

## Selective Professionalisation of Political Campaigning: A Test of the Party-Centred Theory of Professionalised Campaigning in the Context of the 2006 Swedish Election

Jesper Strömbäck

*Mid Sweden University*

During the last few decades, political campaigns appear to have become increasingly professionalised. However, at present most of the evidence for the professionalisation of political campaigning comes from countries such as the United States and Britain, and there is less evidence with regard to countries with party-centred systems, proportional elections and multiple parties. Moreover, there is a noticeable lack of systematic and comparative research on the extent to which political campaigns have become professionalised. At present, the only theory of professionalised campaigning that has been operationalised to allow systematic comparisons is the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning. However, so far it has only been applied once. Thus the usefulness and validity of the theory remains largely unclear. Against this background, the purpose of this study is to elaborate on the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning, and to test this theory in the context of the 2006 Swedish election.

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During the last few decades, the style and character of political campaigning appear to have changed fundamentally. No longer do political campaigns rely mainly on volunteers, interpersonal communication or the expertise gained through the experience of holding political offices or previous campaigning. Instead, political campaigns appear to have become increasingly reliant on professional expertise in the use of an expanding number of sophisticated campaign techniques, such as opinion polling, telemarketing and voter segmentation (Powell and Cowart, 2003). In the words of one observer, there is ‘no room for amateurs’ any more (Johnson, 2001).

If the campaign warriors of yesterday were activists and volunteers, today they are, rather, professional political persuaders and consultants for hire (Nimmo, 1999; Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Thurber and Nelson, 2000). At least this appears to be the case in the United States and to some extent Britain, where most of the research on the professionalisation of political campaigning and the use of political marketing techniques has been carried out (Davies and Newman, 2006; Kavanagh, 1995; Newman, 1994; Trent and Friedenberg, 2004; Wring, 2005). In that context, the mode of political campaigning has evolved from a pre-modern to a modern and finally to a postmodern phase (Farrell, 1996; Farrell and Webb, 2000; Norris, 2000).



However, less is known about the mode of political campaigning and the degree of professionalisation in countries with other political and media systems, in particular in countries with proportional elections, multiple parties and party-centred systems. Although there are some important exceptions to the rule of an Anglo-American bias in the study of political campaigning (Lilleker and Lees-Marshment, 2005; Negrine *et al.*, 2007; Plasser and Plasser, 2002; Swanson and Mancini, 1996), much work remains to be done in order fully to understand the style and character of political campaigning and the degree to which political campaigning has become professionalised. As most studies on the professionalisation of political campaigning rely on qualitative and in-depth analyses of single countries, there is additionally a need for measures that would allow systematic comparisons, both within and across countries.

So far, the only theory of professionalised campaigning that has been operationalised to allow systematic comparisons is the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning proposed by Rachel Gibson and Andrea Römmele (2001). However, it has only been applied once, in the context of the 2005 German election (Gibson and Römmele, 2006). Hence, the purpose of this article is: (1) to analyse and suggest some modifications to the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning; and (2) to test this theory in the context of the 2006 Swedish election.

### The Professionalisation of Political Campaigning

Judging from the literature, the concept of professionalised political campaigning appears to be of greater importance to European than to American scholars. Perhaps this is due to the notion that campaigns in the United States are more advanced than in other countries, and because it is hence more or less taken for granted that political campaigns in the United States have become professionalised. This can explain why the professionalisation of political campaigning sometimes is discussed in terms of an 'Americanisation' (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos, 1996; Schoenbach, 1996).

Nevertheless, one problem with the concept of professionalised political campaigning is that it is often insufficiently defined. As noted by Darren Lilleker and Ralph Negrine (2002, p. 99), there is an unfortunate tendency to use professionalisation as a catch-all term. In addition, when a definition is provided, it is seldom given in such a way as to allow for *systematic* comparisons across time, campaigns or countries. For example, Donald Green and Jennifer Smith (2003, p. 322) write that 'professionalization encompasses a broad array of interrelated phenomena, ranging from the manner in which campaigns are conducted to the specialization of tasks', while Negrine (2007, p. 29) writes that professionalisation 'refers to a process of change in the field of politics and communication that, either explicitly or implicitly, brings about a better and more efficient – and more reflective – organisation of resources and skills in order to achieve desired objectives'. While

both these descriptions have their merits, they are nevertheless not particularly suitable for systematic empirical studies. Complicating the matter further is the somewhat time-bound nature of the meaning of professionalised campaigning. What was considered professional campaigning in 1987 or 1997 may be less so in 2007, and whatever measures are used today, new campaign techniques and expertise will continue to develop. This cannot, however, be an argument against attempts to measure the degree of professionalised campaigning, although the measures might need to be revised in light of new developments.

Nevertheless, one quite comprehensive definition of professionalised political campaigning is offered by Strömbäck (2007). According to Strömbäck, professionalised campaigning is characterised by being permanent, by the central campaign headquarters being able to coordinate the messages and management of the campaign and by using expertise in analyzing and reaching out to members and target groups. It is furthermore characterised by using expertise in news management and in analysing its own and the competitors' weaknesses and strengths. This definition is close to an operationalisation of professionalised political campaigning offered by Gibson and Römmele (2001, p. 39), according to whom the basic elements of professionalised campaigning can be found 'in the tools and strategy used, the overall mode, and the nature of power relationships associated'. The definition is also quite consistent with the suggestion by Lilleker and Negrine (2002, p. 102) that professionalisation is about 'specialization of tasks, the increased use of experts and the management or centralization of the campaign', and the description of the postmodern phase of political campaigning (Farrell and Webb, 2000; Norris, 2000). Thus it appears reasonable to think of the professionalisation of political campaigning mainly in terms of the use of different sophisticated campaign techniques, the use of expertise in applying these campaign techniques and the management of political campaigning (Esser *et al.*, 2000, p. 212). This is also the case in the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning by Gibson and Römmele (2001; 2006).

### The Party-Centred Theory of Campaign Professionalisation

In contrast to many other theories of party change, the starting point for the party-centred theory of campaign professionalisation is that party change cannot only be located outside the party (Gibson and Römmele, 2001). While systemic factors are important, so are internal factors which, to some extent, the parties themselves can control.

More specifically, and in a manner similar to the integrated theory of party goals and party change by Robert Harmel and Kenneth Janda (1994), the theory 'sees major change in political parties to be the result of an interaction between certain external events or shocks and internal party traits' (Gibson and Römmele, 2001, p. 36). The prime example of an external shock might be a major electoral defeat.

How a party reacts to such a shock is not, however, predetermined. In addition to other considerations, it depends on whether the party should be characterised as vote seeking, office seeking or policy seeking (Harmel and Janda, 1994; Strom, 1990). While an electoral defeat can be expected to trigger changes in vote-seeking parties, this is not necessarily the case for policy-seeking parties (Harmel and Janda, 1994). In other words, party behaviour at any point in time should be perceived as a combination of systemic and environmental factors, and internal factors tied to specific party types and party goals. In the context of political campaigning, the degree of professionalisation can partly be explained by systemic and environmental factors – some of which affect all parties roughly to the same extent – and internal factors – which vary across parties within a particular political system.

The major focus of the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning is on party-specific factors. More specifically, it singles out seven factors which are said to prime parties to professionalise their campaigning: vote seeking as a primary goal, high level of resources, hierarchical party structure, right-wing ideology, heavy electoral defeat, change of party leader and loss of incumbency (Gibson and Römmele, 2006). These are the independent variables of the theory, and all are measured by dichotomous variables.

As dependent variables, Gibson and Römmele (2001, p. 39) suggest a Professional Campaign Index involving ten items: (1) use of telemarketing to contact their own members and outside target groups; (2) use of direct mail to their own members and outside target groups; (3) use of outside public relations/media consultants; (4) use of computerised databases; (5) use of opinion polling; (6) conducting opposition research; (7) presence of an internal internet communication system; (8) email sign-up or subscription list for regular news updates; (9) outside campaign headquarters; and (10) continuous campaigning. In the most recent formulation of the theory, up to three points can be assigned to each of the dependent variables. Thus a fully professionalised campaign would have a score of 30 points (Gibson and Römmele, 2006).

### **Analysis and Modification of the Party-Centred Theory of Professionalised Campaigning**

While representing a major step forward towards a model that would allow systematic comparisons of professionalised campaigning, the list of dependent variables suffers somewhat from a lack of focus on the expertise required in the use of the various campaign techniques. Moreover, it does not take into account some campaign practices, such as the use of focus groups. Thus, while the list of dependent variables is comprehensive, it does not cover all aspects of professionalised campaigning. The dichotomous measurement of the independent variables could also be questioned. While it does make sense for the independent variables to be dichotomous in a political system with only a few

parties, it is less appropriate in multiparty systems as it does not allow for sufficient variation. In some cases a trichotomous variable thus appears to make more sense. For example, the measurement of vote maximisation as the primary goal states that a party receiving more than 35 per cent of the vote should be considered a catch-all party. In a system with a higher number of parties, such a measurement might result in none of the parties being considered as having vote maximisation as their primary goal. In such cases the use of a trichotomous variable would allow for greater variability and make the theory more suitable for multiparty systems. Before the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning is applied to the Swedish case, some modifications are thus warranted.

The next sections will therefore suggest some modifications of this theory – focusing on the operationalisations of the independent and dependent variables – that will make the theory more suitable for multiparty systems without making it less suitable for two or few-party systems.

### *Modified Operationalisations of Independent Variables*

In the original formulation, right-wing ideology was measured by a dichotomous variable with 0 = left and 1 = right. In the modified operationalisation, right-wing ideology is measured by 0 = left, 1 = centre and 2 = right. In the present study, the classification of parties builds on the voter's placement of parties on the left–right ideological continuum (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2004, p. 107). Multiplying the means by ten yields a 100-point scale. While it is not self-evident where to draw the line between categories, it is important that it is possible to discriminate by means of the final classification. Thus, parties with a mean falling between 0 and 40 have been classified as left, parties with a mean between 41 and 60 have been classified as centre and parties with a mean between 61 and 100 have been classified as right. Using the data from the 2002 Swedish National Election Study, this means that the Left party (14), the Social Democrats (36) and the Green party (38) are considered as left, the Centre party (57) as centre and the Liberal party (64), the Christian Democrats (71) and the Moderates (88) as right (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2004).

In the original formulation, vote maximisation as a primary goal was measured by the status as a catch-all party, defined as whether or not a party received more than 35 per cent of the vote. Such a threshold is not, however, appropriate in countries with multiple parties as it might have the effect that no party is considered as being a catch-all party. Thus to make the measurement more valid in countries with multiple parties it appears appropriate to use a trichotomous measurement. In the present study, the status of being a catch-all party is defined as 2 = 35 per cent or more, 1 = more than 20 but less than 35 per cent and 0 = less than 20 per cent.

In the original formulation, centralised internal structure was measured by the number of people employed by the extra-parliamentary organisation *vis-à-vis* the parliamentary party organisation. While the structure of political parties is important, this measurement does not take into account that power relationships in parties are not only a question of the number of people employed in different parts of the parties – they are also a question of internal political culture. For example, some parties have a top-down culture whereas other parties have a bottom-up culture, regardless of the number of people employed. Thus a better measurement might be whether the parties can be classified as grass-roots organisations or not, with the former having a less hierarchical structure than the latter. Such a measurement is admittedly more subjective, but it is nevertheless the approach taken in this study. However, only recent tradition is taken into account, with recent being defined as the last 25 years. Thus parties with a recent tradition of being a grass-roots organisation are given the value 0, whereas parties without such a recent tradition are given the value 1. It should be recognised, however, that this categorisation is subject to interpretation, and in Sweden all parties tend to think of themselves – or want people to think of them – as grass-roots organisations (Nord and Strömbäck, 2003).

The fourth independent variable – level of resources – was in its original formulation measured by overall party income or expenditure in a given year. Unfortunately Swedish parties are not obliged to reveal their incomes or expenditures, so no official record is available. In the present study, campaign budgets were thus used to measure level of resources, and parties were rank ordered accordingly from 0 to 6.<sup>1</sup>

As one important intervening variable, Gibson and Römmele (2001; 2006) suggest whether or not the party has suffered an internal shock. This is measured by a loss of incumbency and the margin of loss in the previous election. In the present study, the former will be measured by 1 = loss of incumbency and 0 = no loss of incumbency. As margin of loss is a complicated measure in systems with multiple parties, this variable will be measured by whether the parties made no loss or by the magnitude of any losses. More specifically, the parties have been categorised as follows: 0 = gained votes at the previous election; 1 = minor loss, defined as losing no more than 10 per cent in the latest election; 2 = moderate loss, defined as losing between 10–25 per cent; and 3 = major loss, defined as losing more than 25 per cent of the votes. The second intervening variable – change of party leader – will be measured as a dichotomous variable, where 0 = no change of party leader since the previous election and 1 = change of party leader since the previous election.

However, at present it is not clear why the internal shock variables should be considered as intervening variables. In the present study, these variables will thus be considered as priming variables with the same status as the other independent variables.

*Modified Operationalisations of Dependent Variables*

The Professionalised Campaign Index originally proposed consists of ten items. In this study, and mainly following Gibson and Römmele (2006), these dependent variables will be measured as follows:

- (1) Use of telemarketing: the more a party made use of telemarketing in the campaign, the more professionalised it was considered to be. The score 3 was assigned to parties that contacted 1 per cent or more of the voting age population through telemarketing; the score 2 was assigned to parties that contacted between 0.5 per cent and 1 per cent; the score 1 was assigned to parties that contacted less than 0.5 per cent; whereas parties that did not make use of telemarketing were assigned the score 0. It did not matter whether the party used telemarketing to reach its own members or outside groups.
- (2) Use of direct mail: the more a party made use of direct mail in the campaign, the more professionalised it was considered to be. Direct mail was defined in the present study as mail sent directly to people, either addressed to specific persons or to all persons within certain groups, such as all households in a particular area or first-time voters. The parties were assigned scores in precisely the same manner as for the use of telemarketing.
- (3) Email sign-up or electronic newsletters: the more frequently produced and more targeted the electronic newsletters used by the parties, the more professionalised the campaign was considered to be. Thus parties that made use of targeted or individualised electronic newsletters sent out at least once a week were assigned the score 3. Parties that made use of and sent out electronic newsletters at least once a week – without targeting them to specific groups or enabling receivers to individualise them – were assigned the score 2. Parties that made use of and sent out electronic newsletters less frequently than once a week were assigned the score 1. The score 0 was assigned to parties that did not make use of electronic newsletters. Only electronic newsletters sent out by the parties or their leaders were included.
- (4) Outside headquarters: one feature of professionalised campaigning, popularised by Clinton's 'war room', is the existence of a separate team that manages the election campaign. The score 3 was assigned to parties that had a clearly defined team of personnel working on the campaign at a physically separate location from the ordinary party headquarters. The score 2 was assigned to parties that had a clearly defined team of personnel working on the campaign within the regular party headquarters. The score 1 was assigned to parties that had a definable campaign team but with less than clear boundaries to the rest of the party headquarters; whereas the score 0 was assigned to parties with no clearly separated campaign team at all.



- (5) Use of external public relations/media consultants: both the use of external public relations or media consultants or, alternatively, advertising agencies beyond the mere production of material, and how much power they had in the running of the campaign, are important in this case. The score 3 was assigned to parties that made use of external public relations/media consultants on an almost daily basis – and to parties that had equally intensive contact with their advertising agency – when they had almost as much say as the people within the party running the campaign. The score 2 was assigned to parties that made use of external public relations/media consultants/advertising agencies on an almost daily basis, where their function was advisory rather than decisive. The score 1 was assigned to parties that made only occasional use of external public relations/media consultants, or used their advertising agency not only to produce material but also to stimulate thinking about messages and message strategies, when their function was advisory. The score 0 was assigned to parties that made no use of external public relations/media consultants and/or used their advertising agency only for producing the material used by the party.
- (6) Use of computerised databases: computerised databases are essential for identifying different voter segments and subsequently for targeting the identified target groups (Baines, 1999). Thus the more parties made use of computerised databases, the more professional the campaign was considered to be. The score 3 was assigned to parties that had some kind of national and computerised database which was used almost daily and continuously updated with new information gained through different campaign activities. The score 2 was assigned to parties that had some kind of national computerised database and which used it frequently on either the national or local level. The score 1 was assigned to parties that had some kind of national computerised database but which used it only occasionally, whereas the score 0 was assigned to parties not using computerised databases. Publicly available information was not considered to be a computerised database unless it was combined with other data by the party in question or by some outside firm which built the database for the party.
- (7) Use of opinion polling: opinion polls are indispensable for any campaign that wishes to understand the mood of public opinion, identify voter segments and track changes over the course of a campaign. The more the parties made use of opinion polling, controlled by the parties themselves, the more professionalised the campaigns were considered to be. The score 3 was assigned if a party had its own specialised unit able to perform or commission opinion polls, when the party also frequently performed or commissioned polls with the results being used almost daily to inform campaign strategies or messages. The score 2 was assigned if a party relatively often performed or commissioned opinion polls, without having its own specialised unit or without necessarily using the results to inform



campaign strategies or determine campaign messages. The score 1 was assigned if a party only occasionally performed or commissioned opinion polls, whereas the score 0 was assigned if a party only made use of publicly available public opinion data.

- (8) Use of focus groups. This item was not included in the original formulation of the Professionalised Campaign Index but suggested by Strömbäck (2007). The measurement of this variable is similar to the measurement of the use of opinion polling. The score 3 was assigned if a party frequently used or commissioned focus groups and where the results were used to provide information in relation to campaign strategies or messages. The score 2 was assigned if a party relatively often used or commissioned focus groups, without necessarily using the results to provide information in relation to campaign strategies or messages. The score 1 was assigned if a party only occasionally used or commissioned focus groups, whereas the score 0 was assigned if a party never used or commissioned any focus groups.
- (9) Opposition research: this campaign practice is often mentioned as being of significant importance (Kamber, 1997; Powell and Cowart, 2003), in order to find weak spots and ammunition for attacks on the opposition. The approach taken here is that the more a party engaged in opposition research, the more professional it was perceived to be. The score 3 was assigned to a party that had its own unit which regularly and frequently researched opposition parties both before and during the election campaign, and made use of the results to guide campaign strategy or messages. The score 2 was assigned to a party that frequently researched the opposition or commissioned opposition research from the outside. The score 1 was assigned to a party that occasionally researched or commissioned opposition research, whereas the score 0 was assigned to a party that never researched the opposition. For an activity to be classified as opposition research, it has to be rather systematic. Just following and reacting to the news or only using easily and publicly available information did not count as opposition research.
- (10) Research of one's own party or campaign: while opposition research is important, it is also important to prepare for attacks through research on one's own party or the campaign's strengths and weaknesses. By doing this, a campaign can foresee and pre-empt attacks or respond rapidly if attacked. Thus, a party that had personnel specifically dedicated to researching its own campaign or party, or commissioned such research, was assigned the score 3. The score 2 was assigned if a party frequently although not continuously instigated or commissioned research into its own party or campaign. The score 1 was assigned if a party only occasionally commissioned or performed research on its own party or campaign, while the party was assigned the score 0 if it never researched its own party or campaign. This item was taken from Strömbäck (2007).

- (11) Continuous campaign: while permanent campaigning is important (Ornstein and Mann, 2000), it is also difficult to measure. The main reason is that political parties in party-centred systems are always engaged in activities aimed at influencing the media and public opinion. Whether such activities should be considered as part of a campaign or not depends on how a 'campaign' is defined. Nevertheless, the approach in the present study mainly follows Gibson and Römmele (2006). A party that was engaged in more than seven of the above activities six months prior to election day was assigned the score 3. The score 2 was assigned if a party was engaged in four to six activities six months before election day, while the score 1 was assigned if a party was engaged in one to three of the activities six months before election day. If a party was not engaged in any of the activities six months before election day, it was assigned the score 0.

### Methodology and Data

To reiterate, the purpose of this article is to elaborate on the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning, and to test this theory in the context of the 2006 Swedish election. As explained above, the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning has been modified somewhat in the present study, to make it more appropriate in the context of a parliamentary country with proportional representation and seven parties in parliament. Thus it is the modified version of the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning that will be tested in the context of the 2006 Swedish election.

The study builds on interviews with one leading party official from each of the seven parties represented in parliament. All interviews took place in early November 2006, and the respondents were either party secretary or head of communications of their parties.<sup>2</sup> All interviews were performed by this author and recorded on audiotape. They lasted for about one hour and took place at a location chosen by the respondent. Originally the study had intended to encompass more questions than were eventually included, but the time limitation necessitated that some questions had to be omitted. However, this did not affect the variables used in the present study. All interviews were transcribed, and a code sheet and code book developed for a systematic content analysis of the transcripts.

The data obtained through the interviews were complemented by a search for media reports on the various aspects covered by the study. More specifically, a search was made for reports on the campaigns in the two major databases in Sweden – *Presstext* and *Mediearkivet*. The reason was that in some (not all) cases, the interviewees were not very willing to offer details regarding how they had managed their campaign; thus their responses were sometimes rather vague. Interestingly, previous research in Sweden (Nord and Strömbäck, 2003) has indicated that the parties tend to de-emphasise their own professionalism in terms of campaigning, out of a fear of being perceived of as top-down and too

calculated in their pursuit of votes. Although all parties have lost members over the last decades (Petersson, 2005), the normative ideal is still that of grass-roots organisations. The description of the parties as professionalised runs counter to this ideal, which can explain partly why the parties are somewhat reluctant when it comes to being open in relation to their campaigning.

Hence the answers provided by the interviewees were not taken at face value. Instead the ambition has been to validate their responses through comparisons with other reports on the campaigns from the media. In cases where the responses differed from media reports or information obtained through informal conversations with party activists, an assessment was made with regard to the classification of the items in the index. Having said this, the results were mainly obtained through content analysis of the transcripts of the interviews, and there were only a few articles produced by additional searches for media reports that offered additional or contradictory information.

### Empirical Background: The Swedish System

Before presenting the empirical results, this section provides an empirical background. Sweden is a unitary state with parliamentary representation. The parliament has one chamber with 349 seats. The electoral system is proportional, although there is a 4 per cent threshold in order to gain parliamentary representation. Since 1994, elections have been held every fourth year, which is true for national, local and regional elections. In all important respects, Sweden is a party-centred country (Petersson *et al.*, 2000). People vote for party lists set up by the parties, although it is possible to express a preference for a preferred candidate. However, the proportion of voters who did that in 2006 was no higher than 23 per cent.

From the introduction of universal suffrage in the 1920s until 1988, the same five parties were represented in parliament. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Green party and the Christian Democrats managed to win parliamentary representation, which they have retained since 1994. Thus since then seven parties have been represented in the Swedish parliament. With regard to government, the rule is minority governments formed by the Social Democrats. When they lost governing power in 1976 it was for the first time since the 1930s. The Social Democrats regained governing power in the 1982 election, and governed until 1991 when the centre and right-wing parties formed a minority coalition government. The Social Democrats governed between 1994 and 2006, when they lost governing power to the 'Alliance for Sweden' – the first formal alliance ever formed by the centre and right-wing parties.

The former stability has thus weakened during the last decades. This is even more evident when changes in voter behaviour are considered. The proportion of voters switching parties between elections has increased from 11.4 per cent in

1960 to 31.8 per cent in the 2002 election. The proportion of voters switching party during the election campaign – which lasts three to four weeks – has increased from 5.1 per cent to 19.1 per cent during the same period. Although most people switch party within the left and the right blocs, 8.7 per cent crossed the bloc line in 2002 (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2004).

The proportion of late deciders has also increased significantly. In 2002, fully 57 per cent made their final voting decision during the election campaign (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2004, p. 90). Party identification has also decreased. In 1968, 65 per cent said they identified with a particular party, and 39 per cent that they strongly identified with a particular party. In 2002, the corresponding shares were 40 and 18 per cent, respectively (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2004, p. 258).

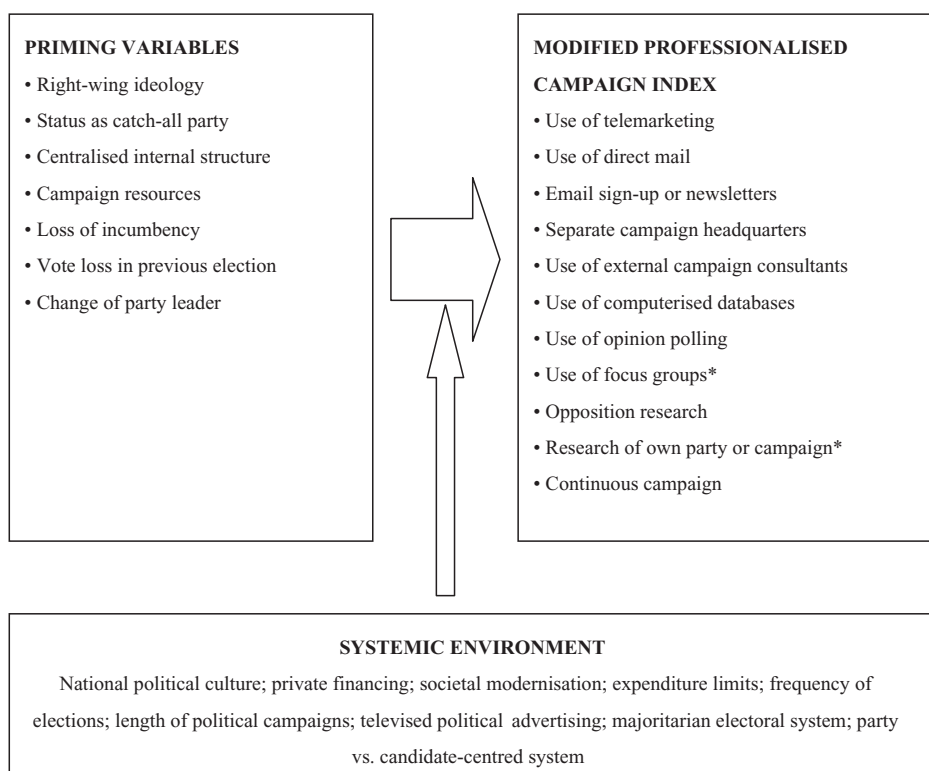
One reason for the decreasing party identification and increasing electoral volatility is that Swedish voters perceive the parties to be located closer to each other on the left–right ideological continuum. At the same time, the left–right ideological continuum is very important in Swedish politics (Oscarsson, 1998). For example, in 1998 the correlation between party choice and voters' self-placement on the left–right ideological continuum ( $\eta^2$ ) was 0.77, which can be compared to the US where the correlation was 0.31 (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2004, p. 106).

Taken together, these trends indicate that election campaigns matter more than was previously the case, and the increasing uncertainty facing parties creates strong incentives for them to professionalise their campaigning. On the other hand, most Swedish parties are rather small and lack the resources that fully professionalised campaigns necessitate. A 'culture of amateurism' also creates disincentives for the professionalisation of political campaigning (Nord and Strömbäck, 2003). Thus there is no tradition of hiring outside campaign consultants, and when the Social Democrats violated that tradition in the 1994 election, it was heavily criticised (Bengtsson and Nilsson, 1994). Thus while Swedish parties try to professionalise their campaigning in the sense that they attempt to bring about a better organisation of resources and skills (Asp and Esaiasson, 1996; Esaiasson, 1990; Papathanassopoulos *et al.*, 2007, p. 10), such efforts are constrained by, for example, a lack of resources and a political culture that appears sceptical towards political professionalism (Nord, 2006; Petersson *et al.*, 2006).

The question then is: to what extent have Swedish parties become professionalised in their campaigning, and can the differences across parties be explained by the priming variables suggested by the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning?

### **Empirical Analysis and Results: The Professionalisation of Swedish Political Campaigning**

In this section the modified version of the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning will be tested. In Figure 1, the theory is presented in diagram-

**Figure 1: Modified Party-Centred Theory of Professionalised Campaigning**

*Note: \*Item not part of the original Professionalised Campaign Index.*

matic form. As can be seen, the figure also incorporates a number of factors related to the systemic environment. To test the importance of these systemic factors a comparative study would be required, which is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, the systemic environment needs to be recognised both because it is important and because it is part of the original formulation of the theory (Gibson and Römmele, 2001).

To analyse the results and the importance of the priming variables, the scores assigned to the parties with regard to the independent variables will firstly be summarised. This will create a ranking of the parties and the likelihood that their campaigns were professionalised in the context of the 2006 Swedish election.

According to the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning, the likelihood that parties will professionalise their campaigning is shaped by seven priming variables: right-wing ideology, vote maximisation as party goal, centralised internal structure, high level of resources, loss of incumbency, loss of votes in

the previous election and change of party leader since the previous election. Table 1 displays the categorisation – following the descriptions above – of the Swedish parties at the time of the 2006 Swedish election with regard to these variables.

As can be seen, the Swedish case offers wide variation. The maximum possible score is 16, and the party that scores highest is the Moderate party, while the party that scores lowest is the Green party. The higher the score, the higher the likelihood is that a particular party will professionalise its campaigning. The sums thus suggest that the party most likely to run a professionalised campaign in 2006 was the Moderates, while the party least likely to run such a campaign was the Green party. Ranking the parties according to the sums suggests the main hypothesis of this study:

H1: The party most likely to have run a professionalised campaign in the 2006 Swedish election was the Moderates, followed by the Social Democrats, the Christian Democrats, the Centre party and the Liberal party, followed by the Left party and the Green party.

To determine whether this hypothesis is supported or not, let us turn to the eleven dependent variables in the modified Professionalised Campaign Index. In each case, the maximum score is 3 points. If a party is fully professionalised in its campaigning, it would receive 33 points.

As can be seen from Table 2, there is wide variation between the parties but also with respect to the use of campaign techniques that is part of the modified Professionalised Campaign Index. This suggests that some campaign techniques are more common whereas others are less common in the Swedish political campaign culture. For example, no party does systematic research on its own party's or campaign's weaknesses and strengths. Telemarketing is another campaign technique that is rather uncommon, and used by only three of the seven parties. On the other hand, all parties use opinion polls, although to varying degrees, just as all parties to some degree try to separate their campaign headquarters from the ordinary party headquarters and start at least parts of their election campaigning six months before election day. Most parties also make some use of their advertising agencies beyond the mere production of posters or ads, and this is why they get some scores on the use of public relations or media consultants. However, it should be noted that had the operationalisation of this variable excluded advertising agencies, thus focusing only on outside public relations or media consultants in the same sense as they are used in the United States or other countries (Johnson, 2001; Plasser and Plasser, 2002), all parties would score 0. The Swedish tradition is mainly to have this kind of competency in-house, and while the use of outside advertising agencies is generally accepted, there is considerably less acceptance for the use of outside public relations or media consultants. This is a reflection of the 'culture of amateurism' (Nord and Strömbäck, 2003) that is an important feature of Swedish political tradition.

Table 1: Swedish Parties at the Time of the 2006 Election: Priming Variables

	Left party	Green party	Social Democrats	Centre party	Liberal party	Christian Democrats	Moderate party
Right-wing ideology	0	0	0	1	2	2	2
Status as catch-all party	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
Centralised organisation	0	0	0	0	1	1	1
Level of resources	0	1	6	5	3	2	4
Loss of incumbency	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Vote loss in previous election	3	0	0	0	0	2	3
Change of party leader	1	0	0	0	0	1	1
Sum	4	1	8	6	6	8	12



Table 2: Professionalised Campaigning Index Scores by Swedish Parties

	Left party	Green party	Social Democrats	Centre party	Liberal party	Christian Democrats	Moderate party
Telemarketing	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
Direct mail	3	3	3	1	2	3	3
PR/media consultants	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
Databases	0	0	2	2	1	1	0
Opinion polling	1	1	2	2	2	1	2
Opposition research	0	0	3	2	1	0	1
Own research	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
E-newsletter	0	2	3	0	2	2	2
External HQ	1	1	2	2	2	1	2
Continuous campaign	1	1	2	2	1	2	2
Focus groups	0	1	1	1	1	1	2
Sum	6	9	20	13	13	13	16

What is most important in this context, however, is the sum each party receives and the rank ordering of the parties. As Table 2 shows, no party comes even close to the maximum score of 33 points. Thus although the extent to which the campaigns were professionalised varied, no party ran a fully professionalised campaign. The party that ran the most professionalised campaign was the Social Democrats, which achieved a score of 20, whereas the party that ran the least professionalised campaign was the Green party, which achieved a score of 6. This difference is indeed substantial.

In light of the hypothesis, the results show mixed support. The hypothesis predicted that the party most likely to run a professionalised campaign would be the Moderates, followed by the Social Democrats, the Christian Democrats, the Centre party and the Liberal party, the Left party and the Green party. The results show that the party running the most professionalised campaign was the Social Democrats, followed by the Moderates, with the Centre party, the Liberal party and the Christian Democrats with the same score, followed by the Green party and the Left party. Thus it was the Social Democrats – and not the Moderates as predicted – that ran the most professionalised campaign. Furthermore, the Christian Democrats ran a less professionalised campaign than expected, while the Green party ran a more professionalised campaign than the Left party. At the same time, the rank-order correlation (Spearman's rho) is 0.849 and statistically significant at the 0.05 level, suggesting that the independent variables are indeed strongly correlated with the scores assigned to the parties in the Professionalised Campaign Index.

Taken together, these results suggest that while the degree of professionalised campaigning is indeed shaped by the independent variables suggested by the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning, it is not determined by them. The priming variables suggested by the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning all increase the likelihood that a particular party will professionalise its campaigning, but they cannot fully explain the professionalisation of political campaigning.

### *Additional Analyses*

The present study might be criticised, however, on three grounds. The first possible criticism might be that the independent variables do not include a measure of the number of employees, which might be critical as there should be a correlation between the degree of professionalised campaigning and the resources in the form of employees (Gibson and Römmele, 2001; Lilleker and Negrine, 2002). This study also suggested (see above) that the expertise in using the different campaign techniques is crucial. As this expertise can be in-house as well as hired, a study of the professionalisation of political campaigning should include some measure of the number of employees in addition to a measurement of the use of public relations or media consultants. Fortunately, a study by Lars

Nord (2007, p. 87) includes the total number of people employed by the Swedish parties in 2003. Although these numbers have probably changed since then, the rank ordering of the parties before the 2006 election should be quite similar. The study by Nord showed that the party with the highest number of employees in 2003 was the Social Democrats (429), followed by the Moderates (113), the Centre party (97), the Green party (60), the Liberal party (45), the Left party (35) and the Christian Democrats (30). Ranking the parties from 0 to 6 yields the total sums for the priming variables shown in Table 3.

Does the addition of the number of employees as a priming variable improve the rank-order correlation between the priming variables and the dependent variables? The answer is yes, as the rank-order correlation (Spearman's rho) increases from 0.849 to 0.881, significant at the 0.01 level. Hence the number of employees appears to be an important variable in itself and as an indirect measurement of the level of expertise within the parties.

The second possible criticism is that the measurement of the priming variables has not been standardised. To address this I have run two additional tests with standardised scores on the priming variables – one including and one excluding number of employees as a priming variable. The results show even stronger correlations when using standardised measurements. Excluding the number of employees as a priming variable, the correlation (Spearman's rho) increases from 0.849 to 0.855, significant at the 0.05 level. Including the number of employees increases the correlation even more, from 0.881 to 0.982, significant at the 0.01 level. Taken together, this suggests that: (1) the number of employees should be included as a priming variable; (2) the measurements of the priming variables should be standardised; and (3) there is a very strong correlation between the independent variables suggested by the modified party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning and the Professionalised Campaign Index.

The third possible criticism is that the analyses presented here are not complex enough and that they do not address whether some priming variables are more important than others. While it certainly is reasonable to assume that some of the priming variables have more explanatory power than others, at present it is simply not possible to investigate this aspect empirically. To test the explanatory power of each of the priming variables would require more advanced statistical analyses, and this would in turn require a larger data set. Such analyses thus have to wait until more research has been done and a larger data set is available.

**Table 3: Revised Sums on the Priming Variables**

	<i>Left party</i>	<i>Green party</i>	<i>Social Democrats</i>	<i>Centre party</i>	<i>Liberal party</i>	<i>Christian Democrats</i>	<i>Moderate party</i>
Sum	5	4	14	10	8	8	17

## Conclusion

This study has shown that there is indeed a very strong correlation between the variables that are said to prime parties to professionalise their campaigning, according to the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning, and the extent to which Swedish parties ran professionalised campaigns in the context of the 2006 election. This result should be interpreted as strong support for the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning, although it was tested in this case in a modified form. Nevertheless, the theory has now been tested in both Germany and Sweden, and in both cases the theory has been supported. In addition, the strong correlations in this study suggest that the modifications of the priming variables and perhaps also the Professionalised Campaign Index were warranted. Thus in future research the modified operationalisations of the priming variables could be recommended.

At the same time, more research is required to enable a deeper understanding of the professionalisation of political campaigning, its antecedents and its consequences. It is hoped that the modifications to the operationalisations and measurements in the original theory made in this study will contribute to making the theory more universally applicable. However, only further research that includes more countries and more election campaigns within countries can shed light on whether further modifications are warranted or not. In addition, further research and a larger data set are needed to allow more advanced statistical analyses that are necessary to investigate the explanatory power of each of the priming variables.

In addition, it should be recognised that the list of dependent variables that make up the Professionalised Campaign Index is not exhaustive. Other existing campaign techniques could be included, and new campaign techniques will certainly develop that should be incorporated in future versions of the index. To some extent, the campaign techniques that make up the Professionalised Campaign Index are time bound, and while this should not be used as an argument against attempts to measure the degree to which parties have professionalised their campaigns, it suggests a need to update the index in light of new developments in the art of political campaigning. It is also crucial to find better and more comprehensive measures to assess *how* the campaign techniques are being used. Using a particular campaign technique is one thing; making full use of it is another. Thus a stronger focus on the expertise applied and better measurements when using the campaign techniques are warranted.

These comments notwithstanding, the party-centred theory of professionalised campaigning represents a major step towards a comparative research programme that includes systematic measures of both the independent and the dependent variables. This study should be perceived as both a validation and a modification of the basic theory. As such, it contributes to future theory building with regard

to the professionalisation of political campaigns, while it also represents the first recent systematic study of the degree to which Swedish parties have become professionalised in their campaigning.

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## About the Author

**Jesper Strömbäck**, Department of Media and Communication, Mid Sweden University, 851 70 Sundsvall, Sweden; email: [jesper.stromback@miun.se](mailto:jesper.stromback@miun.se)

## Notes

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- 1 A single source of information does not exist with regard to the official campaign budgets. The sums mentioned in various media reports vary. In the present study, this problem is not very consequential however, as the rank order is quite similar across different reports. The reason why the Centre party had a larger campaign chest than the Moderates, despite being smaller, is that the party sold a number of newspapers in 2005. See also <http://www.dn.se/DNet/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=1042&a=497876>, and [http://www.svd.se/dynamiskt/inrikes/did\\_13710892.asp](http://www.svd.se/dynamiskt/inrikes/did_13710892.asp) [Accessed 3 May 2007].
- 2 The respondents were: Marita Ulvskog, party secretary for the Social Democrats; Håkan Wählstedt, party secretary for the Green party; Anki Ahlsten, party secretary for the Left party; Göran Holmström, assistant party secretary for the Christian Democrats; Jöran Hägglund, party secretary for the Centre party; Helena Dyrssen, who started the election campaign as assistant party secretary for the Liberal party and then became party secretary during the course of the campaign; and Per Schlingmann, head of communications for the Moderates, who took over as party secretary after the election.

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