

The citizen in Swedish election posters 1908-1936

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore how citizens were addressed in Swedish election posters in the eleven national elections between 1908 and 1936. The period covers great changes in political life as well as in campaign work of the parties. Election posters are better suited for mobilising citizens than for argumentation and presentation of policy alternatives. The question here is how the parties have used this mobilising function to connect to their voters. More specifically: to what extent have the parties turned to members of collective bodies such as social classes on the one hand, and to individuals who may have different political convictions and standpoints, on the other.

This study combines a) a quantitative overview where the explicit verbal messages are being studied, with b) an analysis inspired by semiotic approaches in which both denotative and connotative levels of messages are brought into the analysis.

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Introduction

'The citizen' is clearly among the most contested concepts in social and political science. This is not surprising, given the centrality of citizenship in theories of democracy. The citizenship literature discusses, among other issues, constitutional rights and duties of citizens, but also different aspects of citizenship itself. In an electoral democracy, voting is an important way in which individuals enact their citizenship. During elections citizens first and foremost appear as voters; the latter being the most important – albeit not the only – target of the propagandistic efforts of the parties.

This paper explores the way Swedish parties have addressed the citizens in their electoral campaigns in the period between 1908 and 1936. More specifically, the focus is directed at the rhetorical choice to address citizens as parts large voter groups or turn to more individual qualities. The period covers a number of important changes in Swedish society and politics. Starting at a point in time when still only a fraction of Swedes had the right to vote, this paper delves into the question of how the different ways of addressing the citizens evolve in election posters up to a time when democracy and party system are well established, and the nation stands at the dawn of the welfare state.

Election posters provide an appealing material for studying how the parties address the citizens. Posters generally do not allow for lengthy arguments and deliberation. Instead, political posters are often regarded as particularly suitable for non-verbal communication, and especially for conveying symbols and signs of identification. Typically, political posters use a combination of visual communication and print on a small surface. Thus the parties need to be very selective in their choice of messages. Verbal messages are only brief, and pictures accompanying the texts provide condensed messages open to interpretation.

The questions guiding the analysis will be developed below. First, however the posters are put in their campaign context.

Election posters and their place in the campaigns

Election posters are part of a campaign package which each party launches for each election. Despite the prominence of electronic media -- in particular television -- in contemporary campaigns, posters have retained their place in the mix of channels parties and their campaigners use (Seidman 2008).

From the point of view of the parties, we can easily list some functions the posters fulfill: to 'flag' the election and be a reminder that the election is coming up ('Now is the time to vote!'), to rise awareness of the party and its candidates ('We are party x, we stand in this election!' or 'I am your candidate!'), to convey symbols (names, logos, slogans etc) associated with the party or candidate in order to establish them as 'brands' and to give a first impression of the campaign ('this is me, this is my logo/catchphrase'), to convey a particular political message, such as a general value ('freedom', 'equality', 'change', ...), a more specific election pledge ('Strengthen our defence!' '400 000 new jobs!' 'No to privatisation of hospitals!'), or a message questioning or attacking political opponents ('Don't let them ruin our country!').¹

Speaking in terms of the classical Aristotelian rhetoric, the necessity for parties to keep messages brief should therefore lead us not to expect too much of the *forensic* and the *deliberative* rhetorical genres in election posters. Forensic rhetoric deals with right and wrong, with a kind of argumentation seen in courts of law. Deliberative rhetoric – often regarded as the prototypical political rhetoric – argues about what should or should not be done (Murphy & Katula 2003:70). Instead the primary rhetorical genre of election posters may be the *epideictic* one (Kjeldsen 2002; Vigsø 2004:89). The latter has to do with demonstration of virtues, of praise and blame, and not least with (self) display. The idea is not to provide argument or evidence but to enhance the ethos, to strengthen the bonds between the sender and the receiver. Since this effort calls for some shared assumptions between sender and receiver, Vigsø (2004:210) concludes that posters have a mobilising rather than persuasive function.

The election campaigns during the period covered in the study have been labelled *premodern* (Norris 2000). It covers the phase from the introduction of election campaigns directed at a large population with the right to vote, up to the time when broadcast media, especially television, assumed the place as the most prominent channel between parties and voters. For the case of Sweden the premodern era can be dated from around 1900 to the late 1950s (Norris 2000; 2008; see also Esaiasson 1990). The keywords for the premodern campaign are 'local' and 'low-budget'. Local party organisations still enjoyed great freedom in controlling campaign activities and in producing propaganda material such as

¹ For more on the party strategic functions of posters see for example Seidman (2008 chapter 8), Vigsø 2004.

pamphlets and posters. The most important direct channels were public speeches and (home and work-place) canvassing. The indirect channels, such as the party press, were by and large party-controlled. Local and regional newspapers were usually to be regarded as official opinion moulders of the parties. Campaign activities were labour intensive and required a great deal of volunteer work by party members (Esaïasson 1990; Norris 2000; 2008).

Election posters should be considered as part of the arsenal of campaign media that are party controlled, as opposed to 'free' or 'independent' media. Posters have been used in many countries by contending parties in elections for a long time (Seidman 2008). However it is only with a mass electorate that posters find their place in the evolving campaign cultures of the parties. In the Swedish case, the last decade of the 19th century election marks a change in political campaigns, as rallies and public meetings became more frequent (Esaïasson 1990:88; see also Bodin 1979). The need to advertise these meetings led political parties to intensify production of posters. A typical election poster around the turn of century announced a local party meeting with one or more named speakers, either candidates for parliament or city council, or prominent people of the party endorsing the latter.

As the history of election campaigns in Sweden entered a new stage about a decade into the new century, the election posters also changed. Esaïasson (1990) describes this as a phase of *party politicization* of the campaigns. The leading figures of the parties became very prominent in the campaign efforts. During the period 1908 to 1924 the parties both expanded and diversified their campaign work. They picked up innovations from abroad regarding campaign techniques, and adjusted to the extended franchise. A breakthrough in the use of election posters could be observed in the 1911 elections. The first illustrated posters began to appear alongside with the more traditional text-based announcements. Political slogans and messages became more common. Posters were thereafter not exclusively a means of informing and mobilising for meetings, but also a potential channel for conveying persuasive political messages. In line with the centralisation of campaigns, posters were also to a greater extent produced in a standardised fashion. In quantitative terms, there was a great surge in the use of posters from the election of 1928 and onwards. The Social Democrats alone distributed some 600,000 posters in the 1936 elections, compared to ca 20,000 in 1921 (Esaïasson 1990: 366).

To address citizens as individuals and group members

The focus of this paper is on how the Swedish parties have addressed the citizens in their election posters. There are several aspects that may be relevant to use in a descriptive study of this kind. Here, the dimension that will be explored is that which ranges between addressing the citizens as individuals and addressing them as part of some kind of collective body. From a political science point of view this distinction is interesting since it pinpoints a phenomenon relevant to the study of the ideological development of parties, as well as to the research of campaign strategies. There is evidence that the developments in later periods (from the 1950s and on) have made the parties less bound to certain groups of sympathisers. The rise of the *catch-all* party -- as opposed to the class-based party --, the increasing voter volatility, and the increasing issue voting are well-researched phenomena (see for example Thomassen 2005). Together with increasing individualisation (Dalton 1996:346), this points in a direction of more individual addresses in party propaganda.

The question for this paper is whether this development is already under way in the early part of the 20th century, or whether we see a solid class-based party system producing voter appeals where citizens are depicted merely as belonging to classes and other social groups. The massive extension of the right to vote in 1920/1921 when franchise was extended all men and women of age, regardless of income, can be expected having altered the ways of addressing the citizen.

Moreover, it is interesting to look into what kind of individual and collective appeals that the election posters carry. What are the messages? How do text and images play together to create a conceptualisation of the citizen?

In relation to the objective of the paper, we may express some expectations on the results:

There is ample evidence that voting in Sweden during the first half of the 20th century was determined to a great extent by social class. Only later, starting in the 1950s/1960s we saw a breaking up of the links between classes and party voting (*dealignment*) (for a discussion see Dalton 1996; Oskarson 1994).

*** Class based appeals will dominate over general and individual appeals for the entire period***

Another issue with relevance to the group appeal is whether posters explicitly or implicitly refer to *gender*. With the extension of franchise in 1921 to both men and women it makes sense to expect that this major change is reflected in the election posters and that the male voter stereotype will be challenged.

***From 1921 and on we will see 'gendered' election posters in which the parties explicitly and/or implicitly appeal to 'women' and 'men' as voter categories ***

How, then, is it possible to define the different ways of addressing citizens? There is no obvious dividing line between appeals directed to people as individuals as opposed to members of collectives that can serve as an operational distinction for this study. On the one hand each individual trait or quality can be interpreted as a basis for categorization in a class or group: being 'young' or 'a woman' or 'a social democrat' can be regarded as individual qualities as well as group markers. The young person is a member of the youth collective etc. Being a social democrat may at the same time be an individual conviction and a group membership.

In this paper, I will use references to individual beliefs, attitudes, standpoints and/or convictions as indicators of an individual appeal. References to the beliefs and standpoints of the voters are more likely to occur in an issue oriented political communication.

Before presenting results from the analysis, a brief overview of previous research on political posters is made, followed by some notes on the methods and the material of the present study.

Previous studies of election posters

A great deal of the literature on political posters emanates from an interest in art and design and focus exclusively on aesthetic qualities of posters. Political posters are regarded as a genre among several others in the general art history. An important subfield of poster studies concerns revolutionary propaganda, e.g. early Soviet political art, in which posters played an important role (see for example Kämpfer 1985).

A recent work with a focus on political and persuasive aspects of election posters around the world is Seidman (2008).

There are a number of works on (mainly Western) European political posters. Some of them have a broad historical scope (see for example Gervereau 1991 for France, Reimann 1961 for Germany), while others have more specific analytic objectives, and a smaller empirical material (see for example Memmi 1986 for Italian election posters).

Swedish political posters have been studied by Nittve & Lindahl (1979), Brodin (1979), Johansson (2001). In the former, concepts from art theory and semiotics are applied to analyse election posters from the 1920s to the 1970s. The posters are also put in a historical context by a rudimentary politico-economic analysis. Brodin (1979) is a historical overview of Social Democratic election posters, where party history and political context are in focus; the posters as such are however not analysed.

Two studies of Nordic election posters stand out as thorough and theoretically driven analyses. Jens Kjeldsen (2002) studies Danish election posters from the 1990s with a developed model for visual rhetoric as main analytical tool. Orla Vigsø (2004) analyses Swedish election posters by using a semiotic method, and by relating posters to marketing strategies of political parties.

The closest parallel to the research questions of the present paper is found in a study by Tom Carlson (2000). He analyses the development of Finnish election posters, both when it comes to substantial content and rhetorical traits of the posters, as well as the voter appeal; i.e. the groups of voters the parties aim to reach with their posters. Carlson compares party posters from the late 1950s and early 1960s to those from 1987-1991. The early period is dominated by appeals directed either at the traditional voter groups of the parties (labourers, rural residents, employees etc) or at the nation as a whole. The posters of the 1980s and 90s display no specific group appeals. Instead, the most common addressee of the posters is the individual voter (Carlson 2000). This development reflects the socio-economic transition to a post-industrial society in which class cleavages are blurred and become less distinct.

On sources and methods used

The ambition for this study has been to survey all the posters issued by the major parties in the eleven parliamentary elections held during the period 1908-36.

This task is unrealistic in so far as there is no comprehensive collection of election posters. The strategy has instead been to search the collections the political parties have deposited at various archives, in particular the National Archive of Sweden (*Riksarkivet*) and the Royal Library (*Kungliga Biblioteket*) which is the national library of Sweden. Election posters are printed matter and as such the publisher or printer is obliged to deposit copies of each issued poster to the Royal Library.

In addition, the collections of the Labour Movement Archives and Library (*Arbetarrörelsens arkiv och bibliotek*) hold collections of in particular Social Democratic and Communist party posters. The posters were accessed either as print copies, microfiche or digitalised images.² Posters carrying only announcements of meetings and speeches (i.e. without any additional textual appeals or pictures) have been excluded from the analysis, as have local or regional variations of posters already included in the material for the study (e.g. same text and pictures save for differing place names, speakers).

When analysing how the political parties use election posters to turn to the citizens we need an approach which can identify the relevant categories of appeals. Whenever explicitly articulated verbal references to groups, classes, roles, traits etc are made in the election posters, it is possible to employ a common-sense based analysis in which the explicit verbal messages are in focus (Carlson 2000, see also Vigsø 2004; Moriarty 2005). However, in a study of this kind, it is not sufficient to halt at what is explicitly expressed in the text. Particularly since many posters display both verbal messages and images, we need to take this duality into account. Pictures and words convey meanings together, and should therefore be analysed together. I follow the example of Carlson (2000:48-49) which -- inspired by the works of Barthes³ -- divides the meaning of messages into a *denotative* and a *connotative* level. The denotative ('surface') level concerns the literal, descriptive meaning of a message. The connotative level concerns the associations about the object which are shared within a given culture. Both verbal texts and pictures have a denotative and a connotative level which can be analysed.

² Some (although not all!) posters in the Royal Library collections are accessible as digital images at the database libris.kb.se. See also appendix!

³ Overviews and introductions to the key elements of Barthes' use of the concepts are found in Fiske (1990); Moriarty (2005); Vigsø (2004:71-78).

In the visual part of the message this division is expressed by the concepts of *iconic* and *symbolic* relations between picture and meaning. The iconic relation applies when the picture and the object depicted bear physical resemblance; when they 'look alike' (e.g. a picture of a flag in relation to the physical flag), while the symbolic is a conventional relation, where the picture 'stands for' something else (e.g. the national flag standing for 'the nation', 'national unity', 'patriotism' etc) (see for example Moriarty 2005:230) . In a poster depicting a Swedish flag on flagpole it is possible to determine the denotative meaning as the flag= the piece of yellow and blue fabric that is attached to the flagpole, and the symbolic meaning as that of the Swedish nation, and national unity. A quotation from Carlson (2000) gives further guidance for how to do the analysis:

"Here we will discuss which intentions are likely to have been behind the choice of the signs of the poster message: which connotations, associations, feelings and values did the parties intend to evoke among the voters? A certain guidance is given by the verbal text since its function is to steer/control the connotation processes. Moreover, by contemplating what the signs of the posters *do not* stand for (thus: their oppositional meaning) we may reach insight in the intentions of the senders" (Carlson 2000:51; my translation, italics added. See also Fiske 1990:109-110; Moriarty 2005:230-32).

The analyses presented in this paper are divided in two:

- 1) a quantitative account of different types of posters, in which the denotative level of the verbal messages is being determined. Here, the posters are grouped in the abovementioned categories and subcategories. The purpose of this is to give a broad overview of the distribution of the different categories of appeals in the posters, thereby making it possible to draw conclusions about the relative emphasis put on different citizen appeals, as well as about trends over time.
- 2) a closer analysis of illustrative examples of the categories applied under (1). Here, both typical and deviant cases are put forward to give illustrations of the use of citizen appeals, and also to uncover how denotative and connotative levels of messages play together – and sometimes against each other -- to form meaning.

Background: Early twentieth century political landscape in Sweden

Undoubtedly, tremendous political and societal changes took place in Sweden during the first decades of the 20th century just as it did in other countries. On a general level we observe a transition to modernity through processes such as industrialisation and urbanisation. The political changes include the introduction of general suffrage, first for all men 24 years of age and older in 1909, then in 1920 for all adult men and women. It includes the establishment of the principle

of parliamentary rule in 1917, and thus the eventual end to the sidestepping of popular power through the royal claims to appoint the government. Furthermore, the changes include the establishment and consolidation – or ‘freezing’ to speak with Lipset and Rokkan – of a party system which was to exist more or less intact for most of the twentieth century.

Mass party membership and activity rose during the first three decades of the century. In 1932 the Swedish parties taken together counted more than four times as many members as they did in 1905 (Esaïasson 1990:356). In 1913 an agrarian party (*Bondeförbundet*) was formed, which, alongside with the Social Democratic party, took the form of a mass party closely connected to a popular movement.

The labour movement entered a period of growth but also of internal disagreement. The Social Democratic party (*Socialdemokratiska Arbetarpartiet*) was established as the largest party in parliament during the era of Hjalmar Branting (party leader 1908- 1925), growing from some 20 percent to 41 in the 1924 elections. The party gradually shifted into a reformist ideology and a pragmatic outlook on party cooperation. The formation of a Liberal – Social Democratic coalition in 1917 is significant of this development. However, in the same year, the leftist fraction of the party formed a new party (*Vänstersocialisterna*), which subsequently became the Swedish Communist Party (*Sveriges Kommunistiska parti*). Factional dissent continued during the following years, resulting in the formation -- and dissolution -- of several parties to the left of the Social Democrats.

The Liberal party was split in two in 1923 following controversies over the prohibition issue.⁴ *Frisinnade* and *Liberalerna* coexisted until 1934 when they were united in the Liberal *Folkpartiet*.

The Conservative party (*Allmänna valmansförbundet/Högern*) survived the extension of suffrage and other reforms that it had initially opposed, and continued to enjoy enough electoral support to make it the second largest party throughout the period 1917-1936. Thus the Conservatives were the leading party of the bourgeois bloc that was gradually consolidating during the 1920s and 30s.

⁴ In 1922 a consultative referendum was held, resulting in a majority against prohibition of alcohol.

In 1934 however, the youth organisation of the Conservatives left the party and formed an independent organisation with a right wing agenda. Together with a couple of other national socialist parties it formed the far right of Swedish party politics. These organisations were more or less marginalised by the end of the 1930s.

The economic trends shifted significantly during the nearly thirty years covered. The hardships suffered during and after the First World War -- during which Sweden remained neutral) -- were succeeded by a period of prosperous trade and labour market, until the great worldwide depression hit Sweden in the early 1930s. Following the democratic breakthrough ca 1917-1921 a number of short-lived minority governments succeeded each other. In the 1930s the political landscape entered a stable phase, where the 1932 election marked the beginning of a four decade era of Social Democratic governments in office.

The toughest task for the parties during these times was to mobilise their voters, not primarily to persuade supporters of other parties. Election turnout remained low, especially in the 1920s. The intense and ideologically polarized election campaign of 1928 fuelled interest in politics and marked a change: turnout rose from 53 to 67 percent (Esaiaasson 1990:151).

First analysis: an overview

All in all 404 unique election posters have been found for the period 1908-1936. In table 1 below they are divided into three periods to illustrate the change over time. The first break is chosen at the time of the introduction of universal suffrage in 1921. The second separator is placed at the 1932 election, a moment in time when the five-party system was being consolidated, and a longstanding pattern of cooperation and conflict between parties was established.

Table 1. References to voters/citizens in Swedish election posters 1908-36 (percent)

	1908-1920	1921-1928	1932-1936	All
No reference	59	43	59	52
Individual	14	3	1	5
Collective				
- general	14	6	7	9
- social class	13	23	24	21
- gender: men+women	0	18	2	8
- gender: women	0	6	5	4
- other	0	0	2	1
Sum percent	100	100	100	100
	N=100	N=162	N=157	N=419

Note: N exceeds the number of posters (404) since a few posters contain references belonging to more than one category.

As is shown in table 1 a little less than half of the posters contained explicit appeals to citizens, either collective or individual. We can also conclude that among the posters that did contain appeals to citizens the collective appeals are the most common over the entire period, and increasingly so by the end. More than half of the posters carried no information at the denotative level as to how citizens are addressed, a figure which is fairly constant over time. Posters of this kind typically announce a speech (with or without a portrait of the speaker) or a party meeting together with some very brief voting appeal ('Vote for X').

General and specific collective addresses

When turning specifically to the collective appeals in the posters, the first distinction to be made is between posters in which citizens are regarded as part of a broad, general collective, and posters where citizens appear as members of specific groups or classes. In the light of the research questions it is important to single out the latter, 'genuine' class and group appeals, at the same time as it gives us an opportunity to assess the general appeals more in detail.

It is possible to regard the collective address of citizens as a dimension stretching from very general to very specific. The most general category to which the presumptive voter may belong is, arguably, 'mankind'/'the human race' or the like. A politically very applicable category is 'the people' which may be understood in several ways. National labels, such as 'Swedes'/'the Swedish

(people)' are other obvious example of labels that may define the citizen. On a more specific level we expect to find categorisations emphasising different group memberships (social class, profession etc), but also groups emanating from more basic individual traits or qualities (age, gender, etc).

The question is to what extent and in what ways the parties employ general and specific collective appeals when turning to their presumptive voters. Table 1 above reveals that the general labels are not among the most common. They appear in less than one out of ten posters during the entire period. Going behind the figures in table 1, it is equally clear that the most frequent way of addressing is simply 'the voter'.

Since the Riksdag was, and is, elected proportionally in constituencies that comprise regions or larger municipalities, it is no surprise to find that the parties occasionally address the citizens as members of the particular constituencies. (This requires, needless to say, various local or regional versions of election posters, although it does not necessarily imply a local production of the same.)

Another category expected to be found among the collective appeals is 'Swedes'/'The Swedish'. During the covered period of three decades, this way of addressing the citizens is used only twice when considering the denotative level of messages. The two posters were issued in the 1914 election in the shadow of the Great War and during an intense debate on defence, where the conservatives and parts of the liberal camp assumed a strong pro-defence stance.

"Vote on the 7 April 1914! Defend Your Country, Swedes! If you wish the best for Sweden, if you wish to leave a free and independent Sweden to your descendants, vote for Swedish men, who place the well-being of our native Land higher than petty and advocatory partisanship, and higher than today's political bickering. God save the King and our Country!"

Already at the denotative level this poster it is clear that this poster turns to people who could identify themselves in national terms. When considering also the more or less implicit associations made between "Sweden/Swedish" and the value of unity, it becomes clear not only what qualities are inscribed in 'the Swedish', but in addition what values that are *not* congruent with the same. Against the values freedom, independence and well-being are put forth 'partisanship' and 'political bickering' which, thus, are not only in opposition to the positive values, but also 'non-Swedish'.

Although it may be somewhat surprising that there are no explicit references to 'Sweden'/'Swedish' after 1914, the analysis of the connotative level of messages makes it clear that there is a broader register of national appeals than what is evident at the denotative level. There are several examples of posters where various pictures symbolising the nation are used. First and foremost the national flag is made use of, as well as the national coat of arms occasionally accompanied by Svea, the female personification of the nation. Another obvious example is the depiction of the map of Sweden, sometimes in connection with symbols of external threats to the country. Without exception, the symbols of this kind appear in posters from the Conservative party from 1924 to 1936. The national category of appeals may be expanded to include other, more subtle markers of national unity, or "Swedishness", such as yellow cornfields and red wooden cottages. The interpretation in those cases are however less clear-cut, since they may evoke meanings pertaining to other domains, such as the urban-rural dimension.

Labourers, smallholders and farm-hands: class-based addresses

The first half of the 20th century is the peak time of the class based mass party in Western Europe (Bartolini & Mair 1990). Swedish parties make no exception. We may therefore expect that the parties use a rhetoric directed at classes and groups in society which form the core of their supporters. We would expect socialist parties – both the reformist Social Democrats, and the Communist Party – to explicitly turn to the working class in their propaganda. The Agrarians would similarly be expected to address farmers and smallholders. Liberals and Conservatives, on the other hand, would, in accordance with their ideological viewpoints, be expected to reject class membership as a basis for political action. Although the core voter groups of the two parties can be fairly easily determined (middle class/employees and higher employees/business owners, respectively), they are less likely to engage in group-centred rhetoric.

Not surprisingly the two main classes addressed in the posters of the era are "workers"/"labourers" and "farmers". These class-based addresses not only follow the composition of the Swedish population of the time, but also the expected divisions between parties. Social Democrats and Communists use 'labourers' and occasionally 'small farm owners', 'small holders' or the like.

Agrarians turn to farmers but also more generally to 'people of the countryside', a phrase which presumably includes also labourers of the agricultural sector.

A Communist party poster of 1932 gives an example of how class appeals can be used in a fairly unambiguous way. Both the denotative and connotative levels of message play together and give the viewer a clear-cut idea of what the poster aims at, and whom it addresses.

At the denotative level the poster contains the text '*Comrade in worker's shirt! Vote for the workers' party The Communists*'. At the centre of the poster is a male figure drawn in a modernist style reminding of cubist painting. The man wears a blue shirt with sleeves tucked up. From each of his wrists hangs a torn iron chain. The left hand is raised in an upward motion. Behind the figure is a silhouette of chimneys from which smoke is rising into the air.

This poster contains many well-established attributes associated with the working class and socialist ideology. The chimneys in the background represent industry production, and, together with the working blouse establishing the working class status of the figure in the poster. The raised fist, the word "comrade", and the red colour of the text "Communists" all contribute to establishing a revolutionary theme: by voting for the Communist party it is possible for the working class to be liberated from the burdens of the capitalist system. The cut-off chains are also part of this symbolism, although this image is used more generally, and by parties of other political convictions, most notably the Conservatives. The blue colour of the shirt makes the figure stand out against the otherwise black and white picture. This accentuates that the man is breaking free, as if he is moving out of the picture.

The Communist poster above addresses an expected group of voters, the working class. There are however numerous examples where the campaign makers try to make inroads into the territory of other parties by addressing the traditional voter groups of their opponents: social democrats turned to 'academic citizens', communists to 'workers and working farmers', and conservatives to 'workers' and 'wage-earners'. These exceptions to the rule have in common that the address is made very clear and unambiguous, usually in the opening line or heading of the poster.

The Liberal party is particularly interesting when it comes to class appeals. Even though the Liberals are very restrictive using explicit class or group appeals, there is some counter-evidence when invoking the connotative level in the analysis of images and text together. At the denotative level the messages often turn to 'voters' or 'the people' in general, or give no information whatsoever on how the party imagines their presumptive voters. At the same time the images of the posters at times carries connotations of middle class or white collar, male voters, thus narrowing the concept of the citizen as compared to the surface level of the message.

A Liberal party poster which displays this ambivalence was issued in 1928. The text reads: *'The political roads. Which road is shortest and leads to the quickest results? Vote for the Liberals.'* The poster displays an image of three white roads leading from bottom to top in the picture. The two fringe roads are curved, the middle one is straight. In the front of the poster three male figures are seen from behind standing up and each facing one of the roads. They all wear dark clothes, as well as three different head coverings: a flat cap, a fedora style hat, and a rounded derby hat, respectively.

Connotations: A road in general stands for the future, and that someone (we) are on our way somewhere. This is accentuated as the observer sees the characters in the picture from behind, and thus follows them on the road (cf Carlson 2000:72). The curved roads connote difficult, tricky or unnecessary complicated ways of going about, a straight road connotes a well planned and fast way to reach the goals one might have. This connotation is made obvious by the choice of text in the upper part of the poster, in which a short road is conceptually connected with quick results.⁵ The three male figures facing the roads each connote different classes and/or party sympathisers. The key symbolic device used is the headgear of the figures. The cap of the first man connotes 'the common man', and possibly 'labourer'. The rounded hat of the third figure may stand for wealth; a 'capitalist', especially when contrasted to the other two figures. This connotation is reinforced by the broad neck of the figure, another archetypal symbol of wealth and capitalism. The man with the fedora hat is placed in the middle, thus reinforcing the notion that the middle way is the best choice, between the two extremes. Furthermore, the position of the two

⁵ This interplay between verbal text and images is an example of what Barthes regards as anchoring (*ancrage*), where the text gives aid in identifying what is in the picture, and thus reduces the polysemy that all pictures carry (see for example Vigsø 2004:77).

fringe figures, to the left and to the right, respectively, gives them a clear placement on the dominant political scale.

The Conservative party turned out to be more inclined than the Liberals to use class-based appeals. In the earliest instances 1914-1920 we find 'farmers' being the target. The competition over voters from two agrarian parties founded in 1913 and 1917 respectively (*Bondeförbundet* and *Jordbrukarnas Riksförbund*) is likely to have contributed to the targeting of this specific group. Only later, in 1932-1936, Conservative posters addressing 'workers' and/or more generally 'wage-earners' appeared.

Gendering the citizen

The Riksdag elections of 1921 marked the first appearance of female voters in Sweden⁶, following the new electoral law enlarging the franchise to all adult citizens, regardless of gender or income. From this year on, the parties have had a rhetorical choice to address voters as 'men' and 'women', either together or separately. Seidman (2008:15) notes that the expanded right to vote in a number of countries led to more posters targeting the new voter groups. The question is whether this important political reform changed or broadened the party appeals in Sweden? Can it be argued that the concept of the citizen became gendered in any respect after the 1921 election?

The results show that the enfranchisement of women in 1921 instantly triggered voter appeals in which gender was highlighted (table 1). All major parties issued at least one poster with explicit messages directed at either 'women' or 'men and women'. The top three parties in referring to gender were the Social Democrats (22 posters), Liberals (12) and the Conservatives (7). Interestingly, gendered appeals were considerably fewer in the years that followed – 21 out of 56 posters with gender appeals were issued already in 1921. Apparently the new strategic situation of the parties provided a starting point for the gendered appeal, although the effect waned over the elections that followed (Esaïasson 1990:126).

At the denotative level of the messages two types of gendered posters appear: those which address 'women' specifically, and those which address 'men and

⁶ Previously, unmarried women of age (25) enjoyed the right to vote in local and regional elections provided that they had an income eligible for local poll tax and that the tax had been paid. Needless to say, extremely few women qualified for the right to vote.

women' together (typically: 'Men and women of the working class'; 'Men and women of...[constituency/town]').

At the denotative level, men are seldom explicitly addressed as such. The exceptions are when compounds and fixed phrases including 'men' are used ('Dalamän!' = 'Men from Dalarna!'). However, the analysis of the connotative level reveals many instances where images of male figures are employed to connote 'the general citizen', (thus, not specifically a 'man') as an individual or as a member of a group or class.

A Social Democrat poster of 1936 carries the text "*He knows what the election is about. Read the Social Democratic election leaflets yourself*" and a drawing of a man sitting, reading an election leaflet. Behind the man several other leaflets and posters from the Social Democratic campaign are shown. The connotation is that of a knowledgeable and responsible person who does his duty as a good citizen and gets informed about the political issues. The implicit message is that the more you know the better you will understand that the Social Democrats is the best choice among the parties.

When searching for female counterparts in the same role, i.e. images of women connotating 'citizens' or 'voters' – and not 'women', specifically, the result is meagre, to say the least. There is no instance at all during the analysed period of time. Pictures of women are used either in combination with verbal appeals explicitly directed to women, or depicted together with men.

The common textual phrase 'men and women' (see table 1) does not correspond to the use of pictures of the same denotation or connotation. There are very few examples of the inclusive appeal featuring men and women together in the images of the posters. Posters which display pictures of female figures usually have explicit verbal appeals to 'women'.

A rare exception is to be seen in a poster from the Social Democrats in 1936 where the text reads: '*This is ours! Industrious work and a strict economy created it.*' Two figures, one man and one woman stand on top of a hill overlooking a landscape in which yellow fields are seen, as well as some red painted wooden buildings. Both appear young, the male figure wears a white working blouse,

blue trousers and brown boots, the woman wears a white short-sleeved blouse, a red/white striped skirt and an apron of bluish colour.

The brown boots of the young male connotes farmer or farmhand/labourer. The lady's apron, similarly, vaguely indicates belonging to working class. The text of the poster can be interpreted as alluding to the young couple, thus indicating that their hard work has made it possible for them to acquire a home of their own. Another possible interpretation of text and image together, which is fully compatible with the first, is that it refers to the country as a whole. Hard work of the people (and of the Social Democratic Party, being in government for the past four years) and a strict and responsibly managed national budget has made it possible for some workers and smallholders to purchase land and/or a home.

Interestingly enough, with the possible exception of the abovementioned *"This is ours"* poster there are no instances of pictures of women with working class attributes in the posters where Social Democrats address female voters.

To sum up, it is fair to say that the reform of 1921 triggered posters addressing women, but that this effect was short-lived. Moreover, the rhetorical possibility to address both men and women did not change the way parties used images to connote 'the citizen'. Apparently the male stereotype for the citizen prevailed after the franchise reform.

Individual appeals: ideas and personal choices

Above it has been established that election posters have displayed collective appeals far more often than individual appeals, a result in line with the expected. More surprisingly perhaps, is the fact that we find fewer individual appeals in the later periods than in the first (--1920) (table 1).

There are a number of ways the parties can turn to the citizens as individual with particular political convictions. A common way would be to use broader political or ideological labels, such as "liberal(s)", "socialist(s)", "prohibitionist(s)" and the like. Another way is to turn to individuals with issue-specific political standpoints.

The following texts from two Conservative election posters of 1920 (none of them featuring pictures) are typical instances where a party uses an individual appeal based on personal attitudes.

“The voter, who wishes the preservation of ownership, the development of the industry and general wealth, he votes for ‘Landtmän och borgare’ (Farmers and Bourgeoisie, [party list label of the Conservatives])”

“The footprints are frightening! Do you wish socialisation and class rule? Vote for the Labour Party. Do you want freedom and bourgeois social order? Vote for the label [list] Trestadsrketsen [Conservatives]”

Both examples use general pleas, with broad values in focus. Out of the three values in the first text the first one (the private ownership) is easily recognisable as a Conservative value. The second example uses a technique of juxtaposition, where a choice is constructed for the citizen, a choice which, for the intended targeted voter is easy to make.

Many of the appeals referring to issues and policy are issued by the Liberal party. Two political issues are in focus: prohibition and defence. The two issues divided the party, and the posters addressing these issues appear to mobilise either faction within the party.

It is generally harder to determine what connotes different ideas than the connotations of groups or classes. As noted above, symbols such as the national flag may connote both group membership (being Swedish) and certain nationalist ideas (e.g. Sweden being superior to other nations). Only by analysing text and images together this question can be resolved.

A verbal address which both denotates and connotes the individual is the pronoun “Du” (‘You’, singular). Carlson (2000:85) notes that using “Du” when addressing voters is a way of including everyone and excluding no one. Using the word “Du” in posters in the early 20th century also connotes casualness and familiarity, as the word was normally used only in more informal and intimate situations.

An example of the use of this form of individualistic appeal in text, which however is somewhat ambiguous when considering the connotative level, is to be found in a Liberal poster of 1924. The text reads:

“The outcome may depend ON YOU! Do not stay at home on Election Day 21 September. Vote for the Liberals!”

The focal point of the poster is a big hand stretching into the centre of the picture from the right pointing its index finger at a standing male figure facing the pointing finger. The person is dressed in a dark suit with a white shirt and a bowtie.

Turning to the connotations it should be clear that the finger is a symbol that highlights the duty of the one pointed at. The finger urges the individual to do something, in this case, to vote. In contrast to Uncle Sam in the famous poster of the First World War (*I Want YOU for US Army*) who points at the viewer, the finger is here directed at the standing person in the middle of the picture.⁷ The intention from the liberal party may be to give a neutral representation of the citizen or voter without distinctive attributes (*not worker, not capitalist or upper class, not farmer*) etc.

Concluding remarks

The combined analytical approaches of this paper reveal a few traits in the parties' appeals to citizens in their election posters. The first analysis of the explicit verbal messages concerns to what extent group memberships of different kinds were used to define the citizen, as compared to using individual traits or convictions as the basis for construction of a 'citizen'. Group membership and other collective categories were by far the most common among the appeals to the citizens. Appeals to individuals with certain attitudes, convictions or ideological beliefs were not common, and did not increase over time. On the contrary, the greater part of the posters of this kind occurred in or around the spring election of 1914. The liberal party, in particular, used explicit appeals to citizens with particular attitudes in two controversial issues over which the party was divided: alcohol prohibition and the defence issue.

The relative abundance of class appeals is a highly expected result given the importance of class in political life in the first half of the 20th century. Moreover it supports the idea that the predominant function of election posters of the period is the mobilising one, rather than one of presenting policy choices and political arguments. The higher frequency of individual appeals in the early part of the period is harder to explain. Individual addresses of voters are more likely to be found in more recent times, and are more consistent with (post-) modern

⁷ The American war poster had a predecessor in a British poster where Lord Kitchener points at British men with the words *Wants You, Join Your Country's Army! God Save The King!* (Seidman 2008:22).

political marketing and voting behaviour (see for example Norris 2000). A possible explanation is that election posters may have been used more as vehicles of persuasion in early years. Later, as other media were developed and refined as tools in the campaign arsenal of the parties, posters were assigned the role to raise awareness of the election and to mobilise the core voters, rather than to put forth policy proposals and choices.

The second analysis, where picture and texts are simultaneously taken into account, suggests that the denotative and the connotative levels of text/images often reinforce each other. Easily understood symbols such as a drawn picture of a man with a slouch-hat and a plough ('farmer') are employed to complement a text in which the party unambiguously chisels out the target group of the poster. However, as the analysis reveals, there are clearly a number of instances where the connotations are evoked only when the picture is being considered. The national flag or the map of Sweden together with a more general message turning to 'voters' or 'citizens' in general illustrate this phenomenon. Sometimes, the connotations of images are even at odds with the interpretation of the explicit verbal messages, as shown by the examples with Liberal party appeals to the voters allegedly not belonging to any social class. If anything, the semiotic – inspired analysis points to the necessity to go beyond explicit messages in order to better understand how political parties have used various propaganda channels directed to the citizens.

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Appendix: Election posters referred to in the text of the paper. All of them can be accessed by searching on the respective texts/titles at libris.kb.se (Swedish Royal Library database):

Conservative Party, 1914: *'Vote on the 7 April 1914! Defend Your Country, Swedes!'*

Upp till Val den 7 April 1914 Värjom Landet Svenskar! Viljen I Sveriges väl, viljen I som arf åt Edra efterkommande lämna ett fritt och oberoende Sverige, rösten då på Svenske män, som högre än småaktiga, advokatoriska partihänsyn, högre än dagens politiska käbbel sätta fosterlandets välfärd! [...] Gud bevarare konung och fosterland!

Conservative Party, 1920: *'The voter, who wishes the preservation of ownership..'*

Den valman som vill: den enskilda äganderättens bevarande... : han röstar med listan Landtmän och borgare

Conservative Party, 1920: *'The footprints are frightening!...'*

Spåren avskräcka: vill du socialisering och klassvälde, rösta då med Arbetarpartiet : vill du frihet och borgerlig samhällsordning, rösta då under partibeteckningen Trestadskretsen

Communist Party, 1924: *'Comrade in worker's shirt! Vote for the workers' party The Communists'*

Kamrat i arbetsblus: rösta med Arbetarepartiet kommunisterna

Liberal Party, 1924: *'The political roads. Which road is shortest and leads to the quickest results? Vote for the Liberals.'*

De politiska vägarna: vilken väg är kortast och ger lättast resultat : rösta med De frisinnade

Liberal Party, 1924: *'The outcome may depend ON YOU! Do not stay at home on Election Day 21 September. Vote for the Liberals!'*

På dig kan utgången bero: stanna inte hemma på valdagen den 21 sept. : rösta med De frisinnade

Social Democrats, 1936: *'He knows what the election is about'*

Han vet vad valet gäller: läs själv de socialdemokratiska valbroschyerna

Social Democrats, 1936: *'This is ours! Industrious work and a strict economy created it.'*

Detta är vårt: idogt arbete och sparsamhet har skapat det