



# SCANDALOUS!



THE MEDIATED CONSTRUCTION OF

# POLITICAL SCANDALS

IN FOUR NORDIC COUNTRIES

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Edited by Sigurd Allern and Ester Pollack

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NORDICOM

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## **The Mediated Construction of Political Scandals in Four Nordic Countries**

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The Mediated Construction of Political Scandals  
in Four Nordic Countries

Sigurd Allern & Ester Pollack (eds)

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contributors; Nordicom 2012

ISBN 978-91-86523-27-5

Published by:  
Nordicom  
University of Gothenburg  
Box 713  
SE 405 30 Göteborg  
Sweden

Cover by: Daniel Zachrisson  
Printed by: Responstryck AB, Borås, 2012



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## Preface

The general public has become used to the term *scandal* as a common characterization for norm violations in different areas of society. The term itself, from the Greek *skandalon*, is as old as the Old Testament, but in modern capitalist societies it is *journalism* that has taken over the institutional role of public guardian of society's norms.

Major and minor norm violations become scandals because they are mediated, reacted to and condemned; often – but not always – resulting in the loss of positions and the ruining of careers. Scandals have many names and can be found in most areas of society. There are political scandals, financial scandals, royal scandals, academic scandals, religious scandals and sports scandals.

This book is about *political* scandals in a part of the world – the Nordic countries – that was regarded as a relatively scandal-free zone for a long time, especially compared with the UK and countries in central and southern Europe. However, our main topic is not the norm violations themselves, but rather the process of scandalization: how scandals are facilitated, constructed and developed in the media arena through an interaction between journalists, politicians and other actors.

A predecessor to this book, based on case studies from Norway and Sweden, has previously been published in Norwegian (Allern & Pollack, eds. 2009). In a few chapters, some material from this earlier book has been used in a revised form, but most of the texts presented here are new. The Norwegian Council for Applied Media Research has granted research funding, and we thank them for this.

Stockholm, January 2012

*Sigurd Allern and Ester Pollack*



## Chapter 1

# Mediated Scandals

Sigurd Allern & Ester Pollack

Scandals have a long history, but political scandals in their modern form are inextricably linked with news media and new forms of digital publication. That scandals are partly constituted as mediated forms of communication is no exaggeration. News media provide a public marketplace in which scandals are presented and developed as drama before an indignant and inquisitive public. Scandals attract attention to different types of websites, help sell newspapers and increase the audiences of TV-channels. In this context, journalists do not simply perform the role of news reporters: they also interpret and – to varying degrees – direct the progress of the scandal. A scandal “is not merely something that is *revealed*, but something that is *shown, reported, staged and kept alive* day after day” (Ekström & Johansson 2008: 72). As in other cases, the news is not just made up of what is “actually happening”, but of things that are considered to constitute newsworthy events to be interpreted, framed and reported.

As in other types of news journalism, mediated scandals require cooperation between sources and journalists, with shifts taking place depending on which party takes the initiative. In many cases, scandal stories originate as leaks from informed sources, sometimes from whistle-blowers wanting to report transgressions of laws, regulations or norms. In other cases, political or economic actors try to plant information or disinformation in order to harm opponents or competitors. A new and special case is the organisation WikiLeaks, which during the past few years has published material causing world-wide attention and a series of political scandals, leading to debates about source criticism and guidelines for publication.

Exposing circumstances that create political scandals also plays an important part in the professional ideology of journalism. Investigating powerful institutions and public figures is central to the ideals and professional goals for members of the press. The Watergate revelations and other less well-known examples of investigative journalism from different countries have for several decades functioned both as model for and examples of there being, despite

everything, some truth in the myth of the media as a critical “fourth estate”. Scandals may help news organisations strengthen their legitimacy, and sometimes result in journalistic awards.

In certain contexts it is also true that journalistic investigation provides us with new knowledge about goings on in the hidden corridors of power. A persistent and active press can make us better informed, resulting in a strengthening of the democratic dialogue. A society without any revelations that voters interpret as “scandals” may, in most cases, be symptomatic of authoritarian control, a lack of press freedom and open public debate about both politics and politicians. According to this view, political scandals may be seen to be necessary and healthy for democracy.

We basically accept this argument, but it would be naïve to interpret any mediated “scandal” as strengthening democratic processes. The frequency with which journalism provides revelations of importance for political democracy is a different, empirical question. Democratic values are not necessarily enhanced when elected leaders, after a few weeks of media criticism, are pressed to resign before those who have elected them have a say in the matter or a chance to influence the outcome. Neither do unilateral media campaigns that include tendencies of demonization create an ideal climate for reasoning and public debate. Sometimes scandals reveal transgression of norms that from a political point of view are quite trivial. The distinction between the important and the irrelevant may be blurred.

On the basis of empirical data from four Nordic countries, our aim in this anthology is to direct a critical spotlight on the news media’s management of *political* scandals. In a societal context, how important are the norm violations to which attention is being drawn? Why do scandals so easily take on an aura of campaigning? How do political players exploit the news media so as to generate scandals involving their opponents – and rivals? Are character assassination and demonization typical features of media coverage? What ethical dilemmas do journalists – and the general public – encounter in such a process?

These are some of the questions the authors will address in a textually oriented analysis of the manner in which political scandals are *mediated* through journalistic scene setting, news source initiatives and interpretative frameworks.

This chapter introduces some of the book’s key themes and concepts.

## Causing offence

Both the standard Norwegian dictionary and Bonnier’s Swedish Dictionary are content to define a scandal as something that gives rise to offence or embarrassing attention. Longmans Dictionary of Contemporary English defines it as “an event in which someone, especially someone important, behaves in a bad way

that shocks people". With regard to the word's etymology, the Oxford English Dictionary cites the Latin *scandalum* ('cause of offence') and the Greek *skandalon* ('snare', 'stumbling block'). The person at the centre of the scandal causes offence – metaphorically walking into a pitfall. The Greek substantive has a related verb, *skandalizein*. In early Jewish and Christian tradition, a *skandalon* was used to represent an obstacle on the road – or a stumbling block – intended to test belief in Yahweh – or God. In later Christian theology the Latin *scandalum* was linked directly to sinful acts. Religious institutions view scandals as types of behaviour that threaten the faith and commitment of a congregation's members (Soukup 1997: 224). *Skandalon* is associated with desire, the force that puts obstacles on the path to salvation. The concept of a "transgression" may be related to this idea.

The religious connotations of the concept gradually faded as it came to be associated with quite different types of norm violations (Thompson 2000: 12). Nonetheless these historical and cultural roots are easily detectable even in modern mediated scandals: sin, shame, punishment and atonement are still key factors. The French philosopher René Girard describes the shocked indignation expressed during scandals as a hectic desire to distinguish between the guilty and the innocent, to expose the shameful conduct, and to ensure that it receives the punishment it deserves. The indignant parties experience a longing to drag the scandal into the light and to pillory those involved (Girard 2007: 318). As summed up by the social anthropologist Mary Douglas (1986), the identification of "guilty parties" among its own ranks facilitates a society's internal control, strengthening loyalty towards it.

## The characteristic features of a scandal

In his influential work on political scandals, Thompson (2000) listed five key characteristics. We have already mentioned the first: a violation of fixed values, norms or moral codes. The social norms that are violated must moreover represent a generally accepted moral stance (Lull & Hinerman 1997: 11). Politicians are accused particularly frequently of double standards and hypocrisy – of failing to practise what they preach. The classic Anglo-American example would involve the exposure of a politician, profiled as a defender of Christian family values, for cheating on his/her spouse with a political adviser or secretary. A standard political scandal in the Nordic countries would rather involve a politician who is accused of violating laws, rules or regulations that "ordinary voters" have to respect.

Another characteristic of scandals is that the events in question – the norm violation – must be known to persons other than the parties themselves. No scandal exists if two people are involved in corruption of which no one else is aware. A scandal arises only when the situation comes into the public spotlight.

A third characteristic is that there must be people who are shaken and shocked by the “scandalous situation” – it is not sufficient for them simply to be aware of it. Unless newspaper readers or television audiences receive the news with interest and want to know more about it, the scandal will not really “take off”.

Closely associated with this is the fourth characteristic: there must be players who are willing to voice their criticism in public. Rumours and gossip can form the foundations of a scandal, but “a scandal” is generated only when the media provoke an official, critical reaction. Creating a scandal requires the journalists not only to have contact with visible sources, but also to be able to mobilize reactions from them.

The fifth characteristic of a scandal according to Thompson (2000) – and one that is very typical of political scandals – is that the allegation involving the violation of fixed values, norms or rules threatens the politician’s reputation and renown, and may at worst even contribute to the destruction of his or her political capital and influence. Demands for the person involved to take the consequences of the revelations and resign is often quickly put on the agenda.

A characteristic feature of some political scandals is that they start off as relatively minor; only subsequently becoming more serious. Some may consider the initial “exposure” to be trivial or blown up out of proportion by the media, but over time the scandal deepens and becomes more serious because the politician involved attempts to rely on explanations, denials or responses involving new norm violations. Central in this context is the advancement of half-truths or lies, as when former President Clinton attempted to explain the nature of his relationship with Monica Lewinsky: “I did not have sexual relations with that woman”.<sup>1</sup> A classic British example is the Profumo scandal of 1963. The background was that the Secretary of State for War, John Profumo, had a lover, Christine Keeler, who was also involved with a Soviet marine attaché and KGB operative. Although Profumo’s infidelity was perhaps of most interest to his wife, it also presented a potential security problem, since the relationship could have provided grounds for blackmail. The security service MI5 knew about the issue, but did not consider it particularly serious (Wall 2008). What was more serious was that Profumo, following rumours and suggestions in the media, stated in Parliament that there was no “impropriety” in his relationship with Keeler. When it subsequently became clear that he had lied, it was the end of the road. Or as a popular English limerick put it<sup>2</sup>:

Oh, what have you done, cried Christine,  
You’ve wrecked the whole party machine!  
To lie in the nude  
May be terribly rude,  
But to lie in the House is obscene.

Accusations that the person concerned has a “relaxed” attitude to the truth is another ingredient in several of the political scandals analyzed in this book. An initial and less significant scandal may thus be followed by a new norm violation, which serves to make everything worse. The standard advice, repeated endlessly by political spin doctors, PR consultants and press commentators, is that crisis-hit politicians should act swiftly to put the affair behind them: admitting everything, putting up their hands and apologising for the norm violation. In Sweden this is known as “doing a poodle” – you lie on your back and wave your paws in a conciliatory fashion. Politicians who fail to do this must expect the scandal to roll on – and consequently have only themselves to blame when the media witch hunt continues.

This advice may seem wise, but in practice it has proved difficult to follow. Of course the strategy seems least inviting in cases where it is difficult to find actual written evidence, where one person’s word is against another’s, and where the person at the centre of the scandal believes and insists that there is not much they should apologise for. In such cases, demands for an “unconditional apology” may seem instrumentally immoral: for strategic reasons a person is compelled to say something they do not really think, publicly claiming a version of reality that they believe inwardly to be misleading. When a politician is at the centre of a scandal and knows that his or her actions are not worthy of criticism, the extent of the scandal and the associated media coverage can seem overwhelming. There is little time for reflection, advisers are scarce, colleagues keep their distance, family members are depressed by all the attention, and forming judgements about the consequences of what one says or does is difficult. Going public with one’s negative reasoning may seem synonymous with giving up one’s political career.

In addition there is a further consideration: political commentators who insist that politicians who don’t “put up their hands” and “confess everything” have only themselves to blame for the continuing media pursuit, are at the same time serving to obscure the role of the journalists. Journalists participating in a media hunt are presented as level-headed news seekers and observers – simply as messengers without any independent or active role in the scandal.

## Personalized political scandals

Mediated scandals can occur in many areas of society, such as the world of business and finance, but also within the arts and culture, sport, academia, NGOs and religious bodies. All societal institutions with norms and rules, and expectations regarding particular standards of conduct will periodically find that particular events are viewed as illegitimate, giving rise to public criticism and scandal. Even media organisations themselves experience this. As the

closure of the British Sunday tabloid *News of the World* in 2011 reminds us: illegal and immoral methods used by scandal-seeking journalists cooperating with corrupt police sources may ultimately be regarded as a far more serious scandal than several of the newspaper's celebrity scandals combined. Special features of *political* scandals are that they nowadays occur frequently, and since they generally affect high profile persons in society, they arouse intense public interest.

For a scandal to be characterised as *political* in this context means that it involves political institutions, political processes or decisions – or politicians personally in their capacity as publicly appointed or elected officials. A political scandal “is a violation of rules and procedures in the exercise of political power” (Midtbø 2007: 25) that becomes perceived as such. However, political scandals also occur outside the traditional political arena, in particular in the area where the enactment of legislation, the allocation of public resources and lobbying activities intersect. Political scandals can involve organised sport and culture – and, as we saw in Norway in 2007 and in Sweden 2009, a political scandal can affect, and for a time nearly paralyse, a national trade union federation such as the LO<sup>3</sup>.

Tor Midtbø (2007) reminds us of the distinction between two different types of political scandal. One category comprises scandals that can be linked primarily to mistakes concerning public policy or the actions of government controlled institutions. In Sweden and India the corruption case brought against Bofors in connection with the sale of artillery weapons to the Indian army in 1986 offers a classic example of this type of scandal. In Norway, several political scandals in recent decades have been linked to government and political involvement in the petroleum sector. The two best-known scandals involved the budget overspend at Mongstad in 1987, and the corruption case brought against Statoil in 2003 with respect to bribes paid to an Iranian civil servant. Even though political scandals normally involve a searchlight on the accountability of those involved, often with negative consequences for those in charge, the political focus is on accountability and responsibility for official political actions and decisions. The second category of political scandals is linked to politicians' personal norm transgressions, both as political leaders and in their more private activities.

In most countries and in most contexts, mediated political scandals belong to the second, more person-oriented category, and it is basically this type of scandal that forms the theme of this book. Media capital built up by political leaders in the form of personal trust can easily be lost. As Tumber and Waisbord (2004: 1036) note:

Scandals are examples of the personalization of politics, a trend that has been observed worldwide. Individuals, rather than ideologies or parties, are



usually in the eye of scandals. Scandals reveal that specific individuals have committed acts that break legal and/or moral codes.

In the last decades the number of personally oriented scandals has also grown in the Nordic countries (see chapter 2). This development may be linked to a number of trends in modern society. One important factor is of course the development of the news media as a professionalized, politically independent institution and – from 1995, the development of new, internet-based forms of communication and news. Parties' and politicians' *dependence* on the media has increased, and their adaptation to media logic has been characterised as the mediatization of politics (Asp 1986, Jenssen & Aalberg 2007, Hjarvard 2008, Strömbäck 2008). As Tumber (2004: 1123) writes, the promotional culture and mass media "provide politicians with the main way of publicizing themselves. At the same time, they make politicians vulnerable". Election campaigns are primarily media campaigns. Parties have long since become completely dependent on visible leaders who have mastered the art of television debate and whose marketability puts them in demand (Esaiasson & Håkansson 2002, Allern 2004, 2011). There has been a steep decline in political party membership and parties are struggling to attract people to attend party meetings (Heidar & Saglie 1994). There is less party loyalty at elections.

The boundary between the public and private realms, or between what Erving Goffman (1959) called an organisation's "front stage" and "back stage", has simultaneously become blurred. Events behind the scenes are now leaked faster and more easily to the main stage. Or, as Joshua Meyrowitz (1986) has argued, the growth of television and the new media has in practice created a new middle region, where the distinction between public and private realms has become increasingly unclear. Powerful figures in society have literally become more visible and simultaneously demystified. Needless to say, such processes are not simply the result of developments in the media.

The type of norm violation likely to cause a scandal may vary from one country to another, depending on their historical and cultural climates. In Scandinavia, which has a political culture in which legislation and official regulation play a central role, political scandals often involve violations of decisions, rules or statutes concerning economic affairs (see chapter 2). Examples include allegations of everything from tax evasions and corruption to misdemeanours such as traffic offences, book-keeping irregularities or breaches of local building regulations. One of the best-known Swedish political scandals involved Mona Sahlin, a minister in Ingvar Carlsson's government, who exercised a rather relaxed approach to her use of a government charge card (see chapter 7). Overall the case involved private expenditure slightly in excess of 50.000 Swedish crowns. She paid back the money, albeit late. The items purchased included two Toblerone chocolate bars, causing the scandal to be popularly known and

remembered as “the Toblerone Affair”. Another scandal occurred in Sweden following the 2006 election when it was revealed that several members of the new centre-right government had not bothered to obtain television licenses and had employed domestic home cleaners etc. without paying the proper taxes (Pollack 2009). In Norway, the Mayor of Oslo was forced to resign shortly before the 2007 election following revelations about prior tax evasion. The fact that the case was legally time-barred was seen as irrelevant (Waldahl 2009).

Failure by politicians to practise what they preach is a recurrent phenomenon, even though the inhabitants of the Nordic countries consider marital infidelity to be far less serious than breaking laws or violating norms concerning sexual harassment or prostitution. In spring 2008, however, the Finnish Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva was forced to resign following revelations that he had sent over 2,000 text messages to a well-known “erotic dancer” containing suggestions and desires of a private nature.<sup>4</sup> In the autumn of the same year, the state secretary to Finland’s Minister for Equality resigned after a newspaper revealed that he had “groped” a woman’s breast during an embassy reception.<sup>5</sup>

Thompson (2000) distinguishes between three typical categories of political scandal; financial scandals, power scandals and sex scandals. The last type could be categorized as a subcategory of scandals concerning private life and personal behaviour, but given the fact that the British media is obsessed with adultery it is easy to understand that sex scandals in such a context seem to comprise a dominating category. Another type of norm violation can be termed talk scandals (Ekström & Johansson 2008), i.e. situations where a scandal arises when a politician is caught making unacceptable or surprising political remarks indicating views that they would not support or adopt in public. An example occurred during the 2002 Swedish election campaign when journalists using hidden cameras and microphones on the SVT programme *Uppdrag granskning* [Mission Investigate] provoked a number of local politicians to make inflammatory remarks about Muslims and other immigrant groups (Andén-Papadopoulos 2003, Johansson 2006). During the Norwegian local elections in 2007, a radio reporter working on a youth programme on NRK copied this method of operation. Having established contact with local politicians in the party booths located along Karl Johansgate (the main street in Oslo), the reporter (equipped with a hidden microphone) pretended to be a racist and got a female politician from the Conservative Party to make derogatory remarks about immigrant groups. After the comments were broadcast, the politician concerned resigned all her party responsibilities. It was too late, however, for her to have her name removed from the ballot sheet. Her reward was to receive additional personal votes from a number of Oslo voters sympathising with her broadcasted views.

As mentioned above, the applicable norms and rules – breaches of which provoke criticism and reaction – may vary from country to country. Married

politicians' infidelities are a constant source of sex scandals in the UK and the USA, while the same conduct within the French political elite (including the media elite) scarcely raises an eyebrow. Or to take an example from the Nordic region: the public humiliation of Progress Party MP Per Sandberg for approaching the Norwegian parliament's rostrum after consuming a few shots of aquavit would hardly have given rise to the same moralising reactions a few decades ago in the then more alcohol-liberal political climate in Finland. However, Finnish politicians have experienced that public tolerance concerning alcohol abuse has changed during the past decade (see chapter 2).

Politicians who find themselves at the centre of a scandal due to private or personal matters are held accountable according to an idealised standard of individual political morality, with the media acting as the public guardian of private morals (Lull & Hinerman 1997). Journalists have been characterized as "two-hit spiritual guides, representatives of middle-class morality" (Bourdieu 1998: 46). They maintain the norms of public life and the values of political conduct (Ettema & Glasser 1998), thus influencing the standards according to which politicians are judged.

Political leaders are accused of having fallen short in their capacity as political role models. What sort of society would we end up with if we were to accept politicians lying or neglecting to pay their taxes? As a result, the personal norm violation has wider repercussions and the institution is unable to "live with" the on-going scandal. Government ministers resign "out of consideration for the government"; leaders of national trade union federations resign "out of consideration for the organisation". When a media hunt becomes burdensome for the organisation involved, this seems the only way out.

## The interpretative framework and dramaturgy of scandal

As mentioned above, mediation has a formative role in John B. Thompson's theory on scandals. At the same time, his analysis involves, to a limited extent, a somewhat more specific discussion of how – through the choice of frames and journalistic dramaturgy – this comes about. The point here of course is that "a scandal" is not simply something secret that suddenly comes to light pre-packaged for public consumption. The presentation of the norm violation, the journalistic angle, the sources to be highlighted (or suppressed), the visualisation of the scandal and the proportions attributed to the affair all depend on journalistic decisions and choices. The formative role of the media is particularly linked to the construction of the scandal narrative as a ready-written drama with set roles for the actors involved (Andén-Papadopoulos & Widestedt 2006).

The outcome of mediated political scandals is difficult to predict and all scandals have their own particular characteristics. A crucial point here is the

establishment of an interpretative framework, something which we are familiar with from everyday life. These frames are the means by which we form our sensory impressions and organise our experiences into a context that gives them meaning (Goffman 1974: 21). Framing a news story involves selecting certain aspects of the reality to be described and then highlighting them in the text that is to be communicated. This affects the way in which the problem is defined, the way the causes are understood, the moral evaluation of the story, and the possible follow-up (Entman 1993: 52). The process of framing takes place through the editorial selection of certain sources, angles and images instead of others, i.e. to a greater or lesser extent a conscious attempt is made to present a fixed interpretation of the events in question (Norris, Kern & Just 2003). In this way a single news episode becomes an element in a longer running, familiar news story, as when violent events in very different countries are categorised under the headings of “terror” or “the war against terror” (Allern 2001a: 68).

Sociologically oriented media research into framing emphasises the idea that frames are the object of negotiations and tugs-of-war between editors and sources (Entman 1993, Allern 2001b, Ihlen 2007, Ihlen & Allern 2008). Influential sources are concerned not only to put the matter “on the agenda”, but also to ensure that the story is presented from a particular angle. In addition to issue-specific frames (for example, news stories that are angled as “terrorist stories”), there will be an editorial desire to employ what may be termed generic, journalistic frames (de Vreese 2003): the presentation and focus must be adapted to suit the media organisation’s news values. A familiar frame might be one of conflict, where those involved “rage” against each other or produce hard-hitting allegations. In such cases priority will be given to reporting factors that highlight the existence of conflict.

Goffman (1981: 63) has emphasised the linking of frames to particular cultures and the various ways in which they are institutionalised, and indeed Van Gorp (2007) argues that the media tend to switch between a cultural store of frames that change little over time. Many of these draw upon fairy tales, sagas and myths, e.g., the pauper who won the crown or David and Goliath, or from more modern legends such as the struggle of the individual against bureaucracy. The manifest elements in the framework (such as the headline, images and key quotes from sources) are bound together by what Van Gorp describes as a central organising theme, defined by Bjerke (2009) as a cultural *leitmotif*. The ways in which political scandals are simplified and given a personal orientation may frequently seem reminiscent of the easily interpreted reality presented as a melodrama. Here we are dealing with a struggle between opposing forces: good and evil; weakness and strength; guilt and innocence (Gripsrud 1992: 88-89).

The journalistic construction of scandals establishes a fixed dramaturgic treatment early in the process (Eide & Hernes 1987). The first act establishes a

media framework for the story. This will often be linked to a familiar cultural narrative: the villain vs. the hero; the aggressor vs. the victim. The next act makes room for responses, attempted denials and counter-allegations, although there will be a tendency to prioritise items that fit with the dominant frame. At this point, the media may also commission opinion polls that will confirm the impact of the media's reports: the public is distancing itself from the person(s) at the centre of the exposures – sympathy for the person(s) involved is declining and many people call for their resignation from their job/position. These findings will themselves become a news item that will in turn boost the main story.

All this functions as a build-up for the drama's final act: the logic of the media requires resolution in the form of change, generally through the resignation or firing of the person(s) at the centre of the scandal. Alternatively, if the development of the scandal allows it, the accused may appear in the role of repentant sinner and (through the media) ask his or her immediate family, organisation and the general public for forgiveness. In practice, the modern news media have taken over the role previously occupied by the church in evaluating sinful conduct, suggesting penance and considering forgiveness – all with the assistance of the modern priesthood of communications experts. If repentance is not complete and the apology not acceptable, mercy may be withheld. Such absolution may perhaps be somewhat easier to obtain in countries with a Roman Catholic tradition than those with a Protestant culture. In any event, scandals – like crime fiction – are norm-confirmative (Pollack 2008): society makes peace with the damaging deviation from established norms and the affected institutions are able to renew their legitimacy.

In certain cases, especially where the outcome of the scandal has been hotly debated, it can subsequently provoke renewed critical debate, in particular concerning the role of the media. This is what happened following the suicide of the former Norwegian cabinet member Tore Tønne in the late autumn of 2002 (see chapter 10). Such media debates have developed in the wake of several political scandals in the Nordic countries.

### The competition for news

In news journalism, material concerning political scandals is a competitive resource. While reports on political scandals in different media formats are goods in the public marketplace, they also represent symbolic capital that will boost a media business's reputation and self-image as a guardian of public life. Revealing and launching a political scandal is viewed both as a journalistic scoop and as a strategic, market-related investment in terms of reputation and interest among the general public. If the scandal leads to the departure of a government minister or another powerful figure, this offers proof of the news

organisation's power and effectiveness, and the reports will often go on to receive a media award nomination. As the Swedish journalist Göran Rosenberg sums it up: a well-known and powerful figure up against the wall, with dark deeds on his or her conscience and a panicked gaze is the journalistic pinnacle of media culture (Rosenberg 2000: 45).

A news organisation's market base and catchment area will also affect its priorities. Media aimed at mass audiences have learnt to apply narrative techniques with roots in classical dramaturgy (Hvitfelt 1996: 106). Tabloids and other commercial media outlets oriented towards popular culture are often the ringleaders when a political scandal is made personal and dramatized as a "soap opera". The serial continues with new episodes worthy of the readers' interest. A scandal brings web-based media greater attention – and attracts more clicks. The same logic applies to television channels' pursuit of high viewing figures. A juicy, personally oriented scandal is easy to present visually and draws greater public interest than traditional and more institutional political news. The level of abstraction is low, the celebrity factor high, and images easy to obtain. In addition, everyone can easily adopt a position regarding the norm violation, and distance herself or himself from the person involved. After a few days, the general public's reactions to the media reports can be turned into a separate piece about an opinion poll, something that confirms the significance of both the scandal and the coverage of it by the media.

Moreover, news media are more numerous than before and, following digitisation, more intermeshed: in the media houses' news cycle, news reported by one medium immediately becomes a source for the others. Publication takes place on several platforms. If public interest is considerable, the affair will progress in a kind of circular dance through the media. Commercial competition for the public's attention is fierce. Another feature of this media picture is the news-reporting institutions' increased independence in relation to political parties, and the breakthrough, at least in parts of the news media, of a more proactive style of investigative journalism.

In many newsrooms and in different types of media the competition for news has also encouraged the use of anonymous sources in political journalism. We are not thinking here of those providing background information or tips, out of public view. This type of information can be valuable and does not represent an ethical or source-related problem provided it is also cross-checked against other open sources. Far more problematic is the situation where a report is spiced up during the editorial process by references to quotes from anonymous sources that in reality are subjective characterisations or personal interpretations, often expressed as part of a battle between different party factions or a power struggle (Allern 2001b: 312).

Political scandals are covered in items devoted to news, comment and debate. In the Scandinavian press this distinction between different genres has also

had organisational consequences. Normally material categorised as comment is the responsibility of a chief or political editor, while political news material is processed by a department headed by a news or duty editor.

Naturally there are various types of internal cooperation between departments, but one consequence of the system is that political news is subject to the same space and time constraints as other types of news (Allern 2001b: 139). Larger news outlets have dedicated pages, sections or magazines, e.g., “Finance”, “Culture” and “Sport”, but this is seldom the case for political news in the Nordic media. Accordingly, political news has to compete for attention with classic items of events-based news, such as accidents, natural disasters and crime, or with material about health and consumer issues. As already mentioned, this competitive situation tends to favour political news with a potential for personal angles and dramatization. The media drive in political scandals can also be reminiscent of crime reporting – the guilty party is investigated, accused and judged, with the media acting as tribunal (Pollack 2008).

Membership of this media court includes journalistic commentators – the political experts who analyse and assess the scandal’s political consequences. Through analysis, value judgment and other types of opinion, these commentators traditionally exercise a role as visible political players.

One interesting feature is the prominence given to lead commentators following the decline of the party press. Newspaper commentators are now not less, but rather *more* visible, and are sometimes used directly as analysts and interpreters in news columns, often with a teaser on the front page. This political profiling – regardless of party interests – has become an effective playing card in the competitive marketplace. Something similar has happened in broadcasting. During the long period during which public service radio and television in the Nordic area were run as State monopolies, political issues were commented on by politicians and political experts, with priority given to election researchers. Today both television and radio channels use their own political editors and commentators. After the political news has been broadcast and the politicians have had their say, one journalist will interview another journalist – now in the role of expert – about what all this “really” means.

This is followed by a kind of circle dance from studio to studio in which the news media’s leading commentators are summoned to interpret developments, meanings and trends (see chapter 5). The frequency with which the same contributors are re-used contributes in itself confirmation of their role as authorities.<sup>6</sup> This underlines the news media’s new role as an *independent* political institution with a defining power and a desire to intervene in political processes. If the news media’s priesthood – *the pundits of the press* – with their powers of interpretation declare a scandal-ridden politician to be politically dead, then this judgment will generally function as a self-fulfilling prophecy.



## Media hunts

Offence provokes a reaction and a reaction requires a victim. Consequently the unfolding of a scandal in the media is often compared to a hunt where the journalists represent the hunters and the persons responsible for the scandal represent the prey to be hunted down. In Sweden, journalists and politicians – as well as media communications researchers – use the expression *mediedrev* [media drive hunt] to refer to the intense coverage of scandals by the news media.

In a hunting context, a *drive hunt* describes the practice whereby people and dogs track down and drive the prey towards the hunter – or, as in ancient times, towards a ravine or cliff. We will here use the short form *media hunt*. Inspired by Rosenberg (2000), Nord (2001), Nilsson (2004) and Midtbø (2007), we define a *media hunt* as:

1. wide-ranging, intense and critical reporting directed against one or more persons, organisations or institutions;
2. personal allegations concerning norm violations characterised as scandalous,
3. in a situation where many dominant editors and news media participate over a certain period of time,
4. adopting the same basic perspective, journalistic angle and dramaturgic concept, and
5. where the outcome is uncertain.

Consequently, the publication by a single newspaper of some revealing or scandalous articles about a politician does not in itself constitute a media hunt. There must be a pack of hunters and numerous editors evaluating the situation's nature and news value in the same way. The media's dramatic focus requires the hunt to be undertaken over a certain period of time and – in order to increase the level of suspense and public attention – uncertainty regarding the consequences and outcome (Nord 2001). The length of time expended will vary, but without a series of cliff-hangers there is no media drive. This means that minor political scandals may occur without precipitating a media hunt. A media hunt may be initiated either by editors or by political actors who are exploiting one or more news organisations as their own arena.

A media hunt cannot, however, be *planned* in the way that one might plan a series of reportage pieces or a traditional political campaign: there will always be many uncertain elements, since the news media do not have a common "supreme editor" and neither journalists nor politicians can fully predict the possible reactions and counter-reactions.

Once a scandal provokes a media hunt, it is difficult for a news organisation's editorial agenda not to adopt the same priorities – after all, this is the



scandal everyone is talking about. It takes both independence and courage to oppose the prevalent frames, including those in one's own newsroom. Running with the pack is simpler, easier and gives a sense of professional and institutional solidarity.

## Seven hypotheses

Our reasoning above can, at least partly, be summarized in seven hypotheses about news media participation in political scandals, where political leaders' morals and transgression of moral norms lead to media campaigns and public debate. The hypotheses are only briefly introduced here. We shall return to them in our last chapter, where they serve as a point of departure for a discussion and summary of our empirical findings, both in this book and in a previous one (Allern & Pollack, eds. 2009a) about Norwegian and Swedish mediated political scandals.

1. *The hypothesis of increased incidence of political scandals:* Mediated scandals have the last decades become much more common than they were in the first decades after World War II.
2. *The hypothesis of individualization:* Media's emphasis is on individual, personal transgressions of norms and moral codes, while collective responsibility and structural conditions are kept out of the media picture even when a wider political perspective ought to be of interest.
3. *The hypothesis of sensationalizing the trivial:* Scandals concerning politicians often start off as minor violations of moral standards. The "crime" in question is often a trivial offence, especially when it highlights the discrepancy between ideals and reality.
4. *The herd hypothesis:* Political scandals provoke a media hunt where many leading news organisations follow the same spoor, basically using the same news frames, supporting each other's interpretation of reality.
5. *The command hypothesis:* One or a few national ruling news media have to take the lead in the scandalizing process, especially if it develops into a media hunt.
6. *The gender hypothesis:* 1) The limit of tolerance concerning breaches against norms is lower for women than for men and 2) Women are expected to show more empathy, to be more expressive and less instrumental than men, and therefore the reactions against women who do not live up to these expectations are harsher.
7. *The demonization hypothesis:* The frames of interpretation and narratives in scandals lead to demonization of the person being accused and criti-

cised. She or he becomes part of a story about The Good and The Bad, the Perpetrator and the Victim.

## Outline of the book

In chapter 2, Sigurd Allern, Anu Kantola, Ester Pollack and Mark Blach-Ørsten conduct a comparative analysis of mediated political scandals in Norway, Finland, Sweden and Denmark during the period 1980 to 2010. These four Nordic countries experienced relatively few political scandals in the first decades after World War II, and were often described as “clean” and “scandal free”. From the 1980s onwards, especially after the millennium, the picture has changed. Political scandals have become more common. How may this development be described, and what are the reasons for the political climate change in the Nordic region?

The authors have mapped and categorised mediated political scandals with a national reach in the four countries since 1980, 155 different scandals in total. The comparative analysis is based on this registration and coding of their number, type and consequences. The most striking result is the increase of mediated political scandals during the last decade. Scandals related to offences in economic affairs form the most prominent type in all four decades. However, the types of scandal increasing most since the millennium are norm transgressions concerning personal behaviour (such as adultery, sexual harassment or alcohol abuse). Women politicians are not scandalized to a greater degree than male politicians, but the consequences for scandalized female cabinet ministers seem to be tougher.

In chapter 3, Anders Todal Jenssen and Audun Fladmoe turn our attention to the political actors themselves, and the role scandals may play in political power struggles. The authors, inspired by Machiavelli, argue that the saying “all’s fair in love and war” might be applied to politics as well. When colleagues are being scandalized, political actors rarely try to defend or rescue the accused – be it a political ally or enemy – for fear of being associated with the claimed wrongdoings, or of becoming the next target in the escalating process of scandalization. Jensen and Fladmoe prefer the concept of scandalization, where the process aspect is highlighted instead of the bare phenomenon. They mainly use well-known Norwegian cases to illustrate the strategies and counter strategies in a process where power, name and reputation are at stake, but point out that the mechanisms discussed also apply to other Nordic countries.

Scandalized political actors may claim that they are victims of a conspiracy – an impression that might not be as farfetched as we tend to believe. The authors argue that these experiences do have some basis in fact, but they think that the loaded concept “conspiracy” should be replaced by the less conspiratorial concept “network” The chapter ends with ten commandments, inspired

by Machiavelli's advice for power-holders; political actors who would like to use the weapon of scandalization against a political opponent.

In chapter 4 Anu Kantola takes as her point of departure several recent scandals concerning election campaign funding in Finland, and discusses how different generations of journalists have come to treat their profession as political reporters. The scandal started in 2008, when a Centre Party MP revealed not having reported his campaign financing. This got the media interested, and soon enough a group of businessmen who had channelled money into political campaigns during the parliamentary elections of 2007 were disclosed. Kantola has interviewed twenty political journalists and five editors about how they perceived the accusations of bribery, misappropriation of public funds, electoral corruption, malpractice and so forth, and their perspectives on their own role and conceived mission in relation to the never-ending scandal. Her analysis shows that two different generations of journalists have quite conflicting views of what their assignment is. She argues that the young, up-and-coming generation of journalists "used" the scandal to enhance their self-legitimation and distance themselves from the older generation. The younger ones saw themselves as the "real" watchdogs, and the scandal gave them an opportunity to shape a new, more active professional self-identity during a period of great change in Finish political culture.

Chapter 5 also deals with the role of political journalists, but concentrates on that of political commentators. The authors, Lars Nord, Gunn Enli and Elisabeth Stúr, argue that the position of the "pundits of the press" have moved to the forefront, and today constitute a kind of trademark or brand for newspapers and TV-channels. This development is especially salient after the decline of the political party press.

When it comes to political scandals, the commentators are the interpreters, the ones analysing and framing the scandal as a scandal, picking the winners and losers in the struggle for political survival. How this is done, what it means for the process of scandalization and what effect it might have on the outcome of events is analysed and discussed with the help of case studies from both Norway and Sweden. One of their conclusions is that political commentators often act as driving forces during scandals, ultimately privileged to designate villains and victims, acting as both prosecutors and judges.

In chapter 6, Mark Blach-Ørsten and Anker Brink Lund analyse a certain kind of political power scandal, the security scandal. They focus on three different Danish cases: the scandal around the documentary "The Secret War" from 2006, in which Danish soldiers are accused of helping the American forces send prisoners to Guantanamo on Cuba; the scandal concerning the publication – and later faked translation into Arabic – of a book by a Special Forces soldier; and lastly, the scandal about a leak to the press in 2007 revealing that Denmark was sending special forces to Iraq to assist the regular troops. In

February 2010 the Danish Defence Minister resigned, claiming that the large number of “cases” was one reason for leaving office.

These three security scandals all shed light on hidden practises at the Defence Command of Denmark itself, with their spin-doctors and communication heads, as well as highlighting the political pressure on media that may result in hiding evidence of a political scandal. One reason for the importance of security scandals may be, according to the authors, that Denmark is the only Scandinavian country where the different wars have been associated both with the highest political prestige, and at the same time, where the cost in human lives has been the greatest.

Two of the chapters, 7 and 8, deal with questions concerning the relationship between media and women politicians in political scandals. In chapter 7 Mia-Marie Hammarlin and Gunilla Jarlbro present an analysis of how former Social Democratic Party leader Mona Sahlin was portrayed in the Swedish press at five different periods of time, including the famous “Toblerone Affair” from 1995. Sahlin had a very long career that ended quite abruptly in the autumn of 2010, at a point when she had the chance to become the first woman Prime Minister in Sweden. However, the Social Democrats suffered a historical decrease in popularity in the parliamentary elections of September 2010 and demands for her resignation were harsh. But did she ever have a chance? Hammarlin and Jarlbro pose this rhetorical question after scrutinising how media filled their reporting on Sahlin with gender comments and criticisms. But finally, when she stepped down and no longer posed a threat to the male hegemony in Swedish politics – she was praised for all her qualities.

Elin Strand Hornnes highlights a different question in chapter 8: how do women politicians involved in mediated political scandals defend themselves rhetorically? She analyses the rhetorical strategies of six different politicians from Norway, Sweden and Denmark who were involved in five scandals between 2005 and 2010. What were their defence strategies to maintain their good reputation and public trust? Is it possible to discern a pattern, and what might this tell us about conditions for women politicians meeting media when facing severe accusations? One of her conclusions is that women politicians who have learned to act like men in order to gain power and influence in the game of politics are still expected to be more relation-oriented, more disposed to feeling guilty and apologizing when faced with a scandal. This creates a clear contrast between expectations regarding women’s apologia and the defence strategies female politicians actually use.

A frequently asked question concerns the effects of mediated political scandals. The political impact on politicians’ lives and their careers are often tremendous. Scandals may also have effects on institutions and the political culture. In chapter 9 Tor Midtbø sheds light on another aspect of the “effect” question: do mediated political scandals affect party popularity? His study is

based on an analysis of six different Norwegian political scandals. One reason for expecting scandals to influence party support is, he writes, a *spiral of silence* (Noelle-Neumann 1984): people tend to identify with the majority, and voters may believe that media condemnation of a politician represents everyone else. On the other hand, when journalists have “cried wolf” too long, mediated scandals may be met with increasing indifference and seen as irrelevant. This may be summed up as an *anaesthesia effect* (Meyer 2002).

Midtbø measures trends in party popularity before and after the scandal in question. His statistical analysis builds upon an intervention model, which makes it possible to control for factors unrelated to the scandal and to distinguish between real and random effects. His main conclusion is that the data do not suggest any spectacular changes in party popularity after the scandal.

Chapter 10 by Paul Bjerke focuses on other kinds of effects: those on victims experiencing a mediated political scandal and media hunt. He uses three different Norwegian scandal cases to show how and why these victims suffer. But the author’s scope of analysis is also extended to investigate complex ethical questions: why, and in what way, do media scandals pose ethical questions for the press? Can media practices in connection with political scandals be dealt with by the self-regulatory system of Norway (similar to the other Nordic democratic-corporatist systems) with a limited purpose?

His case studies show that the self-regulatory ethical system in practice excludes an evaluation of media hunts in scandals. The system only handles single issues, and the Press Council tends to discuss isolated aspects of specific news stories, separated from the mediated scandal itself.

In chapter 11 Sigurd Allern and Ester Pollack sum up some of the results and conclusions from the contributions in the anthology and discusses the hypotheses mentioned in this chapter. The authors also reflect on the conflicting roles of journalism in scandalization processes.

## Notes

1. Statement at a press conference at the White House, 26 January 1998.
2. Reproduced in Thompson (2000).
3. In 2007 Gerd-Liv Valla, the elected leader of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), was forced to resign after a two month long media smear campaign. The prime accusation was that she had too tough a style as leader and that one of her subordinate section leaders had been “harassed”. She denied the accusations (Allern 2009). In 2007 Wanja Lundby-Wedin, the elected female leader of the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, was publicly criticised for her performance as board member of an insurance company, owned jointly by the LO and the Employers Organisation (Svensk Näringsliv). The main accusation was that she as part of the board had agreed to a luxurious pension-agreement for a former executive director. She denied the accusations, saying that the board had not been properly informed about the agreement, and in spite of media harassment – survived in her top position as leader of the LO.

4. "Mansgrisen lever" [The male chauvinist pig is alive and well], Barbro Hedvall, Dagens Nyheter, 2 April 2008.
5. "Tafsande statssekreterare fick gå" [Groping State Secretary forced to quit], Dagens Nyheter, 6 November 2008.
6. In an article in the Norwegian periodical *Samtiden* entitled "Kommentariatets diktatur [The dictatorship of the commentariat] two politicians with different political views, Audun Lysbakken (Socialist Left Party) and Torbjørn Røe Isaksen (Conservatives) (2008), jointly criticised commentators' attempts to establish themselves in supreme judgment over politics.

## Chapter 2

### Increased Scandalization

#### *Nordic Political Scandals 1980-2010*

Sigurd Allern, Anu Kantola, Ester Pollack  
& Mark Blach-Ørsten

Today, scandals are a regular feature of mediated political life in the Nordic countries. However, this is a rather recent development. In the first four decades after World War II political scandals were rare events in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. The few that occurred were mostly based on a critique of political acts, seldom involving personal or private moral transgressions. For a long time the Nordic region was even regarded a scandal-free zone compared with other parts of Western Europe and the US. Commenting well-known political corruption cases in Western Germany in the 1980s, John Logue, for example, added that the Scandinavian labour movements and governments “are virtually free of such embarrassments” (Logue 1988: 261). Nobody would award such a political and moral certificate today, neither for the Social Democratic governments or their Conservative and Liberal counterparts in the Nordic countries.

A Swedish example may illustrate how quickly a modern, mediated scandal develops. In the national elections of 2006 the ruling Social Democratic Party was defeated by a Conservative-Liberal alliance. A few days after Fredrik Reinfeldt, the new Prime Minister, had presented his cabinet, four of his ministers were severely criticised by both the press and their political opponents. Their moral transgressions were of two types. Three of the ministers admitted to periodically not having paid their TV-licence fee. Two of them had previously engaged nannies without paying the appropriate taxes. After a number of days of critical headlines about the Ministers’ family finances, half-hearted attempts at public self-criticism and spiteful comments from the pundits of the press, the two female ministers had to resign. The two male cabinet members survived the scandal, one of them being the Minister of Finance. The affair demonstrated the dramatic short-time consequences of a mediated scandal based on the mobilization of public indignation (Pollack 2009, Jacobsson & Löfmarck 2008).

Any long-term effects, however, were more difficult to see. The memory of the license fee and ‘nanny-gate’ scandal quickly faded. News stories became ‘politics as usual’ until new political scandals grabbed the headlines and told

tabloid tales of breaches of moral or political norms. Norwegian, Finnish and Danish politicians have long since experienced the same process; political scandals may develop quickly, but many of them are also easily forgotten (Kumlin & Esaiasson, forthcoming, see also chapter nine).

In this chapter, we analyse and discuss the development of mediated political scandals in four Nordic countries after 1980. The study is a comparative analysis of national political scandals in four Nordic countries, based on a registration and coding of their number, main actors, types and consequences. We compare data from three decades 1980-1989, 1990-1999 and 2000-2009, and we also shortly comment on developments in 2010, the first year of the following decade.

### A register of political scandals

A registration and comparative analysis of political and other types of scandal is always complicated, not least because the term “scandal” is slippery and used in changing ways in different countries and cultures. A behaviour that is regarded as scandalous in one country may be more acceptable in another (King 1986: 174). A special problem is the inflated use of the word by the media. Anything that can be criticised or seen as a transgression of acceptable norms might today be given this label by sources in news reports, even when the news outlet itself treats it as a minor story. Sometimes a news organisation will characterize and promote its own exclusive news as the revelation of ‘a scandal’. However, if few people react, and other news media ignore the case, the story may soon be forgotten.

Scandals are, to an extent, defined by their effects rather than their moral or political characteristics (Barker 1994: 350). In the first phase of a political scandal, accusations about violations of accepted political or moral norms are brought into the public spotlight. If media pundits and interpretive news sources condemn these transgressions as ‘scandalous’, they may threaten the reputation and even the power status of politicians. Without mediation, public criticism and allegations threatening the politician’s reputation, the affair will not develop into a real scandal (Thompson 2000, Lull & Hinerman 1997, Markovits & Silberstein 1988).

Scandals may concern policy issues and the activities and responsibilities of political bodies, but often they primarily involve the political or moral acts of individual politicians, both in their roles as political leaders and as private citizens. In a strict sense, private acts are not “political”. However, if such norm transgressions are mediated and *interpreted* as important because they express something about a politician’s “moral character”, they can develop into political scandals and ruin one’s career. Personalized scandals have a



stronger 'tabloid' quality as a marketable news story than more complex and complicated revelations.

Our main source for the registration of political scandals in the chosen period has been newspaper text archives, especially when comparing the amount of coverage, as well as for basic (and sometimes contradictory) information about the scandal. This has been supplemented by biographical and other factual information from encyclopaedias, as well as information and opinions from political biographies, yearbooks of news events and research literature about political scandals. We have also received valuable information from senior political journalists and communication scholars.

Using media text archives as a data base for researching mediated scandals through time is, however, problematic due to changes in concepts: some decades ago many political scandals – as in the Swedish case – were not characterised as 'scandals' but instead were called 'affairs'. And even in a short-term historical study, going back only a few decades, we meet the classical problem of 'false negatives': some political scandals, mediated as important in their day, may easily be forgotten a decade later if they do not become a part of the nation's collective political memory and used as points of reference.

We have tried to solve this problem by narrowing our operational definition of political scandal to norm transgressions that in the news media's coverage have been interpreted as creating both a *national* and *political* scandal. The minimum requirement to qualify as a national scandal has been whether the case has been *reported* as "scandalous" and given *broad media coverage in at least two leading national media organisations for five days or more*. Normally this means that the scandal also has been reported by the national news agencies and used as news material by several other news outlets.

Concerning *the political* side of the story, the standard requirement in our registration has been whether they either are linked to norm transgressions and mistakes concerning national public policy or to norm transgressions by national political leaders, mediated as political scandals. Those involving only local politicians have, with a few exceptions, been excluded. The exceptions concern a limited number of municipal scandals with political significance that aroused great national interest and wide media coverage. Our registration of participants responsible for such scandals involves politicians in at least one of the following capacities or roles: *Government member (minister or secretary of state); member of the national leadership of a political party; Member of Parliament; mayor or political leader in one of the largest towns, leader of a national interest organisation (including a leader of a National Confederation of Trade Unions)*.

Most of the scandals involve only one politician, but a few include two or more persons. In the discussion about numbers we will therefore differentiate between the number of political *scandals* and the number of *politicians* involved

in such scandals. A few of the politicians have been registered two or more times because they have been involved in more than one political scandal.

The difference between political scandals and scandals in other sectors of public life is sometimes difficult to draw. Scandals occur in all areas of societal life, not only in politics. The lines between political scandals and economic scandals, for example, are often blurred, especially in countries with a large state-run sector and government responsibility for vital parts of the economy. The Norwegian oil and gas industry and the Nordic bank sector are typical examples. This means that it has been necessary to distinguish between economic scandals with clear *political* implications, and those without such effects and consequences. If an economic scandal in a state-owned company did not develop into a public debate about government responsibility leading to initiatives from the respective cabinet minister, it has not been included in the register. Concerning consequences for leaders, the fate of managing directors (CEO's) in state-owned companies has not been included, only the consequences for the politicians involved. In some cases, the final outcome for the government was mainly public criticism without any minister resigning, while the managing directors were forced to resign and board members were changed as a result of political interventions.<sup>1</sup>

### A comparative Nordic perspective

The four countries involved in the study share many similarities, especially concerning political institutions, media systems, economic structure, educational systems and social welfare. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden are all members of the Nordic Council (together with a fifth Nordic country, Iceland) and cooperate in many areas. The Nordic countries are parliamentary democracies with multiparty systems<sup>2</sup>, ranking highly on world lists concerning income, educational level and freedom of press. Another important common factor is the increase in the number of women in public life as parliamentarians, party leaders and government members, a development that has been especially important in the last decades, challenging traditional male networks. On average, more than four out of ten members in Nordic parliaments are women, with Sweden heading the list. This is about double the percentage of the rest of Europe, excluding the Nordic countries.<sup>3</sup>

A number of important differences can be ascertained, however, between the four countries, not least concerning political history and international relations. During World War II, Norway and Denmark were occupied by Germany, Sweden was neutral, and Finland fought the Soviet Union in the Winter War and subsequently allied with Germany in the 'Continuation War' against the Soviet Union. After the war, Norway and Denmark joined NATO, Sweden continued as a West-oriented but neutral country, while Finland developed its careful,

'special relationship' with the Soviet Union. Denmark became a member of the European Economic Community in 1973, while Norway – after a referendum – remained outside. The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the following dissolution of the Soviet Union were especially important for Finland. In 1995, Finland and Sweden joined Denmark in the European Union. Norway chose (after a new no-majority in a referendum) to continue outside the EU, but is together with Iceland integrated into the EU's economic market.

Concerning the relations between the political and media systems, the Nordic region historically belongs to what Hallin & Mancini (2004) named the Democratic Corporatist Model, historically characterized by three 'coexistences': firstly, a high degree of political parallelism coexisting with a strongly developed mass-circulation press. Secondly, a high degree of political parallelism (the Party Press) coexisting with a high level of journalistic professionalism. Political decision makers and political journalists in the decades after World War II often shared a similar agenda and worldview, and cooperated when 'national interests' were a major issue. Thirdly, a significant involvement of the state in the media sector coexisting with strong protection for freedom of the press and a respect for journalistic autonomy and self-regulation.

Commercialization and political changes have in different ways, especially since the 1980s, challenged the Democratic Corporatist Model. Financial investors have expanded into the media market, and important media institutions and corporations are listed on the stock exchange. The Nordic Party Press became history during the same time period, while the independent, popular tabloids began to play an increasingly prominent role in national public life. The public service channels received strong competition in the TV and radio market. Especially after the fall of the party press, political and economic journalism generally became more independent and investigative, increasing the need for public relations, media training and crisis communication among key figures in political and economic institutions. The old types of close personal relations and loyalties between political leaders and press lobbies in the parliaments were weakened.

Some of the contradictory elements in the Democratic Corporatist Model still seem, however, to coexist. The news media are generally market-oriented and independent of the political parties, but some of them still play an active political and ideological role, influencing the agenda and priorities of political parties and other institutions. Leading news organizations outside public service broadcasting do, in many cases, have a political profile linking them with one of the political alliances or blocks, especially concerning government alternatives.<sup>4</sup> News outlets are not biased in the traditional, party-political manner, but their *framing* of political struggles and interventions in political processes are influenced by their own ideological roots, traditions and political history. Nordic media organizations are nowadays supported by different types of press subsidies, and the large, state-owned public service corporations in radio and

television, (including online news services), still play a vital role in the media market (Allern & Blach-Ørsten 2010, Kunelius & al 2009, Herkman 2009, Strömbäck, Ørsten & Aalberg 2008, Esmark & Ørsten 2008, Østbye & Aalberg 2008, Moring 2008, Strömbäck & Nord 2008).

The change in relations between the political system and news media since the 1980s has been characterized as the mediatization of politics, a historical development where adaption to the demands and formats of the news media is a central characteristic (Asp 1986, Asp & Esaiasson 1996). In this process news media have gained increased independence from political institutions, but also increased influence over opinion formation. Adaption may also lead to adoption: “Media logic” (Altheide & Snow 1979) and journalistic standards of newsworthiness have increasingly become a built-in part of politics and the governing process (Strömbäck & Esser 2009, Strömbäck 2008, Hjarvard 2008, Jenssen & Aalberg 2007).

During the past three decades, as in other European countries, political systems have become more open, and the role of political leaders more personalized and visible. Issues of style and appearance have even broken down “some of the fences that separate politics from entertainment and political leadership from media celebrity” (Corner 2003: 2). At the same time, this has made politicians more susceptible to opinion polls and popularity ratings – but also more vulnerable to revelations and accusations of political or moral norm transgressions that may threaten their public standing and political future. Because of the weakening of class-based parties, the loss of “secure” voters and the parallel increase of middle-class floating voters (e.g. Stanyer 2008, Kantola 2003), parties and politicians have become more vulnerable in the face of public indignation.

## The frequency and types of scandals

In this study we have differentiated between *scandals* and *scandalized politicians* as coding units. Some of the scandals involve more than one politician. In four political/economic scandals in the public sector (like the Bofors and Statoil corruption cases mentioned above) none of the national politicians were, on the other hand, made directly responsible. 155 different, national political *scandals* have been registered altogether. The number of scandalized *politicians* registered is 154. However, a few of them have been counted more than once because they have been scandalized in more than one case. Scandals lacking an accused and scandalized national political figure are not included in these person-oriented tables.

Table 2.1 shows the number of mediated national, political scandals in four Nordic countries throughout the three decades (1980-1989, 1990-1999 and 2000-2009). The scandals are registered according to the year they started.

Some of them resulted in investigations and court cases ending several years later. In nearly all of them, a single politician was the scapegoat in the media coverage, but a few scandals – like the Swedish government scandal in 2006 mentioned above – involved more than one politician. Five Swedish and two Finnish politicians have been “scandalized” more than once, in different years and for different reasons. Since the reasons for these scandals are different, we have chosen to code each as a separate case. Table 2.1 confirms that political scandals have gradually become a more regular feature in news media coverage, but with a low yearly average in the two first decades. The significant increase came in 2000-2009, when the number of political scandals reached a level nearly three times higher than in the two first decades. The basic tendency is the same in all countries, but with Sweden in the forefront.

**Table 2.1.** Political scandals by country and decade (1980-2009) (per cent)

Decade	Country				Total
	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	
1980-1989	24	18	29	14	21
1990-1999	22	24	21	20	21
2000-2009	54	58	50	67	58
Total	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(37)	(33)	(34)	(51)	(155)

In table 2.2a and 2.2b the registered political scandals are coded after the type of norm transgression politicians are *accused* of violating. ‘Accused’ means that the coding is based on how the scandal was presented and framed in the media coverage. In several scandals, some of the accusations and evidence was disputed. A scandal based on accusations of tax evasions or corruption has, however, been coded as a scandal concerning economic affairs even if the authorities or the court *later* found that the mediated accusations were untrue or exaggerated. To take another coding example: In the summer of 2010 the Swedish Employment Minister, Sven Otto Littorin, suddenly announced his immediate resignation from government. As the reason for his decision he himself gave the harshness of the media reports about him in a divorce case, including his relations to his children. Shortly afterwards, the popular tabloid Aftonbladet presented another explanation for his resignation: the newspaper had just confronted the Minister with information that their source, a woman, claimed that Littorin had bought sexual services from her in 2006, thus breaking the Swedish prostitution legislation where paying for sex is illegal<sup>5</sup>. Since the affair was framed as a sex-scandal both in the Swedish and international press, we have coded it as such, without any further investigation into the realities of the affair.

The most prominent scandal type in all decades is, as table 2.2a shows, those related to offences in economic affairs, although relatively less dominant

in the two last decades compared with the 1980s. One reason for the importance of scandals concerning economic transgressions may be that the *norms* concerning politicians avoiding taxes and enriching themselves are strong in the relatively egalitarian Nordic countries. The most important *change* in the period 1980-2009 is the increased importance of mediated scandals concerning unacceptable personal behaviour, such as illegitimate sexual affairs, sexual harassment and alcohol abuse. The importance of this type of scandal in the last decade has been especially strong in Finland.

**Table 2.2a.** Political scandals by type of norm transgression and decade 1980-2009 (per cent)

Type of norm transgression	1980-1989	Decade 1990-1999	2000-2009	Total
Offences in economic affairs	56	39	39	43
Offences concerning other laws and regulations	9	–	4	5
Abuse of power	19	24	14	17
Unacceptable talk	6	6	9	8
Unacceptable personal behaviour	6	27	30	24
Other or mixed types	3	3	3	3
Total	100	100	100	100
(N)	(32)	(33)	(90)	(155)

Economic scandals are the dominating type in three of the countries (table 2.2b). The exception is Finland, where scandals concerning personal behaviour top the list. Abuse of power forms a third important category. Scandals linked to other types of offenses are more seldom.

**Table 2.2b.** Political scandals by type of norm transgression and country 1980-2009 (per cent)

Type of norm transgression	Denmark	Country Finland	Norway	Sweden	Total
Offences in economic affairs	38	42	53	39	43
Offences concerning other laws and regulations	8	3	6	2	5
Abuse of power	16	6	18	26	17
Unacceptable talk	5	–	6	16	8
Unacceptable personal behaviour	27	49	9	18	25
Other or mixed types	5	–	9	–	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(37)	(33)	(34)	(51)	(155)

Economic scandals form a very broad and mixed category. Sometimes such scandals concern minor, even trivial transgressions where the *moral* side of the story is the most important. A minister who cheats with taxi receipts in the job will soon discover that a political scandal may develop regardless of the amounts of money involved. Legal and illegal attempts at tax evasion may be a routine affair in some social circles, especially among the affluent, but if a *politician* is caught cheating the public, the loss of trust will immediately cause a problem. Per Ditlev-Simonsen, a 76 year old Conservative politician, former Minister of Defence, and Mayor of Oslo for more than a decade, experienced this when in 2007 – just before the municipal elections – the press revealed that in 1990 he had concealed inherited money in a Swiss bank to avoid Norwegian wealth tax. As a tax case the affair was out-dated, but the political and moral side of the story was not. After a short week of negative media coverage – and attacks from his political opponents – he was forced to resign in disgrace, just a few weeks before his political career would in any case have ended (Waldahl 2009).

In Denmark, in 2010, the leader of the Social Democratic Party Helle Thorning-Schmidt was accused together with her husband of tax evasion in a media storm that lasted most of the summer. But in the end, the Danish tax authorities did not press charges, and both Helle Thorning-Schmidt and her husband were freed of all suspicion. During the media storm, Helle Thorning-Schmidt was very upfront and open about the charges, acknowledging that she may have made mistakes in her communication with the Danish tax authorities. She even returned early from a summer vacation to face media questioning.

*Corruption* is generally regarded as an archetypical political sin. One third of the 66 economic scandals throughout the three decades were based on accusations of corrupt behaviour. During the last decade they became more prominent in Finland than in the other countries; the main reason being accusations of bribery connected with election campaign financing scandals. A careless MP noted that he did not reveal his campaign financiers, as required by law. This information started a major media hunt that revealed several cases of hidden campaign financing. The media coverage lasted from 2008 into 2011 (see chapter 4). As the frame of economic wrongdoings linked with politics was developing for the first of these cases, it was then linked, both reasonably and unreasonably, with a host of other cases. The scandal led to the resignation of Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen in 2010, as well as several criminal investigations concerning major politicians.

Even if the corruption cases in Sweden, Denmark and Norway have been few, some of them did turn into major political events with both economic and political aspects. A prime example is the Bofors case, named after a Swedish weapons manufacturer that signed an arms deal with the Indian government in 1986. This affair is still an embarrassment to the Congress party in India.

Bofors paid large sums of kickback to Indian politicians in order to win a bid to supply India's 155 mm Field Howitzers. The scandal led to the defeat of Rajiv Gandhi's ruling National Congress Party in the 1989 General Elections, and the legal side of the case has been investigated for two decades. In January 2011, Indian tax authorities decided that £ 5 million was paid illegally as a bribe to a friend of the Gandhi family, an Italian businessman involved in the Swedish weapons affair.<sup>6</sup> In Sweden the Bofors affair became a political embarrassment for the government. The then Prime Minister, Olof Palme, had been involved in talks with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi about the deal, and the Swedish government had provided credit support for the weapons export. Investigations by the office of the Auditor General in Sweden revealed that Bofors had transferred SEK 260 million into Swiss bank accounts. However, apart from public criticism, the bribery did not have any direct consequences for the Swedish government or any Swedish politicians.

A case parallel to the Bofors scandal is the Norwegian Statoil scandal from 2003. It was revealed that the state-owned company had bribed relatives of leading Iranian politicians in an attempt to garner energy contracts. Because the Norwegian government is the legal owner of Statoil, the corruption scandal quickly became a political case for the Minister of Oil and Energy. He held the General Manager and the board responsible for the affair and forced their resignation. These actions were also necessary to stop further criticism of the government by the political opposition.

### Breaking norms of personal behaviour

In 1980-1989 only two scandals in the four Nordic countries were related to norms concerning *personal behaviour*. In 2000-2009 the number was 27, representing 30 per cent of all scandals in this decade. However, as mentioned above, there are also important differences between the Nordic countries, with a relatively high incidence of behaviour-scandals in Finland, fewer in Denmark and Sweden, and only three cases in Norway. The three most important subcategories concerning personal behaviour are scandals involving misuse of alcohol, sexual affairs (such as adultery or sexual relations with prostitutes or youngsters) and sexual harassment. The increased incidence of such scandals in the last decade clearly indicates a change in the willingness of news organisations to publish stories about private affairs – and also less public acceptance of old forms of “macho” and male chauvinist behaviour. This change of cultural climate may be one of the reasons why the drinking habits of Finnish politicians are scrutinized more strictly today than a few decades ago.

Scandals concerning sexual behaviour are still few, not least compared with the UK and the US. One of the sex scandals in Finland involved Foreign Minister



Ilkka Kanerva in 2008. He had sent some 200 suggestive text messages to an erotic dancer, some of which were subsequently published by a gossip magazine. The case was linked to the Foreign Minister's well-known reputation as a womanizer, but it also became connected with the story that he had lied when he initially denied having ever sent them (Juntunen & Väliverronen 2010). Both reasons made it easier for the leadership of the Conservative Party [*Kokoomus*] to sack him. However, it was also suggested that the dancer had consciously worked out "a honey trap" for Kanerva and purposefully encouraged him in order to gain publicity. As a result of the scandal she became a media celebrity.

In Denmark in 2008, several media published the story that Jeppe Kofoed, one of the young, up and coming members of the Danish Social Democratic Party, had had a one night stand with a fifteen year old girl who was a member of the party's own youth organization. As a consequence, Kofoed lost his position as spokesperson for the party on foreign policy. However, the media hunt also sparked a public debate where one side argued that since the sex had been consensual, where was "the scandal"? And even though the affair might show poor judgement on the part of Kofoed, it said nothing about his abilities as a politician. As a result, Jeppe Kofoed soon got back his position as the party's spokesperson on foreign policy.

In Norway the only classical "sex scandal" in the three decades occurred in 2001 when Terje Søviknes, the vice-chairman of the right-wing and populist Progress Party, was publicly forced to admit having an affair with a young girl at the national convention of the party's youth association. As a consequence, he resigned from his position in the party leadership, but succeeded in keeping both his wife and his position as the mayor of a rural municipality outside Bergen. His voters quickly forgave Søviknes: in the municipal election in 2003 the local party branch got 45,7 per cent of the votes, a record result.

The examples of scandals concerning sexual harassment (normally regarded as a much greater sin than adultery in the Nordic area) are mostly of a relatively minor kind, but they may still have political consequences. In 2006 Stefan Johansson, the Secretary of State to Finland's Minister for Equality, resigned after newspaper revelations that he had groped several women's breasts at a party held by the Swedish Embassy.<sup>7</sup>

## Power and talk scandals

Scandals connected with the *abuse of power* [power scandals] represent 17 per cent of the scandals in the three decades, and are generally linked to acts of politicians in their public role. An interesting type of power scandal concerns, at least in the eyes of government authorities, national security questions. Three Danish scandals connected with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan can serve

as examples (see chapter 6). In one of these, starting in 2009, the Ministry of Defence tried to stop a book written by an ex-soldier about his experiences in the war in Afghanistan. It was argued that the publication threatened Denmark's national security and therefore the lives of Danish soldiers. As a proof the Ministry of Defence argued that the book had already been translated into Arabic. It was quickly revealed by the press that the "translation" was a machine translation, organised by the Defence Ministry's spin-doctor and then leaked to a newspaper. The affair led to a sharper media focus on the Ministry's PR-initiatives and spin, and it was revealed the Defence Minister himself (or his spin doctor) had leaked confidential information about Danish Afghanistan-soldiers to the press. As a consequence of these revelations, the Minister of Defence was forced to resign.

In Finland a similar scandal led to the resignation of the first female Prime Minister, Anneli Jäätteenmäki, in 2004. It was revealed that she had used secret information in the election campaign to defeat her opponent, the former Prime Minister Paavo Lipponen. Jäätteenmäki suggested that Lipponen had been supportive of waging war on Iraq when meeting President Bush just before the war. After the elections, the media revealed that a frustrated official from the President's office had leaked the memo about Lipponen's visit (Ervasti 2004). Jäätteenmäki resigned.

*Talk scandals*, based on politically unacceptable utterances, is one of the new types of political scandal in the Nordic countries (Ekström & Johansson 2008). In the three decades studied there are only eleven examples, but eight of them occurred in the last period, 2000-2009, most typically in Sweden. Some of these talk scandals occur when politicians more or less spontaneously and carelessly make public comments without thinking about the public's reaction. In 1999 the Swedish Minister Björn Rosengren, after unsuccessful negotiations with the Norwegian government concerning telecommunications, declared that Norway was "the last Soviet state". It was meant as an informal, off the record remark to journalists after a television-interview, but because the microphones still were on, the utterance was made public.

Talk scandals may also occur as the result of a media-directed event, as in the case when investigating journalists from Swedish public service television, using hidden cameras and microphones, succeeded in provoking several local politicians into making racist and anti-Muslim utterances.<sup>8</sup>

## Scandals inside and outside the political field

Political scandals normally concern individual politicians' responsibilities. The norm transgressions are at times directly linked to political acts; on other occasions they are of a more personal or even private character. We have for-

mulated this variable as a question concerning the relation of the politician to the political field, distinguishing between three categories:

1. “A political act” is defined as an act concerning politics and policy questions, directly related to the politician’s official role.
2. “A personal act in a political role” is an act carried out in office but outside the normal realm of politics. An example (from 1986) is the resignation of the Norwegian Minister of Administration and Consumer Affairs. As Minister she had cheated with taxi receipts, an offence the Office of the Auditor General discovered. The sums were not large, but she immediately had to resign and later received a suspended sentence of 45 days for forgery.
3. “A personal act in private role” is an act formally outside the realm of politics, but still with political consequences. Most scandals about tax evasions, sexual harassment or drunken driving fall into this category, interpreted often as scandals because of the discrepancy between private and public modes of conduct. The coding unit in table 2.3a, 2.3b and in the following tables are not scandals, but *politicians* involved in scandals (in a few cases there were more than one national politician involved).

**Table 2.3a.** Norm transgressions inside or outside the political field? Nordic politicians in scandals (1980-2009) by decade (per cent of involved politicians)

Actor role	1980-1989	Decade 1990-1999	2000-2009	Total
Political act	48	46	33	38
Personal act in political role	41	30	40	38
Personal act in private role	10	24	27	23
Total	100	100	100	100
(N)	(29)	(33)	(92)	(154)

Political acts in a political role are, as table 2.3a shows, the largest subcategory in the studied period as a whole, but the relative importance of this category decreased after the millennium. While political acts were carried out by 48 per cent of all actors in 1980-1989, their share was 33 per cent in 2000-2009. In 1980-1989 only 3 politicians (ten per cent of all) were involved in scandals related to their personal acts in a private role. In 2000-2009 this subcategory included 25 politicians, representing 27 per cent of the total number. Transgressions of norms connected with the personal and private life of politicians have clearly gained more importance in mediated scandals.

It may seem somewhat paradoxical that while Nordic societies have become more tolerant and liberal on many issues, political leaders have been

targeted with stricter moral requirements. This may perhaps be explained by two developments. In politics, personalities have become more important and class-based ideologies somewhat diluted. Thus the media scrutinizes political leaders more closely because they personify their party, and to some extent they have taken the place of party ideology. And secondly, the authority of politicians has, in general, been weakened over time. Strict codes were used to protect public authority figures from public criticism, but as societies have changed there is more demand for transparency concerning those in power.

The relative importance of scandals directly linked to political acts has, however, been somewhat less in Finland than in the other three Scandinavian countries, while the importance of personal acts in political or private roles has been greater. One reason might be the Finnish consensual political system that emphasizes co-operation between parties, as well as in government coalitions. The opposition parties need to stay on good terms with the ruling ones since any of them might become partners in the coming government. Thus political disputes do not easily evolve into media hunts and scandals in public affairs.

**Table 2.3b.** Norm transgressions inside or outside the political field? Nordic politicians in scandals (1980-2009) by country (per cent of involved politicians)

Act type	Country				Total
	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	
Political act	49	15	38	46	38
Personal act in political role	30	52	41	35	38
Personal act in private role	22	33	22	19	23
Total	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(37)	(33)	(32)	(52)	(154)

### The importance of being a member of government

During the 30 year period between 1980-2009 a majority of the politicians involved in mediated national scandals were members of government, most of them cabinet ministers; a few were state secretaries. This tendency was basically the same in all three decades (table 2.4a). Since there are far fewer national politicians in governments than outside, the data confirms the idea that government members are more exposed to scandals than those without a government position. This is no surprise. Government members are both the most important and most visible politicians, and the scrutiny of governments' and ministers' actions and personal behaviour is a prioritised, self-proclaimed role of the press. A media hunt ending with a minister's resignation will often be nominated by the media industry as a candidate

for a journalistic award. To trap a parliamentary backbencher does not have the same symbolic value.

**Table 2.4a.** Position of politicians involved in scandals by decade 1980-2009 (per cent)

Position	1980-1989	Decade 1990-1999	2000-2009	Total
Member of government	59	55	54	55
Outside government	41	46	45	45
Total	100	100	100	100
(N)	(29)	(33)	(92)	(154)

However, a somewhat higher proportion of minister and “government-scandals” can be noted for Denmark and Sweden compared with Finland and Norway (table 2.4b).

**Table 2.4b.** Position of politicians in scandals by country (1980-2009) (per cent)

Position	Country				Total
	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	
Member of government	70	42	41	62	55
No government position	30	58	59	39	45
Total	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(37)	(33)	(32)	(52)	(154)

Because government members are the most powerful politicians, it is also to be expected that they become involved in scandals directly related to politics more often than others. Our study confirms this; while scandals connected to clear political acts represent more than fifty per cent of scandals for politicians with a government position, they represent only a quarter of the scandals among politicians without such positions. For non-government politicians their *personal* acts, either related to their political role or a more private role, are the most important categories in scandals.

The importance of the politicians’ government position is also reflected in the party membership of politicians involved. The variable “party block” in table 2.5 has three values: 1) Labour and left socialist parties, 2) Centre parties (social liberal, green and other parties belonging to the political centre) and 3) Conservative parties and right-wing, populist parties. The table reflects the national differences in the parties’ relation to government positions in the period 1980-2009. In Sweden the Social Democratic Party has been the dominant government party throughout the three decades, and therefore most “scandal prone”. In Denmark, the conservative-liberal block has occupied the leading role, while in Finland the Centre Party has normally played a leading role in

the shifting government coalitions. In Norway there has been more of a balance between the different political blocks. The political climate in Sweden is illustrative: historically the Social Democratic Party has held a dominant position, and powerful Social Democratic politicians have therefore been involved in a majority of the mediated political scandals during the period as a whole. However, as soon as the conservative-liberal alliance in Sweden won government power in 2006, they also began to “catch up” with the social democrats in this special area of mediated politics.

**Table 2.5.** Politicians in scandals by party block and country 1980-2009 (per cent)

Party block	Denmark	Country Finland	Norway	Sweden	Total
Labour and left socialists	35	24	44	64	44
Centre parties	5	46	6	15	18
Conservative and right-wing parties	60	30	50	21	38
Total 100	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(37)	(33)	(32)	(52)	(154)

## The consequences of scandals

A characteristic feature of political scandals is that they lead to uncertain outcomes. How “big” the story will be in the news is dependent on many and varied factors, among them competition with other news stories. Accusations concerning norm transgressions are met with counterarguments from the accused. Both friends and foes mobilize. Nobody knows for sure how the public will react or how other political actors will try to intervene. Sometimes the launching of a political scandal may awaken “sleeping dogs” and mobilize rivals and competitors to fuel the media fire (see chapter 3). In other situations, the politicians have a public standing – and political support – that make the effect of the scandalizing process milder.

A variable concerning the main consequences of political scandals has been coded with three categories: 1) Dismissal or resignation from a political position, 2) Only public criticism, and 3) Other reactions (among them politicians who decide to take sick leave or “time-out from politics”). Consequences in the form of court cases are treated as a separate variable.

“Dismissals/resignations” and “only public criticism”, each representing 41 per cent of the main reactions in the whole period, are the two dominating categories (table 2.6).

**Table 2.6.** Main consequences for politicians involved in scandals by country 1980-2009 (per cent)

Consequence	Country				Total
	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	
Dismissal/resignation	49	61	47	37	47
Just public debate/critique	49	39	53	39	51
Other	3	–	–	6	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(37)	(33)	(32)	(52)	(154)

Finland has the highest proportion of scandals (60 per cent) leading to dismissals/ resignations. This might have something to do with the consensual political system in Finland, mentioned above, as well as the high share of corruption cases and offences concerning personal behaviour. As governments in Finland have been based on coalitions between several parties needing to work together, it has been suggested that especially after the early 1990s the politically independent media have taken on the role of political opposition – thus giving rise to a host of political scandals with severe consequences. Sweden, the country with the highest incidence of mediated political scandals, has the lowest proportion leading to dismissal or resignation. One explanation may be that a higher proportion of the mediated Swedish scandals were based on rather trivial norm transgressions.

In the period 1980-2009, Nordic politicians experienced twenty seven cases of scandals resulting in legal processes. 14 were sentenced or fined, six were freed, and one case ended with a legal settlement. In six cases (by summer 2011) a final verdict had not yet been reached.

### Political scandals and gender questions

An interesting question in research about political scandals is whether gender differences exist in the mediated coverage or political outcome (see also chapters 7 and 8). Our investigation of the public debates in connection with national political scandals shows that gender perspectives were non-existent in the 1980s, they were mentioned in a few cases in the 1990s, but became a more regular part of the political picture after the millennium. In one fourth of the 92 political scandals in 2000-2009 gender questions were a part of the public debate; more often in Sweden, rather seldom in Denmark.

As the number of women has increased within the leadership of political parties, parliaments and governments during the period analysed, it is natural to hypothesize that the proportion of scandalized women politicians has increased throughout the three decades. Table 2.7a confirms this. Only 18 per cent of

the politicians involved in political scandals in 1980-1989 were women. This proportion increased to 32 per cent in 1990-1999, and 37 per cent in 2000-2009. The last number is close to the average representation of women in Nordic political institutions today. Thus there is no indication that female politicians are victims of political scandals and media harassment to a *higher* degree than their male colleagues. The proportion of women politicians involved in scandals for the whole period 1980-2009 was highest in Norway and Sweden (table 2.7b).

**Table 2.7a.** Nordic politicians in scandals by gender and decade 1980-2009 (per cent)

Gender	1980-1989	Decade 1990-1999	2000-2009	Total
Male	79	73	63	68
Female	21	27	37	32
Total	100	100	100	100
(N)	(29)	(33)	(92)	(154)

**Table 2.7b.** Nordic politicians in scandals by gender and country 1980-2009 (per cent)

Gender	Country				Total
	Denmark	Finland	Norway	Sweden	
Male	73	76	63	64	68
Female	27	24	38	37	32
Total	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(37)	(33)	(32)	(52)	(154)

Concerning the different types of scandals involving male and female politicians, there are some significant gender similarities – and differences. The relative importance of economic scandals among male and female politicians is the same, but while 39 per cent of the economic cases involving men are related to accusations of corruption, the proportion among women is only 12.

Besides this, women politicians show a somewhat higher proportion of power scandals, while men are “the leading gender” concerning both talk scandals and scandals about personal behaviour. Talk scandals reflect more or less male monopoly; out of 13 cases 12 involve men.

**Table 2.8.** Politicians in scandals concerning personal behaviour by gender

Gender	Type of scandal concerning personal behaviour				Total
	Sex affair	Sexual harassment	Drinking	Other	
Male	100	100	67	50	71
Female	–	–	33	50	29
Total	100	100	100	100	100
(N)	(6)	(5)	(15)	(12)	(38)



A striking trait is the strong association between gender and the *type* of “behaviour scandal”. Only male politicians are represented in the sub groups “sex affair” and “sexual harassment”. The importance of scandals related to the abuse of alcohol is, tragically enough, more equal.

**Table 2.9.** Consequences for politicians in scandals by gender (per cent)

Consequence	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Dismissal/resignation	43	55	47
Only public critique	55	41	51
Other	2	4	3
Total	100	100	100
(N)	(105)	(49)	(154)

In public debates about scandal and gender it has been discussed whether male politicians survive easier in their positions compared to female politicians. A well-known example is the TV-license and “nannygate” scandals in Sweden from 2006, mentioned at the start of this chapter. An analysis of the outcome and consequences of the scandals in our material (table 2.9) confirm that a somewhat higher proportion of scandals involving women politicians ended with dismissal or resignation compared with men.

**Table 2.10.** Consequences for government members in scandals, by gender (per cent)

Consequence	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
Dismissal/resignation	33	61	44
Only public critique	65	39	55
Other	2	–	1
Total	100	100	100
(N)	(52)	(33)	(85)

This tendency, however, is directly related to politicians’ position of political power. Among scandalized politicians with government positions at the outbreak of the scandal, 61 per cent of the women had to resign, while 65 per cent of the men managed to stay in office (table 2.10). For politicians outside government there is no such gender difference. A female government member involved in a scandal is not easily forgiven.

## Discussion and conclusion

The most striking result of the empirical analysis concerning Nordic political scandals is the increased incidence in the last decade. In the 1980s and 1990s,

political scandals became a well-known feature in political media coverage, but the yearly incidence rate was rather low. Political scandals were still relatively unique. After the millennium, the number tripled. It is illustrative that in 2010, the first year of the new decade, the number of mediated political scandals was twelve in the four countries taken together, which is higher than the yearly average in the decade 2000-2009. Sweden is still at the top of the “scandal list”.<sup>9</sup> The 2010-scandals also confirm the picture from the previous decade in most variables, including the importance of government membership. Of sixteen scandalized politicians, seven were women. None of the scandals this year was of a personal character in a private role. Only four of the politicians in 2010 had to resign, most of the cases ended with public debate and criticism. This may be a result of the tendency to mobilize media hunts on the basis of cases concerning minor norm transgressions.

The most important category of political scandals in the three decades concerns transgressions of norms and laws in the economic field, such as attempts at tax evasion, embezzlement or corruption. A minority of the economic scandals involve political institutions or policy questions; most of them are of a personal or even private character, especially in the decade 2000-2009. But it is also worth noting that since the early 1980s, belief in the Nordic welfare states as a corruption-free zone has been severely weakened.

The increased incidence of scandals is a general phenomenon in all four countries, and the type of scandal increasing most in the last decade are norm transgressions concerning personal behaviour such as adultery, sexual harassment or alcohol abuse. However, we have no reason to believe that today's politicians have lower moral standards than their predecessors; on the contrary, concerning both sexual harassment and alcohol abuse, the old male political culture was known to be worse. The accepted norms concerning politicians' personal behaviour have, however, changed. When Finland's Foreign Minister, Kanerva, was dismissed from government after the sex scandal in 2008, President Tarja Halonen commented that the dismissal was a “sign of new times” with the positive effect of “promoting gender equality and proper and decent behaviour” (*Helsingin Sanomat*, 4. April 2008, cited in Juntunen & Väliaverronen 2010). The news media's willingness to reveal norm transgressions like these and turn them into media hunts involving both old and new types of media has increased. Commercial interest for popular media in publishing juicy, personalized stories about leading politicians is also greater than in some past decades.

The relatively high percentage of female politicians in Nordic countries has naturally led to an increase in the number of women in political scandals, though no greater than is to be expected. Women politicians are not more often scandalized than men, but the consequences for scandalized female government members seem to be tougher. The Swedish license-fee and ‘nan-

nygate' scandal in 2006, where two women had to leave the government while two men retained their positions is a striking example. There are also other interesting gender-differences, one of them being the male monopoly on sex scandals and talk scandals.

The large proportion of members of government (ministers and state secretaries) among politicians involved in political scandals reminds us of the importance of power and position. Top politicians are normally more severely scrutinised by the news media. Incriminating news about a Parliamentary backbencher is not necessarily regarded as interesting for a large public, while facts or accusations of norm transgressions in the political elite immediately arouse the bloodhound instinct in professional news organisations. Besides this, investigations about the political and private life of top politicians, not least new government members, belong to journalistic routine today. This more pro-active role of media organisations is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the increased number of scandals in the Nordic region. The party they belong to is of little significance, whereas the power position of the party matters a great deal.

The mediatization of politics is characterized by an adoption of media formats and media logics. With political scandals this has led to a process of developing skills in crisis communication and rhetorical defence strategies by governments, political parties and other institutions. The general public-relations' advice is to put everything on the table, make the necessary excuses, and hope that both the media and the public will forgive. In some cases, defence strategies such as these have proved to be effective. In other scandals, especially when the politicians involved feel the accusations are wrong or greatly exaggerated, instrumental types of crisis communication may be felt to be immoral.

This aspect may create the biggest political and moral dilemma regarding political scandals. They provide, at least sometimes, important revelations based on investigative journalism concerning those in power – a vital and necessary element in a democracy. However, sometimes the political substance is of secondary importance. Scandals may also be the result of planted rumours and exaggerated accusations, the result of political intrigues and rivalries, used by market-oriented media organisations hunting for a juicy story. In these cases, they may undermine democracy instead of strengthening the public debate.

There are no easy ways to solve this dilemma. One answer may be to both accept "scandals" as a part of the democratic process, and at the same time view media hunts with an independent, sceptical and critical eye.

## Notes

1. Because our aim has been to base the study on a registration of *all* mediated political scandals in 1980-2009 meeting the criteria mentioned above, we have not included calculations of association and significance (like the chi-square based Cramer's V) used in analysis of

random samples from a particular population. We have, none the less, tried to interpret the significance of differences with care, not making much out of differences based on small numbers.

2. The Finnish election system deviates, however, from the other Nordic countries in one particular aspect, the individualized character of the voting system: "Votes are cast in direct proportional elections, where electors always cast their vote for individual candidates" (Moring 2008: 47).
3. *Women in National Parliaments. Situation as of 30 November 2010*. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>).
4. Finland may be an exception and special case here, partly because the biggest dailies have a nearly monopolistic market position and a "catch-all" strategy, perhaps because the Finnish election system is more person-oriented and the government alliances less stable than in Denmark, Norway and Sweden.
5. Sälde sex till Littorin [Sold sex to Littorin], <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article7446604.ab>
6. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/8257663/Sonia-Gandhi-under-pressure-over-Bofors-scandal-relationship.html> (Downloaded January 11, 2011).
7. [http://www.upi.com/Odd\\_News/2008/11/07/Finnish-official-resigns-after-groping/UPI-56801226038105/](http://www.upi.com/Odd_News/2008/11/07/Finnish-official-resigns-after-groping/UPI-56801226038105/)
8. Andén-Papadopoulos 2003, Johansson 2006. See also chapter 1.
9. The only country without any *new* national political scandals in 2010 was Finland. One reason may be continuing media coverage of the election finance scandals that started in the years before 2010.

## Chapter 3

# Ten Commandments for the Scandalization of Political Opponents

Anders Todal Jenssen & Audun Fladmoe

Political scandals are often staged as the political villain transgressing the norms and moral principles respected and upheld by ordinary citizens (Thompson 2000). Journalists seem to act as moral guardians on behalf of the public outrage, describing the misdeeds in detail in a language characterized by pathos (Alexander 1988; Jacobsson and Löfmarck 2008). Political scandals are sometimes described as results of state of the art investigating journalism. Although journalists are arguably important actors in mediated scandals, the significance of the political actors and their power struggles is often overlooked. Sometimes, events take a direction suggesting that scandals might have been initiated, or at least reinforced, by political actors from rival organizations, even between rivals within the same organization. Let us just briefly discuss a few internationally well known examples before we turn to the Norwegian cases.

When the headquarters of the National Committee of the Democratic Party in the Watergate building was burglarized by people linked to the Republican president Nixon's staff, this was just the first of a series of disclosures of the dirty war between the parties and the Nixon administration use of surveillance. The Democrats successfully used Congress hearings to display the wrongdoings of the Republican administration to the public. According to Lang and Lang (1983), it was the various official hearings and not the press that kept the scandal going. The indignation was, as might be expected, strongest among Democrat voters. Nevertheless, a significant number of Republicans in Congress also supported the hearings, probably out of concern for the upcoming midterm elections (Just and Criegler 2000). Nixon resigned from office to avoid impeachment and to make it possible for Vice-president Ford to restore the Republican Party. But when the Democrats nominated "Mr. Clean", Jimmy Carter, prior to the 1976 presidential election, the Republicans did not stand a chance. Twenty years later, the Republican Party attempted to use the "Lewinsky scandal" in the same manner. The Republican majority in Congress used the "machinery" created after Watergate for official investigation, appointing

a “special investigator” to prepare an impeachment process (Schudson 2004). Unfortunately for the Republicans, the public outrage was mostly limited to the Christian-Conservative voter segment (Miller 1999, Zaller 1998) such that Clinton ended up being re-elected for a second term.

More recently in France, the conflict between President Sarkozy and former Prime Minister Villepin began when both were pretenders for the party throne. Sarkozy was smeared in the “Clearstream scandal” when his name turned up on a list of persons who had benefitted from money laundering. The list turned out to be a forgery. Sarkozy initiated a public investigation into whether Villepin used his governmental position to initiate a police investigation of Sarkozy and leaked the story to the press, in spite of being aware that the list was fake. Thus far (as of April, 2011), Sarkozy has not succeeded in the courts of law, but he has reached what was probably his main goal: Villepin has left the party, despite being cleared of all charges in court.

In this chapter, the ambition is to highlight the role of politicians and political parties in scandals involving other politicians. We suspect that political actors play a more important role in all stages of scandals than most observers realize. In the examples presented above, the scandals were used as weapons in political struggles. We believe scandals may be even more effective weapons when the part played by other politicians is less obvious from the public perspective. In order to explore these claims, we discuss a number of scandals with which we are familiar. Unfortunately, from a comparative perspective, all of these scandals have taken place in Norway. However, we believe that the mechanisms discussed also apply to other Nordic countries.

## Dependency on personal reputation

Political actors live by their name and reputation. They must be nominated and re-nominated by their party organisation; they face the judgment of the electorate in successive elections and they need personal authority to be effective as negotiators – both within their own party or organisation and in relation to other parties and organisations. Further, they are increasingly dependent upon communication with journalists that take them seriously. Political actors’ dependency on personal reputation makes them vulnerable, and their vulnerability increases by the fact that many journalists believe political actors should adhere to higher moral standards than ordinary citizens. During a political scandal, the name and reputation of a political actor is at stake. In a seemingly chaotic stream of information, the actor’s transgression is highlighted, discussed and assessed by journalists and pundits before the media audience. Dramatic metaphors are often used to describe the scandal: the scandal “explodes” in the media, the politician is “hit” by new information;

the party is “shaken” by the revelations, and so forth. These metaphors suggest that scandals are processes beyond human control; they are unpredictable, unforeseeable and hence, unintelligible phenomena. There is some logic in this argument. When a transgression becomes publicly known through the media, the scandalized actor loses information control; he or she can do next to nothing to defend his or her reputation. The main source(s) of information and the main journalist(s) also lose control as other sources and journalists enter the public stage. The initial scandal tends to grow as new information is brought to the attention of the public. To describe scandals as phenomena beyond human control is nevertheless misleading. Many actors – not least politicians – try to influence the process and outcome of the scandal to the best of their ability. To highlight the deliberate actions in the process rather than the phenomenon (the transgression and publication) we use the concept “scandalization” rather than “scandal”.

Mass media has become the modern pillory, but it is not the media alone which decides who will be scandalized. In this chapter we discuss the role of other political actors as covert sources, as avengers, as participants in party networks, and as allies of the victim of scandalization. Our intention is to shed light on how and why political actors contribute to the scandalization of other political actors. Through the discussion we hope to find answers to some of the questions that have puzzled us following some of the more recent scandals in the Nordic countries. The main questions are:

- Why are private, apolitical transgressions more dangerous than transgressions linked to the role as political actors?
- Are victims of scandalizations right when they claim to be victims of conspiracy?
- Why don't all scandals end with a resignation from office?
- Can scandals exist without transgressions; can there be smoke without fire?

### A Machiavellian perspective

The political culture in the Nordic countries can be described as consensus-oriented, pragmatic and is built on high levels of trust – both between political actors and between voters and political actors. Political actors seek out practical solutions to social problems with the widest possible political support. Agreements and compromise between the parties are usually respected. Peoples' trust in politicians and political parties varies over time (Aardal 2007) but the belief that politicians are trustworthy and capable is stronger in the Nordic countries

than in most other parts of the western hemisphere (Listhaug 1995, Listhaug and Ringdal 2008, Miller and Listhaug 1999). Political scandals shake this perfect idyll. Through the flickering media images of compromising details, denials and confessions and condemning commentary, people obtain a glimpse of a ruthless struggle for power, positions and reputation between political actors. Within the “realistic position” in political science, this is the true face of political life. In politics there is only one law: Might makes right.<sup>1</sup> In their struggle for power and authority, the political actors respect morals and ethics only when backed by power, and they refer to morals and ethics only when these may be used as a weapon against rivals and enemies. In line with this perspective, we ask whether *scandals have become an instrument of power political actors can use to their advantage*. This does not mean that we share the description of the true nature of politics, made within the realistic tradition. Rather, it means that we believe that insights from this tradition may be relevant for anyone interested in studying the dark side of politics. Bitter struggle fought with all means available is also one side of political life.

Hardly anyone has discussed the logic of undisguised power-politics in a more intriguing and more frightening manner than Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527). His most renowned work, *Il Principe* (The Prince; first published 1532), is a textbook for princes and other power-seekers in Italy. Through the discussion of historical examples, Machiavelli extracts the principles for gaining and maintaining power. Many of his insights, mainly from the Italian Renaissance, seem astonishingly relevant for our discussion. Machiavelli’s explicit discussion of the art of conspiracy, treason and manipulation as political means enraged many of his contemporaries, not least the Catholic Church. The good rulers were supposed to set a moral and religious standard for their subjects. Machiavelli refuted this argument. Since other political actors behaved both as (moral) men and (amoral) beasts, the prince must master both the means of power of men and of beasts. Hence, the prince has to be able to justify his acts in the moral world of men, but simultaneously be as smart as the fox and as strong as the lion. There are no moral rules in the kingdom of animals. Reputation is nevertheless important. The prince must guard his reputation, not because reputation or popularity is important as such, but because it is a safeguard against rebellion. It is more important to be respected than to be loved. In some cases, the prince must be capable of eliminating other political actors permanently. For Machiavelli’s Prince, assassination was – if correctly executed – one of several possible means to get rid of someone blocking the road to power. According to Machiavelli the use of violence without a well-defined purpose is unsuitable. Random use of violence creates unnecessary opposition, motivates revenge, and puts the prince in great danger of assassination. To protect oneself from those seeking revenge at all costs is almost impossible. The prince should therefore employ violence with great precision,



preferably at a time when the victim is unpopular. He should conceal his actions, although the fact that people suspect the prince might become a power asset in itself. Rumours may increase the prince's popularity, and – more importantly – increase respect for his power.

As a humble contribution to this tradition, we will try to take our discussion to the point where we can present a set of maxims for the princes and princesses of our time who want to make use of scandals as a political weapon.

### Everything is fair in love and war... But not in politics?

In political scandals, the moral deceit is highlighted, and thereby we are reminded of what is considered “the moral good”. The journalists act as the moral guardians of modern society (cf. Jacobsson and Löfmarck 2008). According to sociologist Jeffrey Alexander (1988), journalists take on the responsibility of restoring the moral order of society. If the victim of scandalization defends his behaviour with arguments like “nobody is perfect”, but refuses to leave office, step down, or by other means shows remorse through action, he will face increased condemnation from the journalists. In this climate of hysterical moral pathos, it becomes important for other political actors to appear immaculate. Searching for public attention by the use of dubious methods to smear other political actors may become dangerous to oneself. If we are to believe some political commentators, it is proper to expect a higher standard of conduct from political actors than ordinary people. Through such argumentation, the drop for “victims” already at the edge of the cliff increases. Political actors rarely arrive for rescue operations when their colleagues are being scandalized, especially if they fear that the scandal may escalate. That anyone should come to the aid of political enemies is perhaps improbable, but most political actors will also be careful not to be too closely linked to formal political allies in free fall. One might be stigmatised as someone who “takes light” on important ethical issues. But even worse, one risks joining the losing team by allying with an actor without a future after the scandal. Anyone who pays attention to what the actors say during scandals may get the impression that political actors, as a group, respect and live by the highest moral standards – a group of people who would never use extortion, scandalization or other dubious methods in their struggle for power and status.

From Norwegian political history we are nevertheless familiar with several examples of political actors scandalizing other actors. The former leader of the social democratic youth organisation (Norwegian labour Youth: AUF) committed suicide in 1970. Some years before, one of the tabloids revealed that his organisation had received funding from the CIA. As a result his political career ended at the national congress of the youth organisation in 1969. The source

was another member of AUF, who favoured a tougher criticism of US foreign policy. Prime Minister Borten (the Centre Party) had to leave office in 1971 after it was leaked to the press that he had shown confidential documents to political activists outside the government. The source was a press secretary in the prime ministers office. The press secretary opposed the prime minister's policy on the most controversial current issue at the time (EU membership) and was a member of another party (the Conservatives) within the shaky government coalition. Prime Minister Nordli (Labour, 1976-1981) complained in his memoirs that no room was closed to the press. He even lost control over his own resignation, because the news of his failing health was leaked by the party's press organisation. In 1989 the Minister of Public Administration, Halvorsen (Labour), had to leave office because members of her own party branch disclosed her economic misconduct. In 2001 the deputy leader of the Progress Party, Søviknes, had to step down when a faction within his party made public his extramarital affair with a young party member (See Midtbø 2007: 78-81 for more examples of political scandals in Norway). In many other cases, sources of the information that forced political actors out of office are, judged by the nature of the information, other political actors – but the sources usually remain unknown.

Sometimes political actors are exposed by people that have discovered their "Achilles' heel"; their dependence on reputation. Before the local elections of 2007, the mayor of Oslo, Ditlev-Simonsen was exposed by his former son-in-law (Waldahl 2009) who wanted to include the hidden family fortune in the divorce settlement with the mayor's daughter, and commenced what the mayor described as "direct threats" to him.<sup>2</sup> When the son-in-law did not succeed, the information about the Swiss bank accounts was passed on to a newspaper. The mayor did not stand for re-election, so the son-in-law's leverage on him would be reduced after he left the political scene. The son-in-law achieved maximum effect by making the information public at the peak of the election campaign. The case is interesting because it makes evident that people, even outside the political sphere, have seen the vulnerability of political actors, and are willing to take advantage of it.

In this particular case, actors from competing parties took part in the second stage of the scandalization (Fladmoe 2008). The leader of the opposition in the city council demanded the mayor's immediate resignation with a reference to the importance of the mayor as a "role model". The Minister of Finance, Halvorsen, joined the ranks of those demanding the mayor's resignation. Her ambition was to drag the mayor's party into the scandal by arguing that his transgression was characteristic of politicians in the Conservative Party. The rhetoric of the opposition leader was much more subtle. He simultaneously demanded the mayor's resignation and described him as an honourable man. The spokesperson for one of the minor opposition parties was less concerned

about people suspecting him of using the scandal to his own advantage when he stated that strict discipline was appropriate for such rabble, not a tap on the shoulder (*ibid.*).

Political actors may also set traps for other political actors. When it was made public in 2008 that the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Haga, had leased a storehouse as accommodation without proper authorisation, the deputy leader of the conservative opposition party, Foss, told journalists that Haga would have to leave office if she had also failed to report the income to the tax authorities. As a former Minister of Finance, Foss was familiar with the intricate tax rules on this point.<sup>3</sup>

When the leader of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), Valla, was scandalized in 2007, several sleeping bears were disturbed (Allern 2009). Valla had a reputation for harsh treatment of her staff. People with whom Valla had come into conflict with earlier in her political career saw an opportunity for revenge. Ten years earlier, when Valla became minister of justice, she substituted the state secretaries appointed by her predecessor. Belonging to the same party as Valla, the two state secretaries had expected to stay on their posts. In 2007, both were more than willing to share their views on Valla's personality and manner of leadership with journalists. One of them was instrumental in the publication of the alleged transgression. When the scandal developed into a fight for trustworthiness between Valla and Yssen (the employee that described Valla as bossy and brutal), Reiss-Andersen strongly supported the allegations against Valla in public.

Former prime minister, Jagland, experienced the same in 2000 (Allern 2001b, Thorbjørnsrud 2001). When he became prime minister he replaced the minister of culture, Kleveland, much to her dismay. When a leadership struggle erupted in the Labour Party, Kleveland took the opportunity to describe Jagland as a person unable to communicate with people, confirming the criticisms raised by persons both inside and outside the party. Jagland was stigmatised in the media as socially incompetent and unsophisticated. Kleveland highlighted the communication skills of Jagland's opponent, Stoltenberg. She also described Jagland as "a man of the past, blocking the way for the man of the future".

Minister of defence, Krohn Devold, faced severe problems during her time as a minister (2001-2005) (Fladmoe 2008). Reforms of downscaling and rationalising the armed forces were in progress, and Krohn Devold was blamed for both the administrative and the economic problems related to this. The Office of the Auditor General of Norway had not finished processing the 2003 budget deficit of the Ministry of Defence when a newspaper was able to reveal that the budget deficit for 2004 was even worse. Based on leaks, the paper wrote on its front page that the 2004 deficit had reached one billion NOK. This was the first of a long series of leaks concerning problems within the military that were blamed on the minister. The anonymous source(s) was most likely a faction of

frustrated high-ranking officers. Politicians from the opposition parties used the leaks indiscriminately. The Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs in the Storting served as a platform for interrogations of the minister. According to the rules of this committee, a minority of MPs can call for public hearings on important issues. This weapon was used extensively, at least as a verbal threat in the mass media. The hearings dragged on for almost a year. When a vote of no-confidence was finally called, only one of the four opposition parties supported the motion. Although it is often said that the “parliament only knows the minister”, the MPs who orchestrated the hearings evidently knew someone within the armed forces as well. They used the information leaked to the media (and directly to them) to keep the hearings going. Whenever the public lost interest, a new scandalous problem was brought to their attention. During the last months of the hearings most observers, including the media, had realised that the opposition wanted to drag out the issue into the upcoming election campaign, and lost interest. The motion of no-confidence acquired very little attention by the media.

### “Some of us have been talking...”

The phrase “some of us have been talking ...” has a special meaning in Norwegian political history. According to various sources, Gerhardsen, prime minister for most of the 1945-1965 period, used this phrase whenever he and the president of The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), Nordahl, had reached an agreement outside the formal channels of power.<sup>4</sup> The phrase has become synonymous with concealed power structures, conspiracy; power executed behind closed doors.

It is not unusual that scandalized political actors claim that they have fallen victims of a conspiracy or campaign.<sup>5</sup> Such allegations have often been interpreted as dilutions produced in a stressful situation. The actors, both journalists and politicians, usually deny any wrongdoings if their role in the scandal is highlighted. Hence, allegations like this are rarely taken seriously, and hardly ever result in further inquiries. We argue that the impressions of conspiracy and campaign have their roots in reality. Whether “conspiracy” is the best concept for describing what the victims of scandalization experience is a question of the denotation ascribed to the concept.

Among political actors there is a lot of “talk” about other political actors: about their competence, their issue positions, their public appeal, their friends and foes, and their political careers. It has become a matter of routine to make a background check on candidates for public office. The party organisations usually scrutinize all candidates as part of the nomination process. When a politician is candidate for a position in the government, the prime minister’s

staff habitually makes further inquiries into the candidate's conduct to avoid future scandals. Most of the "talk", however, is of a very different nature. Political actors have an interest in other political actors as potential allies and collaborators, as opponents and rivals. Much of this interest is directed towards actors within the same party. Whereas the party leaders on behalf of their parties conduct discussions and agreements *between parties*, everybody takes part in the *internal* party processes. Through experience the party insiders know who within a party that talks with, agrees with and votes with whom. When new controversial issues arise and one of the key figures within the party takes a stand, the party insiders instinctively know who within the party will support and oppose that position. The insider knows which party members had most likely been consulted before any statement was made, and which members are outside the actor's circle of confidentiality. On the other hand, the great majority – the political outsiders – will not recognise these patterns. Whenever a scandalized political actor publically claims to have fallen victim of a conspiracy, the majority will not have a clue to what he is talking about. Those that want to ridicule such claims, have an easy task vis-à-vis the public.

If we substitute the concept "conspiracy" with the less value-laden concept "network", it might be possible to discuss the phenomenon in a more productive manner. In sociology "a network" is described as a bundle of informal social relations, which is more extensive and less intimate than a group of friends. Granovetter's discussion of "the strength of weak ties" (Granovetter 1973) often informs the argument: "When it comes to promoting one's personal career and influence, a wide group of acquaintances may be more effective than a small group of devoted "friends". Norwegian researchers interested in party typologies, use the concept of "the network party" as an alternative to "the modern caucus party" (cf. Heidar 2001, Heidar and Saglie 2002): They argue that within the framework of the formal party organisation, informal networks take care of policy-making, decision-making and recruitment. These networks are organized around the party's leading actors. Whereas the party regulations describe a flow of power, initiative and talent from the party's rank and file member to the party leadership, the network party typology describes a flow in the opposite direction. Party leaders exert party power by controlling networks within the formal party organisation. According to this argument, networks within parties are the rule, not the exception. Political actors are often judged by their ability to form and control networks.<sup>6</sup> In these discussions networks are often seen as the basis for the political actors' power.

Aspiring individuals would like to be part of the network of political actors with sufficient power and influence to help them rise within the party. Because political leaders come and go, and because there is often more than one powerful leader within a party, typically there is more than one network within the party organisation. It is unavoidable that conflicts between the leading figures

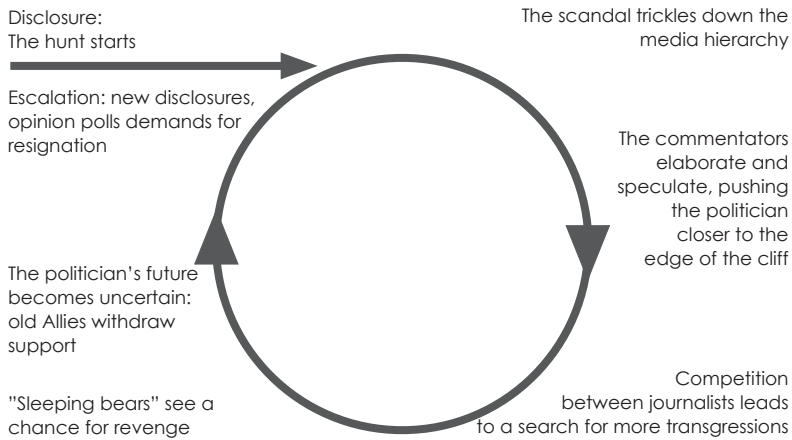
develop into conflicts between their respective networks. The rivalry between Jagland and Stoltenberg discussed above was described as a conflict between two informal networks (Allern 2001b, Takvam 2002). The conflict between Valla and Yssen soon mobilised the network that had brought Valla to the top of The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) and the network organized by her opponents within LO, mainly within the male dominated unions in the private sector (Tranøy 2007). Whenever a scandalized actor claims to see a conspiracy, he is probably observing a network.

### The acceleration of a scandal

Can similarities in interests or positions within social structures lead actors to develop – independently of each other – a uniform behaviour that seems highly orchestrated to an observer? Several metaphors have been used to describe the frenzy that scandals create among journalists. Journalists have been described as a hunting team, a wolf pack, driven by thirst for blood, etc.<sup>7</sup> Not only will the journalists hunt down their prey, their acts are characterised by conformity and lack of second thought. According to Petersson (1994), journalists are motivated by a populist-like criticism of the political establishment, which – together with commercial considerations – have become a part of their profession. Scandals sell newspapers. A political actor that wants to scandalize another political actor will find it easy to attract the attention of journalists. In some cases journalists take the lead, talking political actors into scandalising other political actors.<sup>8</sup> It is not hard to understand why the scandalized actors may interpret this as a conspiracy in the media. It does not help that after days of harsh criticism and negative focus, journalists – in many cases the chief editors – often take on a role as a political actor, demanding the immediate resignation of the political actor. During the scandals the journalists compete to be ahead of the pack, and have little time to contemplate their own behaviour. The media speaks as with one voice.

In Figure 3.1 below, we have illustrated the many processes that make a scandal accelerate and keep it going.

When a scandal is made public, the news is often exclusive. One newspaper or broadcaster has the story but the rest will follow immediately if well-known political actors are involved. Since competing media outlets need time to catch up, they often retell the original story from a slightly different angle. The most resourceful media are those which are likely to come up with new information. But until that happens, everyone from the leading TV stations to the smallest local radio station retell the story with their own twist. As a consequence, the scandal seems to grow as new twists and new arguments – not necessarily new information – are presented and the moral pathos increases. If no new discrediting information is presented and the political actor avoids a secondary

**Figure 3.1.** The hunt: conspiracy or cumulative effect?

scandal by denying or trivialising the transgression, the media will often turn to the “commentators” – usually senior political journalists – to prolong the scandal. The commentators talk up the scandal by highlighting the seriousness of the transgression, underlining the principle of equality before the law, demanding resignation, etc. The commentator with the most extreme analysis is likely to attract most attention from the media. Any attempt to reply will most likely lead the scandalized actor into a secondary scandal. In many cases the secondary scandal turns out to be more damaging than the primary scandal.<sup>9</sup>

If the scandal drags on, “sleeping bears” are likely to awake. On the road to political power, most actors have made some enemies, not least among those with similar ambitions themselves. Some of them might see the scandal as an opportunity to retaliate. They often bring in new information: the information may not be linked to the current events, but it often speaks to the character of the scandalized actor. If friends and colleagues have come to the aid of the scandalized actor, those seeking revenge often silence them. Lending support to the scandalized actor becomes more risky when old transgressions start turning up. When it becomes more probable that the political actor will fall than that he will survive the scandal, supporting him becomes irrational. Helping a doomed actor means risking one's own political future. When the old allies withdraw from the battlefield, the media content becomes even more biased. After some days, it is time for an opinion poll to confirm the effect of the scandal on the public. Backed by the opinion polls, commentators and chief editors tend to become more daring, demanding – if not raised already – immediate resignation.

Recent studies by Allern (2001b, 2009) and Fladmoe and Jenssen (2009) suggest that there are nuances within the media coverage of political scandals. The wolf pack metaphor exaggerates the uniformity of the media output. The

journalistic ideology of impartiality and scrutiny does not tell the whole truth. In the study by Fladmoe and Jenssen (2009) concerning a comparison of different scandals in different newspapers, the results showed that the leading tabloid, *Verdens Gang* (VG), took the lead in the scandalization irrespective of political colour – and irrespective of the seriousness of the scandal. VG's coverage in the four scandals studied can be described as wholeheartedly negative. The tone in coverage in the three other papers published in Oslo varied systematically with the political colour of the scandalized actor. The conservative paper, *Aftenposten*, and the neo-liberal, *Dagens Næringsliv*, were less harsh in their coverage of political actors belonging to the right wing. The social democratic paper, *Dagsavisen*, was less critical when a left-wing actor was scandalized. When a political actor from the “other side” was scandalized, the three papers were just as harsh in their commentary and almost as negatively biased in their news coverage as VG. Although the formal links between parties and newspapers have long been broken, a “media-party parallelism” (Bjerke 2001, Hallin and Mancini 2004) seems to be in place when political actors are scandalized. The results from Fladmoe and Jenssen (2009) are summarised in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1.** Comparison of important aspects of four scandals involving leading Norwegian political actors

	Prime Minister and party leader Jagland	Minister of Defence Krohn Devold	LO-Norway leader Valla	Mayor of Oslo Ditlev-Simonsen
Theme	Competence	Budget deficit	Personnel policy	Tax fraud
Leaks from political actors?	Numerous	Probably	Both from inside and outside the organisation	No
Political actors as anonymous “judges”?	Yes	Probably, but blended with army sources	Yes, the papers seem to pick sources supporting their framing	Anonymous sources outside the political sphere.
Political actors carrying “wood to the fire”?	Numerous	Yes, through The Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs	Numerous	Yes
Unanimous journalists?	Conservative leaning papers more negative. Tabloid negative.	Social democratic leaning papers more negative. Tabloid negative.	Conservative leaning papers more negative. Tabloid very negative.	Somewhat less negativity in conservative papers. Tabloid negative.
Mobilisation of public opinion?	Opinion polls and interviews with party representatives	Opinion polls	Opinion polls	Opinion polls
Scandal ends with:	Resignation	Minority supports vote of non-confidence	Resignation	Resignation



The analysis suggests both that far from being unbiased, the newspapers – with the exception of sensationalist tabloid VG – were not altogether politically unbiased in their reporting, and scandals have become part of the rivalry between the political parties. It is extremely rare that an actor from another party or organisation comes to the aid of the scandalized, and when this does occur it is after the media has lost interest in the scandal.

### Tax cheats and a one billion deficit

Why is a few hundred thousand in tax evasion more dangerous for a political actor than a billion in public budget deficits? The Mayor of Oslo (Norway), Per Ditlev-Simonsen, had to leave office due to a few hundred thousand in tax evasion (Waldahl 2009). Norwegian Minister of Defence, Kristin Krohn Devold, remained in position despite of repeated budgetary deficits reaching the total sum of one billion NOK (Fladmoe 2008). Is it more important for a ministers' reputation to have order in the private economy than to have order in the ministry's budget? Shouldn't political actors primarily be judged by their skills as political leaders?

A scandal is triggered when compromising information is made public. The scope of a scandal is often judged by the "righteous indignation" awakened by the publication. The greater the violation, the stronger the resentment becomes. Most people are not very concerned with politics and they have limited detailed knowledge about formal politics and administration.

Politics is also an area characterised by conflict and persistent disagreement. If there is a budgetary deficit reaching a billion NOK in a ministry, many will be unsure whether this is a big or small transgression, whether the minister can be held responsible, and whether the public criticism is only an expression of the usual disagreements between the government and opposition, etc. Conversely, it is easier for people to form an opinion about tax evasion, illegitimate sex, and blatant lies. Most people have a clear perception of what pattern of behaviour is acceptable, and moral issues are recognisable from everyday life. For those who want to scandalize someone, it is important that the moral outrage is loud and real. The likelihood of a successful scandal, i. e. a scandal that is damaging, can therefore increase with an apolitical issue which is easily understandable, more so than an issue of complex politics. A clear, transparent scandal also gets great media coverage more easily than an unclear and complex issue (Galtung and Ruge 1965).

In the early stages of a scandal it is important for the media to find "voices" that can express the "righteous anger" a scandal is expected to trigger. These voices are often presented as representative spokespersons for a majority of angry citizens.<sup>10</sup> In reality, it is by no means certain that they represent a major-

ity, especially if they require the resignation of a political actor. For example, studies of public opinion concerning the Lewinsky scandal has shown that the “moral outrage” in the wake of the public hearings and Clinton’s lies, was primarily expressed by citizens of the political-religious right (Miller 1999). Clinton had little support in these groups before the scandal. In groups more friendly towards the president, support actually increased despite the persistent negative pressure from mass media. This can probably be explained by the reaction towards attempts to scandalize him. In other words, media outlets do not need support from a majority of the population to demand the resignation of a political actor, as long as they find someone who expresses outrage and demands resignation. It does not seem to be difficult to find people who are willing to express such views publicly in the media; and should it be difficult there is always the possibility to contact another journalist and introduce him as a “commentator”. After a few days of negative, biased media coverage, it is time for opinion polls to document the popular response to the scandalization. If the politician is still in office, a survey of key party members may further weaken the victim’s position and chance of survival.

### An aura of scandal

The moral indignation triggered by a scandal has its own rhetoric and atmosphere. An actor who comments on a scandal can show his indignation and anger through the choice of words, voice and facial expression. Words such as “outrageous” and “reprehensible”, raised eyebrows and an indignant voice are characteristics of the scandal. Consequently, the actor signals the seriousness of the case so that even those who not fully comprehend the content of it are convinced. Even when taking into account that it is the highest screaming actor who is being referred, one often wonders if the “righteous indignation” is not exaggerated when taking the content of the case into account. One classic story from Norwegian politics is about a speaker who had written in the margin of the script: “Poor argument – raise your voice”.<sup>11</sup> The speaker does not trust the substance of the argument and rather use a rhetorical tool. Through the use of a raised voice he hopes that the argument is perceived as being of great importance. Those who want to scandalize someone can create an “aura of scandal”, even though the actual violation of societal norms is minimal.

In the so-called “Jagland case” an “aura of scandal”, was created without any violation. Jagland had not had a mistress, cheated on taxes or violated any political procedure. Nevertheless, the “Jagland-case” was largely perceived as a scandal. Much of what Jagland said and did was ridiculed, and he experienced broad criticism and slander from both journalists and actors within the party supporting his rival for the party throne.<sup>12</sup> One example was how, as an op-

position leader in parliament, he was first criticised for an relentless hard line towards the current government on the issue of cash support for parents of small children. Then he changed the line, and was criticised by the same actors for being compliant towards the government (Fladmoe 2008).

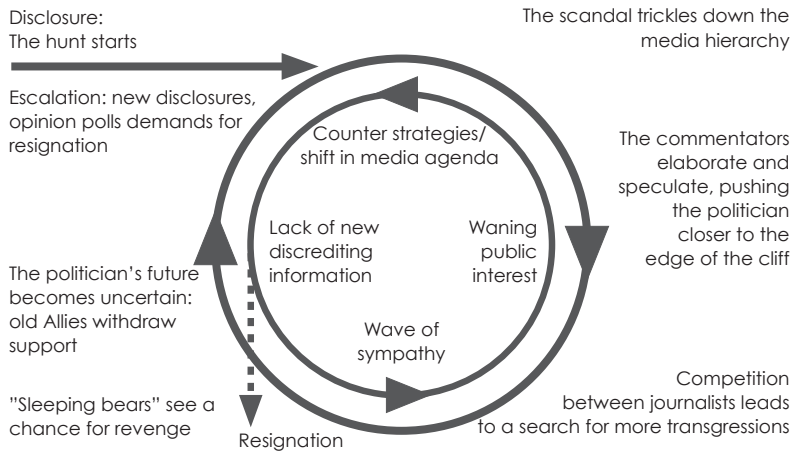
### Strategies of defence; waves of sympathy

A scandal often reaches its climax with the resignation of the victim, although this is not always so. Sometimes scandals die out because the violation is trivial, or because opportunities for journalistic follow-up are limited. In 2005, PM Bondevik and the government backed up the Minister of Defence, Krohn Devold, thereby forcing the opposition parties to retreat from their threat of a motion of no confidence. The upcoming election was only months away, and the opposition parties wanted to take full opportunity of launching an attack on the government during the election campaign. When Bondevik said that the government would resign if the non-confidence vote received majority, the opposition parties backed down – and Krohn Devold was rescued (Fladmoe 2008).

This was not the first time Prime Minister Bondevik defended a scandalized minister. In 2003 he persuaded the Minister of Public Administration, Victor D. Norman, to stay in government despite of the persistent negative media coverage of his extravagant use of dietary and travel money. Norman nevertheless resigned a few months later and Krohn Devold renounced re-nomination to the Storting before the election in 2005. Hence, both cases illustrate the need for leading political actors not to appear as weak vis-à-vis mass media and the Opposition. Rather it is important to appear as powerful and steady, not being overly influenced by the daily wind direction.

In Figure 3.2 the development of a “scandalization” is presented as two wheels that turn in opposite directions. The forces that contribute to the scandalization, as we have already discussed, accelerate and continue (the outer ring). When scandals occasionally have different outcomes, it is because the counter forces (inner ring) are too strong.

Scandalizations can trigger popular sympathy with the scandalized “victim” and the associated party or organisation. After prolonged media focus of financial irregularities and a judicial charge from the National Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic and Environmental Crime in Norway (ØKOKRIM), the retired Minister of Health, Tønne, committed suicide in December 2002. The tragedy provoked strong reaction against the Norwegian mass media, especially the daily tabloid *Dagbladet* which had led the way in the scandalization of Tønne (Bjerke 2009). An analysis of popular support for the Labour Party showed a significant increase in the months after the suicide (Midtbø 2007: Chap. 7).

**Figure 3.2.** The hunt and the counter forces

### The dark side of politics

Machiavelli did not defend his ‘mirror of princes’ based on any moral standards. His argument was one of *realpolitik*. In a world where others will use any available means of power to achieve their goals, any Prince must also master these means. The Prince therefore acts primarily out of necessity, not out of a morbid desire for power or through bloodthirstiness. The goal of the Prince is power, and he adopts the necessary means to achieve this goal. Beside the desire for power, the most notable features of the Prince are cold logic and vigour. When power is achieved and no immediate danger threatens, the Prince can promote business and trade, praise good citizens, cultivate art and culture – simply to prop up personal reputation and to prevent political opposition. Machiavelli’s Prince has two faces: one related to the overt struggle for power, and a gentle face for the periods of consolidation.

The Norwegian prime minister through most of the first two decades of the post-war period, Einar Gerhardsen, attained the image of a popular yet humble “national father”. Hidden behind this facade, his “Caesarean traits” was described by one prominent historian:

It feels natural to imagine this country under his regime, ruled by good friends around a quiet burning fireplace in the woods. This is a wrong image, or at least an inadequate picture because politics is not idyllic. Gerhardsen is a man who can shoot when someone must die [translated by authors] (Seip 1987: 35).

It can hardly be stated more clearly. Modern democratic politics also consist of two faces. Politics is both about the struggle to reach broad consensus and

to realise common goals and, on the other hand, a struggle for power – which at times can be merciless. There is no doubt that it is the first face we usually see. We hope and believe that our political representatives are righteous people, and that the political processes are commenced in open and legal forms. Political actors, both individually and as a group, guard their reputation by exerting their very best means. For the vast majority who have never experienced a political power struggle from the inside, it is easy to overlook the darker side of politics. The sensational “revelations” of power struggles presented by the media often seem childish and naïve among political “insiders”. The mass media take advantage of what they believe is a naïve citizenry.

If we commence a thought experiment – if we let Machiavelli write a new chapter of *The Prince* based on the observations from current Nordic power politics, what would he likely have chosen to highlight? In the absence of political assassinations<sup>13</sup> as a means of power struggle, he would probably have been amazed by the opportunities presented by mediatised “murder of character”. With his willingness to use all means available, he would probably have been astonished by how easily a political actor can defeat his opponent by the means of mediatised scandalization. Based on the *Prince*, it is possible to imagine what advice Machiavelli would give the modern Prince about the possibilities of “murder of character” as a means of power.

### Ten commandments of scandalization

If a political actor perceives that another actor is blocking his personal ambitions and political goals, the following options are available: (i) the actor can give up personal ambitions and political goals; (ii) the actor can try to force his/her own political goals onto the combating actor; (iii) the actor can try to remove the opponent. The third option stands out as particularly tempting because it provides the opportunity to realise political goals and personal ambitions. This is a legitimate choice in any democratic organisation having formal articles and procedures changing individuals and policies. However, such mechanisms are usually characterised as slow; they require significant resources, and the incumbent leadership is in an advantageous position to quash any opposition. The democratic processes therefore seem unattractive for any actor who wants immediate change, who does not have great organisational resources, or who does not want an open battle with the incumbent leadership (for fear of losing, or in fear of harming future foundations of power).

The question is whether there are alternative means to achieve political goals and personal ambitions. One option for the modern political actor is scandalization, and the following 10 commandments may assist in reaching the goal:

1. Choose a case on the basis of its ability to arouse immediate anger among ordinary people.<sup>14</sup>
2. Avoid cases that require explanations or public pre-knowledge.
3. If you don't have any case, wait for one – or create one.<sup>15</sup>
4. If you throw enough dirt, some of it will stick – irrespective of the truth.
5. Contact a predictable journalist and editor. A journalist and an editorial without principles and bounds of loyalty are preferable.<sup>16</sup>
6. In order to achieve an opinion-killing effect, choose a medium with a large audience and an editorial that are regularly cited by other editorials.
7. If possible, avoid revealing yourself as the source. Someone might try to scandalize you in return.<sup>17</sup>
8. If the scandalization has already started, carry more wood to the fireplace. Almost anything will burn if the temperature is high enough.
9. Always refer to the public morality and the highest principles; never mention your personal or allied interests.
10. Praise the scandalized when you require his or her retirement in order to increase the credibility of the charges, and in order to increase your personal esteem.<sup>18</sup>

Most political actors have probably not read Machiavelli. Nevertheless, many of them would probably recognise the line of thinking hidden in these commandments. Reading the main daily newspapers in recent years may be sufficient.

### Critical journalists – or useful idiots?

Scandalization has long been a weapon in political power struggles. An early example was how the political opposition tried to scandalize Louis XIV (1638-1715) using leaflets (Thompson 2000). Elected actors are obviously far more sensitive to scandalization than absolutist monarchs. Their reputation, and thereby future political possibilities is at stake by the publication of compromising information. With media's increased influence on public opinion, this weapon has become far more dangerous. In a short time, news about the scandalization reaches every corner of the country. Suddenly, everyone, from colleagues to ordinary Joe in the supermarket, has a critical view of the scandalized person – and many believe they are in their full right to speak out. The same right, i.e. to answer, is illusory for those who are confronted with the media "witch hunt" and all the actors who have become triggered by this.

The method for a successful scandalization is easy recognisable and does not demand great resources of power but rather more specialised resources such as a knowledge of compromising information, and insight of the logics of scandalization. Many have both. The tremendous power of a media scandal – not least its pace – must appeal strongly to anyone willing to use this weapon. The temptation should be almost irresistible for those who do not have any motives but revenge.

Political scandals are sensations, and few journalists would refuse such a case, even if the information comes from anonymous sources that assumedly do not have any motives except the greater public good.<sup>19</sup> Even when spreading misleading or outright false information, you will be protected by the journalistic creed of protection of sources. One of the internal rules (point 2.7) in the largest Norwegian tabloid, *VG* states: *“The editorial staffs are not exempted from the obligation of absolute source protection even if the source has acted in a disloyal manner, for example by giving erroneous information”*. By using *VG* to spread false information, you only risk that their journalists will not trust you as a reliable source in the future. This is something most people can live with, especially those who have given up their political career.

Scandalization has its price. One obvious consequence is personal tragedy. But scandalizations can also have *political* consequences, where reduced confidence in political actors and political systems are only one part of the implications.<sup>20</sup> Another is that scandalizations can breed certain *types* of political actors. It becomes more important to be impeccable than to be crafty, and it becomes more important to be “clean” than to have comprehensive experience. Democratic decision-making processes can be put aside by scandalizations. Party members elect their leaders, and these members should be the ones to remove their leaders through democratic processes. They may not get the opportunity to exercise this latter right. The most foundational implication is nevertheless *de-politication*. Mediatization of politics contributes to exploiting actors at the expense of parties in the public sphere, and to shift the focus from political issues to the political game. Scandalizations are rarely associated with the *role as political actors*, thereby contributing to de-politication of public opinion. The fact that scandalizations become entertainment does not prevent them from having obvious political consequences. Parties and interest groups change the course of policies; ministers and governments fall and are replaced by others with different political goals.

## Notes

1. In political science, “Realism” is mainly a research tradition in the field of International Relations focusing on self-interest and power as the foundation of politics – not moral, rights and duties.

2. The Mayor used this phrase in his report to the city council before leaving office (Forretning-sutvalget i Oslo Kommune 20.8.2007).
3. According to Norwegian tax law, income from rent is not taxed as long as the rent is used for maintenance and the accommodation is not located in a separate building.
4. Reiulf Steen, who later became leader of the Labour Party, has discussed this phenomenon in his book *Der hjertet banker. Bilder fra et liv* [Where the heart beats. Pictures from a life]. According to Steen, Gerhardsen could open meetings in the party's central committee with the brief remark that: "Some of us have been talking and agreed that ...." By never naming the people he had talked with, everyone was left with the feeling that the decisions were already made.
5. In her autobiography about the scandal, Valla (2007: 279) argued that the media coverage had been "one-sided and like-a-campaign" (in Norwegian – authors translation). Jagland expressed similar views in the aftermath of his resignation (*Aftenposten* 12.1.2002).
6. Several ministers, such as the minister of trade and industry, Giske, and Solheim, minister of environment and development aid in the present Norwegian government (Stoltenberg III, 2009-2013) are renowned for their ability to build networks. Conflicts between established internal party networks have been suggested as important factors in both the scandalization of Valla (Tranøy 2007) and Jagland (Allern 2001b, Takvam 2002).
7. Raaum (1993) used the word "mediedrev" [media hunt], Allern (2001b) described journalists as "flokkdyr" [herd animals] and the newspaper editor Steinar Hansson once wrote about "blodtåka på desken" [fog of blood at the newsdesk].
8. Journalists in the tabloid VG had been working with their main source, Yssen, for a year before Yssen's accusations against Valla were presented on the tabloid's front page.
9. The Lewinsky scandal is probably the best known example. If president Bill Clinton had not lied when speaking under oath about his extramarital affair, the scandal would probably died down. This became the main focus of the investigation by independent counsel Kenneth Starr.
10. VG web reported that "*Almost every major capital city newspaper and television commentators are clear in their verdict: Per Ditlev-Simonsen should resign as mayor of Oslo (21.08.07, cited 26.09.08).*"
11. Depending on who tells the anecdote, it is either the author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in a 17<sup>th</sup> of May speech, "a priest", or "Youngstorget" (headquarters of The Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions) as the originator of the remark.
12. Journalist Halvor Hegtun described the situation: "Along the way all the weird stuff Jagland said was investigated. He tried out new words and metaphors at a tremendous pace. The Norwegian House. Consultation [samråd]. Journalists listened with acidic enthusiasm, always placing emphasis on the most humorous. [Labour] congress in 1998: "We'll be back, yes, we are here already." "We put the foot down and stood on it." Later, on the congress: "It's a new era. An ArbeiderparTID (Arbeiderpartiet + tid = Labour Party era)". On the internal Party strife: "It does not help with a bulletproof vest when the shots come from within". *Aftenposten* web edition 09.05.04 <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/politikk/article790457.ece> (cited 16.09.08).
13. In spite of the gruesome terrorist attacks in Oslo and at Utøya 22 July 2011, it must be said that political murders are not ordinary events in Norway, especially not those suggested by Machiavelli. A striking worker in Buvika (Norway) was shot by a strikebreaker in 1913. In 1981, neo-Nazis shot and killed two criminals who had provided them with weapons. The history became known as "Hadelandsdrapene" [the Hadeland executions]. The parliamentary leader of the Agrarian Party, Nils Trældal, was found dead in his own backyard in 1948. It seemed like he had fallen out of a window, and rumours arouse that someone had killed him. One of his successors, Johan J. Jakobsen, wrote a biography of Trældal where he attempted to refute the rumours.
14. Machiavelli is concerned that if possible the Prince should be well liked. Not because it is a goal in itself but because it helps to secure the Prince's power. If it is impossible to be popular, it is necessary to be respected and feared. It is possible to simultaneously increase



- the popularity and the ability to be feared. Machiavelli discussed the execution of Ramiro, one of Cesare Borgia's employees. First, Borgia let the terrible Ramiro suppress a local uprising with unbridled violence. Then he charges Ramiro for these violent crimes in a trial with a given outcome, "*Under this pretence he took Ramiro, and one morning caused him to be executed and left on the piazza at Cesena with the block and a bloody knife at his side. The barbarity of this spectacle caused the people to be at once satisfied and dismayed*" (The Prince, Chapter 7).
15. For example, one might examine an inexperienced minister about confidential matters in the Ministry and leak the findings to the press. If you send your letter to the prime minister's office, you can be sure that the mail protocol is read by at least one journalist. Those who are sober at party receptions often have some interesting information the next morning, etc.
  16. In chapter 12 of The Prince, Machiavelli discusses the use of own soldiers as well as soldiers of other Princes, and mercenaries. Mercenaries are preferable to soldiers of other Prince's if you cannot use your own soldiers. Mercenaries have no loyalty but material rewards, and they are therefore predictable. Another advantage is that the cohesion between the individual mercenaries is usually weak. An empirical analysis of scandalization in Norway showed that there are some journalists who consistently refrain from one-sided negative characteristics of the scandalized actor (Fladmoe 2008). Such journalists are unsuitable for the purpose of scandalization.
  17. In chapter 19 Machiavelli is concerned about the possible threat avengers may pose to the Prince. It is unfortunate to give someone strong motives of revenge because it is almost impossible to protect oneself against suicide attacks. Machiavelli therefore recommends that as far as possible, the Prince avoids giving people reasons to hate him. If impossible, the safest solution is elimination or forced passivity.
  18. Shakespeare is a good reference for those who are looking for suitable words. In the play *Julius Caesar* he lets one of the assassins, Caesar's stepson Brutus, hold a speech at Caesar's corpse. Brutus justifies his action by claiming that no one had loved Caesar more than himself, but that he loved Rome even higher, and that Rome had to be protected against the power-hungry Caesar. More recent examples can be found in daily newspapers.
  19. As stated by Gunnar Bodahl-Johansen in the Norwegian daily *Dagbladet* (28.01.97): All information must be tested, but indecent motives of the source cannot lead to silence.
  20. Huseby (2000) includes political scandals in her analysis of variation in support for the political system in several European countries. In Italy, it is reasonable to interpret frequent scandals as one explanation for the permanently low levels of political trust. In Denmark, Huseby finds examples of short-term effects, i.e. the "Schlüter-scandal" in 1993. In two cases (France and the UK) she does not find any negative effect of scandals. In an analysis of six Norwegian scandals, Midtbø (2007) also find mixed results. Party support may decrease, but there are also examples where scandalization can result in *increased* support for the party. The problem with such analyses is always that one cannot know what would happen *without* the scandal. As long as no analysis can include any possible factor influencing public opinion such questions remain open.



## Chapter 4

# Warriors for Democracy

## *Scandal as a Strategic Ritual of Journalism*

Anu Kantola

In recent years Finland, like many other countries (Castells 2009: 240-264), has experienced a wave of political scandals (Juntunen & Väliverronen 2010, Uimonen 2009, Saari 2010). This article examines the biggest scandal in this wave, involving election campaign finances, and demonstrates how a new generation of journalists used the episode to enhance their professional identities.

In the year 2000, the Finns enacted a law on election campaign finances requiring MPs to disclose their election campaign funders. In 2008, however, it was revealed that the MPs had not obeyed the law and a major outcry ensued. The scandal lasted more than three years, during which time a host of secret activities around the funding of elections emerged. Several politicians were accused of wrongdoings and some resigned. Even the Prime Minister Matti Vanhanen stepped down in June 2010.

At the same time there was a heated debate on the scandal. The extensive public coverage was unprecedented in Finnish public life. Many politicians and journalists thought that the public coverage was blown out of proportion. The donated sums of money were relatively minor and there was no evidence to indicate that political decisions were affected by the donations.

An increased amount of scandals may be a sign of deeper institutional change, an axiom that applies to the Finnish election funding scandal as well. The extensive public scope of the scandal can be explained by changes in key institutions: political institutions and the mass media (Thompson 2000: 115, Jiménez 2004: 1110-1111). Political institutions faced a situation in which political parties were weakening, and more transparency was being demanded of them. In this sense the scandals signalled democratization and openness in the way they often do (Neckel 2005: 103, Esser & Hartung 2004: 1065-1066).

At the same time political journalism was in flux. Newsrooms felt the impact of global financial crisis and the intensifying competition from the online media. In the background were also the problems of the Finnish democratic corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 29, 66-75), which is hampered by

falling newspaper circulation, the decline of the public broadcasting ethos and increasing competition from new media technologies (Herkman 2009).

The election campaign funding scandal became a way to enhance journalistic ethos and professional self-identity in a time of insecurity. As Allern and Pollack (2009c: 203-204) observe, scandals are important for journalism's self-legitimation as the fourth estate. The Finnish election funding scandal proves this point.

Most importantly, the scandal was used by an up-and-coming generation of journalists. It took place in a time of a generational shift: the post-war baby boomers had begun to retire and a new generation was taking the lead in newsrooms. The scandal became a formative experience for the young: a strategic ritual (Tuchman 1972, Kunelius, Noppari, Reunanen 2009: 62) whereby the thirty-something generation professed its journalistic ethos and identity.

Through the scandal the younger journalists developed a wider political morality. They saw Finland slowly changing from the time of *Finlandisierung* to more Western-style politics. For them the scandal revealed the "old system" of obscure party and election financing and marked a change towards openness and transparency. This ethos was used as a way for them to acquire professional legitimacy in the field of political journalism.

This paper is based on a round of semi-structured interviews with twenty-five journalists who were active in various phases of the election funding scandal. I myself was working as a member of the Committee on Election and Party Funding, in 2008, appointed by the Finnish Ministry of Justice (Greco 2009a: 6-7).

Below I first describe the background to the scandal to give a picture of the institutional changes that were taking place in politics. Then I turn to the journalistic accounts of the scandal and show how they are divided generationally. Finally, I discuss the scandal as part of more general scandalization of politics.

## Background: Opening politics

Scandals typically reveal things that have been secret or hidden. Political scandals often signal democratization while revealing hidden secrets of a given political system and increasing transparency and openness. There are no political scandals in dictatorships (Neckel 2005: 103) because "there is something rotten in a state without scandals" (Esser & Hartung 2004: 1065-1066).

Party and election campaign funding have in many countries been at the heart of political scandals. Because secret money should not have a say in democracies, the hidden and improper funding of politicians, political parties and election campaigns often causes a scandal. In Europe such scandals have taken place in countries from Italy (Cepernich 2008: 104) to Spain (Jimenez 2004: 1102-1106), Germany (Esser & Hartung 2004: 1052-1056), France (Chalaby

2004: 1199) and the Czech Republic (Tumber & Waisbord 2004: 1033). Israel (Liebes & Blum-Kulka 2004: 1169), Mexico, Brazil, Japan, India and South Korea have also had major scandals involving party or election finances (Tumber & Waisbord 2004: 1031-1033). In many countries scandals have broken out in conjunction with changes in laws on party financing (Pujas & Rhodes 1999).

The Finnish election campaign finance episode can be seen as version of these scandals. Many countries have established new, stricter rules on campaign funding and increased the transparency of election sponsors. For instance, the UK, Canada and France have enacted political reforms that have increased the openness of election funding. Internationally, the organization GRECO (The Group of States against Corruption), established in 1999 by the Council of Europe, has been monitoring election campaign and party finances and states' compliance with the organisation's anti-corruption standards.

These pressures were felt likewise in Finland, which, like other Scandinavian countries, had been slow to open its party and election campaign financing to public scrutiny (Venho 2008). Sweden has no law on election funding and relies on a voluntary joint agreement by the political parties (GRECO 2009b).<sup>1</sup> Norway has no requirement that contributions to political parties or election campaigns must be reported (GRECO 2009c: 11-13).<sup>2</sup> Denmark has introduced reforms that have made party funding more open. And yet election funding is not clearly reported in a way that is accessible to the general public (GRECO 2009d: 11).<sup>3</sup>

Finland had no regulation on election or party funding before the year 2000. Yet Finland became a pioneer in the Nordic countries. In the 1990s there was political debate in Finland on election funding and in 2000 the Finns enacted a law that required elected candidates to disclose their campaign funders. However, there were no sanctions if candidates declined to report. Consequently, many politicians left their campaign finances unreported or reported them in inadequate and obscure ways. These hidden activities formed the starting point of the scandal: a law was disobeyed by the MPs themselves.

## The scandal's outline and branches

In May 2008 a Centre Party MP Timo Kalli revealed that he had not reported his campaign finances. The affair started as a talk scandal (Ekström & Johansson 2008: 63-64) when Kalli admitted something that was considered improper, namely that a certain MP did not follow the law. Kalli's statement was also an accident: he thought that the journalist already knew about his finances, and he decided it was best to admit his failings sooner rather than later.

Kalli also mentioned a group of funders called *Kehittyvien Maakuntien Suomi* (KMS), [Finland of Progressive Provinces], which had channelled money

to election campaigns. The media started to dig information on the KMS and new revelations emerged. The KMS was a pool of businessmen who had given money to some thirty high-level politicians during the parliamentary elections of 2007.

More hidden funding practices began to appear and before long the affair turned into a long-lasting public scandal with several branches. The main causes were accusations about the hidden links between economic and political power. According to Thompson (2000: 160), these improper relations can be:

1. bribery, the improper exchange of economic resources (money, gifts) for the purpose of influencing political decisions or outcomes;
2. misappropriation of public funds, fraud or deception for personal or private gain;
3. existence of private interests, which might conflict with public duties or responsibilities;
4. electoral corruption and malpractice, such as bribing electors, gerrymandering and the misappropriation of campaign funds.

The election campaign funding scandal involved accusations in all of these categories. First, there were accusations of bribery involving election donations to major politicians. The KMS gave some 300 000 – 400 000 euro to major politicians for their campaigns. Thus, for instance the eleven government ministers had received 10 000 – 20 000 euro each. It was also revealed that the KMS had been founded in the Centre Party's office, and the party secretary, Jarmo Korhonen, as well as other party personnel had been active in the founding process. Korhonen lost his position: as a key figure in the scandal, he was not re-elected to his post in June 2010.

Also linked to the KMS was a real estate company by the name of Nova, which had been active in channeling money to certain politicians. MP Marja Tiura was publicly accused of taking bribes from Nova. Similarly, Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva was accused of accepting improper funds for his extravagant birthday parties involving some 1600 guests. Both cases were under criminal investigation: Tiura's charges were dismissed, but Kanerva was taken to court for accepting bribes and the case is still pending.

Second, several politicians were accused of misappropriating public funds. It was suggested that certain politicians had used the public funds of Nuorisosäätiö (Youth Foundation), a foundation building apartments for young people, for their own benefit by taking out election support and considerable fees for their work in the Foundation as well as by arranging trips financed by the foundation. Moreover there was another scandal concerning Raha-automaattiyhdistys (RAY or Finland's Slot Machine Association), which has the exclusive right to operate slot machines in the country and also raises funds for Finnish health

and welfare organisations. RAY had financed Nuorisosäätiö, which in turn financed with 24 000 euro the election campaigns of its board members Matti Vanhanen and Jukka Vihriälä. Centre Party MP Antti Kaikkonen was suspected of making the deals, as he was on the board of the Youth Foundation. All three men resigned from their posts. The cases of Kaikkonen and Vihriälä are still under criminal investigation. Prime Minister Vanhanen resigned in the summer of 2010, and the Parliament's investigation of his activities began in the autumn. His charges were dismissed by the Parliament in the spring 2011.

Third, there was a special case of private interests linked with the husband of MP Marja Tiura. Tiura was accused for taking money from the real estate company Nova. Her husband, journalist Olli Ainola resigned from his post at YLE, the Finnish national broadcasting company. It was suggested that Ainola had called the leader of his wife's party, the conservative Coalition Party, and asked for support for his wife. Mixing private interests with a public role was considered improper behaviour for a responsible journalist.

Fourth, there were accusations of electoral wrongdoing. Many politicians had reported their election funding in inadequate and obtuse ways.

The main outcome of the scandal was that the election finance laws were tightened up, a new law entered into force on May 2009, and public awareness of election finances increased considerably (GRECO 2009a: 6-7, Tarasti 2010).

At the same time there was no clear evidence about the corrupt practices, and the sums of money had been relatively modest. Many Finns viewed the scandal as overblown, and many Centre Party supporters especially claimed that the Helsinki-based media had used the events to hound the agrarian party unreasonably. Thus, there is no single overruling rationale of right or wrong when judging whether the public scandal was in proportion to its real significance.

In order to understand the media's rationale I examined how journalists perceived the scandal: why did it become such a major public event? The twenty political journalists and five editors I interviewed had been writing on the scandal, and they represented the country's most prominent newspapers and national television channels. Their selection was made by snowball sampling, that is, selecting the journalists who were most active at the time of the scandal and asking them to identify the most relevant journalists in their field.

## Journalists divided

Asking journalists about election finances produces many different answers. Generally speaking the more senior journalists, those born in the 1940s, 1950s or the early 1960s, felt that the importance of the scandal was exaggerated and at some point, overblown. The younger ones, born in the late 1960s and the 1970s, viewed the scandal as an important turning point in Finland.

The older journalists belong to the generation of baby boomers and their immediate successors. They have held a leading role in political journalism and have established positions in the press as the experienced and most knowledgeable group of political journalists. Many started their careers in the 1970s and were involved in party politics in their youth. They built long-standing relationships with their sources, especially with politicians who were of the same age. Their professional ideal was to write stories that reveal what is “really” taking place behind the scenes. They were critical of the younger generation, which for them was too preoccupied with themselves and presented their opinions without really grasping what was taking place behind the scenes. As one eminent political journalist summarized the difference:

I had been working as a political journalist for fifteen years before I wrote my first column with a picture of me. Now the young ones will have their picture in the paper in a couple of days after they’ve started to work here.

Many of the journalists in this older generation were critical of the election finances scandal and saw it as being overblown. They maintained that the sums of money were relatively insignificant and that there was no proof that the money had made an impact on political process. Some were also critical of the younger generation, whom they viewed as naïve and inexperienced. They pointed out that election campaign costs and their financiers had been covered in parliamentary and presidential elections long before 2008 and those revelations had not become public scandals. Stories about underreporting campaign finances and funders had been published with no outcry or further consequences.

Some also claimed that politics had been more corrupt in the post-war decades up until the fall of the Soviet Union. At that time money had come from the CIA to Finland’s Social Democrats, and from the KGB to the leftist parties, and from the business sector to the right-wing parties. It could thus be suggested that the current revelations were very minor in comparison with the Cold War system.

The younger journalists, those born in the 1960s and the 1970s, had a more positive view of the importance of the scandal. Many of them saw themselves as conducting path-breaking journalism that questioned the existing consensual political system. The finance scandal revealed the rotten side of politics and was an eye-opener for younger journalists. The most problematic issue in the scandal was the systematic nature of the KMS operation, i.e. how systematically the KMS channeled money to selected candidates. This came as a shock to some of the younger journalists, who based their ethos on watchdog ideals, namely to maintain distance and be the outsiders who guard politics and fight corrupt activities.

The differences between the views of the older and younger journalists’ can be seen as part of a generational shift. In many newsrooms the baby-boom



generation and its star journalists had been just retiring. Media firms offered golden handshakes to them and an opportunity to retire. Their editorial posts had been reallocated to the generation born in late 1960s or 1970s. As one journalist described the change: “All the editorial posts have been refilled, and now they are all under forty years of age and their approach is totally different”.

The scandal became a test in which the young ones could show their mettle. In many media the young generation took the leading role in the scandal and actively kept it alive, while the older generation often withdrew into the background. This is reflected in many ways in the interviews. The younger generation clearly constructs a professional self-identity of flexible and active young monkeys in contrast to the old and established political journalists of the previous generation, the old lions.

## The young monkeys

In the interviews the younger journalists made a distinction between themselves and the older generation, those at the core of political journalism. The younger journalists felt the generation gap in concrete terms during the election finance crisis. Some of them felt that some of their older colleagues and editors were reluctant to report on election finances. Some of them suspected that the accused politicians had links with the older journalists, and therefore, the older journalists wanted to play down the scandal.

The young journalists thus viewed themselves as clearly different from the previous generation, many of whom had long and impressive careers in political journalism. As one journalist sternly professed when asked about the political journalists assigned to Parliament:

No, I don't belong to them. I don't believe that any of these political journalists of the new generation belong to them. It is a very special group and no matter how experienced they are as professionals and how well they know the Parliament, they cannot help but identifying with those whom they watch as they sit in the same cafeteria year after year.

The baby-boom generation had clearly specialized careers in politics. The up-and-coming generation saw these specialized careers as problematic. As one journalist put it, there will no longer be careers that are “stuck” to one department as “in the old world”, and in political journalism it is particularly important that the agenda is not left to the insiders only.

The younger journalists who had been active in the affair did not identify themselves as political journalists, but rather as general journalists reporting on politics along with other things. As one of them described it:

I have always refused to be a journalist in politics alone. I want to keep it fifty-fifty; I follow politics, but I'm not only there, and therefore, I have the freedom to do other things as well.

The journalist saw herself as somewhat outside the political games: she was not interested in the traditional core of political journalism, namely the political games reported on in the corridors of Parliament, but rather she was more interested in wider political processes and the legislative developments. Or as another described himself, he is a journalist who happens to report on politics rather than being a political journalist. These journalists have a flexible identity, which contrasts with the actual political journalists who have their well established contacts and networks:

I have always been a little on the fringe. I don't want to be only in the Parliament building, although I know that I would be a better political journalist if I were to build up networks and live there.

The generational shift in political journalism is most often described as a more active stance than before. Journalism aims to set its own agenda and thrives by distancing itself from the corridors of power, which would mean passively reporting on the work of institutions. As one journalist described it:

For instance in Helsingin Sanomat, if you think back ten years, we did reports on Parliament that took half a page or more. We don't do those any more. ...Now we are looking for a different kind of angle. ... Journalism questions things more critically, and we are more eager to look for our own angle.

The younger generation did not rely on established source relationships, but they had to search for sources actively. Sources did not come to offer their views, one needed to know what to ask, and some informants were worried to the point that they would not talk on telephone with journalists. Alternatively, the sources themselves were active: there were anonymous letters, faxes, text messages or leaked memos.

The new generation see themselves as aggressive, opinionated commentators. They challenge and question authorities, and if they don't get proper answers, they ask again and refuse to leave such authorities in peace – even if journalists belonging to the older generation considered such politicians as pals or friends. One needs to maintain a critical distance to authorities, official sources and bureaucrats and consider what is truly relevant for people and citizens:

One needs to separate oneself from what someone says; if a bureaucrat says something, it is not a word of God ... Having too close a relationship with the bureaucratic machinery was the gravest of sins among the old journalists.

Many younger journalists see the real problem as the consensual journalism culture, which was not critical enough and did not want to tackle election funds

earlier. Political journalism in particular has relied on stable source relationships whereby one builds up mutual trust over the years. The post-war baby-boom generation lived together through the politicised 1970s and knew each other very well. One of their main ideals was to maintain access to their sources, or in other words to have confidential and close relationships with politicians in order to know what was “really” taking place.

This generation was regarded by the younger journalists as prone to “Stockholm syndrome”: the older ones are in danger of feeling close to and identifying with the very figures they are supposed to scrutinize; they are criticized for being too close to their sources. As one journalist put it, the older journalists sent their stories to be checked by their sources and the politicians they have interviewed. They mix with them and go to the sauna together with ministers. By contrast, a young journalist described his source relationships thus: he meets people, but mainly over lunch, and there is no drinking involved. Drinking during the day, which was still accepted in the old days, is now ruled out.

The older generation also spent evenings and free time with their sources and maintained close relations that were more friendships than working relationships. The new generation makes a difference here: their relationships are strictly on a professional level.

An interesting trait is also the manliness of the older generation. Many political journalists consider it as self-evident that the older generation who know each other and make deals together consist of men, not women. Typically they mix in ways that easily exclude women, such as evenings with sauna and heavy drinking or ski trips.

## The end of Finlandisierung

The views of the younger generation also reflect the problems of the democratic corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 29, 66-75) in Finland. Many political and local newspapers have closed down, press ownership has become concentrated in the hands of large corporations, press subsidies have decreased, and the role of public service broadcasting has been diminished (Herkman 2009: 77). These changes question the legitimacy of traditional quality journalism and of political journalism, which have worked as a fourth estate in the national corporatist model. The criticism by the younger journalists can be understood in this context: they attack the established elites in the model as they try to renew the legitimacy of journalism and of political journalism in particular.

Thus, many younger journalists perceived the election funding crisis as sign of a larger systemic change in Finnish politics. As one journalist observes, the 1980s was a decade of opening society while the Soviet Union stagnated, financial markets opened up, national banks lost their privileged positions,

and new media, particularly local radio stations, signaled the winds of change in the country. The banking crisis of the early 1990s narrowed the realm of politics again, which then started to open up once more at the end of the decade. However, in politics the corporative practices continued, and the election finance scandal proved to be a threshold that showed that the old times were over in politics as well. One journalist described the crisis as the last gasp in an old system:

The election finances scandal was a sort of last remnant of the old system, and it has become clear that people now expect something else from politics than the old ways ... It was a time of old men making satanic deals, and that's not what we want now.

Young journalists view consensual governments and tripartite negotiations as the main problem with the political system. The Soviet influence and the era of *Finlandisierung*, i.e. the post-war self-censorship as a result of the Soviet influence, are regarded as representing a long tradition whose effects on the political culture are still visible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some reporters claim that Finnish journalists have carried Soviet era customs down to present and therefore politicians and journalists have been in too good terms with each other.

Younger journalists often compare the Finnish system with countries that have more antagonistic politics and aggressive journalism. For instance, in Britain the main dailies are politically aligned to the left or the right, while in Finland, the media are consensual and politically neutral in a way that does not encourage critical viewpoints from journalism. The election finance scandal is seen as having signaled a rupture in the consensual system showing that journalism was adopting a more critical British-style stance vis-à-vis politics:

In our politics all big parties need to be on good terms with each other as they all need to work in mutual governments at some stage. I also think that history, Finnish history and Russia, Soviet Union, the time of *Finlandisierung*, have an effect on how different generations think. We younger ones don't remember it anymore and maybe we are no longer mentally in that culture.

Journalists decipher the problem of multiparty governments, which make politics consensual and stifled:

One should think of shifting to a two-party system. There would be two separate groups and when one is elected, it is clear that we will get a certain kind of politics and if we feel that that is shit, then next time we vote for the other one. The current party system leads to coalition governments that make compromises and politics doesn't go anywhere.

The younger generation is also frustrated by national politics in general and claims not to think in political party terms:

Our reality is based on ... interrail travel and language courses abroad and overall being abroad and later living abroad and the values that are connected with that ... and those values are such that they are not found in any of the political camps here and that makes the political scene really uninteresting.

Many of that generation have studied or worked abroad and view British or Anglo-American journalism as their ideal. The Finnish journalism is contrasted with examples from other countries, also with Sweden:

I was just talking with a Swedish journalist, and he said that in Sweden, journalists distanced themselves from politicians in the 1980s. That was the end of drinking and going to sauna together ... it was simply regarded as improper behaviour. But in Finland, we are only starting.

### Scandals as a sign of systemic changes

The Finnish election campaign scandals can be compared with similar party finance scandals in other countries. For instance, in Italy and France the party finance scandals marked significant institutional changes in 1980s and 1990s. Parties were weakened, and competition intensified. At the same time the media became more aggressive, and juridical control increased. Party finances were caught up in the scandals (Pujas & Rhodes 1999). In Spain the consensual system was changing in the 1990s: the ruling parties were weakened and journalism became more aggressive. Subsequently, a wave of corruption scandals broke out (Jimenez 2004: 1105-1111). In a similar vein the Finnish election finance scandal took place when parties were weakened, and increasing demands for transparency were placed on them.

In this sense the Finnish scandal was a “standard” one, which signaled democratization: the need for increasing transparency and openness of the political system. On a Nordic scale the Finnish scandal might have been a forerunner or at least a warning example. Sweden, Norway and, to some extent Denmark still seem to be at the same stage where Finland was before 2000. In those countries party and election funding have not become major political issues and remain largely uncontrolled. The Finnish scandal might thus be a forerunner in this sense.

If the scandal is seen as a sign of democratization, journalists for their part were warriors of democracy and fought for more transparent practices. Yet the media's motives for creating scandals are often more complex. As Allern and Pollack (2009: 193, 203-204) suggest, scandals typically break out when journalistic self-legitimation is combined with market-oriented news criteria. Both of these were factors in the Finnish scandal.

Journalists' accounts of the scandal show how it became a way to enhance the self-legitimacy of the up-and-coming generation of young journalists at a time of financial crisis. The sense of crisis in quality journalism was especially severe in 2008 owing to the global financial crisis and the sudden and dramatic decline of advertisement revenues. At the same time the rise of the internet and the social media accentuated the feelings of insecurity in newsrooms. In more general terms the sense of crisis was linked with the more general trends that seemed to threaten the old media system: the Finnish democratic corporatist model (Hallin & Mancini 2004: 29, 66-75) which has become shaky (Herkman 2009).

The election finance scandal became a way of manifesting the legitimacy of journalism and a new journalistic ethos at a time of great insecurity. As the driving force was the weakening finances for news production, the medicine was to find new practices that would sell. The wrongdoings of politicians provided the stuff of salable drama. At the same time the young journalists saw themselves as the true watchdogs; they built an identity that was more active and mobile, bypassing the existing hierarchies.

It may well be that the scandal became a formative experience for professing generational professional ethos, perhaps somewhat similar to the Watergate scandal in the U.S. (Schudson 2004, Clayman et al. 2010). Weatherford (1985: 40-41) observed that Watergate opened the way for a younger generation in American politics. These young politicians, *the Watergate babies*, criticized the Nixon administration, entered Congress in the election that occurred only six weeks after the resignation of President Richard Nixon and attacked the senior politicians who had kept their hold on power prior to the arrival of the newly elected politicians.

The Finnish election finance scandal might have worked in similar ways at least in journalism. It gave the younger generation of journalists an opportunity to enhance their professional self-identity. They seized the moment and used the scandal to formulate a moral ethos that placed the affair in the wider context of societal change. At the same time they used the scandal to attack seniority in political journalism and political culture and position themselves as the true watchdogs of the system.

It remains to be seen whether the watchdog ethos of the young monkeys will endure the test of time. Did the scandal mark the rise of a new and different generation that will avoid close contacts with the ruling politicians? Alternatively, one might suspect that, with time, the young monkeys will develop their own relationships with politicians. As Clayman et al. (2010: 311) state, the relationship between politicians and journalists is characterised by mutual dependence (Mancini 1993, Neveu & Kuhn 2002) and reciprocity (Kepplinger 2007). Journalists and politicians need each other and form professional bonds. The present research suggests that these bonds can be generational and the

scandals can become symbolic breaking points, which open up the public forum to a new generation.

Furthermore, it needs to be stated that, at the time of Finland's election funding scandal, a generational shift also took place in the major political parties. All major party leaders are now in their thirties or forties, and all escaped the scandal that mainly targeted the older politicians. Thus, the election finance scandal might have been a formative experience for both politicians and journalists establishing new mutual bonds. In ten years time the young monkeys of the election scandal might become the old lions of the system with their well-established source relations and firm positions in journalism. Thus, journalists and politicians could share their golden memories of the turning point in their careers: the great election campaign finances scandal

## Notes

1. In 2004 Swedish Expert Committee (SOU 2004: 22) suggested that Sweden should have a law on political financing noting the general trend in Europe, including neighbouring countries, which goes in the direction towards more regulation in the area of political financing. This did not lead to anything. Thus in 2009 Greco recommended that Sweden should open up party and elections finances, monitor them and make them open to public (Greco 2009b: 14-17).
2. Greco recommends that Norway would introduce an obligation to report incomes and expenses of election campaigns and ensure independent monitoring of political funding, including electoral campaigns (Greco 2009c: 20-25).
3. Greco notes that election funding is not clearly separated from other party funding and should be disclosed more accurately in a way that "provides for access by the public" (Greco 2009d: 11).





## Chapter 5

# Pundits and Political Scandals

## *A Study of Political Commentators in Norway and Sweden*

Lars Nord, Gunn Enli & Elisabeth Stúr

Political journalism covering political scandals has often been highly controversial in the Nordic countries, even if the role of political journalists has varied from time to time. In the party press era, strongly partisan editorial writers played a central role in the public debate by fostering party arguments. In the following era of professional journalism, independent political reporters gained influence by fulfilling a more adversarial role in relation to the political system affected by the scandal. Nowadays, both editorial writers and political news reporters seem to be playing minor roles compared to political commentators, who at the same time provide citizens with both news and views about the ongoing scandal (Nord & Stúr 2009, Allern & Pollack 2009a, Enli 2009).

The political commentators seem to be everywhere in contemporary mediated scandals. As soon as there is a rumour or a suspicion of a politician involved in some sort of scandal, they appear instantly in broadcast news programmes, morning TV talks shows and debate programmes, online news websites and blogs or on huge by-lines in daily newspapers. Political commentators in the media have become the outstanding oracles of our time: offering the public exclusive analyses of political scandals, and predictions about their outcomes, at any time, anywhere. In covering political scandals, the commentators may also be more useful to the news media than are ordinary news journalists. News reporting is restricted to the coverage of the actual events associated with the news story, while political commentary is more unlimited in time and space: new opinions, evaluations and recommendations regarding 'the affair', or the perceived scandal, may be offered whenever the commentator feels for it and concern whatever matters to him or her. It is no wonder these so-called 'pundits' have become highly important to most contemporary media and crucial to their coverage of political scandals.

The objective of this chapter is to analyse and discuss the role of such political commentators during some political scandals in Norway and Sweden during recent years. Political commentators are defined here as news analysts

in the printed media or commentators in the broadcast and digital media, as well as commentators who are interviewed as analysts in their own media by other journalists. Experts and political analysts working outside news media organizations are not included in this study.

The next section discusses the general role of political commentators and possible explanations for the rise of political commentary in the contemporary media landscape. More specifically, we raise questions about the roles of political commentators during political scandals. The following empirical sections analyse how political commentators in Norway and Sweden have covered some political scandals. The data are based on case studies of political scandal coverage in the two Nordic countries. Regarding methodology, the case studies use qualitative text analysis of newspapers and newscasts. Finally, the chapter discusses possible reasons why political commentators covered these political scandals in the manner they did, and what affect this might have had on the outcome of the events.

### A popular monopoly of interpretations

Political commentary is a journalistic genre in press, radio, television and on Internet sites where journalists analyse or discuss current events. Political commentary often appears in news contexts, but is also frequently found in opinion sections in newspapers, in special programmes or shows in the broadcast media and of course in various forms on the Internet. Political commentary has been an important aspect of political journalism in most democratic countries (Nord 2008). Besides the informative role of providing political news and mirroring alternative political positions, the argumentative role of journalists to comment on or analyse political developments has been widely acknowledged as a basic professional function and a necessary complement to objective reporting (Schudson 2003). Comparative studies of journalists' perceptions of political commentary also confirm that a majority of journalists in most countries considers the analytical function of the media to be 'important' or 'very important' (Weaver 1998).

Political commentary has similarities with both news and views pieces in the media; like editorials and debate articles, it expresses opinions, and like news articles, it focuses on current events. However, the distinctive feature of political commentators is their freedom to comment on and express opinions about what is going on in society, without a declared political party affiliation or an ideologically consistent long-term perspective. Political commentators do evaluate parties or candidates, but rarely with an explicit ideological intention to change public opinion in a certain political direction.

Today, political commentators appear frequently in most media systems around the world, and they are a distinctive feature of contemporary politi-

cal communications. There are various explanations for the global rise of the commentary role of the news media. In times of declining political trust in the most advanced democracies, the neutral reporting position has come under pressure and encouraged a more active and critical journalistic role, sometimes adopting both an anti-partisan and an anti-elite tone (Putnam & al 2000, Dalton & Wattenberg 2002).

Particularly interesting is the role of political commentators in countries like Norway and Sweden, where the party press has gradually vanished (Allern & Pollack 2009a). By instantly picking probable winners and losers in close interaction with numerous opinion polls in elections campaigns, political commentators have a monopoly on interpretation that may affect voters' preferences and political understanding. Thus, the structural bias shaped by today's political commentators may be as important as the ideological bias of yesterday's newspapers (Schudson 2003, Gulati et al. 2004)

Additionally, structural media changes such as increased competition, commercialization and new production conditions have facilitated the shift of journalists and journalistic formats in a more interpretative and speculative direction (McNair 2000, Allern & Pollack 2009, Knapskog 2009, Allern 2010). Perhaps most importantly, the rise of the twenty-four-hour news cycle has dramatically increased the demand for news. As newsworthy events do not occur according to schedule, there is a constant need for interpretations, speculations, analyses and commentaries that can fill the void (Kovach & Rosenstiel 1999, McNair 2000).

Gradually, television has developed into the most visible and important arena for political commentators in modern democracies. Commentators, some of them pundits from the daily press, appear both in ordinary daily newscasts and in special weekly television shows focusing on current affairs. One form of television journalism with roots in political commentary is the so-called punditocracy, a term first developed by American columnist Eric Alterman, who describes a special group of political commentators in television who offer inside political opinions and forecasts in the elite national media (Alterman 1999). The concept of 'political pundit' has become central when explaining the rapid development of political commentary as something of an opinion industry in media societies.

The increased importance of political commentators in the public debate is highly controversial. Some research indicates that the distinction between news and views has become more obscure in our modern media culture (Neveu 2002). This kind of material often appears in conjunction with news, without being explicitly labeled as 'news analysis' or 'commentary', thus making it more difficult for the public to recognize. Today, opinion journalism coexists with objective journalism in most parts of the world, sometimes clearly differentiated, but sometimes mixed more freely. Generally, political commentators are not guided in their work by recognizable code of ethics.

Similarly, research has focused on the effects of increased media competition on public attention. In order to fill the news holes and attract the audience, there is a constant need for provocative, deviating and entertaining political commentators. Content analyses of statements made by political commentators confirm that appearance on television encourages extreme opinions, shortcuts and entertainment value. This has raised a debate on whether such political commentators actually represent and serve the public, or in fact mislead or distort public opinion (Knapskog 2009, Nord & Stúr 2009).

The defence of political commentators often focuses on the fact that their analyses and interpretations in the media actually facilitate public understanding of complex societal issues. The argument is based on the need, in a more complex society, for guidelines and recommendations that enable the public to increase their awareness of the majority of issues (McNair 2000). This is perceived as particularly important, as journalistic communication in general is increasingly 'chaotic' in its structure and effects. Studies have also found that new kinds of argumentative political reporting, such as talk radio and blogging, actually increase political awareness in less politically interested groups (Davis & Owen 1998, Perlmutter 2008).

### Both the directors and stars of scandal stories

Thus far, the free and independent role of political commentators has most often been analysed and discussed during election campaigns (Gulati et al. 2004, Nord & Stúr 2009). However, there are some studies exploring the role of commentary in mediated scandals such as the 'Lewinsky Scandal' in the United States in 1998 (Kovach & Rosenstiel 1999). In many ways, the role of political commentators is important during mediated scandals. The core story behind the perceived scandal is often complex, requiring simplifications and generalizations if it is to be interesting to a wider audience (McNair 2000). The different political actors involved in the story may decide to avoid commenting on the events, thus leaving free room for further speculations in various directions. If there is a void of authoritative voices in the public debate, it may easily be filled with political commentators offering unchallenged perspectives on the scandal. This is exactly what happened to the Swedish government in the aftermath of the tsunami crisis of 2004 (Nord & Strömbäck 2009).

However, political commentators have a strong position even if official views about what has happened do exist. The main reasons for this are the exclusive privilege of political commentators to have the final word in all public conversations and their exclusive ability to play many different roles during the mediated scandal. Taken together, these exclusive positions make political commentators central actors in most media coverage of political scandals.

While most political discussions pursued in public are based on an exchange of diverging views, political commentators offer an ultimate and unchallenged interpretation of what is going on (Isaksen & Lysbakken 2008). As political scandals are often characterized by a lack of relevant information, political commentators normally have good opportunities to frame scandals in a personal and dramatic way, 'capturing the mood' as professional storytellers (Canel & Sanders 2006: 82). They appear in the media with an authoritative voice, and their interpretations and predictions about future developments may also generate additional attention focused on the scandal.

The importance of political commentators is also strengthened by the multiple roles they are able to play in different phases of a scandal. Besides their above-mentioned exclusive privilege to offer ultimate and unchallenged interpretations, political commentators may appear as both prosecutors and judges during mediated scandals (Allern & Pollack 2009a). In the first case, the commentator fuels moral indignation and demands the resignation of the politician. In the second case, the commentator evaluates the performances of the involved actors and the final outcome of the scandal. The single roles of political commentators in these situations may both be relevant and promote public discourse. However, their exclusive ability to play all these different roles with the same acuity during a scandal process puts political commentators in an outstanding position to influence and direct these processes in the media.

The strong position of political commentators in mediated scandals has not appeared by chance, or through their own willingness to be powerful actors in scandal processes. Their important roles are largely supported and encouraged by news media considerations. Presumed political scandals always have the potential to become big news if they can be framed in interesting ways. The increasingly competitive news media environment puts great value on political commentators, as they are able to offer exclusive analyses and 'spin' the story in new directions (Canel & Sanders 2006). Political commentators may be used in various roles in different phases of the scandal process, and even function effectively in a 'post-scandal' phase, introducing a meta-debate on media coverage of the scandal in itself.

Finally, it is worth noting that not all political commentators have these privileged positions as final interpreters with multiple roles. There is a strict hierarchy among political commentators, such that only the most well-known individuals in the national news media can be successful in these functions. They are important brands for their media companies when they appear in public debates outside their own media organizations (McNair 2000, Enli 2009, Allern 2010). Even if the digital media age offers unlimited possibilities for expressing views on public issues, the central role of established political commentators in mainstream mass media remains undisputed and crucial (Nord & Stúr 2009).

To sum up, political commentators seem to have great possibilities to influence and frame mediated scandals. The next sections focus on the roles political commentators actually played during some political scandals in Norway and Sweden during recent years.

### The Ramin-Osmundsen scandal

The first of the cases, from Norway, is commonly referred to as *the Ramin-Osmundsen scandal*, and the affair was defined, from the early phase of media coverage, as scandalous by key commentators. The media drive hunt was short and intensive in 2008, and resulted in the resignation of Minister of Children and Equality Affairs Manuela Ramin-Osmundsen, who only four months before had been proudly introduced by the Prime Minister as the first immigrant minister in a Norwegian government. She was born in Martinique and has a degree in law from a French university.

The background for the scandal was that Ramin-Osmundsen decided not to renew the temporary appointment of the male Child Ombudsman, but replaced him with a female lawyer. Almost immediately, the Minister was accused of appointing a friend of hers to the position, and the press found proof that they both belonged to a network of female lawyers. Although the legal section of the Department of Justice concluded that she had not been disqualified in this case, the critique against the minister continued in the media. The fatal point in the end was that it turned out that her relationship and discussions with the new Child Ombudsman were closer than she had first admitted to the Prime Minister. The last mistake was considered “a scandal within the scandal”.

The *Ramin-Osmundsen Scandal* was highly personalized and the commentaries largely characterized the minister’s personality, thus attacking her as a private person and not just as a political figure. The strongest and most hard-hitting attacks on her personality included key commentators’ characteristics of her as a person with low moral standards who had lied to the Norwegian people (Enli 2009).

Norway’s largest popular tabloid, *Verdens Gang* (VG), was the leading journalistic force in covering the Ramin-Osmundsen case, and had been the first paper to reveal the relationship between the Minister and the newly hired Child Ombudsman. This relation was the key aspect, because the Minister had defined their relationship as an acquaintance rather than a friendship. Moreover, as the newspaper concurrently presented knowledge about private meetings and friendly visits between the two, the criticism of the Minister in the media became massive. As an illustrative example, VG’s commentator wrote: ‘The way she tried to cover up the intimate relationship with Kraby (the newly appointed Child Ombudsman) will forever stick to her name.

She will always be regarded as a person who does not tell the whole truth' (VG 13.02.2008).

In addition, several key commentators characterized the Minister as an elitist politician, partly based on her background from the French education system. Ramin-Osmundsen's image as a politician came in conflict with Norwegian ideals of egalitarianism, thus increasing the commentators' scepticism towards her credibility. Again, the commentator in VG was the most outspoken in terms of pinpointing the influence of social class and educational background on the Minister's performance as a Norwegian politician: 'She is a resourceful French elite-lawyer based in an exclusive part of Oslo, and with a powerful set of connections' (VG 14.02.2008).

The fact that these commentaries were reflected in the wider media coverage of the scandal, and that the arguments were recycled by the newspapers commentators through their guest appearances on television newscasts and radio debate programming, damaged the Minister's image. After massive media coverage, and an overall condemning judgement by commentators in both the popular dailies and the morning papers, the Minister of Children and Equality Affairs Ramin-Osmundsen resigned from her position on February 14 2008. The commentators played an important role in this media scandal for three main reasons. First, the most attractive news sources (the Minister and the Child Ombudsman) had been reluctant to comment on the news story, and thus left a great void for the political pundits to fill, thereby also offering these pundits the power of definition at crucial phases in the scandal. A second element was that Ramin-Osmundsen's status as the first female minister of non-Norwegian ethnic origins paved the way for commentary material based on speculations and considerations related to gender, nationality, and even racism. Third, the scandal itself required interpretations and explanations, and because of its complexity, the commentators functioned both as storytellers and evaluators.

### The gift scandal

The second Norwegian case occurred in 2010 and was termed by the tabloid press as *The Gift Scandal*, referring to revelations about how several Norwegian ministers had received gifts from foreign professional contacts and kept them among their private belonging. The potential scandal surrounding the revealed gift practice among prominent Norwegian politicians was the risk of bribery and corruption at the highest level of the Norwegian Government, in addition to the possibilities of evading the obligatory taxation of costly gifts.

This case revealed at first two Norwegian ministers, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Jonas Gahr Støre (Labour) and the Minister of Health and Care Services Anne-Grete Strøm-Erichsen (Labour), who had accepted gifts such as expensive



carpets from Afghan politicians. During the next few days, *The Gift Scandal* grew when two more ministers were accused of accepting valuable bracelets from Norwegian shipping companies for christening a ship: the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, and leader of the Centre Party, Liv Signe Navarsete and the Minister of Transport and Communications Magnhild Meltveit Kleppa (the Centre Party). Even the Prime Minister, Jens Stoltenberg (Labour), was accused of accepting valuable gifts from foreign governments without paying customs duties. Nevertheless, the most widely attacked minister was Liv Signe Navarsete, who had accepted a bracelet worth 26,500 NOK from the industrial company Aker Yards. Even though the Minister of Foreign Affairs had accepted two carpets from Afghanistan priced at about 20,000 NOK, he received less criticism. One explanation may be that the Minister of Foreign Affairs was quicker to offer what seemed to be a sincere apology, admitting that he might have broken the gift rules. In addition, Jonas Gahr Støre is highly respected among the Norwegian people and, according to recent surveys, the most popular minister in the Norwegian Government (21.12.2010).

At an early phase, the popular VG defined the gift practice as a scandal, and even implied that ministers would have to resign as a result of it. One of VG's political commentators characterized this gift practice as 'a political scandal of great dimensions' (VG 04.09.2010). Another example of scandal rhetoric was the following playful and ironic, but also hard-hitting, comment: 'Diamonds lasts forever, the saying goes. At least longer than ministers...' (VG, 09.09.2010). A key focus in several commentaries was on the uncertainty about the degree to which Minister of Local Government and Regional Development Liv Signe Navarsete had been aware that expensive gifts are regarded as income, and should be taxed accordingly. Several commentators expressed strong scepticism about the Minister's personal judgement and moral standards. By comparing *The Gift Scandal* with previous political scandals leading to the exit of female Norwegian ministers, VG's political commentator indicated that Navarsete could expect a similar destiny: 'I know two other ministers who have argued that we should trust their words. Day after day. The first is named Åslaug Haga.<sup>1</sup> The other is Manuela Ramin-Osmundsen' (VG 09.09.2010).

In sharp contrast to the *The Ramin-Osmundsen Scandal*, however, several political commentators in other newspapers were reluctant to follow up VG's strong condemnation of the Minister and her acceptance of the expensive gift. The exception was the political editor and commentator in the popular daily Dagbladet, who wrote a commentary titled: 'Her words were not enough', which argued that Navarsete should have known better than to expect the Prime Minister and the people to accept her claims of correct taxation of the bracelet without documentation. Still, Navarsete was not attacked in the same damaging way Ramin-Osmundsen was, partly because of the lack of media commentaries supporting the opinions presented in VG's columns, and partly



because of the efficient defence strategy used: Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg saw to it that *The Gift Scandal* did not result in the Government's loss of an important minister. The involved ministers apologized and admitted that they had acted in ways that might be misunderstood as corruption, even though they had followed the rules. Moreover, Stoltenberg immediately introduced rules forbidding ministers to receive such gifts. As the leading newspaper Aftenposten pointed out in a commentary: 'We can hardly remember a quicker procedure' (04.09.2010). The Prime Minister had a strong interest in protecting key ministers in the Government such as his coalition partner Liv Signe Navarsete, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jonas Gahr Støre. While Ramin-Osmundsen could be replaced, these two ministers were not considered replaceable in the current Government.

The role of VG's tabloid commentators in *The Gift Scandal* was characteristically anti-elitist, and their main objective was to critically discuss the blurring boundaries between private and public interests. Although no minister had to resign, the pressure from the media coverage in general and the key commentators in particular, helped to change the rules for politicians' gift practices. Moreover, the commentators in this case helped to single out the most questionable gift practices, and thus to explain for readers to whom they should direct their anger and mistrust. Even though the commentaries were less in unison and reproachful in *The Gift Scandal* compared to *The Ramin-Osmundsen Scandal*, the person pinpointed as the 'worst' gift receiver was Liv Signe Navarsete. However, although some commentaries tried to pinpoint the parallels between Ramin-Osmundsen and Navarsete, there were enough key commentaries that defended her, and that suggested a contradictory interpretation that made VG's hard-hitting anti-elitism commentaries less predominant in the media coverage. In the first case (*The Ramin-Osmundsen Scandal*), the commentators jointly defined the incident as a political scandal, while the second case (*The Gift Scandal*) was defined as a political scandal mostly by VG's commentators alone, with other commentators arguing strongly against this definition. Consequently, the first case resulted in the exit of a symbolically very important minister, while the second case only resulted in the slightly damaged image of a politically crucial minister.

### The Princess who lost her crown

The first Swedish case is based on an event from late January of 2006 when the leader of the Social Democrat Youth League, Anna Sjödin, ended up in jail overnight after being beaten up and thrown out of a bar in Stockholm. In the press, the event was presented as the story of 'The Princess who lost her crown', referring to her spoiled chances of becoming an important politician

for the Social Democratic Party in the future. Four important national newspapers in Sweden are analysed: the morning papers *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* and the tabloids *Aftonbladet* and *Expressen*.

Late Saturday night on January 28 2006, the police were called to a bar in downtown Stockholm. There had been a fight between some of the guests and the employees at the bar. After some struggle between one of the guests and a guard at the bar, the guests were thrown out. At that point, the police arrived and picked up some of the guests who they considered to be misbehaving and too drunk. The police took them to a police station where they had to spend the night in cells to sober up. It turned out that one of the guest, the person who ended up fighting with the guard, was a well-known and respected young politician, Anna Sjödin, leader of the Social Democrat Youth League. The next day, Sjödin held a press conference, where she tried to explain what had happened. She showed bruises she had on her arms and face, accusing the guard at the bar of assaulting her. She also complained about the police taking her and her friends to a police station and putting her in a cell overnight.

The following days, the four leading national newspapers were full of articles about the event and very soon the incident developed into a scandal with a political dimension, referring to the Social Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Government, and not least to the upcoming election campaign. The reporting on the incident turned into a dramatic story that could be followed day by day in the media. Especially the commentators in the tabloid press participated in dramatizing the story, supporting the narrative told by the news reporters in the news articles. Through their analyses, the commentators strengthened the implication of the story – how to understand what the story was about. They became storytellers, leading the readers through the narrative, while giving answers to the questions.

One of the main issues concerned the way Sjödin had acted, if it was proper behaviour for a politician to get drunk in a bar and start fights. Also who did what during the incident – was it Sjödin who was the victim of a beating by a guard at the bar, an innocent person put in jail, or was it instead the guard who was the victim – being mistreated and yelled at. The news reporters in the papers posed these questions in their articles; questions the commentators in their analyses picked up on and immediately gave answers to in commentaries side by side with the news articles. As the political commentator of *Aftonbladet*, Lena Mellin asserted, ‘being drunk and stupid doesn’t bring down a youth politician – the limit goes at shouting damned black foreigner’ (AB, 31.1. 2006).

At an early stage, different characters were established for the persons involved. Sjödin played the role of the fair princess who had lost her crown. She was described by the political commentators in the press as a supposedly good politician, who was said to represent the future hope of the Social Democrat Party. Now, all that was gone because of her misbehaviour late at night in a

bar: 'She was supposed to save SSU – now Anna Sjödin is responsible for the party's latest scandal' (AB, 30.1 2006). Somewhat surprisingly, the guard who had thrown Sjödin out off the bar became a hero. He turned out to be a medical student earning extra money as a guard to support his studies. He had an emigrant background, and this came to play a special role in the story. Sjödin was accused of having shouted at him during the struggle, calling him a 'stupid black foreigner – the sort of people Sweden shouldn't let in to the country' (Expressen, 30.1 06). Later she denied having said anything that referred to him as an immigrant, but there were witnesses who supported the guard's story.

This became one of the main issues in the commentator's analysis. Both Aftonbladet's Lena Mellin and Dagens Nyheter's Henrik Brors used this theme when they wrote about the incident. Lena Mellin asserted that it was not right of Sjödin to say dreadful things about immigrants in Sweden: "A high ranking 'sosse'<sup>2</sup> cannot call people 'damned black foreigners'. Not even in the middle of the night, drunk and pissed off" (AB, 31.1 2006) Henrik Brors wrote about what he called 'young S-careerist who act as if they belong to a political upper class', allowing themselves to call people whatever they want and not thinking of the consequences (DN, 8.4 2006).

Two month after the bar incident, the story came back in the media when Sjödin was prosecuted for assaulting the guard. At this point, Lena Mellin in Aftonbadet debated whether or not Sjödin should resign. Her verdict was that it would be best if Sjödin left politics: "...it seems that what she has done is inexcusable at least for her own party. She has graded people after where they were born and their appearance. This could be the nail in the coffin for Sjödin" (AB, 8.4 2006). Her commentary was published on a double page spread with a citation of herself, Mellin, as the headline: "No, this doesn't work – Politicians must live what they teach". Above the headline there were pictures of four social democratic politicians, among them Anna Sjödin and the party leader and Prime Minister Göran Persson. Each picture had its own headline – Sjödins said: "Prosecuted". Lena Mellin summed up the problems the Social Democrat party had to face in the upcoming election. The only solution according to Mellin was that Sjödin together with some other social democratic politicians "took time out. Anything else would be interpreted as contempt – for the voters" (AB, 8.4 2006).

On the same day, Henrik Brors had a commentary on the first page of Dagens Nyheter with a similar theme. He also predicted that the scandal would damage the Social Democrat Party in the upcoming election. He predicted that instead of using the time on debating important political issues, as for instance the future of the Swedish economy, the party now was involved in handling various crises, such as the Sjödin bar incident.

... now the party is forced to devote time to handling crises throughout the whole election campaign, or at least until these latest affairs are resolved.

This increases the risk that the scandals may influence the voters' decision on Election Day, the 17<sup>th</sup> of September (DN, 8.4 2006).

## The Sex Scandal

The second event is from summer 2010 and occurred during *Almedalsveckan*, a week every year when Swedish politicians gather in Visby on the island of Gotland for seminars and meetings discussing current political topics. The Minister of Labour, Sven Otto Littorin from the Moderate Party (the Swedish Conservatives), was one of many participants. When he arrived at the airport in Visby, an interview team from Aftonbladet met him and confronted him with accusations that he had paid a prostitute for sex. He refused to comment on the rumour, but the next day he held a press conference in Visby where he announced he was resigning his post as minister. He referred to family matters as an account for his decision. He explained that he was going through a difficult divorce and that he was concerned about his children and the publicity surrounding the separation. He also accused reporters of pursuing not just him, but also his children in an attempt to get information out of them. The same evening the news on national television showed news clips of a sad minister from the press conference, nearly in tears, telling about how his children had been stalked by a ruthless press. The next day, the story in the media was about a sad minister who, like a martyr, had been forced to offer his career as a politician in the cause of saving his family. The evil character in the story was members of the media who had forced him to step down in their brutal hunt for sensations.

But Aftonbladet, which had exclusively confronted him at the airport with the sex rumours, had another twist on the story. On one hand, the paper reported from the press conference, but on the other hand, there was a second story – hinting that “the sad minister story” had another background, much more sinister. The minister had to step down because of “suspicion of crime” (AB, 7.7 & 8.7 2010). This act of crime was supposed to have happened during the election in 2006 when he was in the middle of his divorce. The following days Aftonbladet kept reporting about the supposed crime, without telling what kind of offence it was. This stirred up a great deal of speculation in the media, with everyone wondering what this was all about. For example in *Svenska Dagbladet*, where the political commentator demanded that Prime Minister Fredrik Reinfeldt step forward and shed some light on the story.

There was also criticism of Aftonbladet and Lena Mellin for not publishing the whole story – only hinting that there was more behind Littorin's reassignment. This was unfortunate according to the commentary; Aftonbladet had started a lot of rumours instead of either writing the whole story or nothing

at all (SvD 10.7 2010). On July 10, Aftonbladet suddenly revealed that Littorin was supposed to have bought sex from a call girl a month before the election in 2006, a practice that is illegal according to Swedish laws. An interview with the anonymous prostitute was published in the paper, where she claimed she had sold sex to the politician. She said that Littorin had contacted her on a sex website. In the article, she was presented as a victim, a fragile person, ashamed of what she had done and feeling bad afterwards (AB, 10.7 2010). As proof of the supposed sex affair, she had saved e-mails from Littorin in her computer. Littorin commented on the accusations immediately – ‘I have never paid for sex’ (Expressen, 11.7 2010). In an article in Expressen, he admitted visiting sex websites and e-mailing women on these sites, but never buying sex from them and denied knowing the woman who had come forward in Aftonbladet. For a short while, the story turned into a sex affair in the media, but instead of focusing further on Littorin and a minister involved in a political sex scandal, it was Aftonbladet and how the story had been handled by the paper that came to be the object of other media organizations’ attention.

Criticism of Aftonbladet and the way the paper handled the story soon became a main theme in the narrative of Littorin and the sex scandal and was pursued by the other papers and their commentators long after the sex scandal story had ended. In the middle of the storm was the commentator from Aftonbladet, Lena Mellin, who was sharply criticized for her role in how the story was published in her paper.

Many questions were raised: Why did Aftonbladet wait so long before publishing the story if it was true? Had the paper been in contact with Littorin before publishing, and had he had the opportunity to comment on the story? Other questions were about the woman: Was she telling the truth – and if so where were the proofs of her story? During the following days a lively discussion took place in the media about Aftonbladet’s liability and journalistic ethics. In the discussion, one person in particular was being pointed out as responsible for how the paper handled the story, the political commentator Lena Mellin. It turned out that she had had several roles at the paper during this time. As usual she was the political commentator, but at this occasion also stand-in for Jan Helin, the publisher and chief editor of Aftonbladet, during his summer vacation. Mellin was criticized by other media for playing contradictory roles during the publishing of the sex scandal. The main critique was that she had acted both as commentator on the event, and as publisher of Aftonbladet explaining the strategies of printing the story. She and Aftonbladet were also criticized for showing poor journalistic ethics and bad judgement when publishing the sex scandal story. During this period, she appeared in other papers, in interviews, defending herself and Aftonbladet.

On the same day as Aftonbladet revealed the sex scandal, Mellin wrote an article explaining why Aftonbladet had decided to publish the story. She meant

that it was a historical event that a minister suddenly and so dramatically steps down two months before an election:

What happened this week is history. Not because a minister has left his office. That has happened many times before and will happen again. The historical aspect is instead that a minister resigned because of a news story that wasn't yet published (Mellin, AB 10.7 2010)

In her commentary, she also mentioned that another reason for publishing the story was to stop the rumours: '...it's a strange situation when a newspaper keeps silent'. A couple of days later, Mellin commented on a new opinion poll taken before the national elections. She interpreted the results as indicating that the sex scandal would not affect the election campaign and the parties on the right wing. It doesn't seem to matter, she wrote, even though a majority of the participants in the poll said that it was good that Littorin left the government (AB, 13.7 2010)

At this point, the sex scandal story had ended but the discussion about journalistic ethics and Aftonbladet continued for another couple of days. In an editorial in Dagens Nyheter (18.7.2010), the newspaper's political editor Peter Wolodarski wrote an angry article sharply criticizing Aftonbladet and Lena Mellin. In his opinion, Mellin had exceeded all good journalistic ethical boundaries in her and her paper's hunt for juicy headlines. According to Wolodarski, Aftonbladet had been selling intriguing rumours instead of trying to find out the truth, and it was Mellin in her role as political commentator who gave the story its scandalous frames.

The affair of Littorin cast dark shadows over everyone involved. What's true or not true has become more and more unclear. But one thing is obvious: the affair has shifted from being a political crises for the government to a crises for Aftonbladet (Wolodarski, DN, 18.7 2010)

To sum up: in both Swedish cases the commentators acted as storytellers and interpreters, interacting with news reporters. Together with the ongoing changes in news journalism – where reporting has come to include more speculation, scandals and infotainment – one can see how the two groups of journalists depend on each other. Finally, the impact on politics and the election campaign was very limited. The scandals had an impact on the persons involved, but did not lead to any deeper consequences for the parties they represented.

### Conclusions: 'Pundits' matter in scandals

The case studies from Norway and Sweden largely confirm the central role of political commentators during political scandals. Despite the fact that the

above-described scandals are very different from each other, some general observations concerning the influence of political commentators are evident in all cases.

First, the complexity of the different events quickly turns the commentators into storytellers, who dramatize the stories so they have the potential to attract a wider audience. The arsenal of dramatic storytelling often includes a rapid recognition of persons to blame and persons to perceive as victims. The free role of political commentators and their exclusive privilege to frame news stories give them great potential to act as driving forces and directors of mediated scandals, especially when official sources are silent or faced with lying or cover-up actions. As was the case with the two ministers Ramin-Osmundsen and Littorin, their initial silence created a void in the public discourse that was soon filled by commentators' exclusive interpretations of what had happened.

Second, political commentators seem to be most powerful in political scandals in an interplay with news reporting. Sometimes news and views appear on the same page, thus consolidating the way in which the scandal is framed. The framing of the news story is further emphasized in the commentary, and followed by recommendations and 'final words' on the event. This was the case particularly in the Swedish tabloids during the Sjödin event. Furthermore, political commentary plays an essential role in recycling the story in the media, as the views and judgements of the commentators are reflected in talk shows and debate programmes.

Third, the status of political commentators varies. Not every single commentator is important. However, the most prominent political commentators have substantial agenda setting and framing power, and their conclusions and demands are often referred to by other, not particularly outstanding, colleagues in the press and other media. There are signs that this 'celebrity factor' enjoyed by some leading commentators has become more evident in recent years.

Fourth, the unity of political commentators seems to matter. When there is a common critique in mediated scandals, as in the cases of Ramin-Osmundsen and Sjödin, the probability that politicians and ministers will resign tends to be greater than when leading commentators disagree about the relevance of the story or when they express diverging attitudes and recommendations. If a presumed political scandal is not generally acknowledged as such in the media, the story may soon come to focus more on questionable scandal journalism mechanisms than on political behaviour.

In conclusion, there are many factors confirming the essential roles of political commentators during different phases of mediated scandals. As the present case studies from Norway and Sweden show, commentators often act as driving forces during scandals, given their ultimate privilege to designate villains and victims, and to act as both prosecutors and judges in the process. Of course, the 'pundits' in the press do not create political scandals, but their privileged

positions with regard to dramatizing and framing the scandals that occur make them extremely important to the evolution of these events.

## Notes

1. Åslaug Haga, the former leader of the Centre Party, in June 2008 resigned both as party leader and Minister of Oil and Energy. The background was several months of mediated scandals, most of them connected to her family and small conflicts with municipal authorities concerning building regulations.
2. In Swedish, "sosse" is a much used short form of "social democrat".



## Chapter 6

# Security Scandals in the Age of Mediated War

Mark Blach-Ørsten & Anker Brink Lund

In chapter two of this book it is stated that one of the significant changes in the Danish media coverage of political scandals from 1980 to 2010 has been the appearance of the sex scandal and the security scandal. In this chapter we look further into the concept of the security scandal that according to Thompson (2000) is a special form of what he defines as a power scandal. The power scandal concerns the disclosure of hidden and illegitimate power practices to the public. In this chapter we focus on three security scandals that analyzed together make up a three act play, in which the hidden power struggles between military, politics and the news media are exposed. The study also highlights how the concept of visibility is a double-edged sword (Thompson 2005) that creates both new possibilities and new risks, not only for the military and the political power holders, but also for the news media. Thus, it is not only the hidden practices of the military and the politicians that are exposed by the Danish security scandals, but also the hidden power practices of the news media.

### Visibility and political scandal

Thompson (2000) argues for the rise of a new mediated visibility that changes the relationship between visibility and political power. Before the development of print and other types of media, political leaders were unseen, invisible, to almost all of the subjects over whom they ruled (Thompson 2005). Only the court, or the ruling class, had any meaningful face to face interaction with the ruler. This changed, argues Thompson, with introduction of print and other media, and in to-days communication society print, radio, television and the Internet have created an ever-growing field of mediated political communication and quasi-interaction, where “political leaders are able to appear before their subjects in ways and on a scale that never existed previously” (Thompson 2000, 2005: 41). This new visibility also gave rise to the political scandal that,

according to Thompson has become a defining feature of late modern politics. The power scandal concerns the disclosure of hidden power to the public. One type of power scandal, like the Watergate scandal, concerns the misuse of power by elected political leaders. Another type of power scandal Thompson (2000) labels 'security scandals'. The 'security scandal' represents a blurring of the borders between politics, the military and the intelligence agencies. As an example he points to the Abu Ghraib scandal, where "the hidden practices of US military and paramilitary personnel (was) suddenly opened up to public scrutiny, unleashing a sequence of further revelations that (was) difficult for those in power to explain and control. Thanks to the media, these previously hidden practices and events had been given an entirely new status as public (...) the invisible had been made visible" (Thompson 2005: 31). He argues that the political scandal has a potential democratic effect in the sense that it can bring new visibility to the use of power, specifically power that has formally been hidden from the public.

On the other hand, viewed from the side of the politicians, the new visibility is a double-edged sword. It is true that politicians and other power-holders today can get extensive media coverage, but they cannot control this visibility completely, no matter how much they try to professionalize their communication. The modern channels of communication are too vast and too decentralized, and therefore impossible to completely monitor or control. Together the modern communication networks present a great risk to any power holder, because any ill advised action, dirty trick or indeed un-thoughtful utterances, may at any time be exposed to a greater public with potentially huge damage to image, status and the public's trust in the power holder.

## Visibility and war

Since the Gulf War of 1991, many scholars have pointed to the fact that "military and media networks have converged to the point where they are now virtually indistinguishable; the media constitute the spaces in which wars are fought and are the main ways through which populations experience war" (Thussu & Freedman 2003: 7). Webster (2003: 57) writes: "We live today in an era of 'new wars' which is to say that the circumstances surrounding such conflict have been radically transformed (...) Furthermore, war itself is changing, increasingly being what one might call Information War", and this not just a British or American phenomenon. During the Iraq War Denmark was a part of the coalition with the US. The Danish military placed a great deal of focus on the news coverage of the war, and indeed went on record saying that handling the press was a very important part of winning the information war (Hansen 2005, Kristensen & Ørsten 2006). As a way of accomplishing this goal, the Danish media had

a large range of military experts appear, in full uniform, as commentators on Danish television and in the Danish press, commentators that came to play a dominating part in the Danish news coverage of the Iraq war (Kristensen & Ørsten 2006). All in all a study of the Danish media coverage of the Iraq war concluded that the military and the media became intertwined in ways not seen before in Denmark, and that the military to a large extent, succeeded in setting the media agenda during the first part of the war (Kristensen & Ørsten 2007).

In a review article on the mediatization of war McQuail (2006: 114) writes that “western communication science does not offer any clear framework for collecting and interpreting observations and information about contemporary war situations’. We would like to suggest that at least part of the way that the media, politics and the military/intelligence agencies interact in time of war may be theoretically viewed and analyzed through the lens of the power scandal, especially in the form of the security scandal. The Abu Ghraib-scandal is a well-known example, but there are many others; the non-existence of Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq is one, the fictionalized rescue of Private Jessica Lynch another, not to mention the many documents and videotapes released by WikiLeaks. Just as it is the case with modern politics, the new visibility has given the military and the intelligence agencies new possibilities to present for instance the hitherto unseen battlefield of a war to a new audience, but as the examples above demonstrate, the new visibility of war is not without risks for those in power.

### Danish security scandals 2006-2010

Before looking at three Danish security scandals it is necessary to give a brief overview of Danish defence politics. Going back to the late 1970s and 1980s, Danish defence policy was split between ‘cosmopolitanism’, which rejected the use of force, and ‘defencism’, which valued military power. However, since the end of the Cold War, a new consensus was created that favours the “practice of ‘activism’, which made armed force more useful in Danish eyes (Rasmussen 2005: 72). This change in policy led to the participation of Danish forces in the Gulf war and in the NATO missions in former Yugoslavia. This shift in politics also led to Danish participation in the war in Afghanistan 2001, and the war in Iraq 2003.

Each of the three scandals that we focus on is a scandal in its own right, and indeed played out this way in the media. However, our argument is that the three scandals are closely linked together in several ways. First of all some of the central actors involved in two of the scandals are the same, and indeed the third of the three scandals, can be viewed as a direct consequence of the first scandal. Also, the subject of the scandals link them together since they are

all concerned with revealing secret practices regarding Danish defence policy, whether it concerns secret practices of the deployed troops or the secret practices of the defence ministry, its minister and/or its public servants. Thirdly, and crucially, the three scandals are linked through the theory of visibility, and the following analysis therefore focuses on how, in each of the three scandals, hidden power practices were made visible, whether it is the power practices of the military, the politicians or indeed the news media itself. This theoretical approach enables us to highlight specific points in each of the three scandals without having to analyze each of the three scandals in their entirety. However, this approach also means that there are many other interesting aspects to each of the three scandals that will not be covered in our analysis.

### 1) The Secret War and the hidden practices of the military (2006)

The Danish public service Broadcast Corporation, DR, on December 7, 2006, aired the documentary 'The Secret War', a documentary that accuses Danish soldiers stationed in Afghanistan of passing on insurgent prisoners to American forces, who then sent some, if not all, of the prisoners to the Guantanamo base on Cuba, where some, if not all, were tortured. If this accusation is true, it is in violation of a decision in the Danish Parliament (the Folketing), which, when deciding to send troops to Afghanistan, specifically pointed out that Danish troops would only participate in the war, if it was made clear that the Geneva Conventions were upheld (Beslutningsforslag B37). 'The Secret War' thus accuses the then Danish prime minister, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, of lying to the Folketing about the allegation that Danish troops did indeed violate the Geneva Conventions by turning over their prisoners to American troops.

The documentary presents a wide range of evidence to support the accusation, but no final conclusive proof is presented. As could be expected the documentary caused a huge political uproar. The Rasmussen administration denied all accusations, and instead claimed that Christopher Guldbrandsen, the journalist behind the documentary, lied and manipulated the 'facts' that he presented. The Rasmussen administration also verbally attacked The Danish Broadcast Corporation saying that they were politically biased, and that the documentary was a political attack on the prime minister.

As the scandal developed it was divided into several sub-scandals, two of which are important in this context. The first concerns the accusations made against The Danish Broadcast Corporation. Following the government's point of attack several centre-right newspapers criticised the ethics of both The Danish Broadcast Corporation and the journalist responsible for the documentary, arguing that 'The Secret War' was deliberately manipulative and left out several sources that might support the Rasmussen administration. Another sub-scandal

concerns the governments spin against 'The Secret War'. This story broke out after the defence ministers 'spin doctor', Jacob Winther, in an interview disclosed just how many resources the government had spent, preparing their defence against the accusations made in 'The Secret War'. This spin work combined the forces of several ministries and involved, among other things, a carefully planned communication strategy with counter arguments to all the central accusations made against the government in the documentary. This story led to an increased focus on government spin, and several centre-left papers now published stories and editorials, focusing on how the government spent time and tax payers' money on a negative campaign against the makers of 'The Secret War'.

In august 2007 an independent review board consisting of academics and journalists wrote a report trying to piece together just what the facts were. The review board concluded that the documentary produced credible and substantial, if not conclusive, evidence of the torture. However, the boards report prompted neither the media, nor the politicians, to re-open the debate about 'The Secret war', and in the end the scandal did not have any consequences for the Rasmussen administration. ([http://www.dr.dk/forbrug/portal/cmsassets/hemmeligkrig/den\\_hemmelige\\_krig.pdf](http://www.dr.dk/forbrug/portal/cmsassets/hemmeligkrig/den_hemmelige_krig.pdf)). In 2009 Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen left Danish politics and was elected new Secretary General of NATO.

## 2) The Special Forces 'book scandal' and the hidden practices of Defence Command Denmark (2009)

In early September of 2009 several newspapers in Denmark published extracts from a forthcoming new book by a former Danish special forces soldier. The book is about the soldier's life and the missions he served in both Afghanistan and Iraq. On September 14<sup>th</sup> this year, the Danish Chief of Defence writes a personal letter to all the chief editors of the large Danish newspapers urging them to not publish more extracts from the book, because, from the military's point of view, the book is a serious security breach, and further coverage of the book may endanger the Danish troops stationed in Afghanistan. The military also seeks a court injunction preventing the publication of the book altogether. Most of the Danish newspapers choose to follow the request from the Danish chief of Defence, except for the centre-left morning paper Politiken that instead chooses to publish the entire book as a special part of the paper, hitting the news stands on September 16<sup>th</sup>. This decision is widely questioned by the other newspapers in their editorials and, of course, by Defence Command Denmark.

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September the Defence Command Denmark claims to have found an Arabic translation of the book on Internet, suggesting that the book,

also by our possible enemies, is considered a top priority. This information is given to the Danish minister of Defence and the head of Defence Command Denmark. However, an employee of the Defence Command also anonymously sends an internet link to an Arabic translation of the book to the tabloid newspaper B.T. The paper then runs a story on the existence of an Arabic translation of the book. However, the newspaper quickly discovers that the translation is nonsense, and either made by somebody who does not speak Arabic fluently or by some Internet translation service. Despite this, the Danish minister of Defence the next day tells members of the subcommittee on foreign affairs that an Arabic translation of the book indeed does exist, and this proves the Defence Command's point that the book is a threat to the Danish mission in Afghanistan.

At the same time there are press speculations about the reason for the poor translation of the book into Arabic: the translation may just be a fabrication made by the Defence Command Denmark itself. The Danish minister of Defence first argues against this suspicion, but on a prime time talk show on Danish television he concedes that *if* the link to the book in 'Arabic' is a fabrication made by Defence Command Denmark, then it is ultimately his responsibility. "The buck stops with me", he states. On Friday October 2<sup>nd</sup> the head of Communications in Defence Command Denmark is revealed to be the man who sent the Arabic translation to the tabloid paper. On Sunday the 4<sup>th</sup> of October the Chief of Defence Command Denmark hands in his resignation, and on Monday the 5<sup>th</sup> of October the head of IT in Defence Command Denmark is revealed to be the man responsible for making the Arabic translation of the book in the first place, and both he and the head of communications are charged by Danish military prosecutors. However, by the end of the year, the Danish minister of Defence is still in office, despite his own claim that if the translation of the book into Arabic was done by his own people, then the blame would be on him.

### 3) The 'leak scandal' and the hidden practices of the Defence minister, his spin doctor and the Danish Broadcast Corporation (2010)

In January of 2010 Christopher Guldbrandsen, the journalist who made the documentary 'The Secret War' in 2006, gives an interview to a movie magazine, wherein he claims to know the source behind an infamous leak to the press that occurred in 2007. In April 2007 both a newspaper and a television news program broke the story that Defence Command Denmark had decided to send special forces soldiers to Iraq as assistance to the regular troops. The story was based on a leak by anonymous sources, and caused great political debate.

The Defence Command claimed that the leaked story would endanger the lives of the special forces operatives, and the minister of Defence Søren Gade suggested that it was the opposition that had leaked the information to the press. In his interview in 2010 Christopher Guldbrandsen, however, claims that the source behind the leak is none other than the Defence minister's own spin doctor, the same spin doctor who orchestrated the Rasmussen administrations communication strategy against 'The Secret War' in 2006.

Later Guldbrandsen, through his lawyer, claims to have a sound recording that unquestionable proves that it is indeed the 'spin doctor', who leaked the secret information to the media about the deployment of Special Forces in 2007. The sound recording is said to be a phone conversation, where the television reporter, who broke the story, reveals that his source is indeed the minister's own spin doctor. In February 2010 it is revealed that the sound recording Guldbrandsen claims to have in his possession, was made by an employee of the Danish Broadcast Cooperation, and an old friend of Guldbrandsen who had worked with Guldbrandsen on 'The secret war.' At the same time, Defence minister Søren Gade denies that his 'spin doctor' leaked the information in 2007, and the 'spin doctor' himself also denies the allegations in the press. Shortly after, the employee who made the sound recording is dismissed from the Danish Broadcast Corporation, and the director general of the Broadcast Corporations states that the sound recording now is back in his hands, and that the Broadcast Corporation considers the sound recording to be its property, since it was made by an employee of the corporation. The director also says that he will not play the sound recording in public, and is later backed up on this position by the Chairman of the Board of the Danish Broadcast Corporation. However, reporters working in the Danish Broadcast Corporation news division, state that they think the sound recording is relevant to the public and should be aired. A sentiment that many of the newspapers share, when several editorials criticize the director of the Danish Broadcast Corporation of subsuming to political pressure and not airing the sound recording to the public.

In late February 2010, new Danish Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen stages a cabinet reshuffle, and to the surprise of many, Defence Minister Søren Gade decides to leave office citing two reasons for this decision. One, his ambition to spend more time with his daughters after the death of his wife, and two, that the many 'cases' (the special forces book scandal and the leak scandal) have weakened his position as minister. He does not, however, admit any guilt in any of the cases, and to this day, it remains unclear who leaked the information in 2007, even though Christopher Guldbrandsen in a sworn statement, have said that the leak came from Jacob Winther, the Defence Minister's spin doctor.

## Discussion

The Three Danish Security scandals show that the news media have become a central battlefield in an information war – a battle field where the struggle concerns the perception of war, and the status and credibility of those fighting the war. The scandals also show just how powerful the media can be, when they disclose hidden information to the public. However, the scandals also show that the politicians can and will fight back, using negative campaigning to undermine the credibility of the media. Just as importantly, the scandals show how the military tries to use the media for propaganda and misinformation campaigns, but also how this may back-fire, reminding us of Thompson's statement that the new visibility is a double-edged sword.

Thus, the Danish security scandals may indeed have had a democratic effect in the sense that they made visible previously hidden practices of both the Danish military and Defence Command Denmark. But the scandals also reveal how the media may obstruct the visibility of some of the evidence due to political pressure. Thompson pays little attention to the media as a power holder, but in a mediated democracy the media, just like the politicians, struggle for power, visibility and credibility. And just like the politicians the media may lose credibility when their practices are questioned or their dirty tricks exposed. Thompson argues that 'security scandals' represent a blurring of the borders between politics, the military and the intelligence agencies. To this definition we should add '*and the media*' thus highlighting how, in the age of mediated war, the media have become a central actor in the blurring of these borders.

Thompson (2000) also writes that security scandals are particular to Great Britain, but also mentions security scandals in France and the US. Why security scandals are particular to Denmark, as they seem to be in the analysis in chapter 2, is another question. Both Sweden and Norway have troops stationed in Afghanistan (while Finland has none), but they are fewer than the Danish troops, and stationed in more peaceful locations than the Danish troops, who are stationed in the combat ridden province of Helmand. As a consequence, Denmark has lost 41 soldiers in Afghanistan, whereas Norway has lost 10 and Sweden 5.<sup>1</sup> In short Denmark has paid a higher price for its involvement, and as studies of war have shown, body bags can have a very strong influence on public support for war. Thus Danish politicians are more vulnerable to criticism of the war effort, than politicians in Sweden and Norway simply because their stakes are higher. Also the Danish war effort was central to Danish prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen's political agenda, and his personal image as a strong willed politician, who was not afraid to follow the bigger countries, such as the US and Britain, into war. From a media point of view, this turns critical war stories into possible political scandals that could cost a prime minister his political life – and that's just how Guldbrandsen framed his documentary



on Afghanistan, as an attack on the prime minister. In other words the reason for Denmark to be 'leading' in security scandals in Scandinavia could be, that Denmark is the only Scandinavian country where the different wars have been associated the highest political prestige, and at the same time the country, where the cost in human lives have been the greatest.

#### Note

1. Losses by August 2, 2011. Found at: <http://icasualties.org/oef/>



## Chapter 7

# From Tiara to Toblerone

## *The Rise and Fall of Mona Sahlin*

Mia-Marie Hammarlin & Gunilla Jarlbro

“We women are not a flock, nor are we a shoal for that matter. We are political thinking beings.” (our trans.), Mona Sahlin, (*Tala så alla lyssnar och förstår*, Josefsson & Sahlin 1999: 102)

This chapter is about Mona Sahlin, a very well-known and much discussed Swedish politician. She has been among the country’s top elected officials since the early 1990s, and has been the only woman able to seriously aspire to the position of prime minister since democracy was adopted as Sweden’s form of government. She joined the Swedish Social Democratic Party early on, a party that dominated Swedish politics for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was elected to the Riksdag (the Swedish Parliament) at the age of 25, making her at that time its youngest member ever. An unusual manner of speaking has been one of her strongest distinguishing traits, employing a political rhetoric that closely resembles colloquial speech, sprinkled with slang expressions and generous references to her personal life. Her speaking style has drawn both praise and criticism.

In September 2010, Sahlin, who was at that time the chairperson of the Social Democratic Party, had a chance to be elected Sweden’s first female prime minister; however, the party instead suffered a historic reversal. Criticism of the Social Democratic Party and, in particular, its leader, was at times extremely harsh in the wake of the election defeat. Loud calls for Sahlin’s departure were heard in a number of different media outlets, as she was seen as an obstacle to the process of renewal for which the party would now strive. Scarcely two months later, Sahlin announced that she would withdraw as a party leader and was putting her parliamentary seat up for grabs, which made headlines. A long political career appeared to be over.

Few ministers have experienced the highs and lows of politics in the way that Sahlin has, and few have such lengthy experience in government. This will be the subject of the present chapter: how the Social Democratic Party leader

and prime ministerial candidate Mona Sahlin was portrayed in the media (in this case the Swedish daily press) during the course of her long and eventful career. There are at least three factors that make her a particularly interesting subject for analysis: 1) Sahlin was the first woman to serve as Social Democratic Party chairperson, which opened the door for her potential election as Sweden's first female prime minister; 2) she has been the focus of as much media hype as anyone in Sweden in modern times, a subject that has undergone scant scientific analysis; and 3) a debate arose during the 2010 elections in which some actors claimed that Sahlin was receiving more negative publicity than other party leaders, as was later confirmed by a study at the University of Gothenburg (Dagens Nyheter 18.9. 2010, Asp 2011). The main purpose of this study is to describe and analyse the ways in which several influential Swedish newspapers, Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet, and Expressen, chose to represent and interpret Sahlin the politician in five different situations and periods of time.

## Method and material

We have combined a variety of methodological approaches in this study. Some of the analysis is traditionally quantitative and descriptive. For instance, we have made a record of what the various articles focused on, and of whether Mona Sahlin was cast in a private or public role. We have further noted whether the articles focused on the fact that she is a woman. Finally, we have studied the tendencies of the news articles angles, in this case by noting whether they were positive, negative or neutral.

From a theoretical and methodological standpoint, the qualitative portion of the study has drawn its primary inspiration from Danish media researcher Klaus Bruhn Jensen's philosophical views on media and media texts (Jensen 1995). For instance, he advocates an expanded conception of "text" in which products of the media are viewed as elements in a comprehensive communication process: they constitute interwoven and interactive meaning-bearing artefacts with social and cultural significance. "Intertextuality" is one of the terms that Jensen has introduced to describe this process. He uses the term to indicate that newspaper texts, from their smaller components to the larger overall content, interact with one another in a somewhat coherent system. This communicative interaction occurs at a superordinate level that is independent of genre boundaries and time barriers, and sometimes referred to as the "meta-level" of the texts. One useful means of coming to terms with this sometimes hidden horizon is to search for the thematic fields in the texts (ibid.: 114-121). In simpler terms, one might say that the search for thematic fields involves a sort of interpretative and translational process in which, based on the factual content, an attempt is made to find pervasive topics and categories of a more

universal nature that entrain the specific material so that it reverberates in the conceptual world of our culture (Dahlgren 2000: 94).

However, we have also proceeded based on the idea that texts are not only connective and meaning-bearing, but also discursively controlled and limited, thus leading us to additional theoretical fields, specifically gender studies and feminist media research. The media is viewed within these theoretical fields as being of major significance in establishing discourses about how gender shapes itself; in other words, how perceptions of gender are negotiated, constructed and represented in post-modern Western society. The material for the analysis of Sahlin comprises a total of 778 articles drawn from the Svenska Dagbladet, Dagens Nyheter, Aftonbladet, and Expressen newspapers in five different cases (and periods of time). The first case covers the week (19-25 August 1995) when then Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson announced his departure and Sahlin was put forward as his successor. Case two covers the news week (12-19 October 1995) in which it was revealed that Sahlin had used her official credit card to make personal purchases, which later came to be known as the Toblerone Affair. This is one of the most talked-about political scandals in Sweden in the last decades. The third case we have chosen is the week (17-23 March 2007) in which Sahlin became the first woman to be elected as the head of the Social Democratic Party. To enable a comparative gender analysis, we have also in this case studied articles published at the time when Fredrik Reinfeldt became the new leader of the Swedish Moderate Party (25-31 October 2003). Case four looks at the week (22-28 August 2010) when the Swedish 2010 election campaign officially got under way and the election posters for the year were being put up. We have here studied how Reinfeldt was depicted in the press during this period as well. The fifth and final case covers the week (16-22 September 2010) immediately before and after the 2010 election. The press depictions of Reinfeldt from this period have been studied with respect to certain selected variables as well. Our choice of cases and time periods was based on the fact that it enabled us to track the various milestones and decisive events in the career of Sahlin.

The choice of newspapers was made based on an “impact orientation”, which means that we attempted to include those media to which large numbers of people had a possibility of being exposed. The newspapers chosen have large print runs and fairly broad distribution. Although Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter enjoy only limited distribution outside of the Stockholm area, they are considered to shape public opinion, particularly the latter publication. Aftonbladet and Expressen are Sweden’s leading national, popular tabloids.

The newspapers studied are traditional, hardcopy publications, but are also stored electronically. The newspaper materials were retrieved from the Presstext and Mediearkivet databases. The archives were searched for articles containing the search terms “Mona Sahlin” and (in case 3-5) “Fredrik Reinfeldt”. Table 1 below shows the number of articles found for each respective time period.

**Table 7.1.** Number of articles in all studied daily newspapers during the five different time periods (number of news articles in parentheses)

	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	
Mona Sahlin	96(63)	275(207)	133(83)	83(64)	191(140)	778(557)
Fredrik Reinfeldt			34(21)	40(28)	232(181)	306(230)

Table 1 clearly shows that most of the articles written about Sahlin were generated in case 2, during the Toblerone Affair. We can also clearly see that it was a bigger media event when Sahlin became leader of her party than when the Moderates acquired Reinfeldt, their new party leader. The table also shows that Sahlin received more attention in the press when the election campaign kicked off with its election posters (case 4), but that she received less attention immediately before and after the election than was the case for Prime Minister Reinfeldt (case 5). However, in the further quantitative study, only those articles published on news sites will be analysed. There are 557 such articles about Sahlin and 230 about Reinfeldt.

In the qualitative portion of our study we have chosen to focus on case 2, which was the week of the Toblerone Affair. The qualitative analysis includes both opinion-shaping material and news articles in order to derive as broad a picture of the reporting as possible.

### “Sahlin was elected because she is not a man.”

The results of the international research into the representation of women and men from a gender perspective are generally perplexing. Many gender analysts and feminist-oriented media researchers find the discursive framework of the public discourse to be extremely narrow, particularly so with regard to women, a view that is now well substantiated scientifically.<sup>1</sup> There are numerous studies that show how women are either excluded entirely or consigned to a special role in the patriarchally organised public sphere, often as objects or empathetic victims.<sup>2</sup> Gaye Tuchman’s research from the 1970s presents results similar to those found in research conducted by Margaret Gallagher, Liesbet van Zoonen and Madeleine Kleberg in the 1980s and 90s, and to that of Monica Löfgren Nilsson and Gunilla Jarlbö from the 2000s. Women are invisibilised or symbolically marginalised and stereotyped through media representations (Tuchman 1978a, 1978b, Gallagher 1981, van Zoonen 1991, Kleberg 1999, Löfgren Nilsson 2004, Jarlbö 2006).<sup>3</sup>

Our point of departure is thus that gender plays a role in media reporting. We will consequently study in-depth the ways in which Sahlin’s gender was mentioned in the newspaper texts, whether explicitly or implicitly. We will study how the fact that she is a woman is tied to preconceptions and explana-

tory models that are imbued with meanings, and how those appear in turn. We consider this approach to be well suited to our particular material because of the special position to which female politicians appear to be represented in the public sphere.

Political science research indicates that women in politics, both before and now, break with long-ingrained norms in our society. In a 2007 debate article in *Dagens Nyheter*, political scientist Tommy Möller posed a specific question that incorporates these preconceptions about the gender of a politician: "Could the circumstance that Sahlin was elected because she is not a man be problematic?" (*Dagens Nyheter* 19 Jan. 2007). Political scientist Maud Eduards commented in the same year on this oddly worded query: "A dividing line appears to be inscribed on our bodies, a political actor who is a woman can still be presented as a negation, a non-man" (Eduards 2007: 278). Media and communication expert Karen Ross pursued a similar line of thought when she wrote, "A woman politician is ... defined by what she is not, that is, she is not a 'typical' politician, who in principle, bears no gendered descriptor but who is clearly marked as male" (Ross 2004: 66). Current research in this area shows that the paternalistic attitude towards women in politics has in no way been relegated to history, and that it cannot be comfortably divorced geographically from Sweden, which enjoys comparative equality from an international perspective (cf. Wendt & Eduards 2010: 26, Eduards 2007, Wendt 2010).

Therefore, our intention is to be aware of these processes in the reporting concerning Sahlin in part by studying the extent to which her gender, physicality and family life were of interest to journalists, and, if so, the ways in which they were described. We will begin by pointing out certain specific elements and emphasising underlying thematic fields in the total data material.

"If she is appointed party leader, it will be 'back to school.'"

Just prior to the 2010 election, journalism professor Kent Asp presented a study in *Dagens Nyheter* showing that the two blocs involved in the election campaign were given equal space, but that there were more negatively slanted news articles about Sahlin and the red-green parties than about Reinfeldt and the alliance (*Dagens Nyheter* 18 Sept. 2010, Asp 2011). In our investigation, we studied negatively slanted news about the Social Democratic Party's leader but not about the party itself. Our results are, however, consistent with the study described in *Dagens Nyheter*. Twenty-five per cent of the total news material (all of the newspapers and all of the cases studied) portrayed Sahlin in a negative light. There were, of course, differences from one period to another, to the extent that 19 per cent of the articles were negative during case 1, when

Sahlin was put forward as the successor to then Prime Minister Carlsson. The positive elements pertain almost exclusively to her folksiness, and ability to speak simply and comprehensibly. The dominant negative elements concern her lack of education and how it will make it extremely difficult for her to handle her contemplated new role. A number of writers pointed to a variety of ideas, including her poor language skills and doubtful competence. One news article, written by Hans O. Alfredsson, in Svenska Dagbladet included the following commentary:

Mona Sahlin's strength is her ability to appear down-to-earth and folksy, to come across as human and speak so that people can understand her. On the other hand, her knowledge and political substance are often called into question within her own party. (Svenska Dagbladet 19 Aug. 1995)

The competing Dagens Nyheter offered the following reflection in a bylined analysis published on its news site: "Her language skills are not up to much, but when she turns on the charm, her English grammar plays a lesser role." (Dagens Nyheter 19 Aug. 1995)

In a political analysis of all the candidates for prime minister, by the reporter Willy Silberstein, the newspaper Expressen published the following concerning Sahlin on a news site: "Weak on many of the substantive issues, but on the other hand, she has the courage to admit it when she doesn't know. If she is appointed party leader, it will be 'back to school' on a host of subjects." (Expressen 19 Aug. 1995)

The share of articles with a negative angle peaked during the Toblerone Affair (case 2), reaching 34 per cent. The material was characterised by 19 per cent negative articles even when Sahlin became the new party leader (case 3). This can be compared with Reinfeldt, whose corresponding figure when he was elected as the new head of his party was 14 per cent. Although the difference between the two is marginal, it is worth noting that Sahlin also had more positively slanted articles than did Reinfeldt (55 per cent vs. 48 per cent). We interpret this to mean that Sahlin was portrayed either in a positive or a negative light, while Reinfeldt was basically presented either positively or neutrally. During case 4 (when the election campaign officially got under way), we find that 25 per cent of the articles about Sahlin were negative. The corresponding figure for Reinfeldt is 14 per cent, in other words there is a difference of over 10 per cent between the two candidates in terms of negative articles published about them during the early stages of the election campaign.

What is interesting in this context is that essentially the same themes recur in both the positive and negative articles about Sahlin. Her normality, grass-roots popularity and ability to speak in a way that people can understand are emphasised as Sahlin's qualities, as in the following excerpt from an unbylined analysis: "A vote-getter, liked by the masses. Carlsson's candidate. A highly



capable speaker; few can condense a political message into a single penetrating sentence like she can.” (Aftonbladet 19 Aug. 1995)

However, these same traits are also presented in a negative light. Her folksiness is described as opportunism and her manner of speaking as indicative of a lack of knowledge. The oft-recurring conclusion drawn in the negative articles is that she is to be viewed as a lightweight and shallow candidate for the party leadership.

**Table 7.2.** Proportions of articles with a negative angle about Mona Sahlin and Fredrik Reinfeldt in different cases (per cent)

	Mona Sahlin	Fredrik Reinfeldt
Case 1	19	
Case 2	34	
Case 3	19	14
Case 4	25	14
Case 5	25	11

Our analysis also shows that Sahlin’s personal life was of interest in 27 per cent of all the articles, that is the journalists focused on her role as a private person, mother and wife, and not on Sahlin as a politician with political views and a political agenda. 13 per cent of the articles published about Reinfeldt during the three periods we studied discuss his private life. It is interesting to note in this context that the proportion of articles that debated Sahlin’s personal life markedly increased during case 2 (the Toblerone Affair). Forty-four per cent of the articles published at the time addressed the private sphere. Our figures indicate that respect for the sanctity of personal privacy declines abruptly when the media hype a story. On the other hand, the quantitative data do not clarify what is being written about the personal lives of the scandalized politician, with the result that it is necessary to take a closer look at the Toblerone Affair to find the answers to that question. We also find that Sahlin’s gender affiliation was commented on in 17 per cent of the articles. This figure also rose markedly during the Toblerone period, as will be discussed below. It is also interesting to note in this context that not one single article written about Reinfeldt during the election campaign discusses his gender affiliation.

Up to this point, we can see that our results with regard to Sahlin are consistent with international research in this area, in other words that female politicians are allowed to be public persons with political views and activities to a lesser extent than male politicians (cf. Jarlbro 2006). This is further exemplified in that only 3 per cent of the articles studied involving Sahlin include the policies she intended to pursue as a specific substantive question. The articles are concerned to a significantly greater extent with the party and the future, and with Sahlin’s credibility and her role as party leader. This may have to do in part with the

nature of the periods studied, but it is a notably low figure nonetheless. Let us now take an in-depth look at the media representation during period 2 (the Toblerone Affair) to bring a degree of clarity to the pattern delineated above.

### Toblerone – more than just chocolate

Toblerone, the well-known Swiss chocolate, has because of the Sahlin affair come to have a very special significance in Sweden. In October 1995, the evening paper *Expressen* revealed, based on information leaked by a political insider, that Deputy Prime Minister Sahlin had used her official credit card for personal use. She had paid for rental cars intended for her personal use and bought items for her family, including nappies and two Toblerones. Furthermore, she had withdrawn thousands of kronor in cash, all from state funds, at a total value of SEK 53,174.

Sahlin herself asserted that it had never been her intention to misuse the card, which appears to be the case, as she accounted for the receipts for her expenses and paid back the money, albeit late, with no interest and in response to pressure in some instances.<sup>4</sup> She also claimed that the Prime Minister's Office's routines for using credit cards were unclear, as was substantiated by various documents; however, by that time the story had already begun to snowball. Her personal financial troubles could no longer be concealed, and the Social Democratic catastrophe was now underway. The media reporting was intense, detailing unpaid debts, parking fines and day-care bills over the course of a week before the affair culminated in the infamous October 16, 1995 press conference at which Sahlin protested her innocence in her familiar quotidian rhetoric. A number of interesting thematic fields that we have discovered in the newspaper material from the days before and after the press conference are presented and analysed in the next section.

### Crown princess and slob

The material published during the Toblerone Affair comprises a total of 275 articles. A careful count reveals that words highlighting Sahlin's personal life or gender affiliation appear 221 times in these texts. Some of the articles contain no mention of her gender or personal life, while others do so repeatedly within a single text. To clarify matters for the reader, we will provide several examples of individual words, images and terms that we categorise as gender markers: regular gal, decent gal, strong woman, female candidate, ironwoman, woman of steel, crown princess, circus princess, queen, slob, and housewife. We have, for instance, found the following words associated with the private sphere:

row house, family, children, youngsters, mother of several children, mother of a small child, mum, spouse, wife of Bo or Bosse.<sup>5</sup> Based on this count and the aforementioned quantitative data, we see that Sahlin's gender played a definite role in the reporting about her during this period. In the next section, we will study this further by asking how her gender was outlined in the newspapers.

During the initial days of the affair, journalists confined themselves to the facts: invoices were examined, accounts called into question, auditing routines criticised, and the guilty made to answer. An intricate web of opinions circulated within and among the various publications. Firsthand sources were mixed with telegrams from the national Swedish news agency (TT)<sup>6</sup>, and in-house expert opinion was mingled with reproductions of items appearing in other media. In other words, this was the normal process of putting out a newspaper but with heightened intensity, as is to be expected when a scandal is afoot. However, there were a number of articles of the bylined editorial-column type that not only mention Sahlin's gender in passing, but also devote considerable space to the fact that she is a woman, and a young one at that. We have chosen to point out three such columns, after which we will turn to their analysis. The first is headed "Three windows open on Señora Sahlin", and was written by Ana Martinez, a well-known journalist at that time:

When she appears on newspaper placards with her immaculate white blouse and proud gaze, Señora Sahlin becomes a Scandinavian Evita Peron, an indisputably ultra-charismatic figure. Although someone should advise her to change her makeup; she wears too much eyeliner, it's no longer fashionable. I love Sweden and the Swedish people. A country where the level of morality is still high enough that the inhabitants can afford to feel indignant when a female politician who gets a ladder in her tights hastily buys a new pair on her official credit card so that she can look nice at the next meeting (Svenska Dagbladet 18 Oct. 1995).

Yet another writer, named Karen Söderberg, chose to draw attention to Sahlin's femininity and appearance:

Mona Sahlin's political trademarks have been her quick tongue and strength of faith. Her personal style, hedgehog hair and skirts, and her speech (sort of a typical Stockholm gal, if you get my meaning) came as a blessing for a party on the road to stagnation and grey gloominess. The movement's own outspoken little Mona became the symbol of youth, Social Democratic youth. She was the magician that could tame the masses, the hope for the future. (Dagens Nyheter 16 Oct. 1995)

Jan Guillou, an internationally famous journalist and author, tangled himself up in a complicated gender-based line of reasoning in Aftonbladet, in an attempt to analyse the affair. In a consistently condescending tone, he posits that Sahlin

blames the entire affair on her femininity. "Her series of crimes should thus be able to be explained away simply by her being a flighty female", he writes, referencing something another journalist supposedly said about the matter, although no such statement is to be found anywhere in the material from the period studied. The word "flighty" appears four times in the text, while the word "stupid" appears twice. The article concludes, "Respect for Swedish equality demands that [Sahlin] be treated like a man, and that she stand up like a man for the things she has done" (AB 16 Oct. 1995).

The end of this column is interesting, and undeniably invites to a discussion about politics and gender. The two preceding texts also give rise to a host of questions that we will apply to the material: what happens to the political actor Sahlin when she is referred to as a young, flighty, stupid, and outspoken magician with strength of faith, hedgehog hair, ladders in her tights, too much eyeliner, and a proud gaze, who talks in rapid slang and wears a white blouse and skirt? Does she seem credible as a politician? Is this a prospective party leader and prime minister that we see before us?

We believe that she comes across in these texts as a peculiar, warped and exotic figure and, as such, falls far short of our collective cultural images of how a credible leader should look and behave. Each of the writers used her gender affiliation to alienate her from politics. They made her appear as simply a non-man, and thus a non-politician, to tie this to Eduards and Ross's descriptions (Eduards 2007: 278, Ross 2004: 66). This is expressed explicitly in the latter text, where the writer demands that, in the name of equality, she be treated as a man – a proper politician. The positive words used in the articles to describe her, such as ultra-charismatic, dainty and personable, are tied to her appearance as well. This way of personalising, intimising and thus feminising women in politics is an international phenomenon that has been noted in numerous scientific studies of the media (Kahn 1994, Ross 1995, Ross & Sreberny-Mohammadi 1997, McCarthy & Clare 1999, Ross & Sreberny 2000, Fountaine & McGregor 2002, Ross 2004, Jarlbrow 2006). It is a form of sexualisation that leads to trivialisation, where superficiality is presumed to trump depth, emotionality comes before rationality, and spontaneity takes precedence over reflection.

We have illustrated this with a few exemplary cases, but what we intend to demonstrate is how Sahlin's gender becomes an issue in and of itself. It is difficult to imagine the reverse situation, wherein a man's gender would be an issue in a discussion of his credibility as a politician. In these texts and in the majority of others in our material, we see an opposition between femininity, credibility and authority. Research shows that women who are active in politics are forced to negotiate with their femininity in order to appear as authoritative individuals. This negotiation puts women in a difficult situation in which they encounter expectations that they will act, think and look feminine, even as this particular behaviour is punished. This might have to do with the fact that

authority is closely associated with rationality, which is a trait not associated with femininity but rather quite the opposite (Wendt & Edwards 2010). The writer of the previously mentioned *Aftonbladet* article makes just such a two-sided play, writing to point out Sahlin's irrationality, while at the same time emphasising her femininity and, in turn, her presumed emotional and naive disposition: "I had no idea that the plastic card was not for personal use", (AB 16 Oct. 1995) he writes in an attempt to make fun of Sahlin's motives in abusing the office card. He then asserts that it would be difficult for her to function as prime minister were she as stupid as she is trying to appear.

### Certainly not a sloppy mother

Sahlin's femininity in terms of her body, clothing, appearance, and presumed personality traits drew a certain amount of attention in the ongoing scandal, but not nearly as much as did her role as a mother. The single biggest subgroup in our count concerns Sahlin's motherhood, which was mentioned repeatedly in various forms in the material from the period. It may be appropriate to stress here that the scandal had nothing whatsoever to do with her parenthood. However, one of those who pointed out early on that Sahlin was not just a politician but also a mother was then Prime Minister Carlsson. He was grasping at straws in his desire to defend his intended successor, probably in response to the growing pressure from the media. When asked, "Is Mona Sahlin a sloppy person?" in an interview published on a news site, he replied, "Mona Sahlin is the mother of small children, she works until ten or eleven at night" (AB 14 Oct. 1995). At the same time, Social Democratic Party Left member Ulla Hoffman subscribed to the explanation that Sahlin's role as a mother played a part in the unfortunate situation in which she found herself. In an interview with the national news agency TT cited in a number of the papers, Hoffman said that she can imagine a situation in which "the children feel bad and need their mamma" (SvD 14 Oct. 1995). Theories concerning the actual cause of the scandal (the misuse of the office credit card) were thus conflated without hesitation concerning Sahlin's ability, or rather inability, to be a good mother to her children. Another reporter, Britta Svensson, pursued the same line of reasoning when she wrote the following in a bylined analysis:

When Mona Sahlin stepped up as a candidate for party leader, I was the one who was stressed out. I identified with her immediately, and thought: how will she cope? She'll get an ear infection, her children will whine, Bosse will get in a bad mood, the dishes will pile up. (Exp 13 Oct. 1995)

Even if the writer was sympathetic toward Sahlin, the same types of concerns are raised: how will things actually be for her children, home and husband?

And how will she manage with her job? In yet another column in *Expressen*, Maria Schottenius wondered how two adults with three children can be so hopelessly sloppy with their personal finances, adding acerbically: "The concept of Mona has consisted in her being the gal who is just like all the others. She is a mother of small children, toiling and straining but happy all the same, decent and honest, telling it like it is, in simple everyday language". (*Expressen* 14 Oct. 1995)

Quoted from *Aftonbladet*, Sahlin had this to say: "I am sloppy with my finances, but not with the kids. I have made sure that they have had a fine upbringing" (AB 15 Oct. 1995). However, this sloppiness does coincide in one respect: Sahlin failed to pay her day-care bills on time. "Nowadays your children can, in principle, be kicked out if the day-care fees are put out for collection", says one civil servant in Sahlin's home municipality in yet another news article in *Aftonbladet* (AB 17 Oct. 1995).

The reporting continued with greater intensity, which seems to be linked to one circumstance in particular: the aforementioned, now infamous press conference in October 1995. In addition to exhibiting rhetorical skills seldom seen among Swedish politicians, Sahlin used the press conference to answer the journalists' insistent questions and present new facts in the case. The entire event resembled an impassioned defence summation, preferably to prove one's own innocence and other people's guilt. More specifically, the media were identified as the villain of the drama, with impertinent reporters sparing neither family members nor former boyfriends their heated scrutiny. In the first minute, Sahlin stated: "I want to say from the start that I may have been sloppy in my life, but I am certainly not sloppy when it comes to politics or the lives of my children".<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, she mentioned her children four more times during the speech.

The press conference had an incredible impact in the papers. It was analysed in detail and quoted abundantly. The fact that she mentioned her family and children repeatedly during the press conference was viewed as a rhetorical stratagem. A number of writers felt that, combined with the fiery language, it was brilliant. One political scientist who was interviewed believes that it was totally the right tactical move for Sahlin to portray herself as a regular housewife and mother of small children being attacked by a pack of journalists (*Svenska Dagbladet* 18 Oct. 1995). In a bylined political analysis published on a news site, the journalist Paul Ronge wrote: "She played on all our emotions like a violin virtuoso – the lonely, vulnerable, persecuted woman whose only crime was her love for her party (Exp 16 Oct. 1995). Another writer, Willy Silberstein, commented in a similar vein:

It was clever to acknowledge a few faults; who doesn't have a few dust bunnies at home? She is a normal human being, we can identify with her. At the

same time, she is a laudable mother who has certainly done everything for her children. Her love for her party, which is almost comparable to her children, goes straight to the hearts of the grassroots crowd (Expressen 17 Oct. 1995)

Lena Mellin, a very well-known political commentator, wrote that Sahlin's love of her party appears to be as great or even greater than her love for her children: "When her voice quavered, when she was on the verge of tears, she was talking about her party and politics, not her children or family" (AB 18 Oct. 1995).

Another writer, Monica Gunne, chose to devote their entire analysis to Sahlin's role as a mother under the dramatic title "You must choose, Mona": "You are no longer an ordinary mother of three, Mona. You are a State minister. And because you are not a woman of steel, you must choose. And if you choose the life of a minister, you will get service, excellent service. Exactly the same amount of household service as a male" (AB 6 Oct. 1995).

Social Democratic Party Riksdag member Nalin Baksi took a similar tack in a Dagens Nyheter interview published on the news site:

I don't think she should have to clean windows and pick her children up from day-care. She quite simply cannot manage to be both a mother and a politician and cope with every little thing. One time when I was visiting her at the party offices she suddenly had to run out to the druggist's and buy medicine for her children (Dagens Nyheter 18 Oct. 1995)

In a quote from a news article, another political colleague said something quite similar, explaining that she understands very well that it can be difficult to be a full-time politician while also having a family (Aftonbladet 18 Oct. 1995).

### First a woman, second a politician

What image of Sahlin is being communicated in these texts? What do we learn about her, beyond what we already know, essentially that her finances are in disarray and she has misused her official credit card? A sort of intricate dance involving experts, politicians and journalists took place at the time, where different statements were woven into a long line of interviews, reportage and columns, all combining to underscore the fact that Sahlin is not just any politician. She is a woman and a mother. And that, as such, she can be expected to have obligations on the home front that pose a risk of impacting her political responsibilities. Or the reverse: her political obligations pose a risk of impacting her children and family, which is not good either. The unanswered question appears to be: how is she to succeed in juggling all of her obligations and roles as a professional woman, wife and mother? Concerned reporters described how a stressed-out Sahlin rushed from a meeting to the druggist's to buy medicine for her ailing children, how she gets up early and then continues working

until eleven at night. She does not seem to be able to find the time to clean properly at home either. And her children are at risk of losing their places at day-care because of unpaid bills.

If the confusion in her personal finances would not suffice to fully undermine voter confidence in Sahlin, then the intimated problems associated with combining her private and professional lives would further decrease their confidence. The numerous commentaries on Sahlin's motherhood can be viewed as another way of using linguistic tools to undermine her political legitimacy. Like the comments about her appearance and lack of intelligence and education, the element of familiarity and intimacy in the reporting underscores the fact that the reader is presumed to already know about highly placed leaders in general and prime ministerial candidates in particular, especially in terms of what they are not, in other words that they are not usually women or mothers of small children, and that they do not usually need to devote considerable time to household chores or childcare. However, they may be the fathers of small children, but that is hardly a factor that would be expected to affect their political activities. Referring back to the foregoing quotation, for men it is not as "difficult to be a full-time politician while also having a family."

In a social context in which political authority and leadership remain closely associated with masculinity, Sahlin repeatedly stands out as the opposite of an authoritative leader. She says and does things that almost seem apolitical: she uses everyday slang and talks about her children when she should be defending her political honour; admits that she is bad at cleaning house when she should be putting herself forth as a credible candidate for prime minister; and is on the verge of tears when she should be acting rationally, and so on. In this way the media represented her first as a woman and second as a politician. She is linked to her gender affiliation, physicality, emotionalism, and sexuality, which is the opposite of what tends to characterise the public, political sphere of reason, rationality, competence, and (gender) neutrality (Wendt 2010: 122, Ross 2004). From a democratic standpoint, these stereotypical portrayals of women in politics can have numerous problematic consequences, one of which stands out as being particularly serious: substantive issues vanish from the agenda, as our quantitative count confirms (cf. Ross 2004: 68).

### The power of intimacy

One factor that partly militates against this analysis is Sahlin's extensive use of private, intimate and everyday speech. Her manner of speaking must be considered exceptional among Swedish politicians of the modern era. Hardly any other politician has so systematically combined the political with the personal. She can "speak so that everyone listens and understands", to borrow the title of



her own handbook on rhetoric. In her book, she emphasises the importance of being personal in politics, of having the courage to refer to oneself and one's personal experiences when speaking. "Give generously of yourself! That's what I've done, and I've never regretted it!" she proclaims (Josefsson & Sahlin 1999: 63). In other words, it has been a part of Sahlin's political strategy and success to be accessible, not only in her capacity as a politician but as a private person as well. She has chosen to speak publicly about the most personal matters. As the pressure of the hype surrounding the Toblerone Affair increased and journalists stood and waited outside her home with notebooks and microphones in hand, she seemed to take it in stride. She did not avoid them, but generally answered their questions, even when her children were present.

In what way has this benefited her? The answer again is that she comes across as being normal, which may be considered something of a social democratic virtue.<sup>8</sup> Her repeated references to everyday things during the press conference – such as nappies and chocolates – evoke a sense of simplicity that persuades us to see a totally normal woman and mother rather than an elite politician, as numerous journalists also noted after the press conference (Johannesson, Josephson, Åsard 1998: 80).<sup>9</sup> Yet, this very image of "abnormally normal Mona", to use a newspaper quote, served only to further exacerbate her fall during the office card affair. "She has become morally impotent", wrote Peter Luthersson in a bylined analysis, going on to say that her studied normality deceives voters, who viewed her as a representative of a populist uprising against political cliquishness and skulduggery (*Svenska Dagbladet* 15 Oct. 1995).

In other words, holding fast to her peculiar political style yields both advantages and disadvantages. She is found to be, by turns, lightweight and trustworthy, normal and odd, powerful and feeble. One consistent tendency, which is borne out by the statistics in our study, is that she is seldom cast in a neutral light. Essentially, journalists seem either to love or hate her, ready to attack her rudely or ardently come to her defence. This brings us back to our earlier discussion, wherein female politicians are painted as exotic, distinctive figures. In the media descriptions of politics, Sahlin is portrayed as somehow being outside of things even though she is in reality right in their midst.

### Bad mother – bad person

Let us now return to the fact that the newspapers at the time showed such interest in Sahlin's motherhood in particular. We believe that her role as a mother was used as a symbol to further underscore the distance between Sahlin and her political obligations and the associated difficulties. We have already touched upon the implicit gender dichotomies found in the material, which collectively delineate the type of person who can be viewed as political (the

man) and the type that can be considered less political in terms of disposition (the woman). These dichotomies coincide in a thought-provoking way with those traditionally used to describe what a mother is, or is not. Evelyn Nakano Glenn writes the following:

Mothering in Western culture has been defined in terms of binary oppositions between male-female, mind-body, nature-culture, reason-emotion, public-private, and labor-love. Mothering has been assigned to the subordinate poles of these oppositions; thus it is viewed as flowing from 'natural' female attributes, located only in the private sphere of family and involving strong emotional attachment and altruistic motives. (Glenn 1994: 13)

This quote provides a degree of clarity as to why so many pundits and journalists found Sahlin provocative. She did not allow herself to be pigeon-holed, but rather moved between the traditional masculine and feminine, between the public and the private, between integrity and intimacy, between political argument based on reason and emotional gambits, and between professional career and family life. Given her prominent "masculine" position in her professional life, she has, on a symbolic level, difficulty living up to the traditional, romantic ideal of motherhood, according to which the feminine ability to focus flowing, altruistic love on her children continues to be viewed as a woman's main mission in life (Glenn 1994: 11ff, Allen 2005).

Yet, is it not these very discussions of Sahlin's role as a mother that elicit the sympathy of journalists, party colleagues and various experts, at least predominantly? Media historian Tom Olsson (2006), who analysed the aftermath of the Sahlin Affair over one news week in November 1995, believes that it is in her capacity as a mother that Sahlin gained sympathy in the press. He writes that her fall was followed by a sentimental embrace of Sahlin the mother (2006: 169). This shows that motherhood was still a theme in the daily press several weeks after our chosen period of study, which is interesting in and of itself. However, we believe that the situation is more complex than that, at least as it appears in our material from October. Associations with motherhood and housewifery<sup>10</sup> are employed with patent ambivalence to evoke both sympathy and condemnation, sometimes even within the same article. One minute journalists are standing by the prospective party leader's side, by arguing that she should be released from her obligations at home and in their next breath suggesting she is mishandling her role as a mother, consequently urging her to make a choice – either politics or her family. Sometimes she is described as being too feminine, with too much eyeliner and ladders in her tights, while other times she is not feminine enough, in that she is breaching her altruistic duties to her home and family. As a result of the media reporting, her lack of credibility and dubious honour as a politician ultimately shifted the media's glare from the public to the private sphere.

## Every second dance is ladies' choice

The attention paid to the chores of a housewife and mother result in a sort of domestication of Sahlin. Even the articles that were sympathetically written clearly indicated that Sahlin's gender affiliation posed a problem to her continued political activities. Yet, shouldn't this image of women have become outmoded by as late as 1995? From a comparative international perspective, there have been plenty of women in Swedish politics.

However, one need not go particularly far back in time to find a completely different political reality. In 1957, the year Sahlin was born, 90 per cent of the members of the Riksdag were men, an overwhelming majority for the male gender. In 1982, the year Sahlin was elected to the Swedish parliament, the proportion of female members in the body was 27 per cent. At the time she acceded to her first ministerial post in 1991, this figure had risen to 33 per cent, but gender equality in the Riksdag and the government was still far away.<sup>11</sup>

According to sociologist Maria Törnqvist (2007), the entire 20th century was decisive from a historical equality perspective, characterised by tremendous strides such as women's suffrage and their right to exert influence on Swedish politics. Toward the end of the century, the debate focused in particular on the presence of women in legislative bodies, in other words how they were to assume their role as political subjects. Törnqvist believes that the issue of female involvement in politics remained a sensitive one despite a general consensus that both men and women should be involved in politics in equal measure.

From this perspective, the 1991 election results may have had a particularly great impact on Sahlin's political career. The proportion of women in the Riksdag decreased by several per cent in this election, leading to a feminist counteroffensive. The so-called Stödstrumporna (Lit. support stockings) entered politics, a coalition of women arising from a feminist network initiated by, among others, Mona Sahlin. They threatened to run in future elections with the explicit goal of achieving equality in the Swedish Riksdag and government. Lurking in the background was also the threat of enforced quotas to achieve gender balance in the legislative bodies. In other words, the pressure to achieve equality increased prior to the 1994 election. Yet, neither the quota concept nor feminism actually gained any victory. What triumphed, however, was the idea of an "every second dance is ladies' choice" approach to the Riksdag, which, in contrast to the previous two approaches, derived from a voluntary discourse formulated by both men and women in politics, taking the form of a sort of romantic conception of innocuous gender complementarity (Törnqvist 2007: 27). The project succeeded to the extent that the proportion of women in the Riksdag rose from 33 per cent after the national elections in 1991 to 40 per cent after the national elections in 1994. And in this new order, with a victory for equality in the bag, Sahlin was not only appointed deputy prime minister, but

minister of gender equality as well. And as such she came out in favour of the most highly charged concept of gender quotas, which she asserted were a fair and effective tool for achieving equality in both politics and the business world.

We believe that this background is decisive in our ability to understand how the Toblerone Affair was handled in the press. Our study shows that Mona Sahlin posed, on several levels, a threat within Swedish politics. She challenged the paternalistic tradition openly, not only through rhetorical gambits but through strategies for implementing and realising greater equality. Media historian Tom Olsson has written insightfully on this. He believes that Sahlin and the Stödstrumporna were transformed into media fetishes, that is symbolic substitutes for something that cannot normally be expressed. They are portrayed in ironic texts and rude cartoons as scatterbrained and flighty upper-class women or mothers who intend to confiscate the country's wealth. In effect, this was a way for journalists to give expression, in a permissible way, to the negative emotions they felt about women in politics in general. According to Olsson, writers cannot openly attack women as political beings, but they can violate fetishes with no unpleasant consequences. However, Olsson asks why this occurred with such force in 1995 in particular, offering the following explanation: the reason was Mona Sahlin. With her as prime minister, a gender power perspective would have had a real influence on politics, and male dominance would have been threatened in earnest. This, according to Olsson, was one of the reasons why she fell headlong in the wake of the office credit card affair. He writes that the other reason was Sahlin's particular "effeminate" style as a politician: "The feminist and the red-haired gal posed a double threat to the male dominance. This in turn explains the exceptional force of the violations of the media fetishes" (Olsson 2006: 170). Olsson believes that the Toblerone Affair and its aftermath demonstrated not only the paternalistic ideal in politics, but also the male media logic. In summary, he's convinced that the male dominance responded to the challenge posed by female aspirations to power (which not only had to do with the political orientation but also the conformation of the political culture) by means of symbolic violence. Taking this approach, the focus on the personal lives of female politicians, such as their family situations, can be seen as an example of this symbolic violence in that, by extension, it leads to a misunderstanding of the commitment of female politicians and preconceptions about purely political issues.

### Did she ever have a chance?

In this chapter, we have studied Mona Sahlin's political career based on a review of the daily press. What sort of picture of this politician have the media painted? First and foremost, we can see that the spotlight was not on her political activi-

ties, nor was that ever the focus at any time during the periods studied. The bulk of the articles were concerned with her normalness, folksiness, lack of both political and linguistic skills, and her lack of credibility inside and outside the party. We, as newspaper readers, do not actually get to find out what this politician wants to do. On the other hand, we do learn that she is a mother, a wife to Bo, that she lives in a row house, and is a slob when it comes to handling her personal finances and in keeping her home clean and tidy.

Did Mona Sahlin ever have a chance? From a media studies perspective the answer is, unfortunately, no. Seldom have Swedish reporters had access to such a rich and full array of sources within the Social Democratic Party. They assert that she “has great people skills”, while at the same time repeatedly voicing their reservations about her lack of education. Second, we find that the media reporting was full of gender markers, as became increasingly evident during the Toblerone Affair. Third, we can see that, according to the media version, being a woman and politician is tantamount to being the wrong sort of politician. The question that must be asked but cannot be answered in this chapter is: must a female politician be like a man in order to be suitable, or would we still find her unacceptable?

Sahlin announced that she was stepping down on 14 November 2010, just two months after the election defeat. According to the media, she was finally doing the right thing, and in connection to her announcement that she was leaving politics was ascribed the following qualities as a leader: intuitive intelligence, unerring political compass (Svenska Dagbladet 15 Nov. 2010), sense of responsibility, analytical powers, and personal presence (Dagens Nyheter 15 Nov. 2010).

This positive assessment can also be interpreted as if the balance had been restored. Mona Sahlin no longer posed a threat to the male hegemony in Swedish politics.

## Notes

1. The comprehensive reports from *Global Media Monitoring Project* (GMMP) offer a statistically reliable source in this context. This network collects information about gender representation in news reporting from no less than 76 countries. The reports show that women are highly underrepresented in news contexts. Of the roughly 25,000 individuals noted as the subjects of interviews (*news subjects*) in 2005, only 21% were women (GMMP 2005).
2. The American media researcher Gaye Tuchman coined the term “symbolic annihilation”, and its subcategories *omission*, *trivialisation* and *condemnation*, to describe the absence and stereotyping of women in media representations (Tuchman 1978a).
3. The list could naturally run much longer, as this is just a sampling of gender studies-based media analysts that serve to illustrate their breadth in terms of nationality and chronology.
4. The preliminary investigation that was launched was dropped, as no crime could be proved.
5. Of course some terms fall into both categories such as *mother of small children* and *housewife*.
6. TT stands for *Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå*, Sweden’s single largest news agency.

7. The entire speech is reproduced in the book *Ordet är en makt* (Johannesson, Josephson, Åsard 1998).
8. Yet another example of this is the simple home that we are told the prospective party leader has. Sahlin's row house in Nacka is mentioned relatively often in the newspaper material, associating her with a long line of Social Democratic leaders who have opted for a humble abode over more elegant housing.
9. In general, having children and a long-term partner, preferably a spouse, seems to be viewed as a personal qualification for politicians, both male and female. Being a housewife, or spouse and a parent, underscores a politician's normalness and lends them a special personal status, in other words they are just like most other people, and, moreover, obviously responsible and reliable (cf. Adams 2009:189).
10. As the reader may have noted, not only are Sahlin's children mentioned in the newspaper material, but her housekeeping as well. Numerous journalists indicated that Sahlin appears to have difficulty finding time to clean. It is interesting that this is in any way a relevant topic in a discussion of her credibility as a politician. Here again it is difficult to imagine the reverse situation, wherein cleaning would be discussed in connection with the credibility of a male politician.
11. As of this writing, this has never happened. The proportion of women in the Swedish *Riksdag* has yet to reach 50 per cent. However, from a comparative international perspective, Swedish politics does top the list. Sweden came in first place in The Global Gender Gap Report (Hausmann & al 2006) under the category of "political empowerment ranking", ahead of 114 other countries.

## When Women Have to Apologize

### *Female Apologia and Political Scandals*

Elin Strand Hornnes

Regularly the news media report on politicians who have said or done something wrong, not said or done something they are supposed to, or simply said or done something the wrong way. They are, due to their visibility in the media, especially vulnerable to becoming part of a political scandal (Thompson 2000). The Scandinavian countries are well known for having a very high representation of women in politics. Today, women constitute 45 per cent of the members of parliament in Sweden, 39.6 per cent in Norway and 38 per cent in Denmark<sup>1</sup>. With the increasing number of women in Scandinavian politics, a higher amount of female politicians find themselves caught in political scandals and in need of rhetorical defence strategies to protect their reputation or maintain a favourable public image.

This chapter focuses on how female politicians involved in mediated scandals defend themselves rhetorically, and which requirements and expectations they face when defending themselves. Using a combination of William L. Benoit's and W. Timothy Coombs' defence typologies, I analyse how six different female politicians, two from each of the Scandinavian countries – Norway, Sweden and Denmark – choose to defend themselves when accused and criticised in five specific political scandals. The female politicians are Gerd-Liv Valla and Åslaug Haga from Norway, Maria Borelius and Cecilia Stegö Chilò from Sweden, as well as Henriette Kjær and Helle Thorning-Schmidt from Denmark<sup>2</sup>.

I have chosen these particular cases because they all recurred in Scandinavia between 2005 and 2010, included one or two female politicians<sup>3</sup> and resulted in a range of different rhetorical defence speeches such as interviews, biographies, press conferences and press releases. To conclude, I analyse three recurring aspects and tendencies across the five scandals and the six politicians:

- The increase of scandals concerning trivial issues and minor transgressions from the politicians' home, family and private life.

- The frequent use of defence strategies like attack on accuser, bolstering and corrective action across Norway, Sweden and Denmark.
- The missing apology and reluctance to take the blame admit guilt and show remorse.

### Five Scandinavian scandals

The first case concerns Gerd-Liv Valla who was the first woman to lead the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, LO. The “LO-drama”, which forced her to resign, started on the first page of Norway’s largest tabloid newspaper, VG, on January 11, 2007. Just a month earlier the same paper had appointed Valla the most powerful person in Norway. Now she was accused of harassment and of having an authoritarian leader style by Ingunn Yssen, the former International secretary of LO. Yssen claimed Valla had shown disappointment and pointed out that “it wasn’t part of the plan” (Yssen, VG, 11.01.2007), when Yssen some years earlier had told her that she was pregnant. The accusations sparked enormous media coverage and generated a heated debate over Valla’s future as leader of the LO-Norway. The “LO-drama” ended on March 9, 2007 after an external and controversial inquiry, the Fougner-committee, found Valla “guilty” of harassing Yssen. Valla chose to resign, but protested against “the verdict”.

The second case concerns Åslaug Haga, Minister of Petroleum and Energy and the leader of the Centre Party in Norway, who in June 2008, after several months of critical media headlines, chose to step down from her position as a party leader and minister in Jens Stoltenberg’s second cabinet. The “scandal” concerned several affairs, most importantly two violations of property regulations. The Haga family had built an illegal pier by their cabin on the west coast of Norway and rented out a storehouse at their home outside Oslo without proper approval from the local authorities. Haga tried to explain that it was her husband who took care of the different building permits. However, in the media she was portrayed as the one personally responsible for the pier and the storehouse. When the media reports broke, Haga had already announced that she would not be running for re-election to the Parliament in the 2009 election. When she left her political positions on June 19, 2008, she was cited that health problems and the media drive hunt were the main reasons for her decisions.

The third case concerns the “Minister scandals” in Sweden 2006 which in the end resulted in two resignations. Two female politicians, Minister of Trade Maria Borelius and Minister of Culture, Cecilia Stegö Chilò, both had to leave Fredrik Reinfeldt’s first cabinet, a newly elected conservative-liberal coalition government. In an interview with the morning newspaper Svenska Dagbladet (October 7, 2006) Borelius voluntarily admitted that she had been hiring nannies in the 1990’s, without paying employment taxes and employer’s contributions for



these services. Borelius claimed they could not afford to pay taxes, but later it was documented by the press that Borelius and her family were wealthy. Stegö Chilò had also been hiring nannies without paying employment taxes, but was mostly criticized due to the lack of TV-license payment fees over a period of at least 16 years. Not to pay TV-license is considered an offense for an owner of a television set in Sweden. Shortly after, the institution responsible for the TV-license (Radiotjänst i Kiruna AB) and Swedish Transport Workers Union filed charges against Stegö Chilò. On October 14 Borelius resigned, after only eight days as Minister of Trade. Two days later Stegö Chilò followed her example. Minister of Migration and Asylum Tobias Billström had also neglected to pay his television licence fees, and Minister of Finance Anders Borg admitted to hiring home services without paying employment taxes, but they did not get the same amount of criticism and accusations from the public and the media. Of the four politicians, only the two women had to resign (Pollack 2009: 100). They resigned due to transgressions committed long before they were offered a position in the government, and in the case of Stegö Chilò, before she even became a politician.

The fourth case concerns Henriette Kjær, the Minister of Family and Consumption in the Cabinet of Anders Fogh Rasmussen's first government, who on February 16 2005 resigned after 14 days of media criticism due to a scandal concerning unpaid bills in the household. According to the television channel TV 2, which broke the story, Henriette Kjær and her domestic partner had failed to pay for two sofas and an awning worth 58 000 DKK. The couple was taken to court, but the payments were not made in full until campaigning for the Conservatives started in 2005. Her partner accepted full responsibility for the unpaid bills and announced that Kjær was unaware of the missed payments and the lawsuits against them. However, Kjær said she had no choice but to resign, thinking first and foremost about the wellbeing of her family and the strength of her political party. Kjær was not included in the Anders Fogh Rasmussen's second government, announced after the conservative-liberal coalition had retained their parliamentary support in the 2005 Danish parliamentary election.

The fifth case concerns Helle Thorning-Schmidt, the leader of the Social Democrat Party and today's Prime Minister of Denmark. In July 2010 she had to address criticism of contradictory information provided to government authorities concerning her husband, Stephen Kinnock's, residence status in Denmark. Danish tax authorities and police were investigating whether Kinnock committed tax evasion when declaring that he was not a resident of Denmark and thus not obligated to pay Danish taxes, while at the same time Thorning-Schmidt wrote, in an application for dispensation for Kinnock to own property in Denmark, that he resided in Denmark "every weekend of the year from Friday through Monday" (Jyllands-Posten 30.07.10). After an examination of the case, the Danish tax inspectors concluded that her husband was not subject to

Danish taxes. Thorning-Schmidt got full support from her political party and is still the leader of the Social Democrats. In the recent general election she succeeded in leading the opposition to power, and became the first female Prime Minister of Denmark.

### Extended female responsibility?

A common factor in all these five scandals is that the alleged wrongdoings concern the politicians' personality, private life and family, not their political views or actions. The last decade we have seen an increase in the more "private" types of scandals in all the Nordic countries (see chapter 2). Scandals involving politicians' more personal norm transgressions are easily understandable, engage large audiences, include a human aspect and clear-cut moral issues. These kinds of scandals do not only affect female politicians, but it seems to be at least a Norwegian and Danish pattern of "extended female responsibility"; female politicians who are not only being held accountable for their own actions, they are also responsible for what their husbands, partners or close family might do. This was the case with Åslaug Haga, Henriette Kjær and Helle Thorning-Schmidt<sup>4</sup>.

Another distinctive issue in these scandals were the massive media coverage and public criticism, compared to the relative trivial and minor violations committed. The transgressions were covered extensively and ended in most of the cases with resignation, in spite of the scandals lacking social importance and meaning. An illegally built pier, lacking TV license payments or some unpaid bills, don't mean that the female politicians did a bad job in politics or cheated the public.

Most of the scandals were framed as a breach between preach and practice. The Scandinavian media scandals often focus on and frame the issues like discrepancies between what politicians say and do, because political behaviour that stands in contrast to stereotypes creates more commotion and criticism than behaviour that just confirms them. The fact that Valla was the leader of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, and known for the statement; "to act against bullying is a leader's responsibility" (Midtbø 2007: 46), made the severity of Yssen's allegations even worse. The illegal pier owned by Haga was portrayed like a breach between the strict governmental building regulations and the minister's private neglect of the very same rules. In the media she was portrayed like a politician who broke the same laws she was passing; "To be a lawbreaker is bad, to be a legislative lawbreaker is worse" (Midtbø 2007: 25).

The accusations against Stegö Chilò in the TV license controversy in 2006 were especially incisive due to her position as Minister of Culture. As Minister for Culture, Stegö Chilò's responsibilities also included oversight of the Swedish public service corporations, which were the main receivers of the television

license. The unpaid bills in the “Sofa- and awning affair” were strongly criticised, because Kjær had been giving economical advice and warned against loan-financed consumption in her role as Minister of Family and Consumption. Kjær’s loan-financed consumption and failure to pay the bills were portrayed as a breach of consistency between her actions and words, a disclosure which in turn gave her the nickname “Minister of Overconsumption”. Accusations against Thorning-Schmidt of tax evasion could just as easily have ended her political career. As the leader of the Social Democrat Party, the labour union’s own political party, she could not afford the suspicion of having a husband cheating the Danish taxpayers, enriching himself at the expense of all citizens in the Danish society.

### Apologia and rhetorical defence strategies

Scandals have become a pervasive feature of social and political life. Image is extremely important to politicians, and these scandals constitute a threat to their reputation and symbolic power. To have and use symbolic power is vital in the political world, to receive support and in order to get re-elected. When a scandal destroys the political image, their symbolic power weakens and politicians lose their ability to influence and persuade. To maintain a favourable reputation and avoid a tainted image, the politicians make use of rhetorical defence strategies, also called *apologia*.

Apologia is a Greek term and can be defined as a defence – in speech or writing – of own actions and opinions (Villadsen 2009: 192). Apologia can also be seen as a goal-oriented activity to protect ones reputation and image (Benoit 1995). Not to confuse *apologia* with apology, which is an expression of fault, responsibility and remorse. An *apologia* can include an apology, but it’s much more than that. Through an *apologia* the politician can explain his or her actions and positions, and try to convince the critics of his or her rightness or innocence (Smith 2005: 100). Keith Michael Hearit describes *apologia* as a secular remediation ritual that “acknowledge wrongdoing and place it on the public record as a memorial. In so doing, they do not have as their desired outcome the forgiveness of the guilty party, but rather the exacting of a proportional humiliation by which to propitiate the wrongdoing” (Hearit 2006: 205). Through the defence, the apologist reaffirms the very same values that he or she was said to have broken (Hearit 2006: 36). The primary virtue of the *apologia* is that it completes the typical wrongdoing, guilt and restoration drama. By doing so, the politician denies media a continual story, and the society can move on, taking comfort in that broken values have been demonstrated to be vital (Hearit 2006: 17, 36).

Based on the research on accounts and *apologia*, William L. Benoit has developed the Theory of Image Restoration. He presents a typology where image restoration strategies are organized into five broad categories, three of

which have subcategories; *denial*, *evading responsibility*, *reducing offensiveness*, *corrective action* and *mortification*. Together Benoit offers 14 different defence strategies; *simple denial*, *shifting the blame*, *provocation*, *defeasibility*, *accident*, *good intentions*, *bolstering*, *minimization*, *differentiation*, *transcendence*, *attack on accuser*, *offering compensation*, *corrective action* and *mortification* (Benoit 1995, 1997, 2004). Benoit has used this typology to analyse the defence speeches of Richard Nixon (Benoit 1995), Newt Gingrich (Kennedy & Benoit 1997), Gary Condit (Len-Ríos & Benoit 2004), Bill Clinton (Blaney and Benoit 2001) and George W. Bush (Benoit 2006, Benoit & Henson 2009), all male politicians in the US. In a critique offered by Judith P. Burns and Michael S. Bruner, they mention the theory's lack of a broader contextual frame, and suggest exploring the image restoration in different contexts (Burns and Bruner 2000: 33-34, 37). In this chapter I apply Benoit's typology to categorize, analyse and evaluate female apologia in Norway, Sweden and Denmark<sup>5</sup>.

W. Timothy Coombs argues that a politician's response to a scandal can vary from a defensive to an accommodative apologia. His Situational Crisis Communication Theory ranges from the most defensive responses like *attack on accuser* and *denial*, through *excuse*, *justification* and *ingratiation*, to more accommodative defence strategies like *corrective action* and *full apology* (Coombs 1999, 2000). According to Coombs, each scandal is unique and the speaker has to find the rhetorical defence strategy which matches the gravity of the accusations; "As the reputational damage of a scandal intensifies, perceptions of responsibility strengthen along with the need for more accommodative strategies" (Coombs 1999: 126). Based on a combination of Benoit's and Coombs' theories, I have decided to narrow my selection of apologia to six different rhetorical defence strategies; *attack on accuser*, *denial*, *defeasibility*, *bolstering*, *corrective action* and *mortification* (*Full Apology*).

*Attack on accuser* (1) is, according to Coombs, the most defensive strategy on the defence continuum. Benoit's typology also includes attack on accuser, but the strategy is placed under the third main category, reducing offensiveness. If the accuser is also the victim, the apologist may create the impression that the victim deserved what befell him or her. *Denial* (2) is the first main category in Benoit's Theory of Image Restoration, and regarded as one of the defensive strategies on Coombs' continuum. Most people, when faced with a scandal, will start out with a denial, before they move on to other more accommodative defence strategies (Ihlen 2002: 203). It's hard to admit you are wrong and take full responsibility, and if the denial works, the criticism will soon vanish and the damages to the reputation heal.

A rather neutral defence strategy is when the speaker pleads lack of information or control over the situation, known as *defeasibility* (3). *Bolstering* (4) is a way of strengthening the public's positive affect for the speaker, by compliments and reminding them of past good deeds (Coombs 2000: 38). While the

amount of negative affect from the accusation remains the same, increasing the positive feeling towards the speaker might help offset some of the negative impression held by the media and the public.

*Corrective action* (5) is a more accommodative defence strategy, meaning that the accused person vows to correct the problem, either by restoring the situation or promising to mend one's ways. Corrective action is often combined with mortification or a full apology. *Mortification* or a *full apology* (6) is when the accused admits his or her faults, takes full responsibility and asks for forgiveness. Coombs considers a full apology to be the most accommodative strategy in the defence continuum. Kenneth Burke calls this defence strategy a "symbolic suicide", because the speaker offers his or her head on a plate, with the hope of being forgiven (Hearit 2006: 31). Carl D. Schneider means a full apology has to consist of three main elements; acknowledgment of injury with the acceptance of responsibility, felt regret or shame and last vulnerability by not giving any excuses for the offensive act or situation (Schneider 2000: 266-267). Aaron Lazare describes the ritual exchange of an apology in this way; "What makes an apology work is the exchange of shame and power between the offender and the offended" (Lazare 1995: 42, Lazare 2004).

### The Attack-strategy

*Attack* was used as a defence strategy by four of the six female politicians. The LO-leader Gerd-Liv Valla actively criticised her accuser and former colleague, Ingunn Yssen, and stated that the conflict had another background. In a letter to the LO-secretariat, Valla criticized Yssen for "continual absence and a lack of follow-ups" (Valla, letter to LO-secretariat, 12.01.07) in the international department. Valla ascertained that Yssen in many occasions "didn't deliver", took "time off without permission" and "did whatever she liked without following the guidelines/practice [at LO]" (Valla, letter to LO-secretariat, 12.01.07). The LO-leader tried to draw a picture of Yssen not managing her job properly. In Valla's resignation speech, March 9, 2007, she attacked an accuser for the second time, but this time the accuser was the Fougner-committee, consisting of three conservative, high-level lawyers who had been hired by LO to investigate the case. Valla was critical of their assignment and investigation of the "LO-drama";

When the committee started their investigation, we experienced them using both anonymous examination of witnesses and hotline for tips. I have to say that I have perceived it as especially tough that the committee encouraged people to gossip and relieve big and small conflicts. I have to say I have felt a lot of this to be disgraceful [...] If the report from the committee had been a sentence, and not a report, then I would have appealed (Valla, press conference 09.03.07).

In the case involving Minister of Petroleum and Energy Åslaug Haga, she also found it necessary to *attack her accuser*. She pointed out that Ås municipality “had messed up in this case” (Haga, Dagbladet 11.06.08). Since Haga and her husband had sent an email to the local authorities, without getting any response, they thought it was okay to rent out the storehouse. Haga held a press conference on June 12 to answer questions and defend herself against the criticism and accusations. This time she attacked the media covering the scandal. She was upset about the press not respecting her family and private life:

When cases like the once yesterday create five pages of huge headlines in *Dagbladet*<sup>6</sup>, and I know that I’m in for a thorough investigation of my private life and everyone around me in the following weeks, then I have to ask myself if it’s worth it. I have TV teams surrounding the house. [...] I have pale children coming home, because our family is completely invaded (Haga, press conference 12.06.08).

She continued quite emotionally by appealing to the press, talking both about her family and her own health. She emphasized keeping a distance between her public and private life, using her yard as a metaphorical border;

If you [the media] plan to follow me tomorrow, then you can go with me to a funeral in Ås church. On Saturday you can find me. Then you have to come to the nursing home in Årnes, where I am to visit my very sick father [...] You can follow me around, but do not enter my yard” (Haga, press conference, 12.06.08).

In her resignation speech Haga once again attacked the media, by explaining how she had experienced the press coverage during the scandal; “I have to say, during this spring I have experienced that small things have become great issues and everything has been portrayed as just as important” (Haga, press conference 19.06.08).

In a press release announcing her resignation, Stegö Chilò emphasized her ambition to make things right, but at the same time she *attacked her accusers*, Radiotjänst i Kiruna AB and Swedish Transport Workers Union. They had filed charges and Stegö Chilò meant they prevented her from making up for what she had done wrong. She also blamed them of not letting her do her job as Minister of Culture;

By not paying my TV-license and hiring nannies without paying employer’s contributions, I have committed offences prior to my minister period that’s not acceptable, but I have in every way tried to make things right. My ambition has now been stopped by Radiotjänst i Kiruna and the Swedish Transport Workers Union’s criminal charges (Stegö Chilò, press release 16.10.06).

Kjær started her *attack* by claiming that someone had leaked information about her and her partner's unpaid bills to the Danish television station, TV 2, to sabotage her re-election; "I think someone has gone to the press with this information. I don't think TV 2 all by themselves found out that they should investigate me and my economy. There must have been some evil tongues whispering something in their ears" (Kjær, press conference, 16.02.05). Kjær also *attacked* the media covering the "Sofa- and awning"-affair. She found the coverage to be massive and thought it looked more like a character murder, than a political investigation. Both Kjær and her partner were analysed and criticised by so-called experts, handpicked for the occasion. Even the war in Iraq became insignificant in comparison with two sofas and an awning in Hellerup, Denmark; "The critic of the Iraqi war had to give away for the juicy personal story" (Kjær 2005: 151).

### Denial as a strategy

Two of the six politicians explicitly used *denial* as part of their defence strategies. Valla *denied* ever harassing or bullying Ingunn Yssen. At her first press conference Valla stated that Yssen's accusations about her being disappointed about the pregnancy were "far-fetched" and "completely untrue";

I would like to state on behalf of everybody in the leadership, that what has been said has no root in reality, and it's a description of us that we do not recognize. It is important to say that (Valla, press conference, 11.01.07).

Valla made a point out of speaking on behalf of the entire management. In spite of Yssen emphasizing that the criticism and accusations were not directed towards the trade union, only the leader of LO, Valla consequently referred to "we" and "us in the administration" as part of her apology. The defence strategy was a way of showing that she had the backing and support of the whole trade union in this matter.

The Danish minister Henriette Kjær *denied* ever knowing about the bills and the court order. She blamed her partner by calling his actions a breach of trust; "There has been a breach of trust. I have discussed it with my partner, and now we have to move on" (Kjær, press conference 16.02.05). It wasn't Kjær, but her domestic partner, who wanted to buy the awning. A few days earlier, he had been out in the media taking full responsibility for the unpaid bills. However, Kjær wouldn't leave him. She still loved him and thought it would be too cold to just walk away. This strengthened the image of Kjær as a faithful and loving partner, but not necessarily as a good politician; "We have been out in economical uncomfortable situations before, and I have stayed, because I love him, and now I know, that I still do" (Kjær, Ekstra Bladet 17.02.05).



### Defeasibility as a rhetorical strategy

Three of the six politicians used *defeasibility* as part of their defence. Haga used *defeasibility* to plead lack of information and control over the situation. She tried to explain that it was really her husband who handled everything about the cabin and the different building permits; “We have a division of labour in our home, and I have to admit that there are some practical things I do not attend to. That’s no excuse for me. It was wrong not to apply [for a building permit]” (Haga, VG 10.06.08).

Borelius in the “Minister scandals” used *defeasibility* to defend her earlier nanny services and tax evasions. Borelius emphasized that she had given birth to four children during five years, and the fact that she wasn’t the only one using these kinds of services without paying taxes. All her friends and colleagues did the same thing during the 1990’s;

I gave birth to four children during five years, and it’s hard to combine this with my work [...] I did the same thing as a lot of other people then, something considered reasonable among my friends and colleagues, but it was wrong (Borelius, P1-morgon, 11.10.06).

Kjær chose *defeasibility* to argue that she lacked necessary information and control over the family economy. It was her partner who took care of the purchases to the household, and the mail was always taken when she came home at night. That’s why she never had seen any court orders. Kjær did however take full responsibility and resigned from her post as Minister of Family and Consumption;

Our life has been organized in a way, during my three year minister period, that I have always been the last one coming home. There has never been any mail, it had already been taken [...] It’s him [Kjær’s partner] who has organized our home, and I have always said; “Do it if you can afford it” [...] I’m resigning because I feel responsible. I have been too passive (Kjær, Ekstra Bladet, 17.02.05).

She could see why most people had problems understanding this kind of organization of the household; “I can understand why people wonder. I have heard, when talking to people in the aftermath, that in most families it’s the woman who takes care of the bills and the economy” (Kjær 2005: 31).

### Bolstering as a rhetorical strategy

Four of the six politicians used bolstering as a rhetorical strategy. In her resignation speech, Valla started by praising the national trade union organization’s good work during her time as trade union leader;



In six years I have had the honour of leading the trade union, LO. An organization both we and other members in the trade union are excited about. We have obtained good results during this time. I'm proud of these results because we have stood united in everything we have done (Valla, press conference, 09.03.07).

She continued her *bolstering* strategy by telling about all the letters, flowers, homemade mittens and pleasant SMS's she had received from her supporters. Particularly a text message she had gotten from a former head of a division in LO, Kåre Myrvold, which she chose to read out loud at the press conference; "I perceive you, Gerd-Liv, as a strong and demanding, but also an open and listening leader. For this I'm grateful" (Valla, press conference, 09.03.07).

Both Borelius and Stegö Chilò used *bolstering* to strengthen their own reputation and image. Borelius emphasized multiple times that she had always been open about using nannies without paying employment tax and employer's contribution. She claimed to be an honest and faithful person, who tried to live a decent life;

I have always been open about this. When I joined the Moderate Party and told them that I wanted to contribute to their politics, I wanted to fight for work in Sweden [...] I try to be an honest and decent person [...] It's been important for me to keep my openness (Borelius, TV4 Nyhetsmorgon, 11.10.06).

Stegö Chilò emphasized her will to do what was right, in an attempt to re-establish a good reputation; "When you don't pay your bills, a question always arises. Is she trying to cheat? Can't she afford it? I would like to say, it was never about that, but to do what's right, is an important principle for me, which I live by, as far as I can" (Stegö Chilò, press conference, 11.10.06).

Thorning-Schmidt also chose *bolstering* to strengthen her image as a good politician, leader of the Social Democrats and future prime minister of Denmark; "I have been the leader of the Social Democrats for five and ½ years. I think I'm quite a thorough person, take care of my colleagues in the Social Democrats, and know the difference between right and wrong. I always tell the truth, because I'm that kind of a person" (Thorning-Schmidt, airport interview, TV2 Nyhederne 19.00-19.30, 30.07.10).

### The Corrective Action strategy

Four of the six politicians offered corrective action. Valla applied this more accommodative defence strategy in her press conference January 19, 2007 by promising to change her leading style. She would also open up an investigation of the "LO-drama", done by an objective and neutral part from outside the trade union;

Yes, I would like to change my leading style. Some finds me too tough and direct, and I want to change that. In LO we are very concerned about bullying. I could never imagine bullying someone, but we will open up for someone external to take a look. If anyone experiences my tough leading style as bullying, I'm sorry (Valla, press conference 19.01.07).

Haga offered *corrective action* by promising to straighten things out if they had done anything wrong by renting out the storehouse; "We have in all these years paid our taxes. We have conscientious filled out and signed our tax forms. Still, it could be that we have done something wrong. If so, I assure you, it will be straightened out" (Haga, press conference 19.06.08).

Stegö Chilò promised *corrective action* by expressing an ambition to repay with interest what she owed in TV-license payment fees;

In conversations with Radiotjänst i Kiruna AB, they suggested that I should repay, or pay back the money I owe in TV-license from 1990 to Radiotjänst started their work [...] In a couple of days I will receive a bill from Radiotjänst. It's going to be big, it should be, since it covers many years, and of course I will pay it (Stegö Chilò, press conference 11.10.06).

Still Radiotjänst i Kiruna AB, an institution tasked with collecting the licence fees, and Swedish Transport Workers Union decided to file charges against the politician.

Thorning-Schmidt offered *corrective action* by making her husband pay taxes both in Switzerland and Denmark, even thou he was not taxable in Denmark. They did so, to avoid coming into a grey area in Danish tax politics; "Regardless of what SKAT [Danish tax authorities] decides, Stephen [Kinnock] will pay taxes in both Switzerland and Denmark from now on, because he can" (Thorning-Schmidt, GO' Morgen Danmark, 02.08.10).

## The Apology

*Mortification* or *full apology* is considered the most accommodative defence strategy. Four of the six politicians apologized, but only one of them succeeded in giving a sincere and full apology, also called mortification. Valla said she was sorry, but the apology did not resemble a full apology. She didn't acknowledge any injury, show regret or vulnerability. Valla did not ask for forgiveness, because she didn't feel she had done anything wrong. She gave a reserved *apology* and said she was sorry if Yssen felt she had been bullied or harassed;

When it comes to the relationship between Ingunn Yssen and myself, I feel bad if Ingunn Yssen has felt something I have said or done to be hurtful. That was never my intention, so for that I am sorry (Valla, press conference, 19.01.07).

The apology was general and focused on how Yssen perceived Valla. To put it in the terms of Kenneth Burke (1970: 248 cited in Hearit 2006: 31), the apology did not look like a “symbolic suicide”. The LO-leader seemed more concerned about regaining control and closing the case, when she finally agreed to give an apology. Valla felt pressured, by the media and the public, to give an apology, and when she finally gave one, it was not accepted.

On October 11, 2006 both Borelius and Stegö Chilò gave an *apology* in relation to the “Minister scandals”. Borelius emphasized that she had made a big and foolish mistake, but she never specified the mistake or what she was sorry for. She also claimed that there was no excuse to cover what she had done. As a result, her apology did not seem genuine;

I have shown bad judgment in this case and I apologize for this. [...] I have made a mistake and I have done something illegal, and there is no excuse for it, no matter how much money you have, you should always pay what you owe [...] I have made a mistake and it doesn't matter how much I earn.

The mistake is just as grave [...] (Borelius, P1-morgon, 11.10.06).

The very same day, Stegö Chilò called the media to a press conference to say she was sorry, but without giving an explanation for the lacking TV license payments during the past 16 years. Stegö Chilò's apology was later evaluated as weak and non-successful, due to the lacking explanation and specification of her actions. The missing explanation made it almost impossible for Stegö Chilò to either apologize in a believable way, or opposite, attack the TV license or Swedish taxes in general;

There is no good explanation, there is only a huge excuse [...] I can't do nothing but apologize for this unfortunate story, that was discovered yesterday. There is no good explanation; there is really no good clarification either. This is, to me, a deeply regretted mistake [...] It is no way to justify this, I'm genuinely sorry for what has happened (Stegö Chilò, press conference, 11.10.06).

Few thought Stegö Chilò really had forgotten to pay, due to her earlier critic of the fee and her former statement about how she really wanted to get caught not paying her TV-license. The lack of payments was portrayed in the media like Stegö Chilò was taking an ideological standpoint.

Thorning-Schmidt's apology in the “Taxes- and Residence scandal” came closest to *mortification* or *full apology*. She rushed home from vacation to say she was sorry. She admitted her faults, took full responsibility and asked for forgiveness. She acknowledged the scandal, showed regret and gave no excuses. Her defence strategy, which she kept on repeating in every statement and interview, resembled a “symbolic suicide”;

It was a careless mistake of huge dimensions and I'm the first to apologize. I blame myself of course, because I wasn't careful enough when reporting on

my husband's activities in Denmark [...]. I understand the Danish people who think I should have been more careful. I think a lot about my colleagues, the Social Democrats and all our trustees. I deeply apologize to them (Thorning-Schmidt, airport interview, TV2 Nyhederne 19.00-19.30 30.07.10)

It is not supposed to happen, it should not happen to a political candidate running for prime minister, and I deeply apologize. I have reviled myself. I apologize mostly to my political colleagues in the Social Democrats. This shouldn't happen, but it is not done on purpose. There has been no economic benefit (Thorning-Schmidt, TV Avisen, 30.07.10).

It goes without question, I want to apologize for this matter, and I blame myself, because I wasn't careful enough when reporting on how we live (Thorning-Schmidt, letter to all members of Denmark's Social Democratic Party, 01.08.10)

Thorning-Schmidt's swift decision to cut her vacation short, rush home and say she was sorry, seemed to work. This apology was accepted by the media and the public. Ironically the "symbolic suicide" helped her to survive the scandal.

## Discussion

A scandal triggers a person's need to defend his or her reputation and public image. This is especially true for politicians who are, due to their public visibility, highly exposed to political scandals, media drive hunts and a public outcry for resignation. In this chapter I've explored how six female politicians in Scandinavia apply rhetorical defence strategies, also called apologia, using a combination of William L. Benoit's Theory of Image Restoration and Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory. Based on the limited numbers of strategically chosen scandals, a researcher should be careful not to make too broad conclusions. Still, my analysis shows a number of significant aspects and tendencies across the scandals involving the female politicians.

The scandals mainly concerned relatively trivial issues and minor transgressions from the politicians' family and private life. However, the revelations from the politicians' personal life often have serious consequences for their political career, more often than not ending in resignation and withdrawal from politics. Of the six female politicians in this analysis, five of them resigned. Valla chose to leave her position as leader of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) after an external inquiry found her guilty of harassment, while Haga resigned as minister and party leader, officially due to health problems and the media drive hunt. Both Borelius and Stegö Chilò left the cabinet Reinfeldt after a very short period as Minister of Trade and Minister of Culture. Kjær

resigned as Minister of Family and Consumption from the Fogh Rasmussen's first government, but was later appointed political spokesperson and group leader for the Conservative party. She left politics all together on January 25, 2011 after renewed media attention and criticism concerning her questionable personal finances<sup>7</sup> and hence her ability to fulfil her political tasks. Thorning-Schmidt is the only politician in my selection who has not resigned. She is still the leader of the Social Democrats and has just recently (2011) through the Danish general election become the first female Prime Minister of Denmark.

The female politicians used a number of different defence strategies, ranging from the most defensive to the more accommodative. I have chosen to focus on the attack-strategy, bolstering and corrective action, due to the frequency and similarities of use across Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Valla, Haga, Stegö Chilò and Kjær used the most defensive strategy, attack on accuser. In the case of Haga and Kjær the accuser was the media, and they attacked by claiming that the press did not respect their private life, and that the media coverage was too massive. They used the attack-strategy as a response to the media's focus on trivial revelations from their home and personal life. Valla, Borelius, Stegö Chilò and Thorning-Schmidt used bolstering to strengthen the public's positive affect for them and their past good deeds. Valla told about her work in the trade union, as well as, all the flower, SMS's and support she had gotten during the scandal. Borelius and Stegö Chilò portrayed themselves as honest and faithful persons with a will to do what was right, while Thorning-Schmidt focused on her likely future as Denmark's first female prime minister. By using bolstering they tried to strengthen their own image and increase the public's positive feelings towards them, but never really dealt with the criticism and the negative affect from the scandals remained the same. Valla, Haga, Stegö Chilò and Thorning-Schmidt also offered the more accommodative defence strategy, corrective action. Valla promised to change her leading style, while Haga just pledged to straighten things out if it turned out that she or her husband had done something wrong. Both Stegö Chilò and Thorning-Schmidt offered corrective action by paying back what they owed, Stegö Chilò her TV-license and Thorning-Schmidt her husband's taxes. Corrective action is often offered combined with mortification or a full apology, but of the four politicians apologizing, only Thorning-Schmidt offered a genuine and unreserved apology, resembling a "symbolic suicide".

This brings me to my last point; the lacking will and interest to show remorse and apologize. Valla said she was sorry if Yssen had *perceived* her to be bullying and harassing, i.e., a rather limited apology. Haga offered corrective action, but never found any reason to "apologize" for the transgressions of regulations concerning the pier and the storehouse. Borelius and Stegö Chilò apologized, but they didn't specify what they were sorry for. Kjær chose more defensive strategies, like attack on accuser and denial, over accommodative apologia like

corrective action and mortification. Only Thorning-Schmidt's defence strategy can be categorized as a full apology. She rushed home, took full responsibility and made no excuses. This "symbolic suicide" seemed to be accepted by the media and the public, and she survived the scandal. This does not necessarily mean that Valla, Haga, Borelius, Stegö Chilò, Kjær or Thorning-Schmidt had anything to apologize for or to be sorry about. In all the five scandals there was a battle between different perceptions of reality, and an understanding of guilt and responsibility.

"Always say you are sorry and make a poodle<sup>8</sup>", is the advice given by many PR-consultants and communication experts. They expect politicians to apologize and stay low until the scandal has blown over. Still, it does not mean that apologizing and growling at the feet of the media and the public, is the universal solution for politicians caught in a political scandal. The criticism doesn't magically disappear by accepting blame and begging for forgiveness. However, the missing apology might have had something to do with the experience women have with power and powerlessness. To engage in the ritual of mortification or full apology means swallowing some pride and showing vulnerability. Still, the female politicians do not know if the media, other politicians or the voters will accept the apology and forgive.

Women, who have learned to act like men to gain power and influence in the male game of politics, do not feel more comfortable than men with admitting guilt and apologizing when faced with a scandal. They are, on the other hand, expected to be more relation-oriented, more disposed to feeling guilty and giving an apology. This creates a clear contrast between the expectations put on women's apologia, and the defence strategies the female politicians actually use. The different and opposing expectations male and female politicians might meet, demonstrate the rhetorical challenges female politicians face in a political scandal.

## Notes

1. Inter-Parliamentary Union: (Situation as of August 31, 2011) "Women in national parliaments" <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm>
2. Citations from Norwegian, Swedish and Danish texts have been translated to English by the author. My thanks to Lea Hellmueller at the University of Missouri for proofreading my chapter.
3. Gerd-Liv Valla, the former leader of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, is in this chapter considered a politician due to her elected status and political influence. She is also a former Minister of Justice.
4. For more scandals showing a pattern of "extended female responsibility", see Fatma Jynge in Norway 2000, and Lene Espersen in Denmark 2010.
5. I want to thank William L. Benoit for interesting and clarifying discussions concerning his Theory of Image Restoration, when I came to visit at the University of Ohio in Athens (February 27-March 2, 2011).

6. The newspaper *Dagbladet* is a popular tabloid.
7. The renewed media attention and critique concerned a number of bills which hadn't been paid on time and Kjær's "mother in law" reporting both Kjær and her partner Erik Skov Pedersen to the police for forgery, claiming the couple forged her signature on a DKK 200 000 borrower's note held by her as surety. Skov Pedersen responded by stating that the signature on the note was 100 % genuine and dismissed his mother as "senile". He was later found guilty of forgery and economic fraud, and sentenced to three years imprisonment.
8. "Making a poodle" is a Swedish phrase which describes how a person should look like when giving a full apology and grovelling at someone's feet. He or she should look just like a poodle lying on its back and waiving conciliating with its feet (Allern & Pollack 2009b: 13).





## Chapter 9

# Do Mediated Political Scandals Affect Party Popularity in Norway?

Tor Midtbø

The political impact of scandals can be tremendous. Major scandals not only turn politicians' lives and their careers upside-down, but they may also have profound effects on institutions and the political culture as well (Adut 2004: 535).<sup>1</sup> The consequences include everything from government crises, legal reforms, new forms of investigative journalism to deteriorating political confidence and even dissatisfaction with democracy (Bowler & Karp 2004: Kumlin & Esaiasson forthcoming). This study addresses more immediate consequences of scandals: Is there a potential short-term impact of political scandals on *party popularity*? Do Norwegian voters react to political scandals by way of antipathy, sympathy, or just indifference?

On the face of it, Norway does not seem an ideal case for exploring such effects.<sup>2</sup> After all, politics and scandals are not usually associated with Norwegian politics. Indeed, back in the late 1980s "scandalogists" described Norway and the other Scandinavian countries as an idyllic heaven where politicians were unexposed to "embarrassments" (Logue 1988: 261). Elsewhere politics was scandalous, in Scandinavia it was scandal-less. Still, Norwegian politics is hardly as peaceful as that described by foreign observers. Indeed, and although the polity is both small and transparent, political scandals have been part of Norwegian politics from quite early in the Post-War period. It started already in 1963 when the government had to resign due to its unfortunate handling of an accident in a mining factory at Svalbard ("The Kings Bay crisis"). Eight years later the coalition government broke down due to an indiscretion by the prime minister. Even if Norwegian political scandals admittedly remain exceptions rather than the rule, the number of such scandals has – as in most other democracies (Thompson 2000: 43-48) – increased quite markedly over the past decades. The *types* of scandals have become more varied as well. Sex scandals, for example, are no longer confined to British politics, but have made their imprint on Norwegian politics, too. In an era where voters have become less

loyal and more concerned with political personalities, we would expect these scandals to have some impact on party popularity.

The paper is organized as follows: The first section seeks to identify the most important elements in a political scandal. Then six Norwegian scandals are introduced – scandals which in the subsequent empirical analysis are defined as events with a potential of influencing party popularity trajectories. In as much as political scandals are *mass-mediated* scandals, the theoretical part discusses whether the media as such can be expected to affect voting behaviour. Arguments that suggest why, and why not, scandals per se should influence party support are also being considered. A brief discussion of methodology is then followed by an empirical analysis and a discussion of the results.

## Defining political scandals

Political scandals can be defined as spectacular events outside the realm of routine politics and day-to-day journalism caused by politicians' breach of moral norms which, although tried to be kept a secret, were disclosed by the media and condemned in public (Adut 2004: 533, Liebes 2004: 1153). Looking at the concept in more detail, a political scandal appears to have the following characteristics (Thompson 2000: 13-14):

1. Scandals are triggered by violation of certain norms that vary in time and space, being defined by shifting cultural and moral standards. It is not the transgression itself, but how it is *perceived*, that defines the scandal.
2. In contrast to corruption, embezzlement, and fraud – which all may go undetected – scandals are in essence *public events*. A scandal does not become a scandal before it escapes the boundaries of the private sphere. Politicians try to prevent wrongdoings from becoming publicly known, but other actors – such as journalists, tax collectors and political opponents – spend time and resources to prevent them from succeeding. A scandal can therefore be described as a game where strategies meet counter-strategies.
3. Outside actors are offended or hurt by the transgression – or at least they pretend to be. Despite an increasingly more secularised, tolerant and pluralistic society, political scandals often involve violations of old moral codes. They often appear as cheap farces, which may offend someone, but not everyone.
4. The disclosure of a transgression and the subsequent condemnation will threaten a politicians' reputation – a reputation which defines his or hers political capital – capital consisting not only of pride and self-respect but political influence as well: Those hurt by a scandal stand to loose power.

A final element could be added to the list:

5. Scandals are characterized by intense excitement and uncertainty (Nord 2001: 18). As in a good detective novel, everyone eagerly anticipates the ending of the story. The crucial question is whether the politician will succumb to media pressure and resign. Uncertainty fosters speculation which in turn creates renewed interest in the scandal.

### How to distinguish major from minor political scandals

Scandals are processes that can be compared to the building of a cairn: It is impossible to say when a small pile of rocks has become a cairn, but at some point in time it must have happened. Similarly, there are no fixed borders between controversial issues and scandals. Thus, scandals should not be defined as dichotomous events, but rather as continuous phenomena (see Goertz 2006). We should distinguish between smaller and bigger scandals, not between scandals and non-scandals.

To decide where on the scale a scandal is situated, the following criteria might be helpful: First, the higher the formal status of a politician, the bigger the scandal. If a prime minister commits a certain offence, the scandal is more severe than if a local politician does the same. Second, most transgressions receive media attention for only few days in only a few media outlets. Big scandals, on the other hand, are covered by several national newspapers and television networks for several weeks or more. Big scandals are characterized by intense media coverage, smaller scandals are not. Third, when the battle is over, even political opponents tend to admit that the transgression that precipitated the scandal was not that serious after all. To exaggerate the severity of a transgression is part of the political game. That said, and even if the ethical limits probably are a matter of opinion, some transgressions must be considered more serious than others. A wrongdoing that precipitates angry letters to the editor is not the same as a transgression resulting in a prison sentence. Fourth, scandals are in many ways defined by their consequences. Transgressions that are heavily criticised by political opponents are bigger than those which are not. In a similar vein, if a politician is forced to resign, the scandal is bigger than if the politician survives the feeding frenzy and manages to stay in office. Fifth, the size of a scandal should also be judged by the verdict from the electorate. Scandals that trigger massive voter-defections are bigger than scandals voters choose to ignore. In this study the first four criteria are employed to select the scandals, while the last is made susceptible to empirical testing.

## Six scandals in Norway

Given the criteria listed above, and emphasising in particular the importance of intensive and extensive media coverage and public criticism by political opponents, the following six scandals in Norwegian Post-War politics are found worthy of closer examination:

### 1. *The “leakage” affair*

The first major Norwegian power-scandal, the so-called *leakage affair*, occurred in 1971. At that time, the government was severely weakened over internal disagreement concerning Norway’s application for membership in the European Common Market. All commentators agreed that it was only a matter of time before the government would fall apart. Nevertheless, it was the transgression and the subsequent disclosure of that transgression that precipitated the prime minister’s resignation and the dissolution of government.

The crisis started when a newspaper on its front page quoted from a confidential report from the Norwegian ambassador in Brussels. Prime minister Per Borten denied having anything to do with the leakage. Even though the denial was correct as such, it turned out that Borten had in fact revealed the content of the report to leaders of the main anti-EEC organization. These leaders were not, however, the source for the story in the newspaper. The prime minister was not source, but he *could* have been. The transgression, and especially the *denial* of the transgression, prompted the prime minister’s resignation. The scandal received enormous media publicity. Indeed, it has been described as the first mediatized scandal in Norway. Some even argued – among them, the prime minister – that the media transformed a minor transgression into a major scandal (see Bastiansen and Dahl 2003: 441).

### 2. *The Syse-affair*

In September 1990, a huge media attack was launched against the Conservative prime minister, Jan P. Syse. A journalist from Norway’s largest newspaper, *Verdens Gang*, had discovered that the prime minister had neglected to file his tax return for some property as required by the law. Despite the media storm, and notwithstanding some serious strategic blunders at the beginning of the process (the prime minister tried to belittle his transgression by comparing it to getting a speeding ticket), the prime minister managed to cling on to power. However, and once again due to Norwegian Euro-scepticism, the government was dissolved two and a half months later. The largest opposition party at the time, the Labour Party, was among Syse’s fiercest critics. The party demanded a thorough investigation of the prime ministers’ financial affairs – a position that was not reversed until Labour formed a new government.

### 3. *The Rød-Larsen affair*

The so-called “Rød-Larsen affair” involved a Labour minister who in 1996 was forced to resign after only five weeks in the job. Rød-Larsen had to go when the national press started digging into accusations of alleged tax evasion several years earlier. The transgression had been revealed in a book and commented upon by some newspapers long before Rød-Larsen became minister. However, the issue was deemed newsworthy only once he had become a political celebrity. The issue sparked an intense media storm and the minister left his office insisting that “I did not deserve this.”

### 4. *The Tønne-affair*

About four years later what initially was labelled the “Tønne-affair” ended up as the “Tønne-tragedy”. The re-labelling reflected the fact the former Labour minister, Tore Tønne, committed suicide before a police investigation into fraud and corruption was completed. This, too, was primarily a financial scandal. Tønne was accused of illegally receiving money both from the state and a large private enterprise. After the suicide, a commission was set down to investigate media methods in Norway. The newspaper that had been the driving force behind the disclosures, *Dagbladet*, received particularly harsh criticism by the committee.

### 5. *The Søviknes scandal*

Norway experienced its first major sex-scandal in 2001. The deputy leader of the right-wing Progressive Party, Terje Søviknes – a rising star in the party – admitted to having a sexual relationship with a sixteen year old woman at a party congress. After being exposed by the media, Søviknes left national politics, continuing as mayor in a small municipality outside the city of Bergen. Prior to the scandal the party had gone through several internal conflicts between the leadership and a populist wing. During the ongoing power-struggle some of Søviknes’ party colleagues were feeding the press sensitive information. Søviknes undoubtedly got it from his own people.

### 6. *The Norman-scandal*

During some hectic weeks during the autumn 2003 the Conservative Minister of Labour, Victor D. Norman, was accused of numerous transgressions. Among them was having an affair with his previous Secretary of State, buying a piano with public money for private use, and travelling with expensive airlines despite having instructed all public employees not to do so. From the start, Norman was a controversial minister whose low esteem in the capital was caused by his

decision to dislocate several public offices from Oslo to other more peripheral places. Despite of (or *because of*, according to himself) the mounting media pressure, Norman decided to stay in office on the advice from the prime minister and his party leader. About a year later, Norman found that enough was enough and returned to his position as professor of economics.

### Media, scandals and party popularity: Some theoretical considerations

The media-effect on electoral behaviour is controversial. Some argue that the effect is immediate, direct and strong, while others say that the media only reinforce voters' already existing attitudes (see e.g. Larsson 2005: 31). Modern electoral research still musters an ample supply of media-sceptics. According to them, traditional variables like class, sex, religion, education, social networks and political interest continue to determine voter behaviour (Newton 2006: 209). The argument is that transient voter opinion is affected by the more stable attitudes which in turn are affected by the even more stable values. Attitudes and values are supposedly out of reach of media's influence. The irrelevance of the media is supposed, among other things, to be reflected in an aggregate opinion which remains surprisingly stable from one year to the next (Goul Andersen 1999: 57).

The media-sceptics argue that political socialization results mainly from the influence of family, colleagues and friends (see e.g. Schwebs and Østbye 2001: 204-205). According to one early version of this argument, labelled the *two-step hypothesis*, the news is filtered through knowledgeable opinion leaders. The effect of the media on political attitudes is described as weak and indirect, as opposed to the effect of opinion leaders which is supposed to be strong and direct. Psychology-inspired theories suggest the same: People tend to ignore information that contradicts already established attitudes and perceptions. The media message is blocked or redefined through *selective exposure* (voters only respond to information that supports their own views), *selective perception* (the message is interpreted in accordance with the already established opinions), and by *selective memory* (voters remember only arguments that are compatible with their own opinion). It would appear that, as far as their influence on opinion is concerned, the media are not the right media.

More recent research, however, has accredited media a much stronger effect on public opinion than previously assumed (see e.g. Aalberg and Jenssen 2007: 116). The media have become more important partly because other factors have become less important. The effect of social background and party identification, for example, has deteriorated over the past decades. Party preference is also more volatile than before, and issue-voting has become more important. Due

to television becoming more important as a disseminator of political information, personality may also be affecting voting behaviour.

According to the more recent literature, then, the question is not if, but *how*, the media influence voting behaviour (Aardal et al. 2004: 20). According to one perspective, although the media still do not decide what people should think, they still decide what people – and indeed politicians – should think *about*. The media are said to perform an agenda-setting function. More recent studies suggest that the media, especially through their framing of the news, even influence voters' opinions as well (Norris et al. 1999: 3, Norris 2000: 183). News that receives broad coverage, especially in television, contribute to *how* people think about political issues. Unbalanced media coverage (either unequivocally positive or unequivocally negative) is found to attract particular attention.

### Scandals and voting

If the media affect voter behaviour, then the same should probably apply to political scandals as well. After all, scandals attract a lot of attention and they dominate the news – albeit for relatively brief periods. Even if political interest on average is quite low in Western democracies, only hermits can ignore the feeding frenzy surrounding political scandals. What is more, scandals are also by their very nature unbalanced. Despite different journalistic frames and perspectives, the press coverage is overwhelmingly negative. To form an opinion about scandals does not require that much political knowledge. And as some politicians are painfully aware: Transgressions are not easily forgotten, either.

Another reason to expect scandals to influence party support is that opinion may be formed as a *spiral of silence* (Noelle-Neumann 1984). Studies show that people tend to identify with the majority. If the media are united in their condemnation of the politician(s) concerned, they may be seen to represent the popular majority. This may in itself generate a similar majority in the electorate. Voters may believe that the media represent everyone else, even if they do not.

On the other hand, opinion polls, at least in Norway, do not indicate any massive condemnation of politicians who get caught up in a media storm. The irrelevance of scandals can be summed up as an *anaesthesia effect* (Meyer 2002: 96). Journalists have cried “wolf, wolf” too loud for too long, resulting in mediated scandals being met with increasing indifference. Rather than sharing the journalists' moral indignation, voters look upon scandalous news as good, albeit politically irrelevant, entertainment. Indeed, if scandals affect electoral behaviour at all, they might just provoke passivity. American studies suggest that negative political campaigns make voters withdraw from politics (see Kinder 1998: 190-191). It has even been argued that negative campaigns create

a wave of sympathy that actually strengthens the popularity of the candidate concerned (Shah et al. 2002: 345).

## Modelling the impact of scandals

The empirical analysis compares the trend in party popularity before and after the scandal.<sup>3</sup> Monthly time-series stretching from one parliamentary election to the next are divided into a pre- and post-scandal period. The intention is to find out whether the scandal has affected the data generating process, and if so, in what direction and for how long – “long” being defined as until the coming election.

The statistical analysis builds upon simple intervention models. According to the null hypothesis the trajectory of the time series after the scandal is similar to what it was prior to the scandal apart from statistical noise. The effect of an intervention may at times be so conspicuous that it can easily be detected visually in a time series plot. However, underlying trends, inertia, periodical fluctuations as well as the effect of other explanatory variables may either inflate or deflate the effect. An intervention model can be used to control for factors unrelated to the scandal, thereby making it easier to distinguish between real and random effects. The analysis also provides a more precise estimate of the direction, magnitude, and duration of the scandal. Given the scarcity of theories explaining party (as opposed to government) popularity over time (see Nannestad and Paldam 1994), the analysis is restricted to simple ARIMA-modelling with a lagged dependent variable to capture the effect of omitted explanatory variables. A brief description of the method is given in an appendix.

## Analysis

The six popularity series together with an indication of the time of the outbreak of the scandal are presented in Figure 9.1. The results of the statistical analysis are shown in Table 9.1. Neither the figures nor the table suggest any spectacular changes in party popularity after the scandals. According to the statistical models, only the Rød-Larsen scandal had a statistically significant, long-term effect on party support. According to the model, the long-term loss is 5.5 percentage points from the outbreak of the scandal to the parliamentary election about a year later. The effect is, however, only marginally significant in a two-tailed test ( $t=1.94$ ). What is more, the scandal took place more or less at the same time as the popular prime minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland, was replaced by a far less charismatic successor, Thorbjørn Jagland. The change of

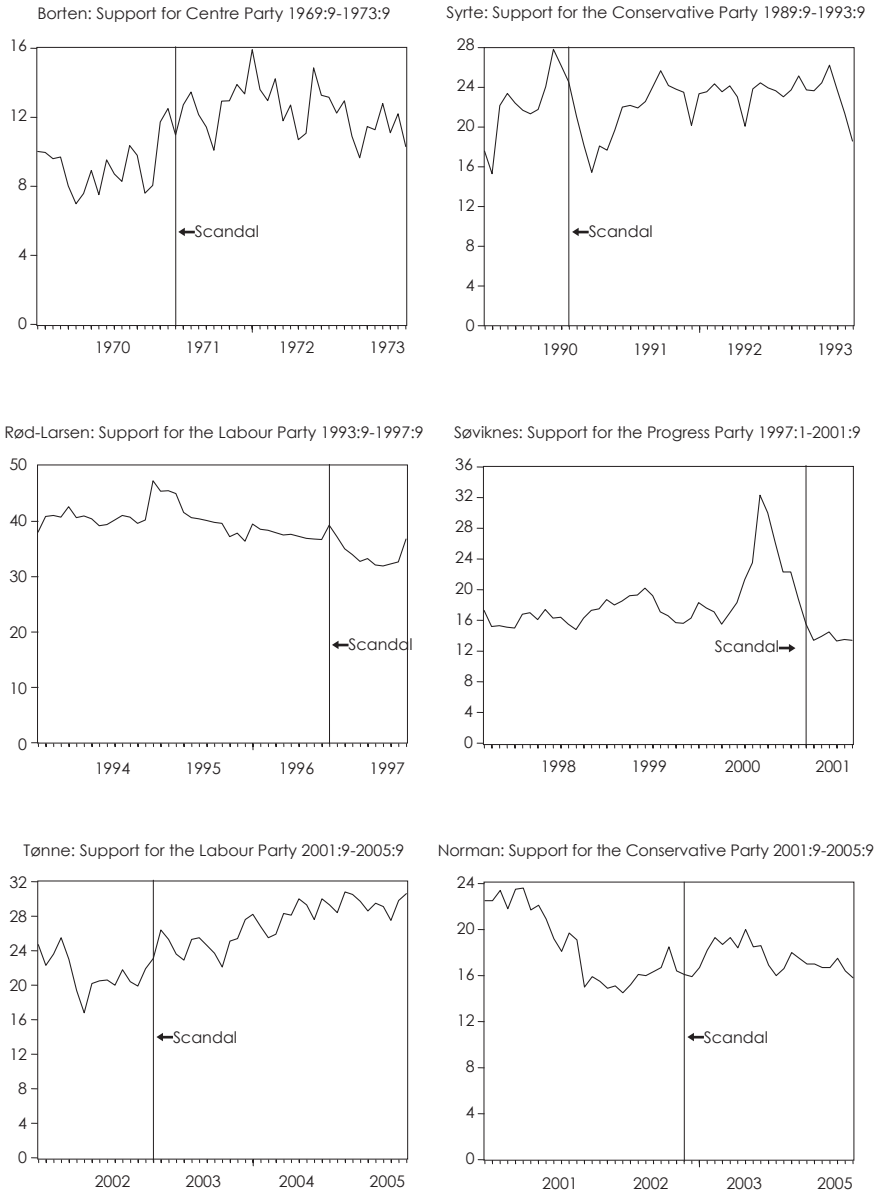


leadership combined with several start-up problems, probably explain more of the deteriorating support for the Labour government than the scandal itself.

At first sight Figure 1 suggests that the Syse-scandal may have hurt the Conservative Party. The impact is, however, far from statistically significant. The same goes for the Norman-affair. Like Syse, Norman refused to step down despite a massive media storm. Apparently it was a strategy the voters did not disapprove of. Not even Norway's first major sex-scandal – a scandal that led to the downfall of the Progressive party's deputy leader and embarrassed the party leadership – appears to have made any lasting imprint on the party's popularity trajectory. Although the immediate effect is estimated to 1.5 percentage points, the scandal has no statistically significant impact.<sup>4</sup> A closer look at the figure suggests that the collapse in popularity started well *before* the scandal – roughly about the time the party leadership started a war against the more extreme elements within the party. The struggle became quite dirty and it became a recurring story in the press.

That scandals do not necessarily harm party popularity is illustrated by both the Leakage- and the Tønne-scandal. In both cases the popularity for the Centre Party and the Labour Party, respectively, actually *increased* after the scandals. As far as the Centre Party was concerned, the effect was only temporary and modest, and might have more to do with the intense political debate over Norway's possible membership in the European Economic Community than the prime ministers' indiscretion. Among segments of the electorate the Centre Party's struggle against membership was undoubtedly a vote-winner.

The positive and long-lasting effect of the Tønne-scandal – measured to as much as 8 percentage points – may have several explanations. The scandal occurred right after the Labour-government resigned, and the Labour Party has traditionally been more popular in opposition than in position (Midtbø 1999). Some of the increase may also may due to a sympathy-effect given the tragic outcome of the scandal (i.e. Tønne's suicide). Without pushing the argument too far, it is also rather striking that the popularity boost occurred after almost all the major political parties – but with the Labour Party assuming the leading role – launched a unique counterattack against the press. Taking the Tønne-scandal as his starting point, the former Norwegian prime minister, Jens Stoltenberg in a much-quoted newspaper article entitled "Who guards the guards?" accused the press for being a "guild" incapable of presenting "alternative perspectives" and unwilling "to apply their own medicine". Criticism of the media by a politician has seldom been so tough.

**Figure 9.1.** Party popularity and six political scandals

**Table 9.1.** The effects of six political scandals on party popularity T=49 (t-values in parenthesis)

Party/Politician	Period	Intervention	Support <sub>t-1</sub>	Level	Pulse	MA
Centre Party/ Per Borten	1969:9- 1973:9	03.1971	0.33 (2.21)	–	2.18 (3.43)	-0.45 (-3.08)
Conservative Party/ Jan P. Syse	1989:9- 1993:9	08.1990	0.48 (2.56)	0.53 (0.60)	–	0.39 (1.99)
Labour Party/ Terje Rød-Larsen	1993:9- 1997:9	11.1996	0.74 (7.77)	-1.47 (-1.94)	–	–
Progress Party/ Terje Søviknes	1997:9- 2001:9	02.2001	0.80 (7.79)	–	-1.50 (-0.76)	0.28 (1.67)
Labour Party / Tore Tønne	2001:9- 2005:9	12.2002	0.84 (12.57)	1.30 (2.61)	–	-0.41 (-2.86)
Conservative Party / Victor D. Norman	2001:9- 2005:9	11.2003	0.80 (12.71)	–	-0.47 (-0.39)	–

## Discussion

The empirical analysis suggests that the effects of even relatively big scandals have relatively small effects. The negative effects are trivial and temporary. Indeed, some of the effects are not even negative. The results may have two explanations. One is that scandals affect party preferences, but that the number of voters who are upset by the transgression are outweighed by the number of those who are not (or who sympathise with the politician concerned), leaving the net effect at zero. An alternative explanation is that party popularity is not affected by scandals because voters do not care about them. Instead voting may reflect more serious matters such as ideology, political issues, and the state of the economy.

Aggregate data cannot distinguish between these two alternative explanations. Still, evidence from the international literature seems to favour the latter explanation. American studies show that three out of four politicians are re-elected despite having been involved in scandals (Shea 1999: 45). During the Clinton-Lewinsky affair the president's popularity remained stable throughout the entire process (Newton 2006: 219-220). The Democrats also did well in the Congressional elections a few months after the scandal. Also, a cross-national study covering 19 nations over several decades suggests that the initial negative effect of scandals on satisfaction with democracy appears to have evaporated – a result which indeed is ascribed to “scandal fatigue” by the authors (Kumlin & Esaiasson, forthcoming).

Looking at it from a slightly different angle, politics may be seen as a *closed circuit* in the sense that voters are excluded from taking part in the ongoing debate between politicians and journalists (Goul Andersen 1996: 99). In Nor-

way, as in other countries, voters criticise politicians for ignoring the signals from the “common man”. Studies show that Norwegian MPs together with the journalists suffer from lower confidence than any other occupational group (apart from car salesmen and estate agents) (see Midtbø 2007). For journalists low confidence means lack of persuasiveness; for politicians low confidence means lack of sympathy. Lack of trust, then, may be one explanation why scandals do not make much of a difference to party popularity.

## Notes

1. The Watergate-scandal is the most obvious case in point. Due to the burglary into the Democratic headquarters and subsequent cover-ups, Richard Nixon eventually had to resign as the first and only American president ever. Several members of his staff ended up in jail. In addition, numerous legal amendments followed suit intending to restore the ethical standards in American politics. The scandal also brought about a global reorientation of journalism, making it more critical and cynical than before.
2. Focus here is on personalized scandals, not policy-scandals. While there have been more of the former type of scandals during the post-war decade (Shea 1999: 49), the latter seem to have increased more rapidly over the last decades.
3. The data for the Centre Party during the Borten-period and The Conservatives during the Syse period have been made available by the Norwegian Social Data Services. The remaining popularity series are downloaded from the homepage of The Conservative Party in Norway, [www.hoyre.no](http://www.hoyre.no). Note that the two former series are from a single agency, while the latter are an average from several agencies. None of the abovementioned institutions are responsible for analyses and interpretations in this analysis.
4. The temporary effect of the Søviknes-scandal becomes statistically significant if a MA(5)-component is added to the model. Since this implies a relatively long time lag outside the seasonal period, the final model has been estimated without this component.

## Appendix

Without going into too much technical detail (see rather Enders 1995: 276), the effects of the scandals are here estimated by dummy-variables: A *level variable* assumes the value 0 until the scandal and 1 thereafter, whereas a *pulse variable* takes the value 1 exactly at the time of the disclosure and 0 otherwise. The level variable is used to capture longer-term effects, while the pulse variable measures potential short-term effects. The ARIMA-analysis implicitly control for alternative explanatory variables by modelling the error term. More importantly a lagged endogenous variable is added to the right-hand side of the equation to control for the effect of all explanatory variables on popularity in the month before. The ARIMA-component and the lagged endogenous variable compensate for an underspecified model. The specification should control for, among other things, the effect of the economy – an effect which indeed has been found to be much larger than the effect of scandals in some other studies (Smyth & Taylor 2003: 585, Woessner 2005: 95). The main shortcoming of an intervention analysis – which it shares with all other types of analyses, quantitative as well as qualitative – is the inability to separate effects close in time. In this particular analysis the problem is that some scandals crop up more or less concurrently with elections and changes of government – events that also may affect party popularity (Midtbø 1999).

More specifically, the level model can be written as follows:

$$Y_t = \alpha + \beta_1 Y_{t-1} + \beta_2 L_t + \varepsilon_t$$

where

$Y_t$  = party support for the politician exposed by the media

$Y_{t-1}$  = party support the previous month

$L_t$  = dummy variable equal to 0 before the scandal and 1 thereafter

$\beta_i$  = parameters to be estimated

$\varepsilon_t$  may be a white noise process or an ARMA(p,q) processes. If  $\beta_1$  is equal to 1,  $Y_t$  is considered non-stationary. The analysis thus requires  $|\beta_1| < 1$ . The immediate effect of the scandal is captured by the estimate of  $\beta_2$ . If the t-value exceeds the critical value, the scandal has a significant immediate effect on party popularity. Provided that  $\beta_1 \neq 0$ , the scandal also has a long-term effect defined as  $\beta_2/(1-\beta_1)$ . The larger  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$ , the larger the effect. The effect after one period equals  $\beta_1\beta_2 + \beta_2$ , the effect after two periods  $\beta_1^2\beta_2 + \beta_1\beta_2 + \beta_2$ , and so on. The larger  $\beta_1$ , the longer it takes before the process reaches its new equilibrium.

If the effect is temporary, the model should include a pulse variable:

$$Y_t = \alpha + \beta_1 Y_{t-1} + \beta_2 P_t + \varepsilon_t$$

where

$P_t$  is a dummy variable equal to 1 at the time of the event, and 0 otherwise.

If both  $\beta_1$  and  $\beta_2$  are non-zero, the temporary effect is equal to  $\beta_2$ , and the effect declines gradually as indicated by  $\beta_1$ . Only  $\beta_1\beta_2$  of the effect remains after one period,  $\beta_1^2\beta_2$  after two periods, etc. The size of  $\beta_1$  reflects the time it takes before the series reaches its old equilibrium. The Schwarz-criterion was used for model selection. The analysis of the ACF and the PACF only revealed MA-components, all of which were MA(1) except for the Centre Party series which was MA(6).



## Chapter 10

# Media Victims and Media Morals

Paul Bjerke

Media Scandals raise genuine professional ethical dilemmas, and one would therefore believe that these dilemmas are dealt with in the bodies that the journalistic profession has established to safeguard the ethics of the press. In this chapter, I will ask and discuss two questions: 1) why and how do media scandals pose ethical problems for the press? And 2) how are these debatable media practices dealt with in a recognized and highly professional in-house self-regulatory system?

The first question will be answered through a review of (mainly Nordic) literature on political scandal victims' experiences and through reflections on how and in what way media hunt victims are hurt. The concept 'victims' refers to persons that are the targets of a scandalizing media hunt. The other question is discussed on the basis of three Norwegian scandal cases: the *Tønne affair*, when a former Minister committed suicide, the *Valla/Yssen case*, when the chair of the largest Federation of Trade Unions (LO, Landsorganisasjonen) was forced to resign – and the Haga case that thwarted the political career of a Centre Party leader and Minister. Finally the chapter discusses the ethical problems related to the conclusion that journalism's own self-regulation system is unable to address this kind of dilemmas. Citations have been translated from Norwegian and Swedish by the author

### How do the scandals affect Media Victims?

There exists a small amount of Scandinavian literature on how victims experience mediated scandals and media hunts. Much of this literature is autobiographical. Among the public celebrities who have published books about how they experienced political media hunts, are the Norwegian trade union leader Gerd-Liv Valla (2007), the Swedish journalist Anders Pihlblad (2010) and the former Swedish PM Göran Persson's close associate Lars Danielsson (2007). The retired Norwegian Minister of Petroleum and Energy Åslaug

Haga's key novel *I de innerste sirkler* [In the Inner Circles] (2009) could also be mentioned here.

In addition, several journalists have written books containing interviews with media victims. Pihlblad (2010) interviewed several political scandal victims, among them the short-term Swedish ministers Maria Borelius and Cecilia Stegö Chiló. In Norway, Tom Kolstad, a photographer in the daily newspaper *Aftenposten*, published a book with a series of such interviews (1994), while journalist Gunnar Ringheim (1993) interviewed persons without top positions who had been exposed to media hunts.

Finally, there are some European research contributions. A pioneer in the field was the Swiss psychiatrist Mario Gmür, who in *Der öffentliche Mensch* [The Public Man] launches and describes a medical diagnosis, "media victim syndrome" (Gmür 2002: 184). Gmür refers to the severe psychological problems that can occur when the gap between one's own self and "the picture that emerges in public" is too large, especially if the "public image appears to be misleading and unfair"<sup>1</sup> (cited in Christensen et al 2007: 3224).

I have also found two smaller Norwegian research contributions. Svein Brurås interviewed nine media victims for his report *Uthengt – subjektive oppfatninger av negativ medieomtale* [Ridiculed – Subjective experiences of negative press coverage] (Brurås 2004), while the psychiatrist Lars Weisæth, media researcher Ragnar Waldahl and former journalist Marit Christensen have published a small article in the *Journal of the Norwegian Medical Association* (Christensen et al 2007). They support Gmür's view that media victims may be given a medical diagnosis. The medical profession disputes whether it is correct and/or useful to establish such a diagnosis (Maaseide 2007: 3192). However, there is a consensus regarding the symptoms that characterize individuals who are exposed to extensive and long-term media scandals: insomnia, concentration problems, feeling of impotence and guilt and flashbacks (Gmür 2002: 192). The (auto)biographical literature supports these research findings.

The victims and their families perceive that their privacy has been invaded and destroyed. They consider the coverage to be unfair and out of all proportion. Many of them feel that the focus is entirely on their bad qualities. They often perceive that "everyone" is staring at them, and they are sometimes obsessed with what the media is going to publish. Some media victims tell how they had to get up in the middle of the night to read the newspapers before anyone else could gain access to them.

Brurås summarizes how the respondents reported suffering from "social anxiety": "You feel like everyone is watching you. It psyches you out". Several of his informants were ill: "I was on the verge of collapsing... it was about to kill me...my world fell apart...terrible psychological pressure" (Brurås 2004: 61). He shows finally that the media scandals not only affect the accused, but also their families: "My wife had to quit her job...his partner felt that people



were looking at her...her daughter was bullied at school...their son expressed a wish to change his surname" (Brurås 2004: 62).

This anthology is about *political* scandals in which the victims are people with experience of the media. They have – voluntarily – been in the media spotlight for years. But such experiences do not necessarily protect them against serious psychological reactions:

Experiences from the victims' public review of such cases and from our interviews with people who have been exposed to highly negative media coverage show that even a long life in the public eye, substantial personal resources or a strong social network are no guarantee against serious psychological reactions to strong media pressure. The media are ruthless when they hunt in packs, and few people recover from such a public pillory without injury of a permanent nature (Christensen et al 2007: 3224).

Interviews with well-known public figures who ended up in media scandals confirm the conclusion. The Conservative Minister Astrid Gjersten was one of the early victims of political scandalization in Norway. She had to resign in 1986 due to a minor taxi bill fraud. She said: "I could not pick up a newspaper in all these weeks and months without fear of what I might encounter. There are no words to describe the awesome media hunt". And it lasted for a long time: "It pursues you for life" (Kolstad 1994: 73 f). Albert Nordengen, a long-time Mayor of Oslo, Norway's capital, had to leave office because of accusations of a conflict of economic interests. He "felt scalded and beaten – it hurts me deeply"(Kolstad 1994: 63).

In 2006, the political reporter Anders Pihlblad at Swedish TV4 became the victim of a media hunt due to a drunk and intimate night on the town with a female secretary of state in the newly appointed Swedish conservative government. She was forced to leave her position. Pihlblad later wrote a book on his own (and others) media experiences:

The scandal and the time that followed turned my life upside down. I learned a lot about myself and about media practices. However, it took a long time to get over it. My life was shattered, I lost friends and I felt generally bad. A year after the first article in Aftonbladet, I had lost 18 kg in weight (Pihlblad 2010: 18).

Cecilie Stegö Chiló, who had to step down after three weeks as Swedish Minister of Culture, believes that "most people who have been exposed to a scandal experience that the consequences are more far-reaching than they have ever been able to imagine".<sup>2</sup>

Lars Danielsson was exposed to one of the most massive media hunts in modern Swedish history. Danielsson was PM Goran Persson's secretary of state. Persson's government's was accused of a passive attitude on Boxing Day 2004

when a tsunami crossed Thailand and 500 Swedes on holiday died, and the media framed Danielsson as one of those mainly responsible for the passivity. However, the same journalists eventually became more concerned with Danielsson's private life: Had he been in his office at all the day the catastrophe occurred? It was suggested he was waiting on his mistress, Aftonbladet claimed on its front page that Danielsson was a *liar*. In his autobiography *I skuggan av makten* [In the shadow of Power] (2007), Danielsson describes how it feels to be in the center of such a media hunt:

I was now in a period when it felt unpleasant to pick up one of Stockholm's two newspapers<sup>3</sup> on the hall floor in the morning and see how I was going to be torn to pieces on this particular day. ... Every day when I came home, Aftonbladet's journalist and photographer were waiting in their car outside my home and wanted to know when I was going to tell 'the truth' ... for the first time I felt a physical fear when I ... was met by a large pack of journalists outside the parliament building (Danielsson 2007: 229f).

In two well-known Scandinavian cases, the victims of media scandals committed suicide. In 2001, Denmark's Radio revealed Danish trade union leader Willy Strube's embezzlement. After a couple of weeks of media coverage, Strube hanged himself in his home.<sup>4</sup> The following year, Norwegian business leader and politician Tore Tønne (Labour Party) committed suicide after a three-week media hunt concerning allegations of the misuse of public funds and questionable loans from the celebrity businessman Kjell Inge Røkke.

The conclusion is that media scandals may cause the victims and their families considerable distress and lead to psychological damage, in worst case suicide. Since a central aspect of a common morality is the belief that you should not harm your fellow man, mediated scandals raise vital and difficult ethical challenges for journalism.

### Why do media hunts hurt?

In what way do media scandals cause their victims such damage? The reports from the victims and the research contributions say that it usually is not the identification or the review or the criticism in themselves that cause problems. Rather, the victims point to the massive scale and the long duration – as well as the one-sidedness, the reiteration and the narrow frame of interpretation.

Part of the definition of media-driven political scandals is that the alleged violation of norms leads to long-lasting and broad media coverage in several parallel channels. A string of case studies have documented the solid extent of this coverage (i.e. Hjeltne et al 2003, Allern 2009: 72, Haugen 2009: 34, Norberg 2010: 54), but these research findings still provide only a rather pale

impression of the dimensions. During the last 20 years, news services in the Nordic countries have increased significantly (Høst 2010) and now include 24/7 news channels on television, hourly news shows on mainstream television and radio channels, as well as continuous updates on the web.

A media frame is established through the choice of sources, the selection of the salient facts to be reported and those to be hidden away – and the choice of so-called “central organizing theme” or *leitmotif*. This theme is a cultural element that binds together the selected sources and factual elements in a piece of journalism and thereby helps to convey manifest and latent reasoning devices as causal explanations and evaluations of the events that are communicated (Van Gorp 2007, Bjerke, 2009). One of the most common leitmotifs is to assign the media story’s participants to a familiar character-gallery, often based on centuries-old myth and narrative structures where “heroes”, “bullies”, “witches” and “victims” play a central role.

When media scandals evolve, stories and information that support and/or underpin the dominating perspective of the scandals are prioritised in the newsrooms – and are normally published. News stories and/or information that do *not* support – or that weaken – the dominating framing of the scandal are not prioritised in the newsrooms (Thompson 2000, Midtbø 2007, Allern and Pollack 2009b). In other words: Stories that support the idea that the witch is a witch are printed or broadcast. Stories that present different perspectives are dropped at the morning conference, thrown into the paper bin at the desk or rewritten by the evening editor. As the media scandal evolves, the framing – and the frame – often grow far stronger and narrower.

In the toughest media scandals the frame may develop in the direction of *demonizing* those who are designated as villains. Demonization is an act which in itself violates a variety of ethical beliefs. In addition, demonizing deprives people of their humanity, and thus weakens the barriers people usually have that stop them behaving in an unethical way towards each other. In a media scandal journalists’ ethical discretion may be weakened. Or, as the journalist and media victim Pihlblad writes:

In case after case, I have seen how the media hunt went too far and the way coverage became out of all proportion. Trifles are lifted up to become bold headlines, privacy is violated, quotes misunderstood or deliberately distorted. Often the newsrooms, in their battle to be the first and the best, forget to ask themselves the basic questions: Is this true? Is this reasonable? (Pihlblad 2010: 13)

Media scandals thus bring to the forefront some of the essential moral and ethical challenges in journalism: proportionality, fairness, respect for privacy and correct quoting. What kind of one-sided, negative media pressure is it morally acceptable to expose other people to? Who will draw the limits and how? There

is broad agreement that journalism should reveal unacceptable conditions. The media's political, economic and political privileges are based on the idea that a free press is essential to a democratic society, partly because it may reveal power, abuse of power, unfair privileges and bad treatment of individuals and groups. When journalism fulfills its "part" of the social contract, it will inevitably damage and hurt the individual(s) responsible. When Norwegian journalists are asked why they have a professional right to harm others in their job, they unanimously refer to journalism's societal mission (Bjerke 2009).

### Norwegian self-regulation as an example

In media scandals the potential damage to individuals is considerable. Therefore, media hunts often lead to heated discussions and a tendency in the public to criticize the media. The criticism reaches a peak when media victims take their own lives, as happened in the cases of Strube and Tønne. Such events, of course, also lead to fundamental self-reflection among the journalists involved.

The question is whether – and if so, how – these central ethical dilemmas of journalism are reflected in the formal institutions of media ethics. It may be fruitful to use Norway as a case at this point because the Norwegian Press Council is (formally) completely independent of government and is widely recognized and respected both in the industry and outside (Allern 1997b, Brurås 2006). This strong self-regulating body is a consequence of the Norwegian media system, where the news institution and the profession of journalism enjoy a high degree of formal independence from both the state and the market. Hallin and Mancini present in *Comparing Media Systems* (2004) three different media systems, the Mediterranean "polarized-pluralist", the Anglo-American "liberal" and the North European "democratic-corporatist". One of the characteristics of the latter system is a strong professional orientation and a highly formalized, independent ethical system (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 67). The authors consider the Scandinavian countries to be "extreme" representatives of the democratic-corporatist media system (op.cit: 70). A closer look at these countries' ethical self-regulating systems shows that Norway has the most unambiguous industry-driven system (Bjerke 2009: 39). In Denmark, the field is regulated by the Media Liability Act adopted by *Folketinget* [The Danish Parliament], while Sweden has an ombudsman [*Allmänhetens Pressombudsmän*] that considers complaints against the press before they are submitted to the industry-dominated Press Council [*Pressens Opinionsnämnd*]. The Ombudsman is appointed by a board where the press' representatives constitute a minority.

Parts of the Norwegian press milieu argue that Norway has "best self-regulating system" in the world, and the scheme has moreover become "export". In Sweden, the Norwegian system is seen as model for a reform of the their

institutions (see von Krogh 2010). A description of how the Norwegian self-regulating system handles ethical issues related to mediated scandals and media hunts may therefore be of some interest internationally.

Norwegian journalism's professional ethics has been formalized and governed by the industry itself through the Norwegian Press Association. The Press Association is an umbrella body for a number of organizations in the press.<sup>5</sup> The most important formal organ of journalism's self-regulation system is the Press Council [*Pressens Faglige Utvalg*], which mainly deals with complaints from people who have been exposed to negative press coverage. Since 1987, four of the Press Council's members and its Chair represent the press (two editors and two journalists), while three members are laymen. *All* members are appointed by the board of the Norwegian Press Association. The Press Council's work is guided by a Code of Ethics [*Vær Varsom-plakaten*], which has also been adopted by the board of the Norwegian Press Association. The Code's paragraphs are based on a consensus among the board members. Both the Press Council and the Code of Ethics have high prestige among Norwegian journalists (Brurås 2006).

In the first half of the 1990s a rather heated discussion on the weaknesses of Norwegian self-regulating system evolved. The well-known psychiatrist and Conservative politician Astrid Nøklebye Heiberg formulated the criticism as follows: "The overall effect (of media hunts) is formidable. Every reporter or editor may defend what he has written or said. But who takes responsibility for the overall impact?" (Kolstad 1994: 93). The unspoken answer was "no-one".

Åse Kleveland, Minister of Culture, Media and Sport 1990-1996, had earlier resigned as a member of the Press Council, partly because she would not support its industry-dominated character (Bodahl-Johansen 2010: 11). The debate led to the Norwegian Parliament demanding that the government should consider appointing a state-run media ombudsman (Bodahl-Johansen 2010). In 1994, the government established a working group that concluded with a conditional "yes". The Norwegian press organizations reacted harshly negative to the proposal and during the second half of the 1990s, an extremely press-friendly understanding of freedom of expression gained a strong position both within the press itself (Bjerke 2010) and in public (see a discussion in Raaum 2003). Important events were a governmental Commission of Free Speech (NOU 1999: 27) and several verdicts from the European Court of Human Rights where the defence of free speech was seen as overriding privacy rights. The ECHR's verdicts forced Norwegian courts to change their practices so that it became almost impossible to bring a successful libel action against the press (Øy 2005: 33). The result of this ideological shift was in part that all ideas of appointing a statutory media ombudsman were put to one side. Furthermore, all formal ethical assessment of journalism in Norway was transferred to the Press Council. In 1996 the Norwegian Press Association changed the statutes

so that not only print media, but also broadcast media were covered. On June 1<sup>st</sup> 1998 the statutory Broadcast Complaint Commission shut down, and its operations were transferred to the media industry's internal Press Council.

In Norway today, anyone who considers themselves subject to abuse in a media scandal may only turn either to the courts (which is very expensive) or to an industry-controlled agency. It is therefore of great interest how this body treats the central ethical issues that arise in media hunts.

## Media Ethics and the pillory

According to their Statutes, the Norwegian Press Council “monitor and promote the ethical and professional standards in the Norwegian press (printed press, online publications, radio and television.”<sup>6</sup> This formulation may be interpreted as instructing the Press Council to discuss the “ethical and professional standards” of Norwegian editorial practice in medias scandals. Here, I will analyze how PFU handles media scandals. I will use three Norwegian political scandals as case studies: The Tønne case in 2002, the Valla affair in 2007 and the Haga case in 2008. In all these cases, a herd of reporters with an almost single voice pursued their prey for weeks and months. The question is whether – and if so, how – the self-regulating system handled these media hunts.

### *The Tønne case*

In December 2002, the Norwegian tabloid newspaper, Dagbladet, revealed that former Health Minister Tore Tønne (Labour) had received NOK 1.5 million in “success fees” from the industrialist Kjell Inge Røkke’s company Aker RGI while he simultaneously received compensation from the State after his term of office. Severance pay beyond one month is given only to people who are not gainfully employed, and the claim was therefore that Tønne had received irregular *double pay*. It was further revealed that Tønne had a loan of NOK 3.0 million from Røkke, and documents indicated that he had this debt while he was a minister.

The published information led to extensive media coverage for three weeks and charges were raised by The Norwegian National Authority for Investigation and Prosecution of Economic and Environmental Crime – until Tønne committed suicide on December 20<sup>th</sup>. His death led to a broad debate about the media coverage of the case. The leader of the Labour Party, Jens Stoltenberg, who had been Tønne’s prime minister, joined the debate, and *Dagsavisen*’s editor Hilde Haugsgjerd gave a representative summary: “Never before in my 20 years in journalism has the media been this seriously challenged. With the previous and the current Prime Minister giving the lead, we are accused of evading criticism and denying our own power and influence.”<sup>7</sup>

In spite of this criticism the Tønne case was *not* discussed in the formalized ethical system. It was not appealed to the Press Council, nor did the Secretary General of the Norwegian Press Association use his right to appeal.<sup>8</sup> However, the Press Association reacted to the strong criticism of the press and set up an independent committee consisting of three academics with no direct link to the press. Their mandate was to make a critical assessment of the media's role in the "so-called Tønne-case".

In May 2003 the committee presented a report claiming that "other than the journalists involved would probably work in a similar manner. Each year, the media publish cases in which individuals are exposed to extensive negative media coverage; however no cases have had the same output as this" (Hjeltnes et al 2003: 4). The committee concluded that this was a case in which "too much concerned Tønne's personal qualities, his integrity and character" (my transl.), that it appears to be "oversized in relation to the actual realities that were revealed and a reasonable understanding of these" and that part of the coverage was characterized by "a lack of precision and accuracy" (Hjeltnes et al 2003: 82).

The committee's report shows how the use of invectives, of hostile images, of prejudices and of categorization demonized and de-humanized Tønne through a large volume of identical stories, one-sided source selections, similar angles and strong personal characterizations. It also documented how the person Tore Tønne was framed, not as the human being Tønne, but as an object, a representative of a de-humanized "greed culture". In the summary, the committee unequivocally states: "Everyone is taking the same approach; no one introduces alternative views and perspectives" (Hjeltnes et al 2003: 50).

Without mentioning the actual concepts, the Tønne report warns against establishing such an extremely narrow and negative framing that may lead to demonization. The committee suggests that editors should create a "devil's advocate, a calm head, within the newsroom" (Hjeltnes et al 2003: 83). This calm head should have an internal and an external role that was clearly defined: to present objections, to maintain contact with the affected party and to have a "sideways glance at the totality of the media picture".

The conclusions and suggestions from the committee received a lot of general support. But did the general consternation and the genuflection of the press lead to any change? Four years later we got the answer.

### *The Valla case*

In January 2007 the so-called Valla/Yssen-controversy was presented in Norway's largest-selling newspaper, the tabloid *Verdens Gang* (VG). It concerned a conflict between the elected chair of the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO), Gerd-Liv Valla and the head of its international department, In-



gunn Yssen. Both Yssen and Valla are former Social Democratic Government policymakers, Valla as Minister of Justice, Yssen as a secretary of state.

The crucial question was the choice of organizing theme or *leitmotif*. Was this part of a political power struggle between the right and left wings of the Labour party? Or did Valla bully Yssen? The mainstream media was dominated by the latter framing (Allern 2009). The controversy was turned into a tsunami-like media scandal and the coverage was characterized by much of the same herd mentality, the same common framing of the issue (bullying), the same pursuit and demonization as the Tønne Affair. This choice was obviously political. But it was also an ethical decision. If this primarily was a political conflict, it would be morally wrong to present Valla as a bully. And even if Valla in some cases had actually treated Yssen badly, was it ethically acceptable to demonize her in a two-month media campaign?

The main actors were very conscious about their framing decisions. Ingunn Yssen chose journalist Eirik Mosveen in VG because she was “sure to get (her) version in the press from Day 1”.<sup>9</sup> Mosveen “never thought it was interesting to investigate whether Yssen did a lousy job” (Tranøy 2007: 103). Right from the start the framing choices determined which questions were asked – and not asked.

The reactions to the media hunt against Valla were weaker than the reaction following Tønne’s suicide. However, several opinion leaders disliked the solid and one-sided coverage. Of special interest in this context is the fact that a majority of the members of the Press Council – as individuals – were critical or skeptical to the coverage. Henrik Syse, a member of the committee that evaluated the media coverage of the Tønne affair, said there “was a huge volume of stories concentrated on one person, and it is especially hard for the family. This is true whether the person has done something wrong or not. There are limits to what people have to tolerate, even in such an important issue. The press ought to say to itself: We need no more front pages and no more fat headlines.”<sup>10</sup>

A lay member of the Press Council, cineast Ingeborg Moræus Hanssen, put forward her views in *Klassekampen* [The Class Struggle]:

The coverage in the dominant newspapers is solid, raw and one-sided. It whips up an atmosphere where you do not to give in before blood flows. I am not saying this to defend Gerd-Liv Valla. She deserves criticism...But this case has been given completely unreasonable dimensions.<sup>11</sup>

Odd Isungset, who was head of the Press Council in 2007, said that “the total coverage has been very solid” and expected a discussion concerning the overall pressure, the number of stories and how “the human considerations are taken care of.”<sup>12</sup> He believed no one had been exposed to anything like this in Norwegian press history. Meanwhile the vice chairman of the Press Council, Hilde Haugsgjerd, said the Valla case showed “a dilemma emerging in the press when it covers cases with a strong, but legitimate focus on a person”. She also stated:



It is *one* person who experiences the overall media pressure, and that is something those in the spotlight feel strongly. We have no overall editor for the Norwegian press. No single media may have broken the Code of Ethics, but Valla may have felt the pressure to be inhuman.<sup>13</sup>

A majority of the Press Council's seven members believed that the treatment of Valla had been ethically questionable. Some of them used strong characteristics, such as "inhumane" and "gross personal persecution". Nevertheless, the Valla affair as such was never formally considered by the Council. It was perfectly clear that statements by individual council members outside the formal system simply can be swept aside. The Secretary General of the Norwegian Press Association, Per Edgar Kokkvold saw no reason to bother with the moral concerns of the Council members. He noted instead that "it is impossible to do anything with the huge dimensions. That is part of having a free press".<sup>14</sup>

Five media scholars made an appeal to the Press Council<sup>15</sup> concerning *Verdens Gang's* first article that launched the media scandal and established the frame. The newspaper quoted Yssen all over the front page: "Valla bullied me because I got pregnant", but without any attempt of documentation. The Council exonerated *Verdens Gang* from any blame. Yssen had confirmed she was correctly quoted. That meant that everything was ok.<sup>16</sup> The Council passed no judgement whatsoever on the use of framing and the awarding of hero and villain roles in the presentation, image-use and wording, where the publication of non-documented allegations of bullying was an important element. In short, the Press Council did not discuss the genuine ethical and moral issues in the case.

### *Jetty and granary room as a scandal*

The same pattern was repeated in the early summer of 2008. The victim this time was the leader of the Centre Party, Åslaug Haga. After the general election in 2005 her party had become part of a centre-left government coalition, and Haga was Minister of Petroleum and Energy.

The case initially involved two minor violations of municipal policies. The first case revolved around a jetty Haga's husband had built ten years earlier at the couple's summer retreat. The jetty was not reported in accordance with the building regulations. The lack of permit from 1998 was discovered when he applied to build an extension in 2008. The application for the extension was granted without any further ado. The husband was given a fine of NOK 7,500 because of the earlier offence, but the fine was later dropped. The jetty case was a mere formality.

The other case involved a former store house on the couple's property outside Oslo. Initially it was known that the granary was let to tenants in 2008 without the formal approval of the local authority. Later, it became clear that

the granary had been let from the late 1990's. Haga had therefore at some point given wrong or inaccurate answers to questions about when the first tenants moved in and out. Thus, this was also an issue about "politicians who tell lies". The store house case was completed in September 2008 when the municipality imposed a "surcharge" of approximately NOK 14,500, "according to the municipal scale of fees levied in cases of less serious breaches of the regulations".<sup>17</sup>

Because of these offences, Åslaug Haga was subject to a massive media campaign (Haugen 2009) and summed up the experience in the following words:

I have a TV-team hanging around the house. My kids are coming home from school pale-faced. We are a family whose privacy has been completely invaded. My husband has involuntarily been assigned a role in the press scrutiny of me. I feel responsible that this now involves him too.<sup>18</sup>

Haga resigned as party leader and as Minister. The public's reaction patterns were in line with what happened after the Tønne and Valla cases. The most harsh comment was probably delivered by Professor Jan Inge Sørbø. He wrote about "the media monopoly on violence":

For those who are defined as famous people – that's enough – from social life or the world of entertainment, it is seen as legitimate to configure a combination of charges and convictions based on the media's own evidence. If it suits the media and its ends, it also pronounces the verdict. An example: The media hunt against Åslaug Haga, which was based on a few selected details, lasts for a few weeks. Then Arne Strand<sup>19</sup> – in sober terms – concludes on TV that she must resign. The same day she leaves office. The media are prosecutor and judge their own court; then the party and the government take care of the execution.<sup>20</sup>

The Press Council did not deal with this matter. However, the head of the prestigious *Stiftelsen for en kritisk og undersøkende presse (SKUP)* [The Foundation for a Critical and Investigative Press] Håkon Haugsbø wrote:

The discussion concerning the solid media coverage came after Tore Tønne's suicide. It came up again after Gerd-Liv Valla had to resign... It was a theme when the storm was at its worst around another Minister who was forced to resign, Manuela Ramin-Osmundsen. It's time to resume the discussion again.<sup>21</sup>

## Media Scandals, morality and formalized press ethics

The debate will rage yet again. However, there is nothing to suggest that the repeated ethical debates following mediated political scandals will lead to substantial changes in the institutionalized Norwegian self-regulating system.

Scandals will be excluded from the system even in the future. This is clear from statements by the representatives of the journalism profession.

Journalists' justification for the fact that the Press Council does not address the important ethical issues that arise in media scandals is first and foremost that the Council is an appeal body. Sven Egil Omdal<sup>22</sup> claims that "with the minor exception for the right of initiative of the Norwegian Press Association's Secretary General, the Council's work builds solely on appeals from individuals or groups who feel offended by the media (my transl.);" (Omdal 2006: 87). But this contradicts the Council's Statute which states that the PFU has "to monitor and promote the ethical and professional standards in the Norwegian press" and "as a *part of this work* (my italics) the Press Council considers appeals about the Norwegian press' behaviour."

Experience shows, however, that Omdal is right. In practice, the Norwegian Press Council is almost exclusively an appellate body. And moreover, it only handles *single issues*. This latter fact was made clear in the autumn of 2008, when the Press Council was asked to discuss a mediated scandal. A paramedic and his colleague had been exposed to comprehensive negative media attention because they refused to take a Norwegian-Somali man with head injuries to hospital (Norberg 2010). The driver wanted to lodge an appeal against "the Norwegian press". The Secretary General of the Press Association, Per Edgar Kokkvold, said that "the appeal would be difficult to deal with, as it was written in a general form" (Schjenken 2009: 111). Kokkvold suggested the paramedic could attend an editors' union meeting to explain his case. The meeting took place in October 2008. The paramedic then withdrew his appeal. Kokkvold summed up: "At the same time we should all be glad that we do not have an editor in this country that limits the media's overall coverage. If that had been the case, we would no longer have the society we want".<sup>23</sup>

Single stories in mediated scandals may be appealed to the Press Council, like all other articles. But then the context, the fact that the article is part of a media hunt drive, is considered irrelevant. The Council will discuss the story *in isolation*, separate from the scandal itself.

The Press Council's narrow focus on media hunts has unfortunate consequences. This is illustrated by the reaction from *Dagbladet* in the Tønne case. As mentioned above, this case was not discussed in the self-regulating system. *Dagbladet*'s editor-in-chief, John Arne Markussen, demanded – unsuccessfully – a Press Council "hearing". His argument was that the Norwegian Press Council is the only authoritative body on ethical issues:

The Press Council has not discussed what is perceived as one of the most controversial affairs in the Norwegian media. The Tønne case was considered so special that the debate took place in other forums than in the body that in all other cases defines press ethics. We cannot live with this situation. The

Council has to discuss the Tønne case. In the Tønne report, I miss clarification of the standards the committee has assumed. There are hardly any references to the Code of Ethics. Thus we have got a document which – with all due respect – is strongly influenced by general speculations.<sup>24</sup>

*Dagbladet's* editor demanded a formal hearing in the body that binds members of the Norwegian Press Association. He was not successful. Markussen has, however, been fully upheld in his basic premise: Only Council rulings are binding. Members of the Norwegian Press Association (journalists, editors and publishers) are required to take into account the rulings of the Press Council, not statements from ad hoc committees nor the Secretary General's opinions. *Dagbladet's* and all other editors are free to disregard the Tønne committee's conclusions. The more general ethical considerations that this committee presented do not bind the press. The Press Association's Secretary General is also free to disregard any statements from concerned individual members of the Press Council in the Valla case.

This illustrates a fundamental problem in the relationship between moral, ethical journalistic practice and self-regulatory arrangements. The self-regulating press councils have (and probably must have) a limited purpose. The Norwegian Press Council is an appellate body. Over the past 20 years it has also increasingly "legalized" itself, in the sense that the verdicts make reference to a paragraph in the Code of Ethics. Two recent academic works conclude that the Press Council has a narrow and technical focus. It concentrates on protecting vulnerable individuals (particularly children) and ensuring that persons who are exposed to attacks are given the opportunity to reply (Bjerke 2009). This "technical" approach also means that critical and investigative journalism of great value can be toppled by careless errors, while mediocre and source-controlled practice de facto is approved as ethically acceptable (Brurås 2009).

At the same time, ethical self-regulatory bodies, at least in democratic-corporatist media systems such as the Norwegian, have a strong and legitimate position as interpreters of professional ethics. This means that practices that the Norwegian Press Council will not discuss are perceived by the profession as being ethically acceptable. The narrow focus of the self-regulating body undermines the profession's ethical awareness in its daily work. Media hunts are good examples of this problem. Because of the Press Council's narrow focus, one of media's most ethically controversial practices, demonizing media hunts in which journalists fail to ask themselves fundamental ethical questions, will not be prosecuted. By refusing to discuss such a practice, the formalized ethical body tacitly accepts the fact that the press – as a whole – commits unethical acts, because no single reporter or newsroom formally breaks the Code of Ethics.

This is an untenable situation.

## Notes

1. All translations into English are by the author.
2. DN.se 16.04.2010.
3. Danielsson refers to *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter*, the two morning newspapers in Stockholm, delivered at the door.
4. In 2006, the Danish commercial tv-station TV2 televised a documentary on the affair, *The Mystery of Willy*.
5. Members per February 2010 are Norwegian Union of Journalists (NJ), Norwegian Editors' Association (NR), Media Businesses' Association (MBL), NRK, TVNorge, TV3, TV2, P4, SBS Radio Norge, Norwegian local radio Federation (NLR), National Association of Local Newspapers (LLA), The Norwegian Specialized Press Association (DNFF), Norwegian Association for Local TV (NFL), and the Weekly Magazine Association (MUF), if: [http://ezcust0003.web1.dedicated99.no.webdeal.no/norskpresse\\_user/Omoss/NPs-medlemmer](http://ezcust0003.web1.dedicated99.no.webdeal.no/norskpresse_user/Omoss/NPs-medlemmer)
6. Statutes for PFU, dated 1.6.07, downloaded 6.11.11 from <http://presse.no/klage-til-PFU/Vedtekter-for-PFU>
7. *Dagsavisen (The Daily)* 16.1.2003.
8. According to paragraph 4 PFUs Ordinance, "the Secretary General of the Norwegian Press Association ... may ask the Board to give a verdict".
9. *Dagbladet* [The Daily Mail] 15.12.07
10. *Dagens Næringsliv* [The Daily Business] 10.3.07
11. *Klassekampen* [The Class Struggle] 29.1.07
12. *Dagens Næringsliv* [The Daily Business] 10.3.07
13. *Dagens Næringsliv* [The Daily Business] 10.3.07
14. nrk.no 17.3.07, downloaded 12.12.07 from <http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/1.2065417>.
15. PFU 082/07.
16. It is worth mentioning that a mainly pro-Yssen Commission of Inquiry later concluded that Valla had bullied Yssen, but not "because she was pregnant".
17. Ivar Gudmundsen in Ås Municipality, interviewed in *Nettavisen* september 2008.
18. NTB 12.6.08.
19. Arne Strand is the editor-in-chief of the social democratic newspaper *Dagsavisen* [The Daily Mail]
20. *Stavanger Aftenblad* [Stavanger Evening Paper] 26.9.08.
21. *Aftenposten* [The Evening Post] 21.6.08.
22. Omdal is a former chair of The Norwegian Union of Journalists and of the Press Council.
23. NTB 14.6.08.
24. *Dagbladet* [The Daily Mail] 15.5.03.



## Chapter 11

# The Marketplace of Scandals

Sigurd Allern & Ester Pollack

The news media function as a public marketplace for scandals in at least two ways. Firstly, as a place where tabloid journalism offers scandalous and outrageous revelations to a public hungry for more. Scandals sell papers, attract attention on the Internet, and cause people to gather in front of television sets (Bird 1997). In the realm of popular journalism and tabloids, scandals fulfil the dream of creating the talk of the town. Secondly, media constitute a marketplace in another and more transferred sense, where information is leaked on purpose to fuel the scandal. Information is exchanged for attention. Rumours are planted; documents are published – often covertly and with promises of anonymity. Many agents flock together in the marketplace of political scandals.

The purpose of this book has been to direct a searchlight on the way in which political scandals are launched, directed, dramatized and interpreted through the different genres of journalism – an interaction and tug-of-war between editors and various political actors. News institutions help build political careers – and tear them down. A process of mediated scandalization can make the passage very quick from power to powerlessness; from top position to banishment.

Media companies that appeal to mass audiences know how to use narrative techniques and a dramatic approach to grab our attention. Dramaturgy in this type of journalism, as Jostein Gripsrud has pointed out in his analysis of popular journalism, often builds on the aesthetics of classic melodrama, with a presentation of the world as if it is guided by moral and emotional values and strengths. Here we find people and events that represent an enduring and mythic universe. Within an apparent state of chaos, the same old story can be found (Gripsrud 1992: 88-89). In political scandals, this concerns the breach between life and learning, lies and moral betrayal. Guilty leaders must be held accountable and receive their deserved punishment. Their personal morality is put in focus. In our times, the border between the private and public life of politicians has become more blurred (Sabato & al 2000). Precisely here lies the populist appeal – and the market potential.

At the same time, a characteristic feature of political scandals is the possibility of linking market orientation and commercial news value with a higher journalistic intent: to criticize society's power-holders and reveal what some of them would like to keep hidden. Even the smallest of revelations can be used as confirmation of the news media's determination and ability to scrutinize power and the powerful. Meanwhile, the scandalized politician runs from corner to corner, looking more and more serious-minded, anxious and upset. When political scandals are dramatized as moral, person-oriented tales, they titillate our curiosity and we urge for more. On a psychological level these stories may mobilize both moral indignation and malicious pleasure in the audience – since they affect someone with power, prestige and privileges. He or she got what they deserved!

The idea that political scandals are constituted by mediated forms of communication (Thompson 2000) has provided a starting point for the analyses. Journalists and editors are more than messengers, even when politicians or other actors take the initiative in a scandalization process. Political scandals are staged and carried out by newsrooms and, by lowering the news threshold for stories and episodes that confirm or fit the established interpretation frame, these stories gain their characterization as a media hunt.

In this chapter we will summarize and discuss some key characteristics of the scandals that have been analysed, starting with a discussion of the seven hypotheses launched in chapter 1.

## Seven hypotheses about political scandals

*The hypothesis of increased incidence of political scandals* is based on the assumption that mediated scandalization has become more common. In the first decades after World War II political scandals were regarded as rare events in the Nordic countries. As mentioned in chapter 1, in an analysis of well-known political corruption cases in Europe as late as the first part of the 1980s, John Logue wrote that Scandinavian governments were an exception (Logue 1984: 261).

The analysis of Nordic political scandals in chapter 2 confirms the notion that national, political scandals have indeed become a more regular feature. On average, the frequency of scandals was still rather low both in the 1980s and 1990s. The significant increase in Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden came after the millennium, reaching a level almost three times higher than in the two previous decades. The number of political scandals in 2010, the first year of the new decade, indicates that this tendency seems to be continuing.

Concerning types of political scandal, affairs related to economic and financial norms dominate, but to a lesser degree in the decade 2000-2009 than previ-



ously. The most important change is the increased importance of unacceptable personal behaviour, a tendency especially strong in Finland. This may be due to changing public norms concerning the type of behaviour regarded as acceptable, but it is clearly also related to changing news cultures and a greater willingness to publish stories about personal and private affairs.

*The hypothesis of individualization* is a statement about media's emphasis on individual, personal transgressions of norms and moral codes, while collective responsibility and structural conditions are kept out of the media picture. Follow-ups focus on personal responsibility, normally leading to demands that the scandalized politician should resign and withdraw from his or her position. In political scandals it comes as no surprise that media reports are person-oriented. The hypothesis is that media coverage is *limited* to individual moral transgressions, even when a wider political perspective should be of interest.

All news media use – at least to some degree – personification in their news reporting, amongst other things because this responds to the audience's need for identification with other individuals, and represents a simplification that has wider public appeal than a more subject-oriented or abstract representation. Commercial popular journalism is first and foremost characterized by the scope and extent of person-oriented journalism, i.e., a tendency to *reduce* reality to what can be personalized and dramatized: "It's all about people, experiences and feelings" (Eide 1995: 44-45). The strong person-oriented political scandals in several of the case studies in this book largely follow this kind of pattern.

The Nordic scandals analysed in chapter 2, the different case studies in this book, and a former analysis of Norwegian and Swedish political scandals (Allern & Pollack 2009) all show that news coverage is characterized by being heavily oriented towards personal norm violations and responsibility. In most cases, the politics of different parties, governments or institutions are not the focus of interest. Both the verbal and the visual portraits are strongly oriented towards individualized accusations, and the victim under scrutiny gradually looks more and more serious, anxious and uneasy, while she or he is hunted from one position of defence to another.

Nevertheless, this hypothesis needs to be modified in certain contexts. Most importantly, some of the large political scandals such as the Bofors and Statoil corruption cases (see chapter 2), or the Danish security scandals (see chapter 9), have largely been reported and discussed as societal issues concerning politics, and not reduced to a problem of greedy, irresponsible or incompetent individuals. But also in scandals involving norm breaches by individual politicians, like the Finnish election campaign scandals (see chapter 4), the affairs have resulted in a more principled discussion about campaign financing laws.

In the Swedish government scandal of 2006, the Conservative-Liberal government followed up criticism about members of the cabinet using black market

childcare by introducing certain tax reductions for housekeeping services. Even if the main angle is strongly oriented towards individuals, such scandals can lead to attention being directed towards other, more societal aspects.

*The hypothesis of sensationalizing the trivial* takes its point of departure from the circumstance that many mediated scandals concerning politicians often start out as minor violations of moral standards. The “crime” in question is often – especially in legal terms – a relatively trivial offence. The use and misuse of a government credit card for personal use by Mona Sahlin (see chapter 7) is, in the Nordic countries, a classic example. The five scandals involving female politicians discussed in chapter 8 may all, at least in retrospect, fall into this category of relatively trivial norm transgressions. Several of the talk scandals are also easily forgotten after a while. Since the millennium, scandals of a minor order such as these have clearly been given increased importance in the Nordic area.

The political aspect of “trivial” scandals concerns first and foremost accusations about overstepping the limits of what is seen to be acceptable behaviour for, and expected of, a politician. Especially important is the possible discrepancy between ideals and reality. One reason that these kinds of events are depicted as important and “big” cases is clearly related to the *position* of the politicians in question, and the democratic demand that lawmakers should abide by the same regulations and norms as everybody else. However, through media coverage and dramatization these cases, irrespective their societal relevance, can also attain alarming proportions.

In scandals where the substance of the case is meagre and of little interest to begin with, poor media and crisis-management may rapidly provide cause for an intensified media hunt.

*The herd hypothesis* can be related to the assertion that the “scandal” provokes a media hunt where many leading news organisations follow the same spoor, basically using the same news frames, supporting each other's interpretation of reality. Herd tendencies will without doubt be reinforced if several different types of media simultaneously mediate the same kind of images of reality. Studies of news media confirm a general feature: the will and capacity for independent information gathering is limited by resources and cost considerations. Scandals about politicians as moral tales are also cheaper to produce than the revelation of political scandals about more complex matters.

By adding bits and pieces to the story, many media actors can contribute to create a media hunt. It becomes journalistically relevant to hunt for sources that have something negative to say, and old accusations can acquire brand new life. When external agents provide or plant information, tips and documents function as information subsidies; they lower the news threshold and publishing them makes it easier to obtain interviews with people who want to comment on or

condemn what has happened (Gandy 1982, Allern 2001a). Through journalist-driven interventions, these person-oriented scandals easily develop into a serial or docusoap, with new episodes appearing day by day (Pollack 2009).

The analyses of the different mediated Nordic scandals seem to strengthen the herd hypothesis; with, however, some important exceptions. Special weight in a scandalization process is given to news appearing in the biggest dailies and on their Internet sites, often followed up by the leading TV channels. For those who are exposed to their attention, the media can be conceived as a collective group of hunters. Tendencies of herd behaviour doubtlessly become reinforced when several different types of media mediate the same kind of pictures of reality in the same time-frame.

However, it is obvious from several case studies (see chapter 3) that the hypothesis about news media as “herd animals” has to be modified. First, there are some variations connected to political profile and history, mainly among newspapers (see chapter 3). Secondly, there may be large variations in how scandals are covered between national, regional and local media. The fact that the leading newspapers and TV channels drive down the same road does not necessarily mean that the priorities are the same in niche papers or in the local media. We cannot assume that all the media will act in the same way, not even when the leading news media hunt as a pack. That being said, we have to acknowledge that it is the media organisations reaching mass audiences who set the preconditions for the scandalizing process – and the very same news media are often the major participants in the media hunt.

*The command hypothesis* implies that one or several of the national ruling news media have to take the lead in the scandalizing process, especially if it develops into a media hunt. In the Nordic countries in our material, the general tendency is for the popular tabloids to play a leading role in both the exposure of political scandals and in giving them a campaign character. However, it is not enough for just one media organisation to expose and interpret something as a political scandal. To “start a fire” other media organisations must treat the scandal as important news and participate in the hunt.

Generally speaking, it is also obvious that the popular tabloids favour *personal* scandals concerning politicians, because they interest a large audience and can be dramatized like a soap opera. Of course to some extent this may be explained by the fact that popular tabloids also play the leading role in many other areas, such as crime news, big accidents and sports. Irrespective of which of these areas a story covers, pictures often play an important role in framing the message. Photos showing a grim looking scandalized politician leaving a room or showing her or him from behind while walking away, are published long before any official resignation is announced. Such “visual voodoo” (Pollack 2009) is part of the dramatization.

Several bigger news media may sometimes *compete* in taking the leading role in the hunt. However, if the scandal was initially launched by one large news organisation, it will often “own” the case with regard to the most important sources and follow-up revelations. But many others will “carry wood to the fire”, and in the age of the Internet no single news organisation will be able to control either the information process or the debate. Blogs and social media are useful tools for those involved in a scandalization process, and may, if picked up by the bigger news organisations, have a certain influence on the outcome of the process.

*The gender hypothesis* can be divided in two sub hypotheses: 1) The limit of tolerance for breaches against norms is lower for women than for men; therefore women politicians are more “scandal prone” than male politicians; and 2) Because women in our type of society are expected to show more empathy, to be more expressive and less instrumental than men, the reactions against women politicians who do not live up to these expectations are harsher than those against men.

Since the number of leading female politicians and ministers has increased over the years, so have the political scandals where women are the main targets of attention (see chapter 2). However, as the analysis in chapter 2 has shown, the first sub hypothesis is weakened: the number of political scandals involving women more or less corresponds to their share of government posts and political appointments. Male politicians are, however, especially overrepresented in scandals related to sex and sexual harassment. Sub hypothesis 2 on the other hand is strengthened, especially concerning female top politicians: of the 85 government members in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden involved in scandals 1980-2009, 67 per cent of the men succeeded in staying in office, while 33 per cent had to resign. 39 per cent of the women succeeded in staying in office, while 61 per cent had to resign.

The most striking example here is the Swedish government scandal where the transgressions of norms and moral codes (not paying TV-licence fees and using black market household labour) applied to both female and male politicians, but the ones forced to resign from the cabinet were the two female ministers. Regardless of the fact that male members of the new cabinet also had a history of unpaid license fees, and that the Minister for Finance Anders Borg admitted to having employed black market labour in his home, the attacks on the female ministers had an intensity and reached a level of aggression that never occurred in relation to the male cabinet members (Pollack 2009).

Another interesting tendency is the increasing number of women politicians involved in scandals concerning their family and private life. Public morality seems to demand that a top woman politician, irrespective of all her public assignments and duties, must still have full control over all the details concerning practical and economical family affairs (see chapter 8). As the case study

of the Swedish politician Mona Sahlin shows, the spotlight was not primarily on her *political* activities, but concerned her normality, folksiness and lack of credibility both inside and outside the party (see chapter 7).

In the process of scandalizing the Norwegian minister Manuela Ramin-Osmundsen in 2008 (see chapter 5), another gender perspective was noticeable. Not only was she a female politician, but also part of a *female network* of lawyers; a condition that really seemed to frighten male journalists and male political commentators (Enli 2009). While politicians are generally complimented on their capacity to build and maintain networks, in this case the ability became exceedingly suspect and indicative of a dependence that potentially disqualified her for the position.

A frequent element in a media hunt, irrespective of gender, is the insistence on the victim to regret and ask for forgiveness for the transgressions of norms. Female politicians exposed to a scandalizing process are expected to master the technique of apologizing as well as male politicians. However, an analysis of the female politician's speeches of defence (see chapter 8) shows that none of them found this strategy to be easy or to serve their purpose. These expectations of a special kind of female "apologia" perhaps lead to more and stronger criticism when the expectations are unfulfilled.

*The demonization hypothesis* asserts that frames of interpretation and narrative in scandals lead to a demonization of the person being accused and criticized. He or she becomes part of a story about The Good and The Bad, the Perpetrator and the Victim. In the journalistic construction of frames, the story becomes part of a greater narrative; it will be interpreted within a context that affects our understanding of the story. There is a marked moral and political problem with media hunts. The frames used in the stories become so restricted that only selected parts of reality fit into the chosen news frames. This leads to a phenomenon (in connection with crime reporting called "tunnel vision") where one looks in only one direction; reality is observed from one and the same perspective. In political scandals news media, especially the leading media organisations take on the role of law court, where the journalist becomes investigator, prosecutor and judge, all at the same time. And the media trial gives the condemned no right to appeal.

From the empirical material analysed in these case studies, we see a tendency for the scandalized politicians to be made infamous on a private level as well, becoming victims of character assassination. Although not always the case, they are all too often reduced to their worst character trait. Anyone expressing doubt when answering journalists, or with a faulty memory, risks being labelled as a born liar who cannot – and should not – hold an official position. Several politicians have been subject to mechanisms such as these, leading in some cases to suicide (see chapter 10). Cabinet members who flee

questions and excuse themselves in different ways are identified as liars and made infamous. In the marketplace of scandals, the guilty ones are sorted out from the innocent, and receive a well-deserved stay in the pillory.

Of course, the idea that leading politicians who deserve criticism must defend their actions in public should not in itself be seen as a problem. On the contrary, it is a healthy feature of democratic societies. In the political scandals researched and presented in our book, several conditions merit discussion and public attention. Neither publicity nor criticism is the problem. The complications occur when the media attention turns into a collective hunt; when both minor and major faults get the same huge headlines, and the coverage grows into dimensions similar to war reporting. Simultaneously, perspectives shrink and become one-eyed, the uses of sources one-sided and the moral tale reduced to a simplified, moral combat between Good and Evil.

### Self-legitimacy and populism

An important aspect of media hunts and scandalizing is the combination of the market orientation of the news business with the need for journalists to legitimize themselves as morally responsible mediators fulfilling an important societal role. Even the smallest of revelations is used as a confirmation of the news medias' need and ability to scrutinize power and the powerful. Journalists who contribute to a mediated political scandal see this normally as a feather in their cap. After a scandalizing process with a lot of attention, the achievement can be celebrated with a nomination for one of the different prizes for journalism that exist in the media business.

The idea of the unmasking of power as one of journalism's assignments in society is closely related to the old Montesquieu-inspired notion of the press as a fourth branch of government, an institution formed to scrutinize legal, executive and judicial power on behalf of the people. Freedom of speech and democracy, information and debate, public interest and independence is stressed. As a political institution, the news media of today are characterized by simultaneously being both arena and actor, with the role of actor being independent of formal ties to the state or party system. As Jan Ekecrantz and Tom Olsson (1994) pointed out, this can be related to journalism's power and possibilities to legitimize itself in a way unknown to other social institutions. When other institutions or organizations are required to ward off criticism, or improve their reputation, their dependency on the news media becomes obvious. News media themselves hardly need any other ideological apparatus when their newsrooms are exposed to criticism (Ekecrantz & Olsson 1994: 23).

Once scandals and media hunts are over, journalists are often criticized. These debates have more or less become a part of the ritual of political scan-

dals, taking place in newsrooms and amongst journalists as well (Pollack 2009). There are always headlines to regret, or attacks on individuals for which there was little justification – viewed after the event. At the same time, there is wide agreement among professional journalists and PR consultants that the scandalized person in question has herself/himself to blame for the curse of events.

One important limitation concerning the institutionalized ethical code of the press is the absence of evaluation of the big moral questions and decisions concerning news priorities and framing (Bjerke 2009). These evaluations belong to the freedom of the press, not to ethics. Collective hunts, one eyed perspectives and demonizing techniques are seldom highlighted in ethical debates in the press, apart from the idea that the accused should be offered the right to reply. Even elementary demands concerning documentation and truthfulness can be overlooked if the accusation against a scandalized person comes from a source that is normally regarded as respectable and trustworthy (Allern 2009).

An interesting feature of mediated scandals, therefore, is the construction of a simple, populist criticism of power, where democratically elected members of the cabinet or representatives of state organizations are seen as privileged, arrogant wielders of power who potentially pose a problem for democracy. Even a minor affair such as a leased cottage on one's property, where one missed filling out the right papers required by the authorities in one's municipality, may be presented as a sign of moral degradation. The strong orientation towards persons and individuals serve the same purpose; now we know that those at the top are no better than us at the bottom; they do not even follow the rules we taxpayers are forced to obey, and therefore it can be said that they take advantage of us.

Of course it is legitimate, and sometimes important, to criticize and debate even minor legal offences and transgressions of accepted moral norms. But all journalism that deserves to be called critical has to evaluate the dimensions of the coverage of events. Big scandals about small conflicts or offences may conceal greater political issues, including the kind of disclosure that now and then grows into a true political scandal. But this demands another type of competence than the talent to dramatize moral tales about individuals breaching the rules. And those stories rarely show the same sales figures in the news market.

Fact oriented and fair journalism is regarded as having great importance for democracy and an enlightened public debate, and this is well-grounded. The problem with scandalizing media hunts is that this kind of political journalism does not offer us new insights, only a ringside seat at the guillotine. The symbolic execution confirms the re-establishment of the social order. New politicians and leaders take the place of the old ones. However, it may not be an obvious triumph for democracy that an elected leader is pressed to resign before those who elected him or her have a say in the matter. Neither is it an obvious mark of progress that large, market-oriented media actors have more influence on the

future of a cabinet minister than do members of parliament. The dramaturgy of media hunts provokes quick decisions that in practice are incompatible with thorough debates, afterthought, and democratic decision-making.

Who will scrutinize the scrutinizers? Modern journalistic norms indicate that the answer to this old question is that this should be the duty of the news institution itself. It is a tempting idea. However, just as questions of war and peace are too important to be delegated to the generals, questions of news and truth are too important to be delegated to media organisations alone. Viewing everything in politics through the spectacles of the media will easily blur vision.



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The purpose of this book is to spotlight the way in which political scandals in four Nordic countries have been launched, directed, dramatized and interpreted through different genres of journalism – in an interactive tug-of-war between editors and various political actors. News institutions help to build political careers – and to tear them down. A mediated scandalization process can make the path from power to powerlessness, from a top position to exclusion, very short.

A number of questions are discussed: How important are the norm violations that have led to political scandals? Have the types of scandals changed over time? How may rivals and political opponents use mediated scandals? Are character assassination and demonization typical traits of a scandalization process? Are male and female politicians treated differently? *Scandalous!* is based on case studies and content analyses of mediated political scandals in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, including an analysis of the frequencies, types, characteristics and consequences of national political scandals during the period 1980–2010.

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ISBN 978-91-86523-27-5



9 789186 523275