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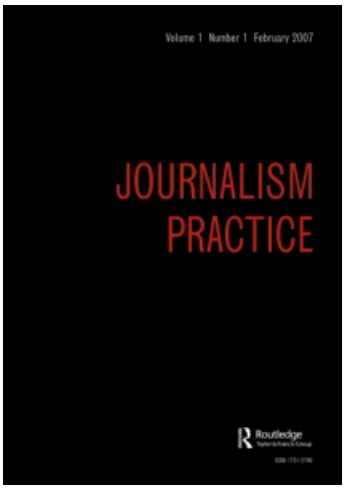

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LOOK WHO'S TALKING
Use of sources in newspaper coverage in Sweden and the United States

Daniela V. Dimitrova and **Jesper Strömbäck**

Even though we live in a global world cross-cultural comparisons of journalism practice remain rare. This study analyzed the use of sources in newspaper coverage in Sweden and the United States. Rather than focusing on one single event, the comparison utilizes data from a number of different events: the 2003 Iraq War, the 2002 national election in Sweden and the 2004 presidential election in the United States, and the 2005/2006 international controversy stemming from the publication of the Mohammad Cartoons. Some interesting patterns across the three events emerged for the use of government officials, academic experts and citizens as sources. The findings are discussed in the context of news reporting and journalism within a distinct national political and media system.

KEYWORDS cross-cultural media studies; election coverage; elite press; Mohammad Cartoons; news sources; war coverage

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Introduction

The main purpose of journalism is to inform. In doing so, journalists need to find the most relevant and trustworthy information to convey to the public. In broad terms, there are basically three routes through which journalists can gain access to such information: (1) they can be eyewitnesses to the events they are reporting, (2) they can search independently for relevant information, or (3) they can get the information from various sources. However, even if journalists are eyewitnesses or search independently for the information they need for a particular story, they cannot escape the need for sources. This is true, regardless of the political environment or the economic status of media organizations. Without sources, there is no journalism.

This claim is hardly controversial—the importance of news sources in journalism has been well established in research going back to classics such as *Newsgathering in Washington* by Nimmo (1964), *Reporters and Officials* by Sigal (1973), and *Deciding What's News* by Gans (1980). More specifically, journalists need sources to get access to information, to provide different viewpoints, to offer context and interpretations, and to validate news accounts (Gans, 1980; Lewis et al., 2005; Manning, 2001; Nimmo, 1964; Sigal, 1973; Tuchman, 1978). The sources that journalists rely on can come from different social spheres, and the role of particular source categories can vary. In other words, the journalistic need for news sources is a constant, but the usage of news sources is a variable.

This notion notwithstanding, there is a noticeable lack of comparative research on the use of sources across events and across countries. Most studies on source use are single-country studies, and many are focused only on a particular type of event. This is

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unfortunate, as it prevents a deeper understanding of how source use is related to different types of events or systemic or semi-structural features of different societies. More comparative research in this area is thus needed. Hence, the purpose of this study is to investigate the use of sources across two highly different countries—the United States and Sweden—and across different events—elections, wars, and international crises.

Theoretical Background

Journalism Practice, News Making and Use of Sources

The use of sources is a given in contemporary journalism practice. The news-making process involves standard newsgathering procedures to put together an account of what happened in order to describe a news event (Manning, 2001). This process follows certain organizational imperatives and newsgathering routines that are common for newsrooms around the world. The construction of the news account also depends on individual characteristics of reporters and editors as well as on external technological, political, cultural and economic determinants (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Manning, 2001; Schudson, 2003; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996). Thus, it is important to place the process of journalism in the wider socio-political and economic environment.

Within that context, there are several practical reasons why journalists rely on news sources. Citing sources or providing quotes from direct observers of the event can be seen as a way of *verification of the news account*. It can also serve as a method of providing competing arguments. It might, for example, be difficult and even dangerous for the credibility of the news for a journalist to state whether global warming is caused by human activity or not, but if the statement can be attributed to a source, the journalist is shielded from accusations of bias and at least partly relieved from the responsibility of finding out what the true cause is (Tuchman, 1978). In other words, journalists can "report conflicting statements, which allows them to say both sides of the story have been told. Both statements may be false, getting the reporter no closer to the truth, yet the procedure helps fend off criticism" (Shoemaker and Reese, 1996, p. 113). If the source is credible, then the credibility is—or perceived to be—transferred to the news account.

Another purpose of source use is to serve as authoritative voices on certain topics or issues. Certain types of sources—government officials, for instance—are considered to have more authoritative voices than average citizens (Bennett et al., 2007; Lawrence, 2000; Manning, 2001). Different sources can also *provide diverse viewpoints* about the same issue from multiple stakeholders in society.

Using sources in news reporting is also necessary to *reduce uncertainty* under deadline pressure. One way to achieve this is to establish regular ties—that is, news beats—with government agencies or other institutions to ensure easy access to expert quotes. This can reduce newsroom uncertainty and make the unpredictable world out there a more predictable place for news production. As Manning notes:

> The pressure of news deadlines and the importance of obtaining information rich in news values, encourages a dependence upon official sources, whether they be government departments, sources associated with parliaments and the formal policy-making process, the police or the other state social control agencies. (2001, p. 55)

Even though journalists follow the same newsgathering routines in their daily reporting, there is an inherent difference between different types of events. The selection

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of news sources may differ between expected events such as national elections and unexpected and breaking news events, such as earthquakes or military coups, for instance (Nord and Strömbäck, 2003). At least partly, both the need for and the selection of news sources depend on whether the events are expected or not, as well as on logistical factors such as access to the scene of action, to eyewitnesses or other sources.

Selection of Sources

Two main tendencies in source selection are key to understanding national media coverage. The first tendency is the reliance on official sources in news reporting, which is common around the world for reasons listed above. Research in the US media context has shown an especially heavy dependence on government and military sources (Bennett et al., 2007; Entman, 2004; Hallin, 1986; Schudson, 2003). This practice has been well documented in studies of war coverage (e.g., Hallin, 1986), crime news (e.g., Beckett, 1995; Lawrence, 2000), and disaster events (e.g., Bennett et al., 2007). In the Swedish context, research has shown that political sources are common (Asp, 2006; Palm, 2002; Sahlstrand, 2000; Strömbäck, 2004), although research suggests that journalists rather than politicians tend to frame news stories (Strömbäck and Nord, 2006). The few studies comparing news coverage between Sweden and the United States have suggested that official sources are cited more frequently in the US than in the Swedish news media (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005; Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2006; see also Shehata, 2007). This difference may stem from the differences in the political and media systems and different understanding of the notion of objectivity (Donsbach and Patterson, 2004; Patterson, 1998).

There is no debate in the literature that journalists in both the United States and Sweden use official sources in their news reporting, even if to a different degree, and that sources can influence media framing. There is a two-way relationship between official sources and news media though. On the one hand, the media need to rely on ''authoritative'' voices to (among other things) fulfill the goal of balanced reporting. On the other hand, government officials may use the media to influence framing of events and release particular pieces of information in the form of press releases or leaks. This opens up the possibility of news management and manipulation of media coverage for those who understand the intricacies of the news-making process (Bennett, 2003; Entman, 2004; Franklin, 2004; McNair, 2003). As noted by Pearlstine (2007, p. 175): ''Sources are rarely altruistic. They usually have an agenda''.

Getting on the News Agenda

The above quote reminds us that many news sources have their own agenda. There are multiple pressures on the news media coming from various interest groups, PR departments and organizations invested in the issues at stake. Such groups not only issue news releases and regularly pitch stories to the media but also make themselves available as news sources. The influence of such groups is not always evident in the sources present in the news accounts, however. Still the impact of PR efforts and spin behind the scenes—even though hard to quantify—can hardly be denied.

One way in which external groups may influence coverage without disclosure is by being cited as anonymous sources. This practice seems common in the US news media. Wulfemeyer (1985) documented the use of anonymous attribution by the two leading US

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news magazines, *Time* and *Newsweek*. While providing anonymity to journalistic sources may be necessary in some cases it also led to ethical dilemmas (Blankenburg, 1992).

Journalists and sources are often interlocked in an interdependent relationship where constant ''negotiations of newsworthiness'' take place (Cook, 2005). It is furthermore a relationship characterized by conflict as well as cooperation (Nimmo, 1964; Sigal, 1973). Whether journalists or sources have the upper hand in this relationship is not clear, and it might vary across events and countries (Bennett et al., 2007). According to the official dominance model (Lawrence, 2000; Shehata, 2007) or indexing theory (Bennett, 1990, 2004; Bennett et al., 2007), official sources have the upper hand (see also Gans, 1980), but there is also research suggesting that journalists have the upper hand (Strömbäck and Nord, 2006). It might also be the case that sources dominate in the ''news discovery phase'' while journalists dominate in the ''news-gathering phase'' (Cook, 2005; Reich, 2006). Sources may have more power during both the news discovery and news-gathering phases, but journalists may have more impact on news content. It is ultimately journalists that select their sources, within the particular socio-political and organizational context. Thus, journalists typically have ultimate control over the construction of their stories.

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Comparisons Across Countries

The notion that the use of sources might vary depending on the nature of the events covered and across countries—and thus also across political and media systems—makes comparative research on source use imperative. In this particular study, we have chosen to compare the United States and Sweden, as these countries can be said to represent ''most different cases'' within the framework of modern, advanced democracies (Åsard and Bennett, 1997; Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005; Granberg and Holmberg, 1998), which allows researchers to detect differences between the two countries.

First of all, the United States is a large country with a federal and presidential political system, whereas Sweden is a small country with a parliamentary political system. Due to the smaller size of Sweden, the distance between both citizens and journalists, on the one hand, and leading politicians, on the other, is rather small, whereas many high-ranking political and official sources in the United States are not very accessible—if not on their own terms (Bennett, 2003, 2004; Skewes, 2007). Another important difference is that TV political advertising is not allowed in Sweden (Petersson et al., 2006), whereas it constitutes a key communication channel in the United States (Kaid, 2004). Thus, although the news media in the United States is very important for the communication between political actors and the citizenry (Graber, 2006; Iyengar and McGrady, 2007), political actors there have an opportunity to communicate without the mediation of the media. Swedish political and official actors, on the other hand, depend almost solely on the news media to communicate their messages to the electorate (Petersson et al., 2006). A possible implication is that politicians and other official sources in Sweden have to adapt to the media and their standards of newsworthiness to an extent that American political and official actors might not have to do. Stated differently, it can be hypothesized that Swedish journalism is at least somewhat more independent of political and high-ranking official sources than American journalism (Strömbäck and Dimitrova, 2006), which should lead to a higher dominance of official sources in American news stories as compared to Swedish news stories. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1 Official sources will be used more frequently in the US press than in the Swedish press.

Another difference between the United States and Sweden is related to the respective sizes of these countries and their places in the global political, economic and communication systems. After the fall of communism, the United States remains the only global superpower, and its political, economic and military strength makes it one of the most important global players. There is hardly any conflict around the world where the United States does not have an interest or a stake, and since September 11, 2001, it has become significantly more involved in military conflicts around the world—most importantly, in Afghanistan and Iraq. The unilateral and preemptive strategy employed by George W. Bush as a president might have decreased the ''soft power'' of the United States, but even so, its ''hard power'' is one of the most extensive in the world today (Nye, 2004). At the same time, the size and economic strength of the United States, in combination with an isolationist streak in US public opinion, has made Americans less outward- and more inward-looking than is the case for many other countries, including Sweden. This can partly explain why foreign news events are not considered particularly newsworthy in the United States, save for cases where the United States is actively involved in events abroad or major international news (Graber, 2006).

The situation in Sweden is quite the opposite. As a small country it is heavily dependent upon other countries, and both at the elite and public levels there is a rather strong tradition of internationalism. In military terms Sweden is also a small and weak country, thus relying on cooperation, public diplomacy and ''soft power'' to influence other countries. There is furthermore a strong interest in foreign news among the Swedish public—with more than 60 percent saying that they read at least ''quite a lot'' of the foreign news material in their newspapers (Andersson, 2007)—and no tendencies that foreign news has become less prominent in Swedish TV news across the last two decades (Jönsson and Strömbäck, 2007). Based on these observations, it might be the case that American journalism relies more on domestic sources, whereas Swedish journalism relies more on foreign sources, and that Swedish journalism is more likely than American journalism to make references or quote sources affiliated with international organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union—the latter an organization that Sweden joined in 1995. Thus, we make the following proposition:

H2 Spokespersons for transnational and intergovernmental organizations will be used as sources more frequently in the Swedish press than in the US press.

The notion that official and political actors in the United States are less accessible, and have a stronger position *vis-à-vis* news journalism than their Swedish counterparts, might also encourage American journalists to rely more on anonymous sources than Swedish journalists. Although there is not much research on the subject, there is a tradition in US journalism to rely on anonymous or confidential sources, as exemplified by the role played by Deep Throat in the Watergate scandal (Woodward, 2005). Furthermore, ''leaking is ingrained in the culture of Washington'' (Pearlstine, 2007, p. 212), and granting sources anonymity is a prerequisite for this. Under this system, briefings can be ''on the record'' but also ''off the record'', on ''deep background'', and ''not for attribution'' or ''background'' (Pearlstine, 2007; Shoemaker and Reese, 1996; Sigal, 1973). In these cases, journalists usually refer to their sources in such a way as to make them anonymous. Typical examples include phrases such as ''sources close to the President say . . .'' or ''a spokesman

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for Pentagon revealed . . .'' Of course, briefings can be ''off the record'' in Sweden as well, and Swedish politicians also use leaks, but there does not seem to be a system with generally accepted conventions in place—although everyone has a legal right to inform journalists without anyone having the right to search for the source of the information. Instead, the ground rule is that everything is on the record, which partly follows from the fact that Sweden has one of the most liberal Freedom of Information Acts in the world (Petersson et al., 2005). This might be reflected in anonymous sources being more common in US journalism than in Swedish journalism. Thus, we state the following hypothesis:

H3 Anonymous sources will be used more frequently in the US press than in the Swedish press.

Another important group of sources are ordinary citizens or people representing different grassroots organizations. These sources can be used to provide eyewitness accounts, a grassroots perspective, or to put a human face on the issue or event. Although it is possible that there is an inverse relationship between the use of official sources, on the one hand, and ordinary citizens and grassroots organizations, on the other, it is also possible that the news coverage in one country features both more official and non-official sources than news coverage in another country. Thus, we ask two research questions about the use of ordinary citizens and grassroots organizations as sources:

RQ1 How frequently are ordinary citizens used as sources in the Swedish and in the US press?

RQ2 How frequently are spokespersons for grassroots organizations used as sources in the Swedish and in the US press?

One source category that is commonly used in many different countries is academic experts. They might be experts on campaigning, war and war strategies, on religion, or on other matters. Using sources with academic credentials gives an aura of credibility to the news account, and this is arguably true in both countries included in this study. Since we have no rationale for predicting whether the use of academic experts as sources is more widespread in Sweden or the United States, we ask the following research question:

RQ3 How frequently are academic experts featured as sources in the Swedish and the US press?

Methodology and Data

The goal of this analysis is to uncover country-specific patterns in source use that are *consistent across events*. The use of sources cannot be understood in isolation from the events being covered. Crime news differs from election news, which differs from war news. To avoid making generalizations about source use based on a study of only one type of event, this analysis focuses on three different types of news events.

The events chosen for analysis are: the 2003 war in Iraq, the 2002 Swedish election and the 2004 US election, and the Mohammad Cartoons controversy in 2005–6. This study draws upon three different studies of newspaper coverage of the three events. All three previous studies utilize quantitative content analysis, focusing on elite newspapers in Sweden and the United States. The data collection and coding process for each event are described below in more detail.

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The 2003 Iraq War

The first study covered the official war period, from March 20, 2003, when the US launched the military actions against Iraq, to May 1, 2003, when president Bush announced ''mission accomplished'' and the end of ''major combat operations''. Although this proclamation has proved to be seriously wrong, the time period chosen still represents the official war period. The newspapers selected for analysis were the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* in the United States, and *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* in Sweden. These are the two most prominent newspapers in each country, and can be considered as functionally equivalent.

The unit of analysis was the individual news article, and the selection of news stories was achieved using online databases. In both cases, ''Iraq'' and ''war'' were used as key words if both terms appeared in the headline, abstract or lead paragraph of the article. Only news articles were selected for analysis. A total of 172 and 184 articles were retrieved from *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet*, respectively. Due to the large amount of articles retrieved from the US newspapers, every sixth article was randomly selected to make the number of articles from both countries comparable. A total of 236 articles from the *New York Times* and 154 articles from the *Washington Post* were analyzed.

Several source variables were included in the codesheet. Most importantly within the context of this study, one variable asked the coders to check all types of sources included in the article, where one option was ''government representative''. This variable will be used when investigating H1. Another option was ''individual'', which will be used to address RQ1. Another variable asked the coders to check if any of a number of organizations was mentioned in the article, where one option was United Nations and another option the European Union. This variable will be used when investigating H2. This variable also included humanitarian organizations, exemplified by the Red Cross and similar organizations. This will be used when addressing RQ2. Finally, the codesheet asked the coder whether the article included anonymous sources and coders were instructed to check ''yes'' if the article contained facts or statements that were attributed to anonymous sources, defined as all sources except individual sources mentioned by name. This variable will be used when investigating H3. All source variables were coded on a presence/absence basis.

Unfortunately, in this particular study there were no variables that can be used to investigate the research question about the use of academic experts as sources. This research question can be addressed based on data from the other two events, however. To check for intercoder reliability, 10 percent of the US articles were randomly selected. The intercoder reliability (Holsti's formula) for the variables used in this study was established at 0.83.

The 2002 Swedish and the 2004 US Elections

This study included the same newspapers as the previous study, that is the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* in the United States, and *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* in Sweden. The unit of analysis was the individual news article. The time frame was the last three weeks prior to the 2002 Swedish election, held on 15 September and the 2004 US presidential election, held on 2 November. The study included all front-page stories that explicitly referred to the respective elections, the candidates or party leaders, or the parties competing in the elections within the first three paragraphs. All articles were

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manually selected. This procedure yielded 88 articles from *Dagens Nyheter*, 46 articles from *Svenska Dagbladet*, 28 articles from the *New York Times*, and 26 articles from the *Washington Post*. All of these were news articles.

The codesheet included a number of variables that are usable within the context of this particular study. The coders were asked to check if any of a number of categories were included as sources in the individual news story. For someone to be considered a source required that at least one statement, fact or quote was attributed to him or her. Among the source categories was ''government officials'', which will be used to investigate H1. The operational definition of ''government official'' was ''people hired by federal, national, regional or local governments, responsible for the implementation of different policies''. Another category was ''domestic politicians'', but we have chosen to exclude that one, because domestic politicians are so very common as sources in election news reporting.

Other source categories were ''spokespersons for the European Union'', which will be used to investigate H2, ''ordinary citizens'', which will be used to address RQ1, and ''spokespersons for grassroots organizations'', which will be used to address RQ2. Yet another category was ''academic experts'', which will be used to answer RQ3. Another variable asked the coders to check if the article included any ''anonymous individual sources'', and the coders were instructed to check ''yes'' if the news story contained any facts or statements attributed to single individuals or several individuals that were not mentioned explicitly by name. This variable will be used to investigate H3.

To check for intercoder reliability, 10 percent of the US articles were randomly selected. The intercoder reliability (Holsti's formula) for the variables used in this study was established at 0.89.

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The Mohammad Cartoons Controversy

This study focuses on the Mohammad Cartoons controversy that was triggered when the Danish newspaper *Jyllandsposten* published 12 caricatures of the Muslim prophet Mohammad on September 30, 2005. The publication of the cartoons eventually led to massive protests around the world, some of which turned violent—for example, setting the Danish embassies in Damascus and Beirut on fire (Larsen and Seidenfaden, 2006). The study analyzed all articles published between October 1, 2005 (the day after the publication of the Mohammad Cartoons) and February 28, 2006 (when the issue virtually disappeared from the news media agenda).

The newspapers included in this study are the *New York Times* in the United States and *Dagens Nyheter* in Sweden. All articles were manually selected, based on whether they referred explicitly to the Mohammad Cartoons or the events, debates and diplomatic scenarios that followed the publication in either headline or leading paragraph. The unit of analysis was the individual news story. The selection process yielded 147 stories from *Dagens Nyheter* and 38 stories from the *New York Times*.

The codesheet for the Mohammad Cartoons study included several relevant variables. As in the previous study, the coders were instructed to check if any of a number of source categories was included in the individual news story. Three of the options were ''Swedish government sources'', ''Danish government sources'' and ''American government sources''. These will be collapsed and used to investigate H1. Two other options were ''spokespersons for the European Union'' and ''spokespersons for the United Nations'', which will be used to test H2.

The codesheet also included several options focusing on ordinary citizens: ''ordinary Muslims in Muslim countries'', ''ordinary Muslims in the country of analysis'', ''ordinary Muslims in Denmark'', ''ordinary Danish citizens'', and ''ordinary citizens in the country of analysis''. These will be collapsed and used to answer RQ1. Other options included ''representatives of Muslim organizations'' in ''Denmark'' and ''in the country of analysis''. These will be collapsed and used to address RQ2, presuming that Muslim organizations in Denmark, Sweden and the United States generally speaking can be considered as grassroots organizations. ''Academic experts'' were also included as a source category, and this variable will be used to address RQ3. Unfortunately, no variable was included to measure the use of anonymous sources in this study.

To check for intercoder reliability, a precoder reliability test was employed where 32 percent of the US articles were randomly selected to check agreement. The intercoder reliability for the variables used in this study was established at 1 across all source variables, using Holsti's formula.

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Analytical Strategy and Data Limitations

This study uses data from three different studies to analyze the use of news sources across events and across countries. While being sensitive to the importance of the specific news events for the use of news sources, the main purpose of this study is to uncover and understand *country-specific patterns* in source use across *different news events*. The benefit of using several different studies is that we, in this particular study, can establish results that hold across the news coverage of different events. While this is one of the strengths of our comparative study it also presents us with three different types of events, which may have influenced the selection of sources in each particular case. For example, the Iraq War was a foreign news story in Sweden with limited relevance to the national audience as was the Mohammad Cartoons controversy for the United States. The national elections, on the other hand, are typical domestic news where the influence of more routine sourcing patterns can be considered stronger. It should be acknowledged that the type of event has an influence on sourcing patterns shown in the media coverage.

Another limitation stemming from the reliance on data from previous studies is that they used event-specific coding instruments. The main drawback is that the earlier studies do not match perfectly when it comes the source variables included in their code sheets. However, the coding instructions for the source variables from these studies allow us to compare variables that are exactly the same or similar enough to be used in this context. In some cases there were no corresponding variables, in effect meaning that not all hypotheses can be investigated for all three news events. The original studies asked the question whether certain types of sources were used in the news coverage of the event, rather than the number of sources per article. Another limitation is that one of the studies includes only one newspaper in each country. Overall, the benefits of the analysis conducted here are, however, considered greater than the drawbacks.

Results

The first hypothesis predicted that official sources would be used more frequently in the US press than in the Swedish press. There are several reasons for this, among them that official sources are less accessible in the United States and that they presumably have

the upper hand in relation to the press. US official sources also have more alternative means to communicate to the people than do Swedish official sources, which have to rely on the news media in cases where they want to reach larger audiences. The results from the Chi-square test are displayed in Table 1.

The results show that US newspapers, indeed, are more likely than Swedish newspapers to include official sources in their news reporting. The difference between the extent to which US and Swedish newspapers use official sources is significant both with respect to the coverage of the 2003 Iraq War ($\chi^2 = 15.585$, $p = 0.000$, df = 1) and the 2002 Swedish and 2004 US national elections ($\chi^2 = 10.856$, $p = 0.001$, df = 1). Official sources were also included more frequently in the US newspapers than in the Swedish newspapers in the coverage of the Mohammad Cartoons crisis, although this difference was not statistically significant. Taken together, the results thus lend support for H1.

H2 predicted that spokespersons for transnational and intergovernmental organizations, in this study operationalized as the European Union and the United Nations, would be used more frequently as sources in the Swedish than in the US press. The results show mixed support for this hypothesis. Spokespersons for transnational and intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union were indeed included as sources more frequently in the Swedish than in the US newspapers in the coverage of the 2003 Iraq War, and this difference was highly significant ($\chi^2 = 27.465$, $p = 0.000$, df = 1). In the Mohammad Cartoons crisis the difference in source use was not significant but in the expected direction. Due to the low counts per cell we could not run tests for transnational organization sources in election news coverage. It was most surprising, however, that spokespersons for the European Union were completely absent in the Swedish election news coverage in 2002, despite the fact that the country is a member of the European Union. Although it is well known that the EU does not play a prominent

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TABLE 1
Use of sources in the Swedish and US press (% of articles)

Event coverage	Source type	United States	Sweden
Iraq War ($N = 746$)	Official sources***	44.4	30.3
	Spokespersons for transnational organizations***	18.2	35.1
	Anonymous sources***	80.5	58.1
	Ordinary citizens***	59.2	39.0
	Representatives for grassroots organizations	4.9	6.5
Election news ($N = 198$)	Official sources***	31.3	11.9
	Spokespersons for transnational organizations†	3.1	0.0
	Anonymous sources**	6.3	26.9
	Ordinary citizens***	37.5	14.9
	Representatives for grassroots organizations	3.1	2.2
	Academic experts*	17.2	7.5
Mohammad Cartoons ($N = 185$)	Official sources	31.6	25.9
	Spokespersons for transnational organizations	4.8	10.5
	Ordinary citizens**	26.3	9.5
	Representatives for grassroots organizations***	39.5	4.8
	Academic experts**	18.4	4.8

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.
†Chi-square test could not be run due to the small number of observations.

role in Swedish elections (Asp, 2006), we expected at least some visibility for EU representatives in the Swedish election coverage. Perhaps the explanation for this is that the study included only front-page stories. It is quite possible that EU sources were cited in related articles inside the newspapers but not on the front page.

The third hypothesis predicted that anonymous sources would be used more frequently in the US than in the Swedish press. The results show that the hypothesis receives mixed support (Table 1). As predicted, anonymous sources were more common in the US than in the Swedish press coverage of the Iraq War, and the difference is highly significant ($\chi^2 = 44.202$, $p = 0.000$, df = 1). With respect to the election news coverage, anonymous sources were, however, significantly more common in the Swedish than in the US press ($\chi^2 = 12.082$, $p = 0.002$, df = 1). The absolute levels of anonymous source use also differ sharply between the two events—they were much more common in the war coverage than the election coverage. These results suggest that the nature of the event may have a significant impact on source use (i.e., war versus election news, or foreign versus domestic events).

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The voices of ordinary citizens are important in media coverage in any democracy since it is crucial that not only the powerful, but also ordinary people, have an opportunity to express themselves through the media (Haas, 2007; Rosen, 1999). Yet ordinary citizens are rarely mentioned in news coverage, especially compared with official sources (Lewis et al., 2005). Our research question asked how frequently ordinary citizens are used as sources in the Swedish and the US press.

The results show that citizens are used as sources much more frequently in the US than in the Swedish press. The differences are significant with respect to the coverage of the Iraq War ($\chi^2 = 30.336$, $p = 0.000$, df = 1), the elections ($\chi^2 = 12.771$, $p = 0.000$, df = 1), as well as the Mohammad Cartoons crisis ($\chi^2 = 7.541$, $p = 0.006$, df = 1). There does not appear to be an inverse relationship between the use of official sources and ordinary citizens as sources, however, as both categories are more common in the US than in the Swedish press. Our data do not reveal the way people were addressed in the news coverage, i.e. as citizens, consumers, or in vox pops (cf. Lewis et al., 2005).

The pattern is less clear with respect to the use of grassroots organizations as sources (RQ2). This type of news source was not common in either the Swedish or the US press in the coverage of the Iraq War and the elections. The only case where representatives for grassroots organizations were common news sources was in the US coverage of the Mohammad Cartoons crisis, and in this particular case the difference between the two countries is significant ($\chi^2 = 34.723$, $p = 0.000$, df = 1). Considering the overall pattern, this might be due to the special character of this event, and that we used Muslim organizations in Denmark, Sweden and the United States as a proxy for grassroots organizations.

Finally, we were also interested in the extent to which academic experts are included as sources—be they political scientists, sociologists, communication experts or others. The results show that academic experts are significantly more common in the US than in the Swedish press, and this is true of both the election news coverage ($\chi^2 = 4.320$, $p = 0.038$, df = 1) and the coverage of the Mohammad Cartoons crisis ($\chi^2 = 8.054$, $p = 0.005$, df = 1). This finding is consistent with the US media practice of providing "multiple sides" to a news story, but another reason for this pattern might be that the US press experiences a greater need to use expert sources to legitimize the news, as the discussion about news

bias is more heated in the United States (Farnsworth and Lichter, 2006; Niven, 2002) than in Sweden (Asp, 2006).

Discussion

The goal of this study was to compare the use of sources in newspaper coverage in Sweden and the United States across distinct news events and beyond a single event. Our analysis shows that use of official sources is much more common in the US press than in the Swedish press. This pattern was consistent across the three different events included in the analysis. American journalists remain heavily dependent on their official sources. Such dependency was documented in research on the Vietnam War (Hallin, 1986) to recent studies of the Iraq War (Dimitrova and Strömbäck, 2005), the Abu Ghraib scandal (Bennett et al., 2006) and Hurricane Katrina (Bennett et al., 2007). This pattern is not unique to the United States. In a comparative analysis of newspaper coverage in Asia, Yoon and Gwangho (2002) showed that government sources were used in 64 percent of the Japanese coverage and 44 percent of the South Korean coverage. Heavy reliance on official sources, of course, opens the possibility for political elites to influence the news framing of events, which, according to our study, seems more likely in the US rather than the Swedish press.

While official sources were significantly more common in US news coverage, no clear pattern emerged for the use of spokespersons for transnational and intergovernmental organizations as sources and with respect to the reliance on anonymous sources. The reasons for this are unclear. The theoretical contribution lies mainly in the fact that international organizations such as the UN and EU, which are arguably significant players on the global arena, remain relatively invisible in news coverage, even when the media report on international conflict events. Elite newspapers in Sweden and the United States rely on them as sources in 0–35 percent of their coverage. This is especially surprising for Swedish news coverage. What this finding might suggest is that national media are predominantly ''inward-looking'': they tend to find their news sources locally and in the ''event zone'' where the conflict is taking place, but rarely add views of non-governmental and transnational organizations in their reporting.

Our study documents an important tendency in source selection—the reliance on domestic rather than foreign news sources. Even though we live in a more global world today, the ''forces which encourage ethnocentric news selection are powerful'' (Manning, 2001, p. 62). News stories have to be culturally resonant for the audience. Cultural proximity can be a strong determinant of source selection. Such arguments provide a rationale for the lack of international organizations as sources in news reporting in both Sweden and the United States.

In certain cases news media have to rely on anonymous sources in their coverage. Our expectation was that anonymous sources would be used more frequently in the US press than in the Swedish press. This was supported only in the case of the Iraq War, but not for the election news coverage. One reason for this might be that there is a tendency for Swedish journalism to sometimes be unspecific when attributing facts. For example, it is somewhat common that Swedish journalists refer to ''experts say . . .'' or ''according to sources . . .''. In cases such as these, the sources used remain anonymous for the reader, but the reason for not providing the names of the sources is not necessarily to protect the

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identity of the sources. Of course, such a tendency is by no means unique to the Swedish press.

Our findings also suggest that different types of events may put different constraints on the news-gathering process and on source selection and source availability. War coverage in particular presents journalists ''with logistical obstacles and safety concerns [that] may limit their access'' to places and people (Seib, 2002, p. 94). Journalists in Sweden and the United States covering the Iraq War, for example, may need to rely on external sources, sometimes anonymous sources, more frequently than when covering a local event. There is another important challenge associated with war reporting. Seib (2002), p. 95) notes that ''[p]erhaps more than in any other kind of coverage, war reporting tests journalists' resolve to resist constraints imposed by those behind the news''. External pressure on war reporters may be stronger if their own country is involved in the military conflict.

The analysis also compared the use of three types of sources that are typical in news reporting: ordinary citizens, spokespersons for grassroots organizations, and academic experts. We were trying to get at the diversity of coverage as well as the ability of everyday people and non-governmental organizations to voice their opinions in the media, a characteristic of a healthy democracy. With the exception of the Mohammad Cartoons coverage, use of spokespersons for grassroots organizations as sources remains rare in both Swedish and US media, however. The same is true, to a lesser extent, for ordinary citizens. Individual citizens seem to have a better chance than non-governmental organizations to be references in media accounts in both countries. Reliance on ordinary citizens as sources was more common for US media, although the reasons for this finding are not clear.

Using academics as sources tends to increase the credibility of the news and provide ''unbiased'' viewpoints. Our findings show that the use of academic experts as sources is more widespread in the United States than in Sweden. In terms of journalistic practice, US media may be more likely to provide multiple perspectives in order to legitimize the news and also to avoid accusations of news bias. This pattern suggests that there may be a greater (perceived) need for the US media to incorporate expert sources in their coverage. Providing diverse and ''balanced'' viewpoints in news reporting, however, may be only ''an implicit substitute for objectivity'' (Manning, 2001, p. 71). The fact that US newspapers used government officials, academics and citizens as sources more frequently than Swedish newspapers does not necessarily make the American coverage better in terms of quality of news reporting.

It is important to put the Mohammad Cartoons crisis in context as well. International events have always been challenging to cover because of financial, cultural and logistical barriers. Shrinking international news staff and closing foreign news bureaus are part of today's media world (Seib, 2002). Journalists tend to cover foreign news that is culturally closer. Perhaps because of these reasons, US journalists were limited in their access to sources in the Middle East in the case of the Mohammad Cartoons controversy and had to rely even more heavily on the Danish government as a source.

Finally, our results by and large support the idea of ''hierarchy of credibility'' in which official sources are regarded as more authoritative and sought more frequently by the media (Manning, 2001, p. 71). With a few exceptions, this was true for both Swedish and US newspaper coverage. Official sources in both countries seem to be regarded as more

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credible, which gives them more potential power in influencing the news (Bennett et al., 2007; Lawrence, 2000; Manning, 2001).

Limitations

As mentioned above, our analysis is limited because it relies on three prior studies, which were designed to answer different research questions. The main limitation stems from the fact that the source variables were not exactly the same across these prior studies. Therefore, we lack some data for some events, which is unfortunate. Secondly, the data capture only the *types* of sources used per article. There is no data on the total number of sources used per article, or on the number of times a certain source, or source category, was used per article. Therefore, we cannot examine whether increasing the use of certain sources leads to a decrease in the use of other sources. Investigating whether a certain source category is present or absent in news articles might be a necessary, but certainly not sufficient, means for analyzing the use of news sources in media coverage. From this perspective, this study should be seen as a first step towards a fuller understanding of source use in news media in different countries covering different events. Thirdly, news sources influence news coverage in different ways, and not all sources contacted by a news reporter show up with direct references within the coverage. Our analysis cannot capture the impact of special interest groups and PR efforts that certainly impact news coverage in both countries. The impact of such external groups should nevertheless be acknowledged. Finally, none of the events included here represent routine news in both countries under study, which should be addressed in future research.

Future Research

Our study opens the doors for future cross-cultural research on source selection, journalism practice and news reporting, which is a challenging yet worthy undertaking. More research, including the development of a framework for comparing source use across countries as well as original empirical studies designed to focus primarily on the use of news sources and its antecedents, is needed. Future studies should also include research that compares the use of sources in routine news. From a theoretical perspective, particularly interesting might be to test indexing theory and the official dominance model comparatively and with respect to both routine and non-routine news reporting. Another fruitful area for future research on source use could be investigating newsroom routines from a participant observation approach. Future studies can also make use of surveys of news reporters across countries to gain a deeper understanding of source type, selection and use across different news events.

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