002; Strömbäck 2008a, 2010).

This points toward mediatization as a dual process, where media organizations not only have acquired the status of an independent institution but also have become
increasingly integrated and embedded in the operations of other social and political institutions and organizations. As Sparrow (1999: 10) writes,

As an institution, the news media constrain the choice sets of these other political actors, that is, they structure . . . the actions of those working in the three formal branches of government, in public administration, and at various stages or parts of the political process. The news media thereby exert important effects on other political actors.

What this suggests is that mediatization of politics is a multidimensional concept, where at least four dimensions can be identified. As suggested by Strömbäck (2008a, 2010; also see Strömbäck and Esser 2009), the first dimension is concerned with the extent to which the media constitute the most important source of information and channel of communication. The second dimension is concerned with the media’s independence from other social institutions, not least political institutions. The third dimension is related to media content and the degree to which media content is mainly governed by media logic or political logic. The fourth dimension focuses on political actors and the degree to which they are governed by media logic or political logic.

Based on this, the degree of mediatization can be expected to vary across time as well as countries and even institutions within countries. However, as noted there are only few studies that explicitly seek to investigate the mediatization of politics (although there are a number of studies that are relevant in this context, usually done with reference to the mediation rather than the mediatization of politics). This calls for more empirical research that explicitly focuses on the mediatization of politics and that are either longitudinal or comparative, or preferably both. A crucial step in this direction is to operationalize the concept of mediatization.

**Operationalizing Mediatization**

As noted, there is in effect only one study that explicitly seeks to investigate the degree of mediatization of politics empirically. This is remarkable, considering how often the concept is referred to, but it also emphasizes the need for more empirical research on the mediatization of politics. At the same time, major research efforts have been devoted to research on media influences, media content, and the mediation of politics, and some of this research is clearly relevant also in the context of theory and research on the mediatization of politics (see, e.g., Bennett and Entman 2001; Farnsworth and Lichter 2005, 2006; Hallin 1992; Nimmo and Combs 1983; Patterson 1993). Here, however, we focus on research that may be relevant with respect to the third dimension of mediatization, that is, media content and the degree to which it is shaped by media logic as opposed to political logic.

The main study that explicitly seeks to investigate the degree of mediatization of politics empirically is Kepplinger’s (2002) article (but see Brants and van Praag 2006). Although he investigates media content, the focus is on the activities of members of the German parliament. Hence, his study deals more with the fourth than with the third
dimension of mediatization. Kepplinger finds a rise in “symbolic politics” in media content, perceived as an indicator of mediatization. Apart from that, the study does not provide much guidance with respect to how the mediatization of media content can or should be operationalized.

More useful in this context may be research related to the “media’s discretionary power” or “media interventionism.” As defined by Semetko et al. (1991: 3), the discretionary power of the media refers to “the extent to which the media are capable of playing a formative role in shaping the agenda of election campaigns, and with the forces that enable them to play such a role or limit their performance of it.” Media interventionism similarly refers to the degree to which the content of political news is shaped by journalistic interventions. As suggested by Esser (2008: 403), “The journalistic attitude toward intervention in election campaigns is high when journalists report the campaign in their own words, scenarios, assessments—and when they grant politicians only limited opportunities to present themselves.” Indicators that media coverage is shaped by journalistic interventions, reflecting media logic, rather than the wants and needs of political institutions and actors, reflecting political logic, may thus work as indicators of both media interventionism and the degree to which media content is mediatized.

One prime example of such an indicator is the length of politicians’ sound bites, where Hallin (1992) set the agenda for subsequent research and also linked the issue to how mediated news coverage is. Ultimately, it is the media that decide how long politicians are allowed to speak in their own words on TV and which sound bites to include in news reports. The length of politicians’ sound bites or the proportion of speaking time that is devoted to journalists speaking may thus be one indicator of the degree to which news content is mediatized (cf. Esser 2008; Farnsworth and Lichter 2006, 2008; Grabe and Bucy 2009).

A second and closely related example of media interventionism is the degree of journalistic visibility, that is, how visible journalists themselves are in a news report (cf. Farnsworth and Lichter 2006; Grabe and Bucy 2009; Patterson 1993). The more journalists themselves are visible—for example through stand-ups or anchors interviewing reporters live or in studio—the more they insert themselves between viewers and that which the news report is ostensibly about. Hence, degree of journalistic visibility may be a second indicator of the degree to which news content is mediatized.

Closely related may be the extent to which journalists are granted the wrap-up, that is, the concluding sound bite. Following Grabe and Bucy (2009: 202), having the last say is thought to have beneficial consequences, not least because people tend to retain more recent information better and because the last words “leave the strongest, most favorable impression.” The extent to which journalists are granted the wrap-up may thus be a third indicator of the degree to which media content is mediatized.

A fourth indicator focuses on lip flaps, that is, “the overlay of a reporter narration on corresponding video of a candidate who appears to be mouthing the words of a speech or a spoken comment” (Grabe and Bucy 2009: 202). When journalists speak while the visuals show politicians talking, the journalist is in effect silencing the politicians. Lip flaps may thus be a fourth indicator of the degree to which media content is mediatized.
A fifth indicator may be the framing of politics as a strategic game or a horse race. Here research overwhelmingly shows that the media have a strong tendency to frame politics as a strategic game or horse race, although there are differences across countries (Cappella and Jamieson 1997; De Vreese and Semetko 2002; Esser and Hemmer 2008; Kerbel et al. 2000; Lawrence 2000; Patterson 1993; Scammell and Semetko 2008; Sheafer et al. 2008). More important, though, is that this kind of framing of politics is driven by the media rather than by political actors, as suggested not least by Zaller’s (2001) “rule of product substitution.” If politicians were allowed to decide, they would mainly talk about and focus on the issues (Just et al. 1999; Patterson 1993), but from a journalistic standpoint focusing on the strategies, the tactics, and the horse race offers more compelling narratives. It also provides journalists with more control over the content and serves to mark their independence from politicians (Zaller 2001). The degree to which politics is framed as a strategic game or a horse race may thus be another indicator of the degree to which media content is mediatized.

A sixth indicator of the degree to which media content is mediatized is related to the journalistic style of news reports, where a distinction can be made between a descriptive and an interpretive journalistic style. When the journalistic style is mainly descriptive, journalists focus on describing the who, what, where, and when. The journalistic voice is mainly passive and neutral and focuses on facts or known entities (Patterson 1993). When the journalistic style is mainly interpretive, journalists instead tend to focus on the why and another kind of what: why something happened, what it means, and what something might lead to. It is a kind of journalism that attempts to go beyond the obvious and provide analysis or context. Whether it is for good or bad might be a matter of contention: What is important is, as noted by Patterson (2000: 250), that the “interpretive style empowers journalists by giving them more control over the message. Whereas descriptive reporting is driven by the facts, the interpretive form is driven by the theme around which the story is built.” And he continues, “The journalist is thus positioned to give shape to the news in a way the descriptive style does not allow.” Hence, the degree to which the journalistic style is interpretive may be yet another indicator of the degree to which media content is mediatized.

To sum up, drawing on previous research in related areas, six potential indicators of the degree to which media content is mediatized have been identified: length of politicians’ sound bites, journalistic visibility, wrap-ups granted to journalists, lip flaps, an interpretive journalistic style, and framing of politics as a strategic game or horse race. The common thread is that they are all about degree of media interventionism and the extent to which media content is shaped to suit the media’s formats, production routines, news values, and needs, suggesting the close linkage among theories of media interventionism, media logic, and mediatization. The next step is to test these indicators and investigate the degree to which media content is mediatized.

Selecting Cases and Hypotheses

When doing comparative research, the selection of cases is always crucial. In this case it was complicated by the fact that there are virtually no empirical studies that
explicitly focuses on the mediatization of politics. Having said that, there are basically two different research designs to choose from: the most similar and the most different systems design (Przeworski and Teune 1970: 32–39). The essence of the most similar systems design is to control for the system features that are similar. The essence of the most different systems design, on the other hand, is to control for system features that are different. In both cases, the objective is to control for some system features. At the same time, Przeworski and Teune (1970: 35) note, the “difference between the two strategies should not be overemphasized. Both strategies can result in the confirmation of theoretical statements and both can combine intrasystemic and intersystemic levels of analysis.”

Considering the somewhat explorative nature of this study, the first task at hand is to investigate the degree of mediatization along the third dimension and if there are differences across nations. As most theorizing on the mediatization of politics has been based on experiences and trends in Western democracies, it is appropriate to narrow the population to advanced, postindustrial democracies.

Within the family of Western democracies, Hallin and Mancini (2004) have identified three models of media and politics: the democratic corporatist, the polarized pluralist, and the liberal model. With respect to media system characteristics, these models differ from each other with respect to the strength and character of the newspaper industry, degree of political parallelism, degree of professionalization and systems of self-regulation, and role of the state in the media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 67). In brief,

The Liberal Model is characterized by a relative dominance of market mechanisms and of commercial media; the Democratic Corporatist Model by a historical coexistence of commercial media and media tied to organized social and political groups, and a relatively active but legally limited role of the state; and the Polarized Pluralist Model by integration of the media into party politics, weaker historical development of commercial media, and a strong role of the state. (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 11)

Thus, these models differ with respect to both media commercialism and the role of the state. This is significant, as media commercialism oftentimes is singled out as one of the key factors spurring media interventionism and the mediatization of politics (Esser 2008; Patterson 1993; Strömbäck 2008a). According to this line of thinking, the media have increasingly become institutions independent from and differentiated from politics and the state, but the same process has simultaneously made them more dependent on market mechanisms and less differentiated from commercial markets.

Differences in media commercialism and different roles of the state in the media system may help explain different levels of mediatization. From this perspective, selecting countries representing the liberal and the democratic corporatist models of media and politics would be appropriate. In countries forming part of both models, the media are essentially independent from political institutions (the second dimension of mediatization) in terms of how they operate, with the important exception of
public service broadcasting media in countries forming part of the democratic corporatist model of media and politics. While public service media in democratic corporatist countries are usually politically independent in all important respects, they have a stronger obligation to provide news that are in the public interest than do pure commercial media. Hence, degree of commercialism varies across liberal and democratic corporatist countries, particularly with respect to broadcasting media. Research showing different degrees of mediatization in broadcasting media along the third dimension would thus suggest that media commercialism might indeed be an important explanatory factor, while research showing that news content is equally mediatized in broadcasting media in such countries would suggest that media commercialism is not an important explanatory factor.

Based on this, this study investigates the degree of mediatization along the third dimension in TV news in Sweden and the United States. These countries are often considered most different cases within the family of advanced, postindustrial democracies (Åsard and Bennett 1997; Granberg and Holmberg 1988; Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2006). Hallin and Mancini (2004) consequently note that the United States is a prototypical example of the liberal model whereas Sweden is a prototypical example of the democratic corporatist model.

In both countries, the mass media in general and TV in particular constitute the most important source of information about politics and society (Graber 2005; Strömbäck 2008b). In both countries, broadcast media are essentially independent from political institutions in their daily business. An important difference, however, is that the public service audience share is miniscule in the United States, whereas it is significant in Sweden. More specifically, the household audience ratings figure for NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, the flagship news program for PBS in the United States, is less than 1 (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2009). In contrast, in Sweden 51 percent of the population regularly watch public service TV news, whereas 32 percent regularly watch news from the most important commercial TV channel (Sternvik 2009). Hence, whereas the broadcasting system in the United States is almost purely commercial (Croteau and Hoynes 2001; Hamilton 2004), Sweden has a dual system of public service and commercial broadcasting (Strömbäck and Nord 2008).

In both countries, the media constitute the most important source of information (the first dimension of mediatization of politics), and the media are mainly independent of political institutions (the second dimension of mediatization of politics). The broadcast media are however more independent of political institutions in the United States than in Sweden. Also, within Sweden commercial television is somewhat more independent of political institutions than the public service television in the sense that they do not have the same obligations to serve the public interest as the public service channels have (Petersson et al. 2005).

Therefore, we expect U.S. television news to display a higher degree of media interventionism and mediatization of media content than Swedish TV news. We also expect Swedish commercial TV news to display a higher degree of mediatization than Swedish public service TV news. These expectations are reflected in the following hypotheses:
**Hypothesis 1a (H1a):** The average length of politicians’ sound bites will be shorter in U.S. than in Swedish TV news.

**Hypothesis 1b (H1b):** The average length of politicians’ sound bites will be shorter on Swedish commercial than on Swedish public service TV news.

**Hypothesis 2a (H2a):** Journalistic visibility will be higher on U.S. than on Swedish TV news.

**Hypothesis 2b (H2b):** Journalistic visibility will be higher on Swedish commercial than on Swedish public service TV news.

**Hypothesis 3a (H3a):** Wrap-ups by journalists will be more common on U.S. than on Swedish TV news.

**Hypothesis 3b (H3b):** Wrap-ups by journalists will be more common on Swedish commercial than on Swedish public service TV news.

**Hypothesis 4a (H4a):** Lip flaps will be more common on U.S. than on Swedish TV news.

**Hypothesis 4b (H4b):** Lip flaps will be more common on Swedish commercial than on Swedish public service TV news.

**Hypothesis 5a (H5a):** The framing of politics as a strategic game will be more common in U.S. than in Swedish TV news.

**Hypothesis 5b (H5b):** The framing of politics as a strategic game will be more common in Swedish commercial than in Swedish public service TV news.

**Hypothesis 6a (H6a):** The journalistic style will be more interpretive in U.S. than in Swedish TV news.

**Hypothesis 6b (H6b):** The journalistic style will be more interpretive in Swedish commercial than in Swedish public service TV news.

**Method and Data**

To investigate the hypotheses above, we conducted a quantitative content analysis of the most important TV news programs in Sweden and the United States during the last twenty weekdays before the 2006 Swedish parliamentary and the 2008 U.S. presidential election. In Sweden, the study included the public service news programs Aktuellt and Rapport and the commercial news program TV4 Nyheterna. In the United States, the study included ABC World News, CBS Evening News, and NBC Nightly News. These are the most important network news programs in each country and can be considered as functionally equivalent (Van Deth 2009).

The content analysis includes all news stories with the “election” vignette or its equivalent and stories that in words or images explicitly refer to domestic political actors, political institutions, or the election, including stories about voters or the candidates.

The unit of analysis is thematic news stories. A thematic news story was defined as a single news story focusing on a particular theme or event. When the focus of the news story changed from one theme or event to another, it was counted as a new thematic news story, that is, another coding unit. In all, the content analysis includes 481 units of analysis: 72 from ABC World News, 78 from CBS Evening News, 72 from NBC Nightly News, 103 from Rapport, 83 from Aktuellt, and 73 from TV4 Nyheterna.
All variables used in this study are listed in the appendix. Two coders, both native speakers, did the coding of the U.S. and the Swedish data independently. To check for intercoder reliability, 10 percent of the U.S. news stories were randomly selected to include news stories from all three news programs. The intercoder reliability for the variables used in this analysis averaged .89 (see the appendix).

Results

The main expectation guiding this study was that U.S. election coverage on TV would be more mediatized than Swedish election coverage and that the election coverage would be more mediatized in Swedish commercial than in Swedish public service TV news.

The first hypotheses predicted that the average length of politicians’ sound bites would be shorter in U.S. than in Swedish TV news and in Swedish commercial than in Swedish public service TV news. On average, the length of politicians’ sound bites was 11.6 seconds \( (SD = 10.646) \), ranging from a minimum of 1 second to a maximum of 89 seconds. While the median length of politicians’ sound bites was 9 seconds, there were some outliers. To reduce skewness, the four worst outliers were excluded from further analysis.\(^3\)

To test H1a, an independent samples \( t \)-test was performed. The results show that the average length of politicians’ sound bites was significantly shorter on U.S. TV news \( (M = 9.6, SD = 10.1) \) than on Swedish TV news \( (M = 12.1, SD = 5.3) \). This difference is statistically significant \( (t = 2.742, p = .007, df = 233) \), which lends support to H1a.\(^4\) However, H1b was not supported \( (t = –0.256, p = .799, df = 161) \). The average length of politicians’ sound bites was not significantly shorter on Swedish commercial \( (M = 12.1, SD = 5.2) \) than on public service \( (M = 11.9, SD = 5.5) \) TV news.

H2a and H2b predicted that journalistic visibility would be higher on U.S. than on Swedish TV news and on Swedish commercial than on Swedish public service news. To investigate these hypotheses, three indicators of journalistic visibility was used: whether the journalist covering a story does a stand-up, whether the anchor is interviewing the journalist covering a story live on location, and whether the anchor is interviewing a journalist or media analyst in studio. As shown in Table 1, the results demonstrate that journalistic visibility is indeed significantly higher on U.S. than on Swedish TV news, particularly with respect to journalistic stand-ups (Cramer’s \( V = .644, p = .000 \)) and journalists being interviewed live on location (Cramer’s \( V = .146, p = .001 \)). Specifically, journalists did a stand-up in 77 percent of the U.S. news stories as opposed to only 13.1 percent of the Swedish news stories. Journalists covering the stories were interviewed live on location in 5 percent of the U.S. as opposed to less than 1 percent of the Swedish news stories. The only aspect of journalistic visibility where there was no difference between Swedish and U.S. television news concerns news anchors interviewing journalists or news analysts in studio.

Turning to H2b, the results show no statistical differences in the degree of journalistic visibility across Swedish commercial and Swedish public service news. Journalists
on commercial TV news did stand-ups somewhat more often than journalists on public service news, and it was also slightly more common with journalists being interviewed by the news anchor in commercial than in public service news, but these differences failed to reach statistical significance. Hence, while H2a was supported, H2b was not.

H3a and H3b predicted that wrap-ups by journalists would be more common on U.S. than on Swedish TV news and on Swedish commercial than on Swedish public service TV news, whereas H4a and H4b predicted the same with respect to lip flaps, that is, when journalists talk while politicians are seen speaking. With respect to differences across countries, the results show support for H3a and H4a (see Table 1). Whereas journalists were granted the wrap-up in 95.5 percent of the U.S. news stories, the corresponding share for Swedish TV news was 42.1 percent. This difference is significant (Cramer’s $V = .569$, $p = .000$). Similarly, journalists were speaking while politicians were shown in speaking mode in 64.4 percent of the U.S. coverage compared to 27.8 percent of the Swedish news stories. This difference is also significant (Cramer’s $V = .367$, $p = .000$). Hence, U.S. television news journalists are granted the concluding sound bite significantly more often than Swedish TV news journalists; they also “silence” politicians significantly more often than Swedish TV news journalists.

Comparing wrap-ups and lip flaps in Swedish commercial and public service TV news, the results show that both are somewhat more common in the former than in the latter, although the differences fail to reach statistical significance. Again, the results thus show support for the hypotheses targeting differences across countries, but not for differences across commercial and public service TV news in Sweden.

Turning to H5a, it predicted that the framing of politics as a strategic game would be more common in U.S. than in Swedish TV news. When investigating this issue, the dominant frame was computed based on four items tapping the framing of politics as a strategic game and four items tapping the framing of politics as issues (see the appendix). The same procedure was followed when investigating H5b, predicting that the framing of politics as a strategic game would be more common in Swedish commercial than in Swedish public service TV news. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 1. Journalistic Visibility, Wrap-Ups, and Lip Flaps on Swedish and U.S. Election News (percentages)

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<th>Public service news</th>
<th>Commercial news</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Journalistic stand-up***</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist interviewed live***</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalist interviewed in studio</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalistic wrap-up***</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>39.2</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>99.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lip flap***</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>64.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$N$</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>186</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***Statistically significant difference between countries at the .001 level.
The results indeed show support for both hypotheses. With respect to differences across countries, the framing of politics as a strategic game was significantly more common in U.S. than in Swedish TV news ($Cramer’s V = .250, p = .000$). This frame was dominant in two-thirds of the U.S. news stories, compared to fewer than half of the Swedish news stories. Even more important is that the issue frame was dominant in less than 20 percent of the U.S. news stories, compared to more than 40 percent of the Swedish news stories.

Also noteworthy is the difference between public service and commercial TV news in Sweden, where the commercial TV news displays a significantly stronger tendency than the public service TV news to frame politics as a strategic game ($Cramer’s V = .182, p = .014$). In fact, if we exclude public service news, there are no longer any significant differences across countries. This suggests that media commercialism is one of the main factors explaining the degree to which TV news frames politics as a strategic game (see also Strömbäck and van Aelst 2010).

The two final hypotheses predicted that the journalistic style would be more interpretive in U.S. than in Swedish TV news and in Swedish commercial than in Swedish public service news. The results show that the journalistic style is somewhat more interpretive on U.S. (52.3 percent) than on Swedish (48.6 percent) TV news ($Cramer’s V = .036, p = .431$) and on Swedish commercial (57.5 percent) than on Swedish public service (45.2 percent) TV news ($Cramer’s V = .111, p = .073$), but these differences are not significant at the .05 level. Although the results go in the direction of the hypotheses, they are not supported.

To sum up, the results suggest that election coverage on U.S. television does display a higher degree of media interventionism and hence mediatization along the third dimension than election coverage on Swedish television. The results also show that there is variance across indicators and across commercial and public service TV news within Sweden.

### The Mediatization of Election News?

Drawing on the literature on mediatization, media interventionism, mediation, political news journalism, and related areas, this article set out to identify and test indicators...
of media interventionism, simultaneously conceptualized as indicators of the degree to which news content is mediatized, across commercial and public service television news in Sweden and the United States. The degree to which news content is mediatized constitutes the third dimension of the mediatization of politics, following the framework proposed by Strömbäck (2008a, 2010), and is one key albeit not the only indicator of the mediatization of politics. Based on the suggestion that media commercialism and state intervention in the media system are crucial factors explaining degree of mediatization, the overall hypotheses were that news content would be more mediatized in the United States than in Sweden and in Swedish commercial compared to Swedish public service news.

The results show statistically significant support for five out of six hypotheses addressing differences between countries but only one of six hypotheses addressing differences between commercial and public service television within Sweden. The only indicator where no statistically significant difference was found between either countries or commercial and public service television was related to the dominance of an interpretive as opposed to a descriptive journalistic style.

The results showed that politicians’ sound bites were shorter, that journalistic visibility was higher, and that journalistic wrap-ups, lip flaps, and the framing of politics as a strategic game were—as hypothesized—more common on U.S. than on Swedish election news. An interpretive journalistic style was about equally dominant across countries. There were few statistically significant differences between Swedish commercial and public service TV news—with the exception related to the framing of politics as a strategic game—but the differences that were found ran in the direction of the hypotheses. Overall, these results suggest that election news on U.S. television is more mediatized than Swedish election news, but only somewhat more mediatized on Swedish commercial than Swedish public service TV news.

In this context and considering the consistent differences between countries but not between commercial and public service TV within Sweden, the role of journalism cultures (Hanitzsch 2007), political news cultures (Esser 2008), and political communication cultures (Pfetsch 2004) needs to be considered. Although an extensive discussion of these concepts and mediatization is beyond the scope of this article, Hanitzsch (2007) suggests that journalism cultures and journalists’ role perceptions consist of three main dimensions: interventionism, power distance, and market orientation. Esser (2008) suggests that an interventionist reporting style is shaped by political structure and campaign professionalization, political culture, media structure and media professionalism, and media culture (including organizational and national news culture). Pfetsch (2004) furthermore distinguishes among four political communication cultures based on the dimensions of (a) dominance of media logic versus dominance of political logic and (b) distance between political spokespersons and journalists: media-oriented culture, public-relations-oriented culture, strategic culture, and (party) political communication culture.

This brief discussion suggests that there are many linkages among mediatization, journalism culture, political news culture, and political communication culture. Aside
from the need to further explore these linkages, it also suggests that the degree of medi-
atization may be moderated by journalism cultures, political news cultures, and politi-
cal communication cultures that are consistent within but not across countries.

Hence, the results of this study show that news content is more mediatized in the
United States than in Sweden but only somewhat more mediatized in commercial than
in public service TV news within Sweden. To the extent that media commercialism is
one of the main factors spurring media interventionism, they also suggest that the effects
of media commercialism may be moderated by national journalism cultures and national
political news or political communication cultures.

We believe the indicators used here are all valid indicators of both media interven-
tionism and mediatization along the third dimension of this conceptual construct. They
are not by any means the only possible indicators, and through further theorizing more
indicators should be identified, integrated, operationalized, and tested. To do so is an
important task for future research on the mediatization of politics.

In fact, an important next step in research on mediatization is further theorizing with
the goals of both exploring the linkages between similar concepts such as political news
culture and political communication culture and identifying and integrating valid and
reliable indicators and operationalizations of all dimensions of the mediatization of
politics. After about two decades of using the term *mediatization* without clear concep-
tual bounds, the time is ripe for systematic empirical investigations of the degree to which
politics has become mediatized, variations across time, and variations across countries
or other units of analysis. Only through such research can we reach a greater under-
standing of the antecedents, expressions, and effects of the mediatization of politics.

### Appendix

#### Variables Used and Intercoder Reliability

**Average Length of Politicians’ Sound Bites**

- Number of sound bites by politicians (intercoder reliability = .90)
- Combined length of politician’s sound bites (intercoder reliability = .90)

**Journalistic Visibility**

- Does the journalist covering a story do a stand-up? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .85)
- Does the anchor interview the journalist covering the story live on location? Y/N (intercoder reliability = 1)
- Does anchor interview a journalist or media actor in studio? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .90)

(continued)
Appendix (continued)

Wrap-Ups by Journalists

• Who is granted the concluding sound bite (wrap-up)? One of the categories was journalist. (intercoder reliability = 1)

Lip Flaps

• Does the reporter talk at least once while a politician simultaneously is shown and in speaking mode? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .85)

Framing of Politics as Issues or Substance (Cronbach’s α = .819)

• Does the story deal extensively with substantive public policy issues, problems, and solutions? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .95)
• Does the story provide descriptions of politicians’ stance or statements about substantive policy issues? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .80)
• Does the story deal extensively with general implications or impacts of legislation or proposed legislation for the public? Y/N (intercoder reliability = 1)
• Does the story deal extensively with real-world problems, situations, or processes (i.e., reality) that explicitly or implicitly have policy implications? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .90)

Framing of Politics as a Strategic Game (Cronbach’s α = .564)

• Does the story deal extensively with politicians or parties winning or losing elections, legislative debates, governing negotiations, or winning or losing in politics generally? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .80)
• Does the story deal extensively with politicians’ or parties’ strategies for winning elections, negotiations, or issue debates, i.e., campaign tactics, legislative maneuvers, the way they campaign? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .90)
• Does the story deal with the implications or consequences of elections, governing negotiations, legislative debates or other news events for politicians or parties, i.e., how politicians or parties might be affected by elections, governing negotiations, legislative debates, or other events? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .85)
• Does the story deal extensively with polls and politicians’ or parties’ standing in the polls? Y/N (intercoder reliability = .85)

Interpretive Journalistic Style

• Dominant journalistic style: coders could choose between descriptive, interpretive, and cannot be determined. (intercoder reliability = .80)
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Notes

1. According to Google Scholar (February 11, 2010).
2. This statement is based on the literature published in English and that explicitly seeks to investigate the mediatization of politics. There is however numerous studies that are relevant for the mediatization of politics, without explicitly linking it to mediatization.
3. The lengths of the excluded outliers were 62, 68, 71 and 89 seconds. Excluding these, the average length of politicians’ sound bites was 10.85 ($SD = 8.11$), ranging from 1 to 56 seconds.
4. Equal variances not assumed, as Levene’s for equality of variances was significant.

References


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