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*Citation for published version (APA):*

van Kempen, H. M. A. (2008). Context in political communication : measurement and effects on political behavior.

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## Chapter 2

### Press-party parallelism and its effects in Sweden

A longitudinal study 1979-2002\*



\* This chapter has – in a slightly different form – been published as an article in *Scandinavian Political Studies* 29 (4): 406-421 (2006).

## **Abstract**

Seymour-Ure (1974) introduced the concept of press-party parallelism into mass media studies. This concept describes the partisanship of the newspaper system. So far, little systematic longitudinal research of press-party parallelism and its possible effects has been conducted. The current study fills this void. It makes the argument that press-party parallelism (PPP) should be conceptualized as a contextual variable, which structures political behavior. It then proposes a measure of PPP and applies this measure to eight Swedish Elections from 1979 to 2002. Finally, it studies the effect of PPP on electoral participation. PPP varies considerably over time, and the analyses show that it structures electoral participation. In the concluding section I argue that a decline of press-party parallelism is a manifestation of a decrease of exclusive party attachments (de-alignment), and of a process of professionalization of journalism.

## Introduction

Scholars of political communication effects have mainly stressed individual-level media exposure effects on political attitudes and behavior. Most of these studies do not consider another important aspect, namely the media context. Nevertheless, scholars seem to agree that this context is central to the study of political communication because it may shape individual political behavior such as electoral participation (Semetko, 1996).

This paper aims to contribute to the area of political communication by exploring one specific feature of the media context, namely the strength of press-party parallelism. Press-party parallelism is the degree to which the newspaper system parallels the party system (Seymour-Ure, 1974). In other words, it is the strength of the alignments of news organizations to political parties. It is expressed by the partisanship of journalists and the media's users, by media ownership and/or by the media contents.

In Chapter 1, I analyzed the effect of press-party parallelism on voter participation in a cross-national comparative setting. However, this cross-national study left some questions unanswered. I found strong associations between press-party parallelism and voter participation, but since the study did not contain variation over time, the effects of developments in press-party parallelism could not be studied. The implications of the findings in that paper would be that turnout will decrease if press-party parallelism becomes weaker. To test whether this is indeed the case, this chapter replicates the cross-national analyses using longitudinal data for a single country: Sweden. This provides the opportunity to draw conclusions about the development of press-party parallelism over time and to make stronger causal claims.

In Scandinavia in general, and in Sweden in particular, the partisan press is traditionally very strong (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Österlund-Karinkanta, 2004; Rokkan & Torsvik, 1970; SOU, 1965: 22; Weibull, 1983, 1995; Westerståhl & Janson, 1958). At least until the 1980s, the majority of the Swedish citizens read a newspaper within their own political 'bloc' (Weibull, 1983). Today still, an important feature of the Swedish press is the fact that almost all newspapers declare to have a party-political affiliation on their opinion page, an affiliation normally well-known by readers (Weibull, 1995). However, the role of newspapers as instruments of political mobilization in Sweden has diminished and also changed its forms during the last decades (Hadenius & Weibull, 1999). This paper investigates whether this is the case and tries to study the rationale behind it. Moreover, it studies the consequences of press-party parallelism (PPP) for electoral participation, and associations between PPP and other socio-political developments. First I will discuss the underlying theoretical considerations.

### Press-party parallelism and its consequences

Press-party parallelism exists in its strongest form when each newspaper is aligned to a single party, whose views it represents in the public sphere. An example is Denmark in the early twentieth century. At that time, each major town had 4 newspapers, representing the 4 major political parties (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This kind of one-to-one con-

nection between media and parties is increasingly uncommon nowadays, but in many Northern European countries including Sweden, links between newspapers and parties or broader ideologies have long existed, and are still present (Semetko, 1996; Westerståhl & Janson, 1958). In addition to organizational links between parties and newspapers, press-party parallelism manifests itself in the partisanship of newspaper audiences, with supporters of different parties or tendencies buying different newspapers (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Seymour-Ure, 1974; SOU, 1965: 22). Weibull (1983) found that until the 1970s it was very common in Sweden for supporters of all parties to read outlets with strong links to that particular party. In 1995, the same author notes that the choice of newspapers is still largely in line with the readers' party orientations (Weibull, 1995).

The linkage of party preferences and media use varies between individuals, as well as between countries. The concept of press-party parallelism describes the extent to which the readership of newspapers coincides with partisanship. In this paper I focus on the consequences of press-party parallelism as a contextual variable on voter participation. PPP is considered to be important as a context variable, because this specific aspect of a media context may well affect everyone, including those who do not read a newspaper with links to their party, or those who do not read a paper at all. Most people have a social network of friends and relatives, and because of interpersonal communication newspapers do not only affect their own readers, but other citizens as well, through two-step flow processes (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). So PPP may also influence voting indirectly: even those not exposed to the partisan press, may be affected by it. In order to test for such two-step flow effects, I will test whether PPP as a context variable also affects citizens who do not read political news.

Even though press-party parallelism will be measured at the contextual level (i.e., it takes on a different value for each election year), the analyses will be conducted at the individual level, because I expect this context to structure the behavior of individual citizens. As will be discussed below, the study allows for the possibility that different citizens will be affected differently by this context.

The relationship between exposure to the partisan press and voting is likely to contain reciprocal causation. Rokkan & Torsvik (1970) argued on the basis of a Norwegian study that reading and voting mutually strengthen each other. On the one hand, when a person holds a pronounced orientation towards a specific party, it results in a strong motivation to read papers, which promote that party. On the other hand, regular exposure to such papers will provide arguments for maintaining the orientation and strengthen the commitment to the party. This is a view that is shared by Hallin & Mancini (2004), who claim that partisan press exposure reinforces the connections between citizens and parties. In other words, regular exposure to partisan news may strengthen party adherence and reduce uncertainty of political opinion building (Miller, 1991; Newton & Brynlin, 2001; Norris, Curtice, Sanders, Scammell, & Semetko, 1999; Patterson, 1998; Voltmer, 2000).

Formulated first in *The People's Choice*, the argument stated above is in line with findings in early studies of elections and public opinion (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944). They found that people are inclined to read and listen to information that corresponds with their own political views; in other words, they selectively expose them-

selves to information. This consonant information helps to crystallize and strengthen the vote choice (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). Partisan newspapers play an important role in strengthening the bonds between citizens and parties (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Newton & Brynin (2001) observed a strong relationship between party voting and reading specific newspaper titles. They found that exposure to a paper of the own party outlook increases the likelihood to vote for that specific party. In their follow-up study, they learnt that this phenomenon applies to turnout as well: those who read a newspaper that matches their party-political preferences tend to vote in larger numbers (Brynin & Newton, 2003).

This study differs from the previous studies, because it does not focus on the match between newspaper readership and partisanship at the individual level, but it conceptualizes PPP as a context variable. In contexts where newspaper readership is strongly connected to partisanship, political debates will tend to reinforce previously held party-political beliefs. Citizens in such contexts will be more likely to turn out, even those who do not read newspapers, based on the two-step flow hypothesis (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The resulting hypothesis is:

*H1: Press-party parallelism has a positive effect on electoral participation.*

Despite of the fact that PPP is a system-level variable, the impact of PPP is not necessarily the same for different citizens. Exposure to partisan news may increase identification and the likelihood to vote especially for those, who are not so much involved in politics (e.g., Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; McLeod, Becker, & Byrnes, 1974). Those who are highly politically interested are more likely to hold strong party-political opinions than persons who are less politically interested. From the start, individuals with high levels of political interest are more likely to turn out than persons who are less interested. For the less politically interested, exposure to partisan messages can make much more of a difference in party attachment and the likelihood to turn out. Since their predispositions are weaker, they are more open to influence. This results in the following expectation.

*H2: PPP has a larger effect on electoral participation of persons with low political interest than of persons with high levels of interest.*

This hypothesis predicts a negative interaction effect of PPP and interest on turnout.

### **Research method and data**

To test the hypotheses, the study compares the eight consecutive Swedish general elections from 1979 to 2002. Sweden was selected because in terms of press-party parallelism, Sweden turned out to be an average case in Chapter 1. Moreover, comparable election studies over time are available for Sweden over the period 1979-2002 which contain the necessary data for testing the hypotheses.

All analyses are based on data from the Swedish Election Study, *Svensk Valundersökning* (for 1979, 1982, and 1985) or from the Society, Opinion, Mass media studies, *Samhalle, Opinion, Massmedia* (for 1988, 1991, 1994, 1998, and 2002). Both studies are based at Göteborg University. The large-scale face-to-face surveys include citizens of age 18 and over. The data set contains information on political attitudes and preferences, electoral behavior, media use, and socio-demographic characteristics. The pooled dataset yields 22,046 respondents over eight elections (1979-2002).

For reasons of comparability, the model that will be estimated for the explanation of electoral participation in Sweden is similar to the model presented in Chapter 1 for a cross-national comparative analysis. It includes press-party parallelism (PPP), an interaction between PPP and political interest, age, political efficacy, party attachment, political interest, media use (operationalized by how much the respondent reads about politics), and cleavage voting. The variables 'attitude towards the EU' and 'attendance of religious services' were not available in the Swedish dataset, and could therefore not be included in the model. Neither are the contextual variables included that were used in the model in Chapter 1, as they revert to constants in a model that pertains to a single national context only. Appendix E describes the exact measurement of the variables.

### Measuring press-party parallelism

There are at least four ways in which press-party parallelism can manifest itself (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Seymour-Ure, 1974). It is discernible in media contents, in the ownership of the news media, in the affiliations of journalists, owners, and managers, and in readership patterns. In this study, I focus on readership patterns, as newspaper readership is likely to express partisan bias in media contents (Kleinnijenhuis, 1990; Seymour-Ure, 1974; Weibull, 1995; Westerståhl & Janson, 1958). The paper investigates the relation between newspaper readership and party-political preferences.

PPP is conceptualized as a system-level variable. To measure PPP, party sympathy scores were regressed on newspaper exposure. Party sympathy scores are measured by asking respondents to indicate for each party how much she likes that party on a scale from -5 ('strongly dislike') to +5 ('strongly like'). For exposure to newspapers – the independent variables – dummies are included for regular exposure<sup>27</sup> to each of the main national newspapers. A score of one indicates regular exposure; zero indicates no (regular) exposure. For the sake of comparability, in this study only those newspapers are used that were distinguished in the EES-99 data (see Chapter 1)<sup>28</sup>.

As a consequence, local and smaller regional papers were not included in the analysis<sup>29</sup>. However, this is not likely to harm the results much, because smaller local newspa-

<sup>27</sup> Regular exposure: once a week or more.

<sup>28</sup> Included newspapers are: Aftonbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Svenska Dagbladet, Göteborgs-Posten.

<sup>29</sup> Including all newspapers that are coded in the Swedish datasets (including small regional and local ones), resulted in slightly higher values for MPP. However, the relationships that are described in the 'results' section, are similar and almost identical. Therefore, I decided to use the restricted set of newspapers, so that comparisons can be made between Figure 1 and 2.

pers normally cater to the interests of a broad audience, in order to maximize the potential reach and to serve as many people as possible by reporting in a relatively nonpartisan way. Therefore, most local or regional newspapers are not strongly linked to national parties (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Weibull, 1995). These expectations are indicated by the finding that including all newspapers results in only slightly higher values for PPP. However, the relationships described later in this chapter, are almost identical in both cases.

Party sympathy scores are regressed on newspaper exposure variables for each party in each election year. After doing this for all parties, I calculated the mean of (adjusted) explained variances weighted according to each party's strength (measured by electoral success at the election). This results in a score that indicates the strength of PPP. The PPP-variable can take on any value between 0<sup>30</sup> (no press-party parallelism) and 100 (maximum press-party parallelism). The procedure is reported in detail in Chapter 1.

## Results

Table 1 describes the level of press-party parallelism for each election year. The table shows a considerable decline in press-party parallelism: from a high value of 13.3 in 1979 to 5.6 in 2002. Its average is 10.4 and the median is 9.9<sup>31</sup>. Compared to the other member states of the EU in 1999, the value of PPP in Sweden is close to the average (see Chapter 1).

Two different processes may underlie the declining strength of PPP in Sweden. The most plausible explanation is that it indicates that newspapers are becoming less partisan. Another, yet less likely, reason may be that media usage becomes more fragmented over different media outlets (e.g., Becker & Schoenbach, 1989). This reason seems less important, however, because, firstly, TV news viewers tend also to be the most loyal newspaper readers, because these two media fulfill different needs (Weibull, 1986 in Johnson-Smaragdi, 1989). Secondly, also in a heavily expanded media environment, people have the tendency to selectively expose themselves to (political) media messages (Cotton, 1985; Weibull, 1983). So, with many more different (contradictory) opinions at hand, people are still rather likely to receive – at least limited – (party-political) opinions. Table 1 is thus more likely a reflection of a declining partisanship of media *content* than of changing patterns of media usage of citizens.

<sup>30</sup> Theoretically PPP might even acquire a negative value if the relationship between media use and party preferences is weaker than one would expect to find on the basis of random response.

<sup>31</sup> I also computed a similar measure for television news-party parallelism (TPP). This ranges from .83 in 1979 to .27 in 2002. Since television-party parallelism is very low in Sweden, I excluded it from further analyses. The low level of TPP indicates that television news programs appeal to a broader public – in party-political terms – than newspapers.



**Table 1** Press-Party Parallelism (1979-2002)

Election year	PPP
1979	13.27
1982	14.26
1985	12.50
1988	10.49
1991	9.26
1994	9.37
1998	8.41
2002	5.57
Mean/Median	10.39/9.93

**Table 2** b-coefficients in a logistic regression of electoral participation on individual and systemic characteristics, Swedish Parliamentary elections 1979-2002 (standard errors in parentheses).

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.280 (.046)**	.280 (.046)**
Attitudinal and media usage- variables		
Read about politics	.125 (.045)**	.124 (.045)**
Political interest	.429 (.048)**	.431 (.048)**
Party attachment	.521 (.034)**	.519 (.034)**
Political efficacy	.262 (.039)**	.259 (.039)**
Contextual variables		
PPP	.059 (.012)**	.053 (.040)
PPP*interest	-.040 (.015)**	-.040 (.015)**
Cleavage voting		.099 (.034)**
Constant	3.060 (.284)**	3.200 (.289)**
Variance explained (McFadden pseudo R <sup>2</sup> )	.0894	.0903
n	18116	18116

\* p&lt;.05

\*\* p&lt;.01

In order to test the two hypotheses, Table 2 presents the results of two logistic regressions for electoral participation (at the individual level). These models control for the variables shortly discussed above (for a more thorough discussion, see Chapter 1). The first model estimates the effects of PPP and the interaction of PPP with political interest on participation along with the control variables. The model shows that PPP affects voting indeed in a positive manner, and that the interaction effect has a negative sign, as expected. Both effects are significant. As for the control variables, age has a positive significant effect on participation, which is in accordance with Chapter 1. Reading about politics, political interest, party attachment and political efficacy all increase turnout significantly. After controlling for these variables, the context variable PPP as well as its interaction with

political interest have significant effects on turnout in the expected directions. Both hypotheses are thus supported. The model explains only 8.9% of the variation in electoral participation. However, with a skewed distribution of the dependent variable<sup>32</sup>, it is not common to explain a very large proportion of the variance.

Another indicator of the magnitude of the effect of PPP on participation is to study the difference in predicted participation when one moves from the minimum level of PPP to the maximum, keeping the other variables at their means<sup>33</sup>. On the basis of the regression equation predicted turnout decreases from 95.2% when PPP is at its maximum (in 1982), to 92.3% when PPP reaches the minimum value (in 2002)<sup>34</sup>. Keeping all other variables at their observed means, the decline in PPP accounts for a drop in turnout of nearly three per cent. The historical decline in PPP is thus accountable for a significant drop in electoral participation<sup>35</sup>. The actual decrease in turnout from 1982 to 2002 (for the whole population) was 11.3%.

One has to keep in mind that these calculations are based on samples that – unavoidably – overestimate electoral participation (e.g., Granberg & Holmberg, 1991; Voogt & Van Kempen, 2002). Survey nonresponse is partly a consequence of factors that also obstruct voting (e.g. illness, absence, etc.), and partly of self-selection on the basis of variables that are related to electoral participation (politically uninterested citizens being more likely to be nonrespondents). As a consequence, the sample will overrepresent levels of interest, efficacy, party attachment, etc. The effect of PPP was estimated while keeping all other variables at their mean values. As these mean values are upwardly biased, the estimated effect of PPP is also somewhat biased. In this case, more realistic means for the other variables would yield a somewhat larger effect of PPP on turnout.

One could, however, object that PPP is likely to be higher when socio-political cleavages are stronger (Seymour-Ure, 1974), since a strong partisan press often reflects a stable party-political system (Weibull, 1983). So, perhaps, the findings of model 1, Table 2 do not only reflect effects of the changing media context, but also of a de-alignment of traditional social-political cleavages. To test whether this is the case, Model 2 of Table 2 includes a variable indicating the strength of cleavage voting (see Appendix F of this dissertation for an explication of the construction of this variable). Re-estimating the model while controlling for the extent of cleavage voting, the effect of PPP is hardly changed in magnitude, but it is no longer statistically significant. This prompts the question whether the context variable PPP is just an indicator of cleavage voting.

To answer this question, let us consider the relationship between socio-political cleavages (or cleavage voting) and PPP. Figure 1 shows the strength of both measures for

32 In the pooled data set of eight Swedish elections, 91% of the respondents indicated that they had turned out at the last national election.

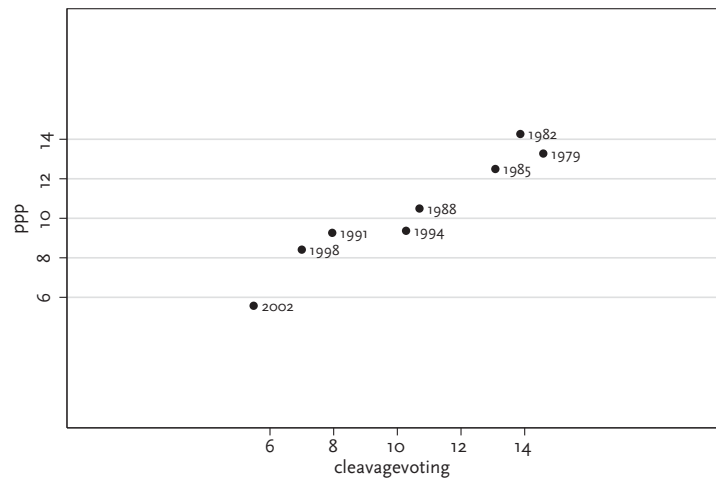
33 These predictions were estimated using Stata *spost* (see Long & Freese, 2003). Stata *spost* can be downloaded from <http://www.indiana.edu/~jslsoc/spost.htm>.

34 The real turnout levels were 91.4% in 1982 and 80.1% in 2002.

35 PPP makes the same difference in turnout as age (.03) and it takes about 1/3 of the difference in probabilities of party identification (.10). On average, the highest predicted probability -/- the lowest predicted probability for each of the five (non-PPP) variables is .054.

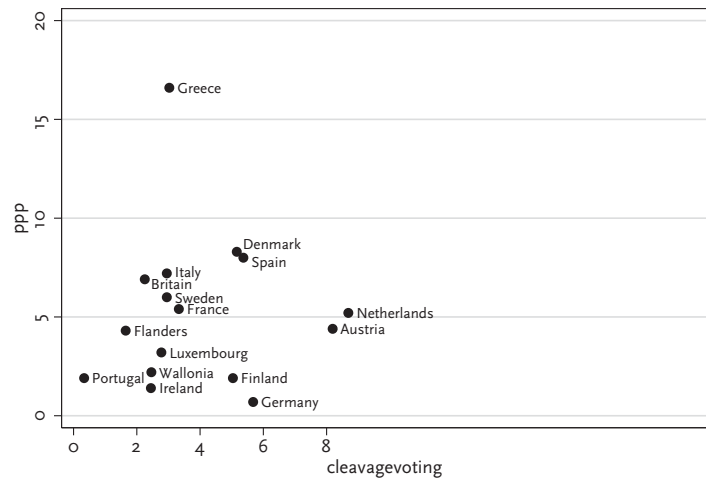
Sweden in the various years. The graph shows that the size of the cleavage voting measure and the size of the PPP variable are nearly identical and that both measures decrease to a similar extent. The correlation between the two contextual variables is .96. Figure 1 clearly shows that a decline in cleavage voting and decline in press-party parallelism coincide in Sweden in the 1979-2002 period. This raises the question whether these are two different, yet historically co-occurring processes, or whether they are different manifestations of a single process.

**Figure 1** Scatterplot of cleavagevoting by PPP – Sweden 1979-2002



To assess which of the two interpretations is most plausible, we now turn to Figure 2, which utilizes data that I analyzed in Chapter 1. These cross-national comparative results stem from data that were gathered immediately after the elections to the European Parliament in 1999<sup>36</sup>. If Press Party Parallelism would be just a proxy for cleavage voting, we should expect Figure 2 to show the same relationship as Figure 1. But since the correlation here is only 0.02, this interpretation seems implausible. In some countries, such as Greece, high levels of PPP coexist with low levels of cleavage voting; whereas in The Netherlands and Austria, relatively high levels of cleavage voting coincide with relatively low levels of PPP. My interpretation of Figure 1 is therefore that the decline in PPP and the decline in cleavage voting reflect separate socio-political developments that happened to coincide in Sweden in the 1979-2002 period.

<sup>36</sup> In this case, cleavage-voting is calculated by regressing party sympathy scores regressed on self-reported social class (4 dummies), urbanization (2 dummies), religion (4 dummies), attendance of religious services (4 dummies), membership of trade union (1 dummy); weighted adjusted R<sup>2</sup>'s (Franklin, 1992).

**Figure 2** Scatterplot of cleavagevoting by PPP – EU 1999

At a somewhat higher level of conceptualization one could regard both of these developments as part of a more general process of de-alignment (e.g., Dalton, 1996; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Lilleker, 2006). Yet, this does not imply that they necessarily develop at the same moment and at the same rate. Figure 2 suggests that they do not, and that their co-occurrence in Sweden (see Figure 1) may be happenstansical. Actually, even Figure 1 shows some indications of the two processes not being identical: connecting the elections in chronological order demonstrates that, at least to a limited extent, the two developments have separate characteristics. Applying these arguments to the analyses reported in Table 2, I conclude that the non-significance of the PPP coefficient in Model 2 is caused by multicollinearity of the PPP and cleavage voting variables, but that there is no reason to regard press-party parallelism as the same phenomenon as cleavage voting.

An objection one could conceivably make against my analyses is that PPP may be incorrectly portrayed as a context effect. If only those people who regularly read a paper are affected by PPP, then the effect of PPP could conceivably be reduced to an individual-level media exposure effect. Such an argument would be incompatible with a two-step flow effect (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), which would imply that ‘ideas often flow *from* radio and print *to* the opinion leaders and *from* them to the less active sections of the population’ (Lazarsfeld, Berelson & Gaudet, 1948 (p.151) in Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). To test whether the effects attributed to PPP are proper contextual effects, or individual-level effects in disguise, a number of tests were conducted which are reported in Table 3. Table 3 reports four regression models of electoral participation, using the same independents as reported in Table 2. Added to these are interactions between PPP and newspaper usage for political information This interaction has been defined in two different forms, one

form being used in models 1 and 3, the other in 2 and 4<sup>37</sup>. In two of these models the interaction between PPP and political interest is included (models 3 and 4), in the other two it is not (models 1 and 2). This distinction I made because I expect a certain degree of multicollinearity between the interaction of PPP and newspaper usage and the PPP\*interest interaction, which may complicate the interpretation of the results. I find that in all four different ways I achieve the same outcome: the interaction between PPP and newspaper usage is not significant. Concluding, PPP even has an effect on all citizens, irrespective of their usage of newspapers. PPP even affects electoral participation of those who do not read newspapers at all, which is indicative of a two-step flow effect.

**Table 3** b-coefficients in a logistic regression of electoral participation on individual and systemic characteristics, Swedish Parliamentary elections 1979-2002, controlled for two- step flow effects (standard errors in parentheses)

Independent variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Age	.295 (.045)**	.282 (.046)**	.294 (.045)**	.281 (.046)**
Attitudinal and media usage- variables				
Read about politics	1.036 (.334)**	.391 (.147)**	.736 (.359)*	.432 (.049)**
Political interest	.421 (.044)**	.448 (.048)**	.404 (.044)**	.432 (.049)**
Party attachment	.521 (.034)**	.521 (.034)**	.521 (.034)**	.521 (.034)**
Political efficacy	.250 (.039)**	.262 (.039)**	.250 (.039)**	.262 (.039)**
Contextual variables				
PPP	.105 (.031)**	.064 (.012)**	.067 (.034)*	.058 (.012)**
PPP*interest			-.037 (.016)*	-.035 (.017)*
PPP*read abt pols.	-.041 (.033)	-.027 (.014)	-.010 (.035)	-.010 (.016)
Constant	2.301 (.381)**	3.369 (.240)**	2.626 (.409)**	3.392 (.244)**
Variance explained (McFadden pseudo R <sup>2</sup> )	.0924	.0890	.0930	.0894
n	18116	18116	18116	18116

\* p<.05

\*\* p<.01

<sup>37</sup> The first and the third model treat newspaper usage as a dummy; i.e. never (0) contrasted to occasionally, often and always (1); the second and the fourth model treat the variable as an ordinal variable with four categories (see Appendix E).

## Conclusion and discussion

Seymour-Ure (1974) introduced the concept of press-party parallelism (PPP) for describing a specific aspect of the media context, but up until now, this concept has not been applied in a longitudinal comparative research. This chapter applied the concept as a context variable that structures individual political behavior. It proposes an operational measure of PPP and applies it to eight Swedish Election Studies from 1979 to 2002. The use of survey data to measure PPP makes it possible to study media system partisanship without labor-intensive content analyses.

The chapter also investigates the effect of PPP on electoral participation. PPP is expected to enhance voting participation by reinforcement of already existing party-political preferences. Moreover, the effect is hypothesized to be stronger for people who are not interested in politics than for highly interested ones.

Press-party parallelism was measured by looking at the empirical association between party preferences and newspaper use. The results showed that PPP varies considerably over election years. Press-party parallelism has a significant positive effect on electoral participation (thus confirming H1). Moreover, its effects extend to people who do not (regularly) read a newspaper which can best be understood as indicative of two-step flow communication effects. This finding implies that PPP really is a contextual variable that cannot be reduced to individual-level media exposure.

The effect of PPP on participation is stronger for those who are not interested in politics. This confirmed the second hypothesis that was tested in this paper. The effects of PPP are not affected by controlling for important other relevant variables. When controlling for cleavage voting multicollinearity causes the PPP effect to be non-significant. Inspecting the relationship between these two contextual variables in a country-comparative study strongly suggests that this is a historical particularity of Sweden, and that PPP and cleavage voting do reflect different real-world phenomena.

The combination of an over-time analysis of the Swedish case and a cross-national comparative analysis (reported in Chapter 1/Appendix A) strengthens the interpretation that the effects of PPP on electoral participation are of a causal nature. The inherent weakness of causal attributions in cross-sectional analysis is compensated for by the longitudinal analysis. The one-context limitation of the longitudinal analysis is compensated for by the country-comparative analysis. In combination, the results of this and the previous chapter reinforce the conclusion that the extent to which a media context is partisan affects individual-level behavior.

