

Political Communication Cultures: Brief summary of findings from the Swedish study

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- Mostly small attitude differences between politicians and journalists
- The greatest differences concern the judgment of how the media coverage has developed: politicians are more likely than journalists to view coverage as more negative, more about tactics and personal life, and less broad and complex.
- Gender differences are generally small.
- However: Women in politics as well as media perceive media agenda setting power as stronger than do men + they have more concerns about political pressures on reporting. Moreover, women believe more in the role of internet based news media.
- People in public service media are more sceptical than newspaper employees about the merits of opinion polls in political coverage.

A few questions that divide journalists and politicians...

Among the issues dividing politicians and journalists we find a number of items describing the development of political journalism. Politicians are clearly more inclined to think that *media coverage is becoming more negative, more focused on tactics and private lives of politicians, and that journalism is losing its broad scope and complexity.*

Politicians have a stronger belief that *Internet based media have a political role*, while the two groups show similar judgments of the role of the traditional media.

Table 1a. Items with greatest differences between politicians and journalists (mean deviation, scale 1-5).

Question/item	diff. politicians – journalists
1 How legitimate is it for journalists to publish confidential political information without approval?	- 1.3
2 Journalists increasingly avoid reporting broadly on complex issues and debates	+ 0.8
- ...your opinion on the media's impact on how well democracy functions in this country. (1= negative, 5=positive)	- 0.8
- The media increasingly portrays politicians in a negative way	+ 0.8
5 Journalists increasingly focus more on the private lives of politicians than on political issues	+ 0.7

Plus ('+') indicates greater values for politicians, and vice versa. Journalists N=160, politicians N=142.

The item in top of the list above is the issue of *publishing confidential (secret) information*. Journalists are unanimously in favour of publishing such information, while politicians score clearly lower. A high standard deviation for the politicians reveals differing political opinions in this matter, however.

Note: all tables show mean differences between groups. Scale 1-5.

Apart from the general comparisons of attitudes and evaluations reported above, we may juxtapose the self-assessments of journalists concerning norms of their profession with politicians' judgments on whether they believe journalists fulfil these norms. Differences turn out to be greater for these questions than for most other items. In particular, politicians do not think *journalists provide information and give a balanced view* to the extent that these norms are esteemed by the journalists themselves.

Table 1b. Journalists' norms and politicians' reality assessments compared (mean deviation, scale 1-5).

Question/item	diff. politicians--journalists
1 How important is it to you to provide citizens with information they need to make informed decisions about politics? Journalists report on politics to provide citizens with information they need to make informed decisions about politics.	- 1.9
2 When covering politics, how important is it to you to give equal voice to all sides? When covering politics, Journalists aim to give equal voice to all sides.	- 1.8
3 To you as a journalist, what is the importance of voicing particular views on political developments? Journalists cover political issues to voice particular views on political developments.	- 1.1
4 And how important is it to investigate claims made by politicians and serve as a watchdog of political elites? When covering politics, journalists aim to serve as a watchdog of political elites	- 0.9
5 And how important is it to you to produce content of interest to a large audience? When covering politics, Journalists mainly aim to produce content of interest to a large audience.	- 0.8
6 And how important is it to you to get information to the public fast? The main goal of journalists when covering politics is to get information to the public fast.	- 0.3

'+' indicates greater values for politicians, and vice versa.

...and some on which they agree

Mostly, the views of journalists and politicians do not differ much from each other, and sometimes not at all.¹ Among the latter we find items representing *the influence of different media* on politics, the perceived *trust in the media* among the public, as well as a couple of questions about *the reason of conflict* between politicians and journalists. There is also great consensus about *the role of opinion polls*: their democratic value, whether they misrepresent opinions, and whether they make journalists using them more credible.

Women and men: mostly similar views

For many of the analysed items the gender variation in answers is negligible. There is however a systematic pattern which recurs in all groups (journalists, politicians and spokespeople). An example is the *political impact of internet based news media* (which women rank higher than men). Another example is the question of the *agenda setting*

¹ Less than 0.1 deviation from total mean.

function of the media: women have a stronger belief than men that the media - rather than politicians - have the power to establish which issues are important. Men are less inclined than women to subscribe to the view that *media should represent groups according to their importance*. This is true above all for journalists and spokespersons, and somewhat less for politicians.

Table 2 Items with greatest differences between women and men (mean deviation, scale 1-5).

Question/item	diff. women--men
1 How high would you rate the political influence of online media?	+ 0.5
2 In a democracy, the media has to represent the different groups in society in accordance to their importance	+ 0.4
- The media decide which issues are important in politics while politicians have little impact	+ 0.4
- How legitimate is it for journalists to publish confidential political information without approval?	- 0.4
5 How strong would you say is the impact of political pressures on media coverage?	+ 0.3

'+' indicates greater values for women, and vice versa. Women N= 149; men N=204

Political differences: opposition and government

Just as we might expect there are diverging answers from politicians of different political camps. Below we compare representatives of the governing (centre-right) parties with those of the (left-leaning) opposition. Differences turn out to be very small for most of the issues examined. However, there are clearly diverging attitudes especially for issues which carry heavy left-right loading. For example, how politicians view *the political leaning of the media landscape* (which opposition politicians place more to the left than government party politicians do). The same pattern is found when asking about the merits of *commercial television*, and the general *commercial influence on media coverage*.

Table 3. Items with greatest differences between representatives of the governing parties and the opposition parties (mean deviation, scale 1-5).

Question/item	diff. opposition-govt
1 Would you say that the media landscape leans more toward one side of the political spectrum? (1= left, 7= right) NB 7-grade scale!!	+ 2.0
2 Commercial television channels lead to more variety in the range of opinions ..	- 1.8
3 How strong do you think is the impact commercial pressures (like profit orientation) have on media coverage in Sweden ? (1=not strong at all , 5= very strong)	+ 0.9
- It is crucial for a democracy that people exert direct influence on political decision-making, e.g. through referendums.	+ 0.9
5 The public was better informed about politics before commercial television was introduced	+ 0.8

'+' indicates greater values for opposition politicians, and vice versa. Opposition N=40, government N=77.

Differences and similarities among journalists

a) newspapers and broadcast media

The journalist group consists of respondents from daily newspapers, online newspapers, television, radio and one news agency. Among the notable differences between the largest groups – those from newspapers and broadcast media - is the issue of *voicing particular views* on political matters. However, the varied roles of journalists play an important part in determining the outcome. Those who mainly work with opinion formation (e.g. editorial pieces/leading articles) naturally regard expressing opinions as very important, while reporters normally do not. Yet, even after the exclusion of the editorial group (as in table4),

newspaper journalists are more positive to voicing opinions than their colleagues from broadcasting.

Table 4. Items with greatest differences between newspaper and broadcast journalists (mean deviation, scale 1-5).

	Question/item	diff. newsp - broadcast
1	To you as a journalist, what is the importance of voicing particular views on political developments?	+ 0,7
-	How important is it to you to get information to the public fast?	+ 0,7
3	It is crucial for a democracy that people exert direct influence on political decision-making, e.g. through referendums	- 0,6
4	How strong would you say is the impact of political pressures on media coverage?	- 0,5
-	It is a good thing for a democracy that opinion polls are covered regularly in the media	+ 0,5

'+' indicates greater values for newspaper journalists and vice versa. Newspapers N=84, broadcast N=74

The distinction between newspaper and broadcast media coincides to a high degree with that between public service media and commercial media (TV4 is the only commercial broadcaster in the sample). Therefore, the results of table 4 also reflect the public service/private dimension to some extent. Two differences that are Proportionality and the viewpoint that *political pressures influence reporting* are given somewhat higher values by public service journalists than by those from commercial organisations (+0.5 and +0.4 respectively).

b) is there anything special about the bosses?

The respondents from the media elite differ slightly depending on the position they have in their workplace. Below those with some form of managerial/leading position (editor-in-chief, head of news desk etc) are compared with others, mainly reporters.

Table 5. Items with greatest differences between managerial roles ('bosses') and journalists without such roles (mean deviations, scale 1-5).

	Question/item	diff. boss- not boss
1	In a democracy, the media has to represent the different groups in society in accordance to their importance	- 0.4
-	How important is it to you to get information to the public fast?	+ 0.4
3	Politicians prefer to pass information to journalists with similar political orientations.	+ 0.3
-	The public in was better informed about politics before commercial television was introduced.	- 0.3
-	How often do conflicts arise because journalists report information incorrectly?	+ 0.3

'+' indicates greater values for editors in chief (etc). 'boss' N=63, no 'boss' N=91.

Differences turn out to be smaller than when comparing different media. Proportional representation in the news report had fewer supporters among the editorial people, as had the idea that people were better informed before commercial tv was introduced. The speed of news delivery to the public on the other hand, had more support among the 'bosses'.

Appendix

Inspired by Miika & Tom I present some radar charts to give an overview (without comments!) on the differences between the three professional groups.

Figure 1. Perceived political influence of five media (mean scores).

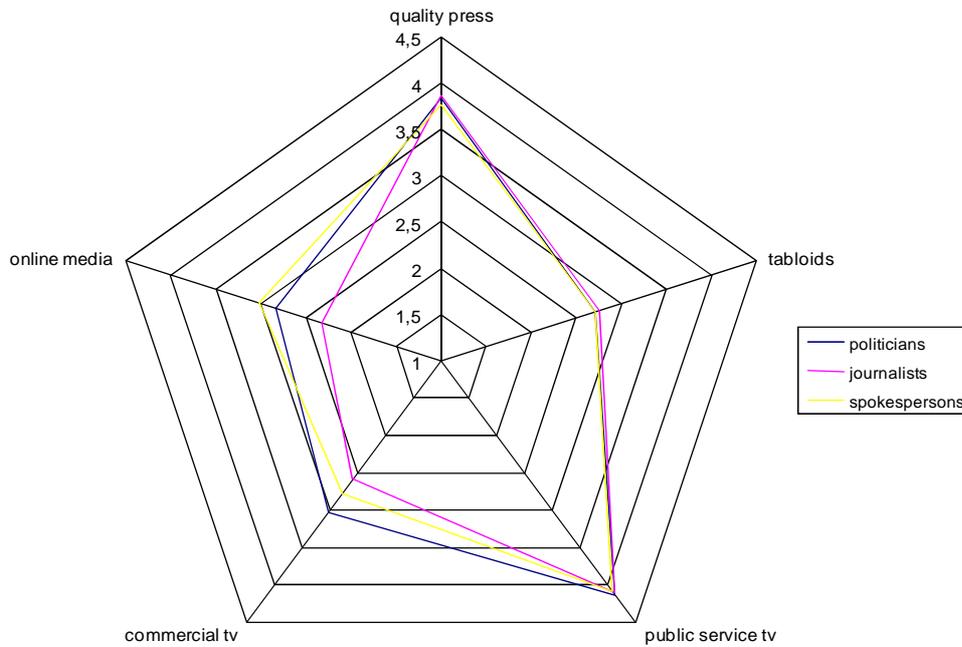


Figure 2. Perceptions of the development of the media (mean scores).

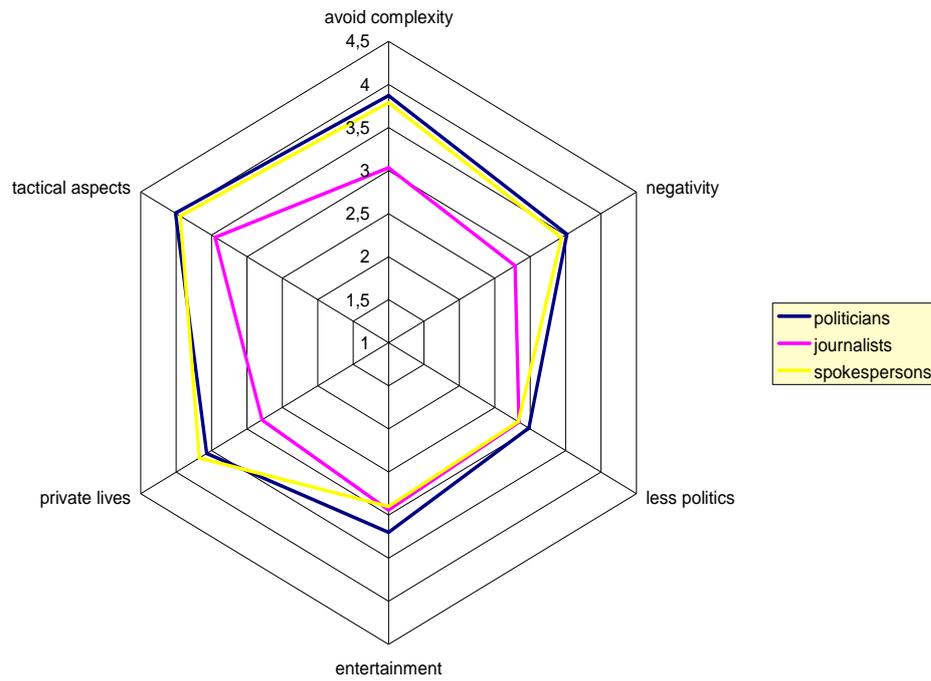


Figure 3. Evaluations of six aspects of the media-political system (mean scores).

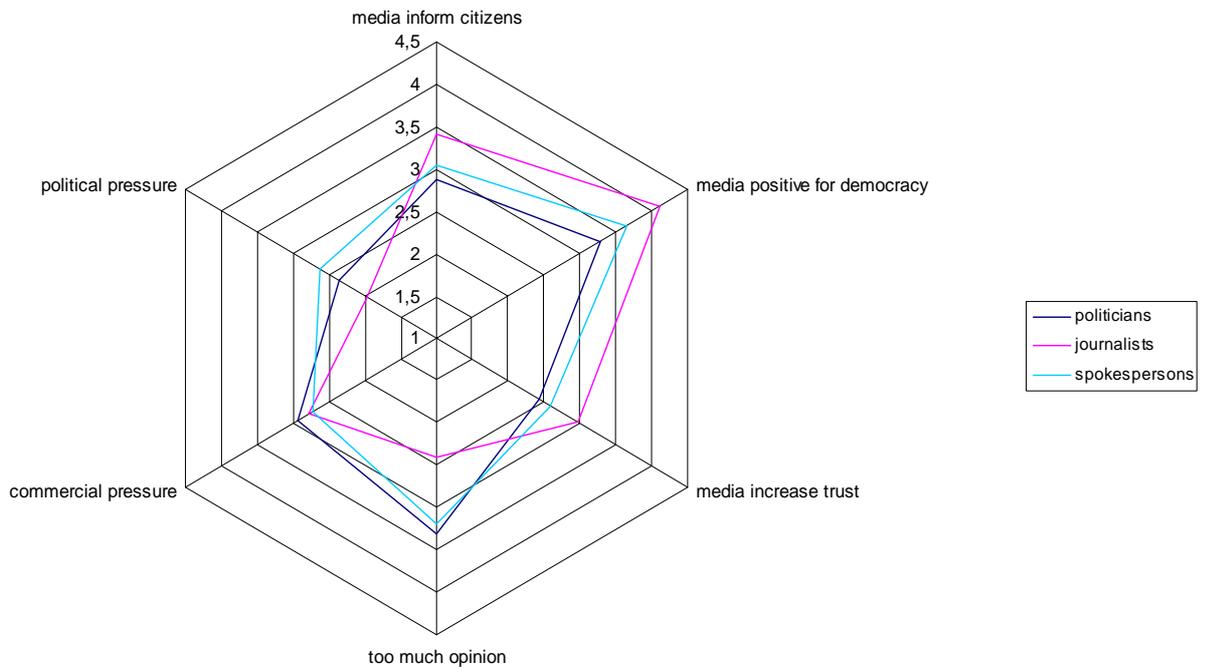


Figure 4. Evaluations of political and commercial impact on opinion, information and media supply (mean scores).

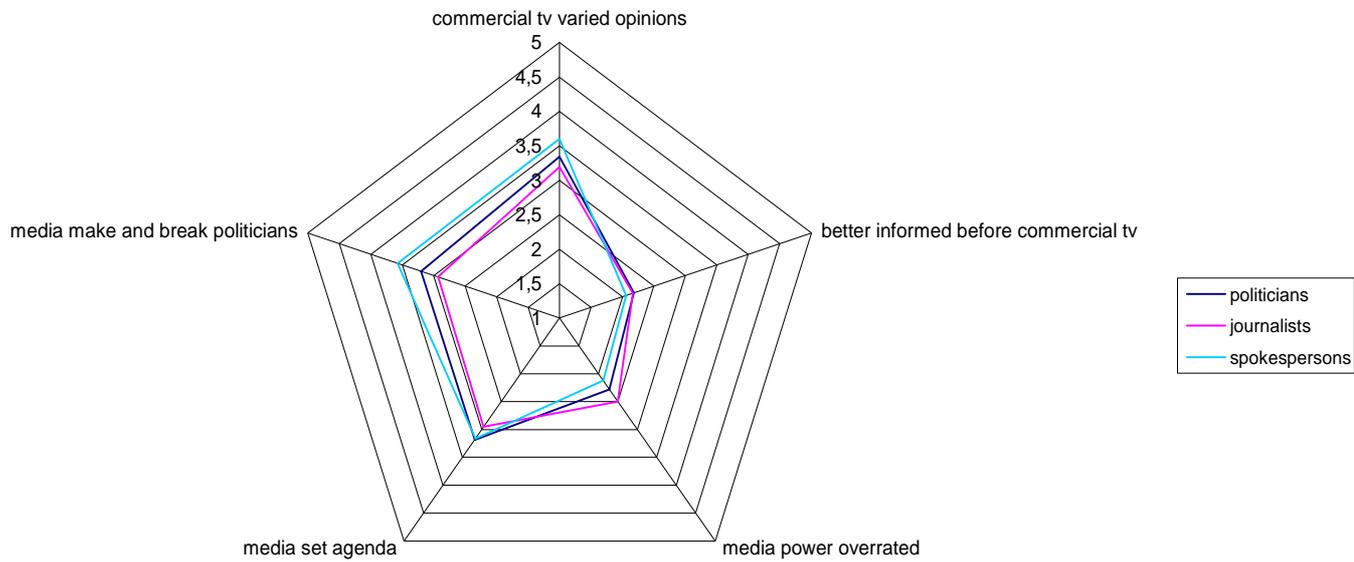


Figure 5. Perceptions concerning opinion polls (mean scores).

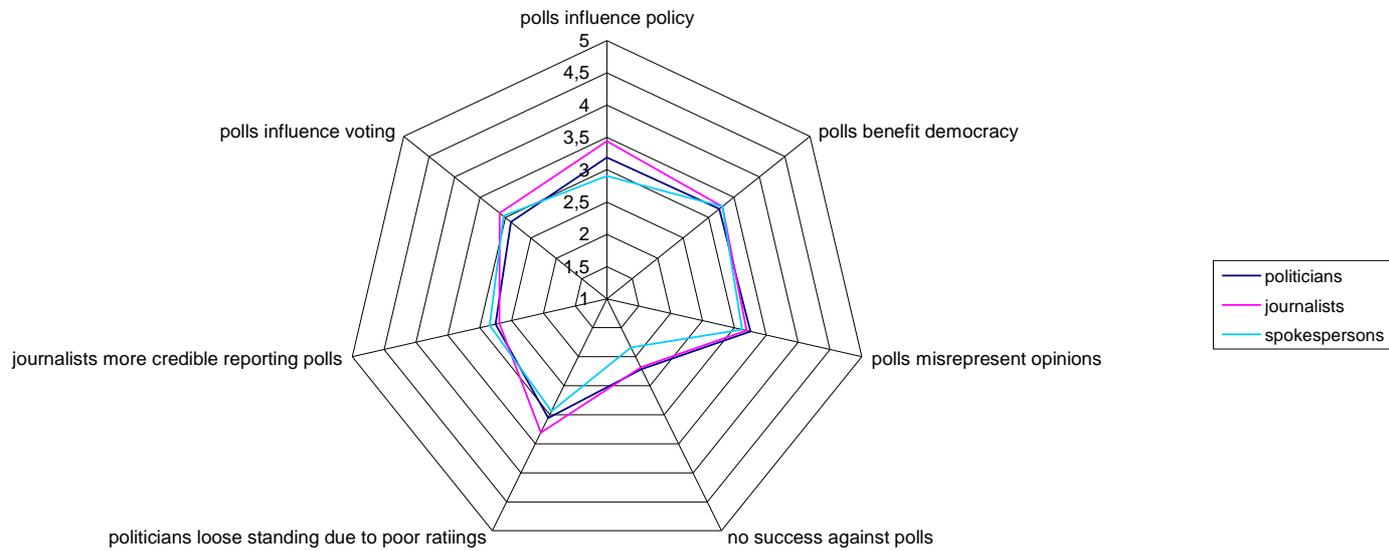


Figure 6. Perceived effectiveness of party communication strategies (mean scores).

