

Margin of Error

A study of the use and misuse of polls in the Swedish media

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to analyse how the Swedish newspapers' use of party-preference polls has changed over time. I study 246 articles published by Göteborgs-Posten, Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet and Expressen, and compare the time-period 1994-1996 with 2010-2012. Amongst other things, I look at the newspapers' reporting of basic statistical information in their polls, as well as the general presenting of the results. The theoretical framework of the thesis is drawn from the concept of mediatization, and how the media present their political coverage as a horserace.

My major findings are that the annual number of articles, ordered and published by the newspapers, has increased since the mid-1990s. I also conclude that all four papers have worsened in their reporting of basic statistical information, and that the articles today to a greater extent are commented by politicians, political scientists and representatives from the polling companies. Unexpectedly, I also conclude that the usage of horserace journalism has slightly decreased.

Key words: opinion polls, media, horserace, mediatization, party-preference

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1 Introduction

“Public opinion polls are rather like children in a garden, digging things up all the time to see how they're growing.”

J. B. Priestley

On January 9, 2013 a debate arose in Sweden between a number of journalists, statisticians and political scientists. The subject was a poll conducted by the polling company Demoskop, and published by the newspaper Expressen (Karlsson, 2013), which under the headline “Free-fall for Löf” revealed that the leader of the Centre Party had reached a new low in voter confidence. The problem, as many critics emphasized, was that no changes in the study were statistically significant, and they claimed that the title was misleading (see for example Grill Pettersson, 2013; Bjereld, 2013). A couple of days later the president of the polling company announced that the results from the survey in fact *were* significant, and that Expressen had made a mistake. The editor in chief of Expressen defended the article, and instead blamed the critics of giving a false impression of the newspaper's use of statistics (Sveriges Radio, 2013).

1.1 Problem

So, what is the big issue here? Isolated, the incident above is quite uninteresting. However, it points to a greater problem that I think is both puzzling and troubling: The Swedish newspapers' coverage of politics seems to be centred around opinion polls. The way in which media present the polls interests me for several reasons. Very often, it seems that small changes in the polling results, sometimes within the margin of error (although not always presented), becomes big news. Also the large volume of polls, even in times almost exactly between two elections, puzzles me. To me, the whole idea of publishing polls about which party the voters prefer, when no election is imminent, seems illogical and like a waste of time. The media should of course write and report about politics – it is in my opinion their most important job – but I am not sure that the conducting and publishing of polls is the best way to do this.

I am not the only one who has noticed this. For example, the political scientist Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson wrote in early 2013 that “the Swedish domestic politics seems to have been completely bewitched by measurements of how the voters would vote if the election were today”, and he appealed to the media to use the new year to rest from daily data on voting intentions (Ekengren Oscarsson, 2013).

This makes me wonder if it has always been like this. Intuitively, I feel that the number of polls has increased in recent years and that the quality of the polls has worsened, which leads us to the main research question of this thesis:

- *How has the Swedish newspapers' use of party-preference polls changed over time?*

Of course, the newspapers publish a lot of polls other than party-preference, like voter confidence in party leaders, or attitude towards the EU. In this study, I have decided to focus solely on polls measuring party-preference. The reason is that I believe these polls are the most important published, and that they receive considerable attention both from the media as well as the voters.

1.2 Purpose

My main research question focuses on the *use* of party-preference polls in the Swedish newspapers. Since almost all newspapers that reports about politics also use polls, I believe some clarifications must be made about what I mean by the word “use”. I have therefore divided my research question in four sub-queries, which more specifically describe the purpose of the thesis.

The first problem with the polls published in the newspapers is, in my opinion, the quantity. In times prior to an election I find it reasonable to publish party-preference polls. However, to publish polls on a monthly basis two years before an election does not strike me as equally necessary. Therefore, the first sub-question I want to answer is:

1. *Has the number of published articles increased?*

This question also implicate a study over time, a longitudinal retrospective study, where I compare the number of articles containing a party-preference poll published today with another time-period, to see if a difference can be observed.

Besides the quantity of the published polls, I have also observed a lack of quality in many polls. As in the example in the introduction, where Expressen was accused of depicting a change in voter confidence when the change in fact lay within the margin of error, it seems that many newspapers are generally sloppy with facts in their publications. The second purpose of this thesis is therefore to answer the following sub-question:

2. *Has the reporting of basic statistical information worsened?*

Exactly what I mean by “basic statistical information” will be described more thoroughly in the theory-section, on page 9.

In addition to the sub-questions mentioned above, I have two more sub-questions that also constitute the purpose of this thesis. They are as follows:

3. *Have the persons who are allowed to comment on the polling results in the newspapers changed over time?*
4. *Have the newspapers become more focused on horserace journalism?*

At this point it might not be clear for the reader why question 3 and 4 are important, but it will be clarified in the following sections. However, it has to do with the way the newspapers depict the polls, and how politics becomes *mediatized* and *personalized* (see page 6 in the theory-section). What horserace journalism is, and why it is relevant to the publication of party-preference polls, will also be clarified in the theory-section.

1.3 Earlier research

Most of the Swedish research conducted about the usage of polls in the media comes, not surprisingly, from the University of Gothenburg. The main researchers are the political scientists Olof Petersson, Sören Holmberg and Henrik Ekengren Oscarsson, along with journalism researcher Jesper Strömbäck from the Mid Sweden University. There has already been made some studies about the use of opinion polls in the major Swedish newspapers (see for example Nilsson et al., 1979; Holmberg & Petersson, 1980; Olsson, 1998; Wiik, 2007 and Strömbäck, 2008a). The main conclusions are that the publications of polls in Sweden increased from the 1960s to the 1980s, and then levelled out in the 1990s.

In 1998, Johan Olsson studied how the newspapers Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Expressen and Aftonbladet reported basic statistical information in their opinion polls during the election-year 1994. The results showed that Svenska Dagbladet and Expressen were sloppier than Aftonbladet and Dagens Nyheter. He also concluded that about 60 percent of the articles described politics as a game (which is relevant adjacent to the theory of horserace journalism). The study was followed up in 2007 by Jenny Wiik, who focused on the 2006 election-year. The results showed that the newspapers were on almost the same level when presenting basic statistical information. The exception was Dagens Nyheter, which had become much more sloppy (73 percent score in 1994 but only 37 percent in 2006) (Wiik, 2007:17). She also concluded that the description of politics as a game had decreased since the 1990s, most in the morning papers (Dagens Nyheter and Svenska Dagbladet) but also, to some degree, in the evening papers.

Jesper Strömbäck (2008a) also studied the opinion polls in the same newspapers during the election campaigns 1998, 2002 and 2006.¹ The results from his research were not unambiguous, and no clear pattern could be distinguished between the newspapers and the different years. However, as Olsson and Wiik disc-

¹ Here the election campaign refers to the time-period three weeks prior to Election Day.

overed, Strömbäck also concluded that all major newspapers lack in the quality of the polls and in their reporting of basic statistical information (Strömbäck, 2008a: 178). He also concluded that the evening papers were more likely than the morning papers to describe politics as a game (2008a:184).

In the final section of this thesis, I compare some of my results with the conclusions made by Olsson, Wiik and Strömbäck. However, one should keep in mind, that the conclusions that can be made from such comparisons are limited, since the methods used by the different researchers differ. For example, the other researchers have focused on all kinds of opinion polls, whereas I focus only on the party-preference polls. Olsson and Wiik have both studied one year each, while Strömbäck focuses on the election campaigns. I aim to study two longer time-periods, which also limits the chances of fruitful comparisons with the other studies. As we shall see, there are also some other differences in the methods and variables used in the different studies.

2 Theory

Writing about newspaper usage of party-preference polls would have been pointless if I did not believe that the polls matter, and that they can tell us something that is scientifically relevant. In this section, I discuss the theoretical foundations my work is based on. Firstly, I look at the issue from the media point-of-view and discuss their general reporting of politics, and which role the polls play in this reporting. After that, I focus on the voters and discuss how they are affected by the polls. Lastly, I present an ideal type of what I think a newspaper party-preference poll should consist of.

2.1 Horserace journalism

A very common metaphor used when describing the modern reporting of politics in the mass media, is as a horserace. The term was first coined by Thomas Patterson in his study “The 1976 Horserace” about the US presidential campaign the same year (Patterson, 1977). Horserace journalism is something we have all experienced, probably on a daily basis in times prior to a general election. It is characterized by little or no focus on political points at issue, such as policy proposals and substantive election issues. Rather, it emphasizes the strategic competition between the candidates (Strömbäck, 2012:272; Matthews et al., 2012: 262). It focuses on the relationship between the political actors, on who is winning and losing, and by how much. Politics are described as a horserace, where the candidates are the jockeys competing to see who can get the most votes (Pettersson & Holmberg, 1998:118; Strömbäck, 2008a:181-182). The same phenomenon has also been called the “game schema” and the “strategy frame” (Nisbet, 2012).

In modern democracies, there is a strong tendency to portray politics with horserace-terminology, and research shows that there is a positive correlation between commercialization and the use of horserace journalism (Strömbäck, 2012: 273). Thus, horserace journalism is somewhat more common in the United States than in Sweden, and is more often used in commercial news channels and evening papers than in public service-media and the morning papers (Strömbäck, 2012: 273).

In 1993, Thomas Patterson showed that between the years 1960 and 1992 the use of horserace terminology in the United States increased from 45 to 80 percent (Patterson, 1993). Studies on Swedish media have reached the conclusion that the use of horserace journalism were at almost the same level as in the United States in the 1990s, but has declined in recent years (see Olsson, 1998; Wiik, 2007; Strömbäck, 2008a:273-274). However, one should not draw too excessive conclu-

sions from the results, mainly because it is difficult to measure and compare the amount of game-oriented articles, and there are no systematic criteria for what counts as horserace journalism.

Not surprisingly, horserace journalism is in general considered to be a bad thing. Critics have argued that it impairs citizens' ability to assess information about what the different parties and candidates really want to achieve (Nisbet, 2012). When the political coverage in the media only emphasizes the games - and not the substance - of politics, it gets very hard for an ordinary citizen to distinguish where the politicians stand on various issues. Fundamentally, this is a question of what is best for democracy. The citizens need some basic information to make well informed decisions when electing their representatives, and this information, which in modern society is provided by the media, would in an ideal democracy be presented as points at issues, rather than as a game (Strömbäck, 2012:272; Nisbet, 2012). When the media's only aim is to entertain - rather than educate - the citizens, it also contributes to the decline of the democratic society, which scholars believe is an on-going process (see for example Fischer, 2009:58). Another criticism directed at horserace journalism is that it frames the politicians as being selfish and greedy poll driven opportunists, which increases the general public distrust in politicians (Strömbäck, 2012:272; Nisbet, 2012).

However, some scholars do not consider the framing of politics as a game a particularly big problem. For instance, the American scientist Anthony Broh writes: "If people are more interested in sports than politics, why not use sports to teach them about politics" (Broh, 1980:527). The problem is that the information people get from horserace journalism is most likely of poor quality, and it is a very simplified framing of politics. This leads us to another important question: *Why* do the media describe politics as a game? To answer this we have to widen our theoretical framework.

2.2 The bigger picture: The mediatization of politics

Historically, political information was provided to the citizens mainly via the political parties. Today, if a political actor wants to send out a message, or if the people want to obtain political information, it goes through the mass media (Fischer, 2010:58). In order to describe this transformation, we say that politics has become *mediated* (Strömbäck, 2009:239). Now, in an ideally mediated world the politicians would give their message to the media, which thereafter objectively would retell the message to the public. However, this position also gives the media power. If the citizens have a need for orientation about e.g. the political candidates in an election, they turn to the media for information. The media then, to use a famous phrasing, set the agenda (McCombs, 2006:80ff.) Since an average newspaper has a limited amount of space, and the daily political information and messages being produced has no such limit, the media can *choose* what political information that reaches the public, and what does not. The consequence of this is that politicians and parties adapt their policy to the media. To put a word to this

phenomenon, where the politics becomes packaged, we say that politics has become *mediatized* (Nord & Strömbäck, 2012:12; Street, 2011:237). Since there is a rat race between the different newspapers based on who can sell the most papers, the mediatization also leads to a focus on political news that the media assume the people want to read, and horserace journalism is a good example of this. The political coverage becomes simplified and intensified, with focus on the polarization between the party leaders (Strömbäck, 2008b:233). At the same time, research shows that the actual policy making in modern democracies has become more technical, with more use of expert knowledge. Or as Christina Boswell writes: “Just as policy becomes more complex, public debates on politics appear to be increasingly irrational, emotive and personalized” (2009:100-101).

With all of this in mind, we shall now proceed with a discussion about the most evident form of horserace journalism, which includes all the main ingredients when describing politics as a game, namely polls.

2.3 Why polls matter

Today we see the use of polls in newspapers as a natural and integral part of the political coverage. However, the whole idea that you can say something about a population, just by asking a few selected individuals, is not that self-evident as it might seem. Polls, like the ones we are faced with today, were first published in the United States in the 1930s by George Gallup. During this time, several different scientific approaches, like positivism and behaviourism, were inter-woven in America. At the same time, commercialism began to take hold of the US, and companies wanted to know what the consumers thought of their product. All this together suddenly created a need for opinion polls (Petersson, 2009:133-134).

The results were disappointing for many democracy theorists; it turned out that most citizens had very limited knowledge about the political system in which they lived. Modern research also shows that people in general know very little about the politics that affect them. This is the case in European countries, as well as in the United States (Dalton, 2008:15-17). In Sweden, the first political poll was published in Dagens Nyheter in 1942, and by the time of the general election in 1964 the publishing of polls was a consolidated part of the political news coverage (Holmberg, 2008:137).

The use of polls has been criticized for a number of reasons. When hearing that Sweden had adopted the use of polls, the sociologist Fritz Croner wrote that the technique was created for the American business-market, and that it could not be used on Swedish politics without an unavoidable inaccuracy (Petersson, 2008:27). Today polls are big business, and newspapers often order polls from their own polling companies. The papers then publish the polls, often as breaking news, followed by commentary on the polls themselves. That way, the newspaper can *create* their own news, which gives them a great deal of agenda-setting power (Strömbäck, 2008a:168-169). The newspapers can decide which statistical information from the survey that should be included in the article, and since the polling

companies are in competition with each other, they are very reluctant to give out too much information regarding how the survey was conducted, which is a transparency problem (Petersson & Holmberg, 1998:156-159).

Many critics accuse the polls for being a threat to democracy itself, where the citizen becomes a consumer of specially designed policies. The possibility of discussion between politicians and voters, about various points at issue, fades when the media insist on describing politics as a horserace and the voters as its audience (Petersson & Holmberg, 1998:160-162). Examples from research on the Swedish media also show that the publishing of polls contributes to the general use of horserace journalism, and the lack of describing politics as points at issue (Strömbäck, 2008a:183).

However, others have argued that polls are good for democracy and that they give the citizens a chance to make their voices heard in times between elections (Strömbäck, 2008a:169). A supporter of a participatory democracy would probably approve of the use of polls, while an elite theorist would say that it is a waste of time to consult the masses on other occasions than on Election Day (Petersson & Holmberg, 1998:174). Regardless of these different viewpoints, polls are a recurrent topic in discussions about the media's role as a creator and sender of political news, and as our perceived need for updated information grows, the demand for polls will most likely continue to grow.

2.3.1 Voter behaviour and the bandwagon effect

Up until now, I have only discussed the theory behind polls from the perspective of the media. Now we shall change the focus from the sender to the recipients of the article. The big question is: Do polls affect the opinion? If, for example, a voter reads in a newspaper poll that an increased number of people are now against a particular candidate, will this voter also lose sympathy for the same candidate? This is not an easy question to answer and it concerns both psychology and political science.

One of the most famous theories about voter behaviour is the *bandwagon effect*, which means that the party that is currently doing well in the polls will attract more sympathizers, and thus further strengthen its position (Petersson, 2008:21-22). Basically, the theory says that people want to be on the winning side, and the same theory can be applied to other things in society, e.g. fashion trends. The bandwagon effect also has a flip side – the conformity in human behaviour makes us avoid minority beliefs, which can affect smaller parties negatively (Petersson & Holmberg, 1998:146).

One must of course note that these phenomenons sometimes never occur, and there are a lot of things other than polling results that affect the general sympathy for a party. Nevertheless, polls *do* shape the image of who is the winner and the loser of the election, which indirectly also affects the party-preference (Petersson & Holmberg, 1998:146-150). Also, in countries with an election threshold (such as Sweden), the polls may have the opposite effect, making people strategically vote for the parties near the minimum percentage of votes, which has been proved

in various studies (Petersson, 2008:21; Petersson & Holmberg, 1998:150-151). For this reason, many countries have banned the publishing of polls in the days prior to an election (Peterson & Holmberg, 1998:176). However, such regulations are hard to maintain and have often been accused of restricting the freedoms of speech and of the press (Petersson, 2008:24).

2.3.2 The ideal poll

The target of observation in this thesis is party-preference polls published in the newspapers. Amongst other things, I intend to study the quality of the polls, i.e. the presentation of basic statistical information in the articles. There are a number of ways to conduct a survey, and without some basic statistical information it is impossible for the reader to assess the quality of the results presented in the newspaper (Petersson & Holmberg, 1998:119).

So, what is important to present and what is not? To discuss the whole methodological concept behind a survey is a bigger task than the scope of this thesis. However, some important aspects should be highlighted. Therefore, I shall now list seven pieces of basic statistical information (written in *cursive*), that I think should be included when presenting the results from a party-preference poll. Most of the information is also listed by The European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research, which sets guidelines for how ethical opinion polls shall be conducted (ESOMAR, 2013). Although some of the Swedish newspapers have their own guidelines when presenting statistical information, there are in Sweden no legal requirements for what information that should be presented in an opinion poll (Strömbäck, 2008a:177).

The basic concept behind a survey is to make inferences about a *population* from information contained in a sample (Scheaffer et al., 2012:48ff.). If you conduct a survey measuring party-preference, the ideal population would be everyone who is entitled to vote. The *survey method* can also be implemented in a number of ways (e.g. stratified random sampling by phone), but a common goal is that the result of the sampling resembles a miniature of the population, in terms of gender, age, income etc.

Another important piece of statistical information is the *number of respondents*. This is important because the larger sample the smaller *margin of error*. The margin of error is also lower on percentages close to 0 or 100. For example: If the support for a party in reality is 50 percent, and the number of respondents in the sample is one thousand individuals, then the expected number of supporters in the sample would be between 47 and 53 percent.² On the other hand, if the support for another party is 30 percent in reality, and the number of respondents is seven thousand individuals, then the number of supporters in the sample would be, with a confidence level of 95 percent, between 29 and 31 percent (Petersson & Holmberg, 1998:40-41). The margin of error was 3 percent

² Based on a confidence level of 95 percent, which is the most common used in newspaper surveys. The confidence level says that in 95 cases out of 100 we expect to cover the correct value of, in this case, 50 percent.

in the first example, but in the second example it fell to 1 percent, due to the larger sample and the lower percentage. If a newspaper publishes a poll where a party is up 2 percent, it is very important that the newspaper also reports the margin of error. If the margin of error, in this case, is above 2 percent, then the increase of party-preference is not statistically significant, and may just as well be due to chance.

The next important piece of statistical information is the *response rate*. When, for example, doing a phone-survey, you often have a large number of people who do not answer the phone, or immediately hang up. You also often have a number of people who cannot answer the question because they belong to the group *undecided voters*, which is especially common when it comes to party-preference. The last piece of basic statistical information that should be presented is the *exact survey question* put to the respondents, since different formulations can cause major differences in the responses (Petersson & Holmberg, 1998:157-158).

In the section about earlier research, I referred to the studies conducted by Olsson (1998), Wiik (2007) and Strömbäck (2008). When they looked at the presenting of basic statistical information they all focused on six variables: *survey question*, *population*, *number of respondents*, *margin of error*, *survey method* and whether the *orderer of the survey* was presented or not. In addition to these six variables, I have thus also included *response rate* and *undecided voters* in my study, but left out the variable *orderer of the survey* for reasons that will soon be revealed.

3 Methods

So far, I have discussed what I want to study, why I want to study it and why it deserves to be studied. The next question is *how* I shall study it. In this section, I discuss the basic methodology behind my results. I first cover the process of selecting the articles for my research. After that, I present the 13 variables used in the study and describe how they were coded in the data file.

There are a variety of approaches to examine the media usage of party-preference polls. The main question is: Do I want to answer this question quantitatively or qualitatively? A qualitative research could have been based on interviews with a political journalist and perhaps an editor, with questions like how they look on party-preference surveys, and the media's role as a political actor. However, since I want to study a development over time, I would have needed access to similar interviews conducted at a different time, which I do not believe exist. Therefore, I have to work quantitatively, and study a number of party-preference polls published in the Swedish media.

The “media” is also a very broad concept, which can mean anything from television and radio to newspapers and websites. In this thesis, I have decided to focus solely on newspapers. The reason for this is that I believe the newspapers are the most important form of media, which also reaches the largest number of citizens. As we shall see, they can also be studied and measured in a methodologically appropriate manner.

3.1 Articles

The hypothetical population for my study is every single poll about party-preference that has ever been published in any Swedish newspaper. However, not very surprisingly, the task of including all these thousands of articles would have been far too great. When deciding which articles that should, and which should not, be included, I asked myself three major questions.

The first question is: How many newspapers should be included? Since my major assumption throughout this thesis is that opinion polls are important, and that they affect the political society, it seems reasonable to focus on the major newspapers, which reach the largest number of citizens. I decided to use the four largest newspapers. In Sweden, the four newspapers with the largest editions are Göteborgs-Posten, Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet and Expressen. All papers are labelled independent liberal, except Aftonbladet which is labelled independent social democratic. Göteborgs-Posten is located in Gothenburg, while the rest have their headquarters in Stockholm. Appropriately, the first two are morning papers,

while Expressen and Aftonbladet are evening papers, which makes comparisons between the papers more fruitful.

The second question is: Which time-period should be covered? Ideally, I would have wanted to analyse all the polls in Swedish newspaper-articles since the first one was published by Dagens Nyheter in 1942 (Holmberg, 2008:137). In Sweden, all articles published by any major newspaper are conserved on microfilm. The problem is that you cannot search in a database after a specific article on microfilm published before the 1990s. Therefore, if you, for example, want to find a party-preference poll published by Expressen in 1975, you have to go through all the thousands of articles published that year on several reels of microfilm, trying to find that specific article, which would have been an enormously time-consuming task. Since I am doing a quantitative study, I want to include as many articles as possible. For that reason, I have to be able to search for articles in a database, so I know which microfilm reel I should study. The first year, where you can search and find articles from all of the four newspapers, is in 1994, which thus becomes the starting point of this thesis' time-period.

Since I want to make comparisons over time, the two time-periods I have chosen to study is 1994-1996 and 2010-2012. The time-periods are of the same length, they both include an election year and the number of articles published during this time is also suitable for the scope of this paper. All of the articles in the years 1994-1996 are only available on microfilm. Most of the articles 2010-2012 are available on the online article search engine Retriever.³

Table 1: Polling companies

	Göteborgs-Posten	Dagens Nyheter	Aftonbladet	Expressen
1994-1996	Sifo	Temo	IMU	Gallup
2010-2012	Sifo	Synovate/Ipsos	United Minds	Demoskop

Each newspaper have their own polling company that conducts the surveys for the newspaper. As can be seen, Göteborgs-Posten are the only paper that has used the same polling company in the 1990s and in the 2010s.

The third question is: Should I include all of the party-preference polls published in the papers? The intuitive answer might be yes, but each year, especially on election years, the newspapers publish *a lot* of party-preference polls. Some surveys have been conducted by other newspapers than the paper who publish it, and it is not unusual that the papers publish, and make references, to each other's surveys. I have therefore chosen to only include polls that the papers have ordered themselves from the polling companies.⁴ The reason for this is that the papers have the full liability for these polls and they have direct access to all the surveys

³ It should be noted that I have only used articles published in the printed papers – not articles published online which often differ from the printed publications.

⁴ This is also the reason why I do not use the variable *orderer of the survey* (unlike Olsson, Wiik and Strömbäck) – all my articles are ordered by the newspaper who published it.

information. Normally the newspapers publish one such poll almost every month of the year which, unfortunately for me, meant that each article from the 1990s had one unique microfilm reel.

Table 2: Article overview

	Göteborgs-Posten	Dagens Nyheter	Aftonbladet	Expressen	Total
1994	12	7	4*	5	28
1995	9	7	4**	11	31
1996	9	7	6***	4	26
2010	14	17	25	14	70
2011	12	11	14	11	48
2012	11	10	11	11	43
Total	67	59	64	56	246

* 3 of the articles are about EU-membership

** 1 of the articles is about EU-membership

*** 4 of the articles are about confidence in party-leaders

Table 2 above presents an overview of the 246 articles that my study is based on. The total number of articles published in 1994-1996 are 85. The same number for the time-period 2010-2012 are 161, which answers the first question I listed in the beginning of this thesis; the number of party-preference polls has increased in the 2010s. A more thorough analysis about the publications will be found in the results-section of the thesis, however some points need to be made right now.

When I started to collect and compile the articles, I made an unexpected discovery; in the time-period 1994-1996, Aftonbladet only ordered and published six party-preference polls (compared with the 50 polls published 2010-2012). This interesting finding raised the methodological question whether comparisons between the time-periods would be useful? Normally a statistical sample of only six units is considered low. However, this is not a sample. In fact, the six polls are the *total* number of published party-preference polls, which gives this study the character of a census more than of a survey. Therefore, I believe, comparisons can be made. However, in addition to the six party-preference polls published, I have also used four polls about the 1994 EU-membership referendum, along with four polls about confidence in party leaders. These eight articles are only used when I compare the quality of the polls on pages 21-22.

In June 1994, Expressen published its very first own party-preference poll and in 1996 they published their last party-preference poll, for that year, during the summer. Before and after that most polls, like Aftonbladet, were focused on confidence in party leaders. However, I believe that the 20 party-preference polls published by Expressen 1994-1996 are enough to make meaningful comparisons.

3.2 Variables

The variables I have used in my research can be divided in two major groups: variables *measuring* the quality of the polls and variables *analysing* the contents of the articles. The first group answers the second question I listed in the introduction, on pages 2-3, while the other group answers the third and fourth question.

I have used seven variables for determining the quality of the polls (which I listed in the theory-section), based on the basic statistical information I think an ideal poll should present: *margin of error*, *exact question*, *number of respondents*, *response rate*, *undecided voters*, *population* and *survey method* (presented in tables 9-10). In the tables the variable *response rate* is not presented and the reason for this is that not a single one of the 246 articles presented this important piece of information.

For the other group, that analyses the contents of the articles, I have used six different variables. Half of them focus on the headline and the rest of them focus on the general content of the articles. They are listed as follows, along with the tables the results are presented in:

1. Who is the main actor of the article? (table 3)
2. Are different voting-groups presented in the article? (table 8)
3. Are the voters mentioned in the headline? (tables 6-7)
4. Is the name of any party leader in the headline? (tables 6-7)
5. Is there any horserace terminology in the headline? (tables 6-7)
6. Who is commenting the article? (tables 4-5)

The last two are the most important ones, and they also constitute half of the four major questions I mentioned in the purpose-section of the thesis. However, the other four variables are also of interest, and together they all contribute to the major analysis of the articles, as well as to the whole concept of the *mediatization* of politics.

Most of the variables are quite easy to answer, often with a simple yes or no. However, some clarifications can be made, especially on the fifth variable about horserace terminology. In the theory-section, I discussed horserace journalism and wrote that it is characterized by politics described in terms of strategy, competition and game (Holmberg, 2008:161). When I decided whether a headline used horserace terminology, I asked myself if the words in the headline could be linked to a competitive element. Some words I especially looked for was *winning*, *losing*, *ahead* etc. and I tried to be as consistent and methodical as possible. However, as I wrote, there are no systematic criteria for what counts as horserace journalism, which one should keep in mind while reading the results of my study.

Whether the voters are mentioned in the headline, or if different voting-groups are presented in the article, is also interesting in connection to horserace journalism, which often focuses more on the politicians than on the actual voters. One example of how different voting-groups can be presented is if an article illustrate how highly educated people vote. To present polling results this way has

been criticised for creating artificial units of voting-groups, which may not always be self-perceived by the voters (Pettersson & Holmberg, 1998:163). Also, for example, if a newspaper writes that men are more likely to vote for a certain party, it may affect the opinion and make male voters think that they also should vote for this party.

Whether the names of the party leaders are mentioned in the headline, or if politicians are given the chance to comment on the polling results, might also be an indicator that the coverage has become more personalized and focused on individuals rather than on different political issues.

3.3 Coding

Most variables were coded as dummy-variables, that is they can only take the value 1 or 0 (where 1 means yes and 0 means no). The advantage of such coding is that the mean value also can be interpreted as a proportional rate, i.e. the proportion with the value of 1, which provides great advantage in the analysis process (Dahmström, 2011:178). It also saves a lot of time when inserting the values in the data file.

For the variable for who is the main actor in the article, each of the nine parties with any mandates in the Riksdag 1994-2012 were coded separately. One value was also given to the centre-right coalition and one value was given to the Red-Green opposition launched in 2008.

The variable about who comments the polling results had four different values: no outer comment, comment by a representative from the polling company, comment by a political scientist and lastly comment by a politician. No outer comment could either mean that a journalist from the newspaper commented and analysed the polling results, or that there were no comment at all. Regardless of these two different situations, I decided to treat them both as the same value. It should also be noted that each unit was allowed to have multiple values, e.g. if an article was commented by both a politician and a political scientist.

4 Results

Now I will begin to present the major results from my research. In the first section, I discuss some general observations I discovered while doing my research, as well as presenting the results from the variable measuring who was the article's main actor. The second section presents the results from the variables that analysed the contents of the articles. These results are presented in tables 4-8. In the third and last section, I present the quality of the polls and how the different newspapers reported basic statistical information in their party-preference polls. These results are presented in tables 9 and 10.

All tables 4-10 are constructed the same way: *The numbers shown in the table are in the form of percentage, where the percent represents the number of yes-answers.* For example, the number 60 in a table means that 60 percent of the articles did include a certain piece of information, depending on which variable the table presents.

4.1 Article's main actor

Before I start presenting the results from my study, I shall give some accounts about what characterizes the two different time-periods. The reason for this is that I believe it is important when you interpret and compare the various tables to understand the different political situations in the mid-1990s and the early 2010s.

When I studied the articles published 1994-1996, I noticed how the Swedish EU-membership referendum in November of 1994 affected the political debates in the newspapers. As I have discussed, many polls conducted by Aftonbladet during this period were not focused on party-preference, but rather on the EU-membership. Another hot topic was the downfall of the populist party New Democracy, who lost their mandates in the Riksdag in 1994, in favour of the Green Party. The election of 1994 also led to a shift of power, when the Social Democrats defeated the centre-right coalition, who came to power three years earlier.

In the early 2010s, Sweden had a very different political landscape, with two established coalitions of parties: the centre-right Alliance and the Red-Greens. This change was especially evident in Aftonbladet's party-preference polls in the 2010s, which often only presented the two blocks of parties against each other, without presenting the percentage for the individual parties. In addition to this, the far-right party Sweden Democrats won representation in the Riksdag in 2010, something which also received much attention in the newspapers.

To better delineate how the political landscape changed during the different time-periods, table 3 on next page shows who was the main actor of the articles

used in this study. In this table we clearly see a transformation to a more coalition-focused presenting of politics. In the 1990s, no article presented any coalition as the main actor.⁵ However, in the 2010s, the Alliance was the main actor in 11 percent of the articles and the Red-Greens in 6 percent. We also see that both the Social Democrats and the Moderate Party are the main actors in almost the same percentage of articles in the different time-periods, even though a shift of power occurred in 2006.

Table 3: The article's main actor (%)

	1994-1996	2010-2012
No main actor	21	17
Left Party	12	3
Social Democrats	31	29
Green Party	13	5
Centre Party	1	6
Liberal People's Party	5	1
Moderate Party	9	11
Christian Democrats	3	3
Sweden Democrats	0	9
New Democracy	5	0
The Alliance	0	11
Red-Greens	0	6
Total	100	101
	N=77	N=161
		Total N=238

Some other things I noted during my research, that I did not have any measurable variable for, was that in the 1990s, the morning papers often used linear charts when presenting the results from the party-preference polls. In the 2010s, the results were instead presented in much more legible and colourful bars and circles. In the 2010s, Dagens Nyheter also gave its polls much more newspaper-space than Göteborgs-Posten, which often presented its results as a smaller item, except in the times prior to the election of 2010. Another important thing to point out is that in both the 1990s and in the 2010s, the morning papers used a larger number of respondents, often two or three thousand people, compared with the evening papers, who seldom used more than one thousand respondents. When doing a survey, measuring for example party-preference, a sample of one thousand respondents is often enough. However, it is also true that the larger sample the more reliable and accurate are the results from the survey.

⁵ The term "the Alliance" did not exist in the 1990s. Instead I looked for the word "borgerliga" which was the common word used when referring to the centre-right parties during this time-period. However, as table 3 shows, no article presented the "borgerliga" as the main actor.

4.2 Poll analysis

Here, I present the different variables analysing the contents of the articles. The first part covers the variable measuring who is commenting on the articles, with the results presented in tables 4 and 5. After that, in tables 6 and 7, I present the three variables analysing the headlines of the articles. Lastly, table 8 presents the results from the variable measuring the reporting of different voting-groups.

4.2.1 Article comments

The variable measuring who was commenting on the article had three alternative answers: comment by a representative from the polling company, comment by a politician or comment by a political scientist, and each article was allowed to have multiple commentators. Almost all articles had some kind of comment on the polling result by the journalist writing the article, or another expert from the newspaper. For example, in the 2010s, Expressen often included knowledgeable comments on the polling result by political journalist K. G. Bergström. In other cases, the journalistic comments were scarce, merely noting which political coalition that was the largest at the time. In either case, I have not included comments by journalists in this study.

Table 4. Article comments 1994-1996 (%)

	<i>Göteborgs-Posten</i>	<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	<i>Aftonbladet</i>	<i>Expressen</i>	
From the polling company	0	0	0	20	
By a political scientist	0	0	0	5	
By a politician	0	0	17	35	
	N=30	N=21	N=6	N=20	Total N=77

Table 4 above shows which outer actors that were given the opportunity to comment on the polling results in the 1990s. As we see, no one of the morning papers used any outer comments during this time-period. The evening papers were more keen on bringing in outer commentators. In 17 percent of the articles, a politician commented on the polling results in Aftonbladet, but the newspaper never used any representative from the polling company or a political scientist. We also see that Expressen was the only paper that included comments from all three actors, although not to a greater extent.

Table 5. Article comments 2010-2012 (%)

	<i>Göteborgs-Posten</i>	<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	<i>Aftonbladet</i>	<i>Expressen</i>	
From the polling company	59	97	90	72	
By a political scientist	49	11	14	22	
By a politician	5	0	52	94	
	N=37	N=38	N=50	N=36	Total N=161

When we compare these results with the 2010s, in table 5, we see a major change in the reporting. The morning papers still very seldom ask a politician about the polling results, but they both usually include comments from the polling company, and in half of the articles Göteborgs-Posten let a political scientist give his or her opinion. The evening papers have also increased their outer comments from all the actors, and most articles include comments from both the polling company and from one (or several) politicians.

4.2.2 Headline analysis

The headline analysis included three variables: name of party leader, horserace terminology and voters' perspective. These variables are all connected to the general idea of mediatization, which is characterized by focus on the politicians, description of politics as a game and a marginalization of the voters and the points at issue.

Table 6. Headline analysis. 1994-1996 (%)

	<i>Göteborgs-Posten</i>	<i>Dagens Nyheter</i>	<i>Aftonbladet</i>	<i>Expressen</i>	<i>Average</i>
Name of party leader in headline	10	14	50	35	21
Horserace terminology in headline	63	48	33	70	58
Voters' perspective in headline	33	29	50	5	26
	N=30	N=21	N=6	N=20	Total N=77

Table 6 above shows the results from the articles published in the 1990s. We see that the evening papers more often used the name of the party leader in the headline, compared with the morning papers. The use of horserace terminology is clearly present in all papers, but no distinction can be made between the morning- and the evening papers, since both Göteborgs-Posten and Expressen have a higher percentage than the other two. As we see, no clear pattern can be distinguished

between the morning- and the evening papers in interpreting the polling results from the voters' perspective.

Table 7. Headline analysis. 2010-2012 (%)

	Göteborgs-Posten	Dagens Nyheter	Aftonbladet	Expressen	Average
Name of party leader in headline	14	8	30	47	25
Horserace terminology in headline	32	45	58	39	45
Voters' perspective in headline	11	29	6	6	12
	N=37	N=38	N=50	N=38	Total N=161

When we compare the results from table 6, with the time-period 2010-2012 in table 7 above, we see that unlike the earlier tables, the changes are not as evident in the headline analysis. The most remarkable result is that the use of horserace terminology in the headlines has in fact *not* increased, which I thought it would have. On the contrary, the average percentage of articles using horserace terminology has decreased from 58 percent in the 1990s to 45 percent in the 2010s. The only paper that has increased its usage is Aftonbladet (33 percent in the 1990s, 58 percent in the 2010s).

When we compare the time-periods, we also note that the average mentioning of the party leaders' names has slightly increased, while the voters' perspective in the headline has become rarer (26 percent in the 1990s, 12 percent in the 2010s). This might be an indicator that the presenting of politics has become more personalized, although no clear pattern can be distinguished between the newspapers.

4.2.3 Reporting of different voting-groups

The last variable, in this section, measures to which extent different voting-groups are presented in the polling results. An example of this is if an article presents how urbanites, women or highly educated people vote.

Table 8: Reporting of different voting-groups (%)

	Göteborgs-Posten	Dagens Nyheter	Aftonbladet	Expressen	Average
1994-1996	38	52	33	5	33
2010-2012	41	24	4	8	18
	N=67	N=59	N=56	N=56	

In table 8, on the previous page, we see the results. In the 1990s, Dagens Nyheter, was most keen on publishing how different groups in society would vote. Expressen almost never published such information. In the 2010s, we see that it has become more rare for newspapers to report different voting-groups. Only Göteborgs-Posten are on the same level in the 2010s as in the 1990s. The average percentage in the 1990s was 33, in the 2010s it has decreased to only 18 percent.

4.3 Poll quality

We will end the results-section with the most comprehensive variables; the ones measuring the reporting of basic statistical information. As I mentioned earlier, not a single one of the 246 articles presented the surveys response rate, and because of this that variable is not included in the tables below. The reason why this was never presented is not clear, but an educated guess is that the polling companies did not want to give out too much information about how their surveys were conducted. How the four different newspapers reported basic statistical information in 1994-1996 is presented in table 9. The same information in 2010-2012 is presented in table 10.

Table 9. Reporting of basic statistical information 1994-1996 (%)

	Göteborgs-Posten	Dagens Nyheter	Aftonbladet	Expressen	
Margin of error	90	100	29	20	
Question	100	95	86	80	
Respondents	100	95	93	100	
Undecided voters	100	100	71	35	
Population	0	95	93	75	
Survey method	0	95	86	70	
Average	65	97	76	63	
	N=30	N=21	N=14	N=20	Total N=85

In table 9, we see that the two morning papers Göteborgs-Posten and Dagens Nyheter did quite a good job in their reporting of basic statistical information in the 1990s. For example, they both reported the number of undecided voters in all of the articles. On average, Dagens Nyheter reported 97 percent of all the basic statistical information (not including the response rate). Göteborgs-Posten chose not to include the population and the survey method which lowered its average to 65 percent. As we also see, the evening papers were sloppier when presenting the margin of error (29 percent in Aftonbladet's articles, and only 20 percent in Expressen). However, on average they were quite good in their reporting. Aftonbladet reported 76 percent of the necessary statistical information, while Expressen reported 63 percent.

Table 10. Reporting of basic statistical information 2010-2012 (%)

	Göteborgs-Posten	Dagens Nyheter	Aftonbladet	Expressen	
Margin of error	76	84	2	22	
Question	51	74	100	31	
Respondents	100	97	100	100	
Undecided voters	54	61	0	3	
Population	0	66	94	28	
Survey method	0	58	56	39	
Average	47	73	59	37	
	N=37	N=38	N=50	N=36	Total N=161

When comparing the previous results with the years 2010-2012 in table 10 above, we see a dramatic change. Göteborgs-Posten still avoids reporting of population and survey method. The newspaper has also been much more careless in its reporting of the margin of error, as well as the survey question and the number of undecided voters.⁶ On average, the paper only reports 47 percent of the basic statistical information required. Also Dagens Nyheter has worsened in its reporting of all variables, except the number of respondents. On average, it reports 73 percent of the basic statistical information.

Things do not look brighter when we look at the evening papers. Although Aftonbladet is quite good at presenting some of the variables, it only presents the margin of error in 2 percent of its articles and never the number of undecided voters. Except for the number of respondents, Expressen almost entirely leave out most of the basic statistical information. The average for Aftonbladet in the 2010s is 59 percent and the same number for Expressen is 37 percent.

To summarize, all four papers have worsened in their reporting of basic statistical information between the years 1994-1996 and 2010-2012. Dagens Nyheter is generally better than the other three, but there is no clear pattern to suggest that the morning papers are significantly better than the evening papers, due to Göteborgs-Posten which never reported population or survey method.

⁶ It should be noted that Göteborgs-Posten often refers to its polling company Sifo for more information about the survey. However, I assume that the average newspaper-reader do not have time to do this, and therefore never will take part of the omitted information.

5 Discussion

So, now we have reached the last part of this thesis, where I will discuss the results from my study. Below this section, I list the four most important conclusions from my research. After that, I compare my results with the findings from earlier researchers and give some suggestions for further research. I end this thesis with a short discussion about the thesis' validity and how reliable the results are, and write some final thoughts about the general implications of my findings.

5.1 Four major conclusions

In the beginning of this thesis, I listed four questions that I wanted to find answers to. They were:

1. *Has the number of published articles increased?*
2. *Has the reporting of basic statistical information worsened?*
3. *Have the persons who are allowed to comment on the polling results in the newspapers changed over time?*
4. *Have the newspapers become more focused on horserace journalism?*

In 1994-1996, the four newspapers ordered and published 77 articles with a poll measuring party-preference. The same number in the years 2010-2012 was 161 articles. Aftonbladet is responsible for the largest increase. In 1994-1996, the newspaper only published six party-preference polls. In 2010-2012, it published 50 polls, with a peak in the twelve days prior to the election in September 2010, when one new poll was published each day. With this said, I believe it is safe to say that the number of published articles has increased – although one must keep in mind that I have not included polls conducted by another newspaper than the paper who published it. It is hard to say *why* this increase has occurred. One possible explanation is that the demand for polls has increased, and that the voters today, to a greater extent, request polls. Since our modern society is characterized by a constant flow of updated information in various forms, it is not hard to believe that this might also be the case with polls.

Another possible explanation is that the methods when conducting a poll have become more efficient, e.g. surveys can be done via online questionnaires, and thus the polling companies can provide their employers with more polls today than before. Although this might be true, I do not believe this is the main reason why the publishing of polls has increased, since the methods were already well developed in the 1990s. I believe a more likely explanation, which has to do with

the mediatization of politics, is that the newspapers know that polls sell, and it is a very efficient way to produce news that people are interested in. However, the aim for this paper is not to look for an explanation. With my results I can only conclude that there has been an increase – but not say anything certain about possible causality.

In table 4 and 5, we saw that there has been a major change in who is commenting on the articles. Both politicians, political scientists as well as representatives from the polling companies comment on the articles to a greater extent today, than in the 1990s. This might be an indicator that the newspapers' reporting of politics has become more personalized. Some of the results from the headline analysis, in tables 6 and 7, also support this theory. Also, the huge increase in comments by the polling companies might be an indicator that the companies role has become more important, and that they have become a more powerful actor.

When comparing tables 9 and 10, we saw that all four papers have worsened in their reporting of basic statistical information. This is a very strong finding and a clear indicator that today the newspapers' use of party-preference polls is characterized by a lack of quality. Lastly, to answer the fourth question listed above, I found no strong evidence that the media have become more focused on horserace journalism. On the contrary I found that the use of horserace terminology in the headlines has decreased.

Once again, I shall now return to my main research question and give an answer that sums up my four major conclusions:

How has the Swedish newspapers' use of party-preference polls changed over time?

- 1. The number of published polls, ordered by the newspapers, about party-preference has increased since the mid-1990s*
- 2. All four papers have worsened in their reporting of basic statistical information*
- 3. Today the articles are, to a greater extent, commented by a politician, a political scientist or a representative from the polling company*
- 4. The usage of horserace journalism has slightly decreased*

5.1.1 Comparisons with earlier research

On page 3, I discussed the earlier research about the use of polls in the Swedish media, and mentioned that in 2007 Jenny Wiik followed up a study made by Johan Olsson in 1998, about the 1994 election-year. Since there are many differences in the methods used in this study and their studies, comparisons that focus on the different percentage in the results are most likely not very fruitful. However, I do believe some comparisons of the general trends can be of interest, and contribute to the cumulative research in this field.

One of my findings was that the usage of horserace journalism has decreased since the mid-1990s, which I concluded after examining the headlines of the artic-

les. When Wiik compared her results from the 2006 election, with Olsson's results from the 1994 election, she also found a decrease in the usage of horserace journalism (Wiik, 2007:15). The decrease was more prominent in the morning papers than in the evening papers – a result consistent with my conclusions, since Aftonbladet in my study had increased its use of horserace terminology. In his 2008 study, Jesper Strömbäck also concluded that the portrayal of politics as a game had decreased between the years 1998 and 2006 (Stömbäck, 2008a:182). The fact that all studies have reached the same conclusions might be an indicator that the newspapers' use of horserace journalism has levelled off since the 1990s.

In the same study, Strömbäck also looked at the reporting of basic statistical information. Unlike me, he found no systematic changes in the reporting between the years (2008a:178-179). Wiik also came to the same conclusions when she compared her results with Olsson's results. However, unlike me they have included all kinds of opinion polls, while I have solely focused on party-preference polls ordered by the newspapers. This means that they have included polls that only refer to other newspapers' results, and it is no surprise that these polls in general lack in the reporting of basic statistical information. Since I have studied every party-preference poll ordered by the newspapers during two longer time-periods, I believe my study better depict how the quality of the reporting has changed. Although, it should also be noted that their studies focus on the morning paper Svenska Dagbladet, while I have used Göteborgs-Posten in my study, which might explain the different results.

5.1.2 Further research

As I wrote above, I can only state that there has been a change in the newspapers' use of party-preference polls. I have shown that the number of published articles has increased, that the reporting of basic statistical information has worsened, that the use of outer commentators has increased and lastly, that the amount of horserace journalism has decreased. As with all social science, you also want to find an explanation to your findings. My variables were not created to reveal causality – I merely wanted to find out if a change had occurred during the last decades. Since both me, and the other researchers, conclude that the usage of horserace journalism has decreased since the 1990s, it would be interesting to find out *why* this is. I believe this is a good topic for further research.

The same can be said about some of my other findings. By conducting interviews with a newspaper editor, you could also perhaps explain why the newspapers sometimes leave out important pieces of information when presenting their polls, or why they today, to a greater extent, let politicians and representatives from the polling companies comment on the results from the surveys.

5.2 Validity and reliability

Now that we are almost finished, the reader might wonder if my conclusions are reliable and valid. If this is the case, I can reassure the reader that the room for systematic errors are quite small in this study. Since I wanted to study the use of party-preference polls in Swedish newspapers, and my object of study has been party-preference polls in Swedish newspapers, I believe this gives my study strong validity. The only one of my variables that may lack in validity is, in my opinion, the one measuring the amount of horserace journalism. My operationalization of the term was to look at the headlines and decide whether or not it referred to the politics as a race. Since this was based solely on my own opinion, one might question if the theoretical definition of horserace journalism really was implemented in the variable. However, since I have worked very consistently and guided the reader through the methodological process, and since there are no systematic criteria for what counts as horserace journalism, I would be surprised if there are any doubts about what is being measured, and what is not.⁷

Of course, I cannot guarantee that my study is free from smaller random errors, e.g. in the process of data input, which might lower the reliability. However, if any such error has slipped in they are not of a greater amount, and if another researcher would reproduce the study it is my strongest opinion that he or she would reach the same conclusions as I did.

5.3 Some final thoughts

This thesis started with a quote by J. B. Priestley who described opinion polls in a very unflattering way, and when reading my thesis you might think that I believe opinion polls is a bad thing. This is not the case. I believe opinion polls, when conducted and presented the right way, can enrich the political discussions, and be an important link between the voters and their elected representatives. However, I am critical to the way opinion polls are used today. When the newspapers focus their political coverage on opinion polls about which party, or party leader, the voters prefer today, there is a risk that it diminishes important points at issue and impairs the quality of the whole democracy.

Fundamentally, the topic of this thesis is responsibility. There are many actors who contribute to the problem of polls, and to just blame the newspapers is also to simplify the issue. The polling companies conduct the surveys, they provide the information to the newspapers, and today they also comment on the polling results to a greater extent than in the 1900s, which gives them a great deal of power. I have also noticed that some of the political scientists that criticises the use of polls in books and scientific journals, often also comment on the polling results in the

⁷ If someone still has doubts about the validity of this study, or simply wants to reproduce it, there is an appendix after the references that lists all articles used, including headlines and dates of publishing.

newspapers. This inconsistency is also a problem that I believe should be discussed more openly, even though it might be a sensitive topic.

Despite this, one cannot deny that the media hold the greatest responsibility. When they present the polling results in a certain way they also affect the opinion, and whether they are aware of it or not, they also shape the way the voters think of the parties. When, for example, Aftonbladet only presents the two blocks of parties against each other, without presenting the percentage for the individual parties, it also “locks” the parties in these roles and most certainly influence the way the voters view the political landscape.

Lastly, there might be some good news on the horizon. When I started to write this thesis one of my main hypotheses was that the newspapers' use of polls had worsened on all fronts. Even though some of my results showed that there has been a negative development since the 1990s, it also showed that the presenting of politics as a game, with only winners and losers, in fact has decreased. Maybe the horserace has finally reached the finish line.

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7 Appendix – List of articles

7.1 Göteborgs-Posten 1994-1996

Date	Headline
940130	M vann på uppgörelsen om bron
940227	”Räkna inte ut Nyd”
940327	Nyd på väg ut ur riksdagen
940427	Ny demokrati fortsätter rasa
940529	Väljarna ser rött
940626	S har stabilt stöd av väljaren
940828	S-majoritet trots kärvt valbudskap
940904	Miljöpartiet valrörelsens nya vinnare
940911	Sista veckan avgör
940916	S-raset gynnar v och mp
941030	Kds fick hjälp av stödröster
941127	Carlssons smekmånad slut
950129	Vänstern fortsätter att öka
950226	S tappar väljare
950430	S hotat från två flanker
950611	Mp på väg mot starkt Europaval
950625	Carlssons attack rubbade inte v
950906	Medvind för EU-kritiska partier
950915	De gröna skjuter i höjden
951001	Mp går hem hos kvinnorna
951223	S och m möts på toppen
960204	Socialdemokraterna drar ifrån
960303	Männen sviker mp
960331	S tar tillbaka från vänstern
960602	Schyman går hem i stugorna
960901	Väljarna tog också semester
960920	Kd tar väljare från alla håll
961027	Allt fler väljare tveksamma
961201	Inga nya sympatisörer för fp
961229	S fortsätter sin kräftgång

7.2 Dagens Nyheter 1994-1996

Date	Headline
940226	Stort väljarras för folkpartiet
940414	Väljarna lämnar ny demokrati
940528	Nyd ramlar ur och mp tar sig in
940618	Fortsatt starkt stöd för s
940910	Kvinnorna överger Carlsson
940916	Fortsatt stabil ledning för s
941125	Väljarna trogna sina partier
950127	Ras för s men uppåt för vänstern
950428	Ytterkantpartier på frammarsch
950519	En skön maj för v
950825	S försvagat inför EU-valet
950915	Miljöpartiet har segervind
951027	Fortsatt framgång för miljöpartiet
951124	M fortsätter växa
960126	Moderaterna rekordstora
960223	Mp kraftigt tillbaka
960322	Persson lockar tillbaka väljare
960614	Leissners återkomst lyfte fp
960927	Jämnt lopp i halvtid
961101	Fler osäkra väljare igen
961220	Kärnkraftsspelet gynnar mp

7.3 Expressen 1994-1996

Date	Headline
940618	Tre partier på väg mot botten
940811	Åtta av tio tror att s vinner
940825	Le Carlsson, du vinner!
940914	Nu är det jämnt mellan regeringen och sossarna
941208	... men i Sverige går moderaterna upp
950118	(V)innaren
950215	M blir bara större
950412	(S)amarbetet ett klipp för (c)
950517	Kamrat 14 procent
950617	Schyman fortsätter att surfa på vågen
950812	Vänsterpartiet växer vidare
950831	Carlssons avgång – partiets uppgång
950907	Leiss...ner i botten
951014	Sossarna rasar i Gallupmätning
951111	Gallup-chocken

951208	S lyfter med rätt Persson
960120	Ras för miljöpartiet
960317	Framåt för partiet
960516	Underbart är kort, Persson
960615	Persson störtdyker

7.4 Aftonbladet 1994-1996

Date	Headline	Polling topic
940916	Valet blir en riktig rysare	
940921	Första prognosen: knapp Ja-seger	EU-membership
941015	Dött lopp	EU-membership
941103	Idag skulle 52 % rösta nej till EU	EU-membership
950111	Siffrorna Carlsson tiger om	
950331	De egna sviker dig, Carlsson	
950907	Svenskarna har vänt EU-ryggen	EU-membership
951109	Svenskarna tror mest på farbror Bildt och farbror Carlsson	
960604	Håll er borta, partiledare	Confidence in party leaders
960606	Var fjärde vet inte hur de ska rösta	
960629	Du får godkänt, Persson	Confidence in party leaders
961123	”Vad håller ni på med?”	Confidence in party leaders
960820	De ungas bästa parti – inget alls	
961229	Knappt godkänt, Persson	Confidence in party leaders

7.5 Göteborgs-Posten 2010-2012

Date	Headline
100124	Unga väljer rödgrönt
100214	Ny Sifo: Moderaterna framåt
100314	De rödgröna behåller greppet
100418	Gapet blir allt mindre
100516	Bäddat för spännande valrörelse
100613	Moderaterna störst
100809	Alliansen ökar försprånget
100815	200 000 skiljer blocken åt
100823	Avståndet växer mellan blocken
100905	Kärnväljarna sviker S
100918	Valrysare väntas
101017	M störst i GP/Sifo
101114	S fortsätter tappa röster
101219	Fortsatt kräftgång för S
110123	Tre småpartier nu kring fyra procent

110220	GP/Sifo: M tar alliansröster
110320	Ingen Juholt-effekt
110417	Rödgröna blocket störst
110515	Kd:s tapp fortätter
110619	Rödgröna drar ifrån i ny Sifo
110821	Krisen ändrar alla förutsättningar
110918	Moderaterna går framåt i orostider
111016	Juholt-affären fick S att rasa
111023	Stödet för S på ny bottennivå
111113	Ledarstriden i KD hårdnar
111218	Nej, botten var inte nådd för S
120122	Ännu en bottennotering för Socialdemokraterna
120219	Löfveneffekten
120318	Väljarna flyr M när S bara ökar
120415	Fortsatt stadig Löfveneffekt
120513	Nya utmaningar väntar Löfven
120617	Väljarna flyr Vänsterpartiet
120826	Överraskande nedgång för S
120916	Därför är småpartierna så desperata
121014	SD når en ny rekordnivå
121118	Fortsatt uppåt för SD – trots filmskandalen
121216	SD är det tredje största partiet

7.6 Dagens Nyheter 2010-2012

Date	Headline
100129	De rödgröna tappar försprånget
100226	Avgörande att väcka soffliggarna
100326	Väljarna vänder SD ryggen
100430	Historisk spurt krävs av alliansen
100528	Nu går alliansen om de rödgröna
100624	Kraftig medvind för alliansen
100820	Nästan dött lopp en månad före valet
100827	S sjunker till bottennivå
100903	De rödgröna knappar in
100908	Alla utspelen lyfter FP
100910	Majoritet av väljarna ger alliansen sitt stöd
100915	Alliansen är i majoritet
100918	Alliansen i majoritet inför avgörandet
101005	Nu är M störst
101029	Väljarnas stöd för moderaterna ökar
101126	Rekordhøgt stöd för M i nya väljarbarometern

101217	Väljarstödet för S är rekordlångt
110131	SD i medvind – trögt för allianspartierna
110226	Centerns stöd störtar
110325	Juholt-effekten uteblev bland riksdagsväljarna
110430	Ingen Juholt-effekt
110527	S-väljare återvänder – partiet större än M
110623	C och V under riksdagsspärren
110826	Fyra partier under riksdagsspärren
110930	Moderaternas sämsta siffror på ett år
111028	Kvinnorna vänder S-ledaren ryggen
111125	Öppet för nya politiska konstellationer
111219	Juholt har partiets stöd trots nytt tapp
120127	S tappar väljare till vänstern
120224	Alliansens övertag dalar i ny mätning
120330	Alliansen backar – nu får de rödgröna egen majoritet
120428	Rödgröna blocket fortfarande störst
120629	Väljarna straffar idelös regering
120903	Allt fler är osäkra på hur de skulle rösta
120929	Miljöpartiet klättrar mot nya toppnivåer
121026	SD i stark medvind – nu tredje största parti
121130	Sympatierna för SD ökar i takt med varslen
121222	Centern i kris – kärnväljare överger partiet

7.7 Expressen 2010-2012

Date	Headline
100115	Mauds misstag hotar Alliansen
100205	Alliansen knappar in
100306	Miljöpartiet över 10 procent
100410	Maria-effekten!
100505	Rödgrönt jätteras – Alliansen förbi
100604	Nu är Alliansen större
100620	Visset, KD
100709	Miljard-spurten
100904	Botten, Sahlén
100912	Om sju dagar avgörs Sahlins framtid
100917	Förnekar siffrorna
101008	Demoskop: SD rasar under riksdagsspärren
101105	Nu rycker Alliansen
101103	KD i kris
110113	Reinfeldt regerar
110207	KG: Allvarligt för Reinfeldt
110306	Reinfeldts huvudvärk

110412	Juholteffekt: S backar igen
110508	Alliansens kräftgång
110604	Smakstart imponerar
110710	Nytt rekord för Juholt
110912	Annie-lyftet för Centern
111010	Nu sviker väljarna
111104	Kata(s)trof
111214	Hit flyr väljarna, Juholt
120109	Gröna vågen
120204	Miljöboven
120314	Löfven: Jobben avgör
120406	Löfven-lyftet: Nu är S störst
120504	Löfvens succé
120608	Nya kallduschen
120706	Lööfs kris: 3,5 procent
120907	Miljardfiaskot
121006	Reinfeldtlyftet – Alliansen är nästan ikapp de rödgröna
121109	Skrällan: SD tredje störst
121210	Reinfeldt går om S

7.8 Aftonbladet 2010-2012

Date	Headline
100202	Skräcksiffror för Alliansen
100204	Maria går hem i medelklassen
100302	Centerns fiaskolag
100303	Rödgrönt ras
100427	MP ökar mest
100525	Vilket lyft, Reinfeldt
100622	SD kan fälla
100803	Nu ökar Sd – kaos hotar
100824	Hotet mot riksdagen
100831	Rekord-raset
100907	Kriget om varje röst
100908	Alliansen fortfarande i ledning
100909	”Lars Ohly gör en bra valrörelse”
100910	V och Mp nästan lika stora
100911	M är nu största partiet
100912	Rekordlägt resultat för S
100913	LO-folket går till M
100914	Alliansen har fortsatt egen majoritet
100915	Fixar du spurten, Mona?
100916	Mauds spurt
100917	Reinfeldt rasar

100918	Super-jämmt
101026	S tappar mest
101122	S har klarat Sahlinkrisen
101220	(S)kräckraset
110117	(M)affigt
110214	Ännu en (s)mocka – Rekordligt S-stöd
110214	Succé - direkt
110322	Juholteffekten är borta
110411	”Han är nervös”
110506	Nya siffror avslöjar: Motvind för Alliansen
110606	Succé - direkt
110703	Alliansen störst igen
110815	Norge-effekt i (S)verige
110912	Det våras för gröna Löf i höst
111011	(V)äljarflykten
111107	Stumma – av skräck
111205	Vind(s)tilla
120116	Lena Mellin: Nya bottenrekord – Juholts förfall har gått för långt
120213	Kolla, ni är i kapp
120312	Tillbaka – på tronen
120410	Unik succé, Löfven
120508	Nu är festen över, Löfven
120604	M tappar –då ökar SD
120701	Faller han faller alla
120820	Reinfeldts krissiffror
120917	Katastrofras för Löf
121015	Tvärstopp för Löfven
121112	Högsta nivån - någonsin
121217	”Järnrören sänker SD”