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EUROPEAN STUDIES

A Tale of Two Elections?

Differences in Media Representations between the European Parliament
Election and National Election

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Abstract

The low turnout in the elections to the European Parliament is arguably a crucial aspect of the democratic deficit in the European Union. Although the reasons for the low turnout may be several, this thesis puts focus on the influence of the media and their potential impact on the turnout. The aim of this research is to contribute to the explanation of the low turnout in the European Parliament elections by investigating what the differences are in the media representations of the European Parliament election, which has a low turnout, and the national election, which has a much higher turnout.

In order to achieve this aim, a qualitative frame analysis was conducted on 36 Swedish newspaper articles about the 2014 national election in Sweden, which was the country subjected to this study, and 36 Swedish newspaper articles about the European Parliament election in the same year. The analysis and results showed that the media generally framed the European Parliament election as a second-order election whilst the national election was portrayed as very important. The combined message conveyed in the articles about the national election stressed the importance of voting whereas such a message was less prominent in the articles about the European Parliament election. This research consequently contributes to the explanation of the low turnout in the European Parliament elections by bridging the gap between the media representation of the European Parliament election and the democratic deficit manifested in the low turnout.

Keywords: Media representations, European Parliament election, national election, democratic deficit, legitimacy deficit, European Union.

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1) Introduction

The European Union (EU) is arguably moving towards an ever closer union. Whereas it started out as an economic union, it has since also become a political one. Kim and Jung (2010:53) even argue that the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 suggests that the EU is now moving towards a federal state. This is problematic since the EU suffers from a democratic deficit which means that there is a lack of accountability between the political elites and the EU citizens (Kim & Jung, 2010:53). There are many aspects of the democratic deficit but one of the most obvious is the fact that there is only one elected institution in the EU, namely the European Parliament (EP), in which elections there is a low turnout. Given that the EU is a powerful political entity which might even be moving towards a federal state, it is arguably strange that the EU citizens show this high level of political disengagement. As educational philosopher Robert Hutchins famously wrote in 1956:

“The death of democracy is not likely to be an assassination from ambush. It will be a slow extinction from apathy, indifference, and undernourishment.” (cited in Culver, 2005:69)

Moreover, the title of this thesis alludes on the famous novel by Charles Dickens, “A Tale of Two Cities”, which takes place prior and during the French Revolution, depicting the life in both Paris and London during said period. The novel illustrates parallels between the two cities but, naturally, there are also differences. Similarly, the elections to the national parliaments and the EP have parallels but perhaps there are differences as well. Whilst Dickens gave life to the tale of the two cities, it is the media that today narrates the tale of the modern day elections. This thesis will thus investigate whether the modern day authors are indeed telling a tale of two elections and, if so, analyse why that might be.

Furthermore, since the media plays a central role in the public’s experience of politics (de Vreese et al, 2006:478), their representations of the EP elections can aid us in our understanding of why there is such a low turnout in these elections. Indeed, it is through the media that the public learns about significant issues and, depending on how these issues are portrayed, the amount of importance that they should attach to them. Also, the mass media have been said to be of particular relevance in relation to politics since it is often the only contact that the electorate have with politics. The information that is given by the mass media hence becomes the main source on which the decision to vote, and also how to vote, has to be based upon (McCombs & Shaw, 1972:176).

The turnout in the national elections in the EU tends to be higher than the turnout in the EP elections. In the last EP election the turnout in Sweden, which is the country subjected to this study, was only 51,07 % (TNS/ScytI in cooperation with the European Parliament, 2014) whilst 85,81% voted in the national election held in the same year (Idea.int, 2015). Thus, there appears to be a great discrepancy between the public attitudes towards voting in the national election, as opposed to the EP election. Since it is known that the media greatly influence our understanding and experience of politics, it is important to investigate if they represent the national and EP elections differently as this might affect the turnout.

According to de Vreese et al (2006:478), the EP elections do not receive much attention from the media and they stress that, in order to update the discussion on the democratic deficit, empirical knowledge about the media's coverage of the EP elections is needed. Hence, this study strives to contribute to increasing the empirical knowledge about the media's coverage of the EP elections by looking at newspaper articles written prior to the 2014 EP election in Sweden. In addition, by comparing these with newspaper articles written prior to the 2014 national election, the thesis will uncover differences in the messages conveyed to the public. By doing this, the study will consequently contribute to our understanding of the low turnout in the EP elections, which is a crucial aspect of the democratic deficit in the EU. The democratic deficit is itself a part of the legitimacy deficit in the EU, further discussed in chapter 5, which will also be a central concept in this thesis.

1.2“Along the roads that lay before them”

As the quote from Dickens' novel suggests, this section will work as a roadmap explaining the outline of the thesis. It will first introduce some background information of the varying levels of turnout in the EP elections in all the Member States (MS) and compare this to the national elections in the MS, thereby situating Sweden in a European context. The research aim and questions will then be presented followed by a chapter discussing previous research about the EP elections as well as why people do not vote in elections and why they do. This chapter will also account for the academic contribution of this thesis.

The following chapter will go through theories about the influence of the media and the relationship between the media and the EP. Theories about the legitimacy

of the EU, identity in the EU and discussions about what the EU is will also be included in this chapter. The research design and method including, and motivating, sampling procedures and choice of analytical approach will follow together with a discussion about the credibility and generalisability of this study.

After the research design and method have been explained, the analysis and results will be presented. The findings of the results and the conclusions that can be inferred from the analysis will be summarised and further developed in the concluding discussion.

2) Background:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times”

The purpose of this chapter is to situate Sweden in a European context. The differences in turnout between the national elections in the EU Member States and the EP elections will be illustrated, thereby revealing that Sweden is one of many MS with a significant difference in turnout between the national and EP elections.

Figure 1: Map of the EU Member States



Source: 2.le.ac.uk (2015)

Again alluding on Dickens’ novel, “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times” here refers to the differences in turnout between the national elections in the EU Member States and the EP elections. As shown in table 1, with the exception of Belgium, Luxembourg and Greece, the turnout in the national elections is generally significantly higher than the turnout in the EP elections. Thus, the national elections are arguably having “the best of times”, although in some countries the turnout in these elections are also relatively low, whilst the EP elections are showing “the worst of times” figures.

The high turnout in both elections in Belgium and Luxembourg might be explained by the fact that they have compulsory voting (Europa.eu, 2015). On the other hand, so does Greece and

Cyprus (Europa.eu, 2015) and they have a much lower average turnout in both elections than Belgium and Luxembourg although there is not much difference in turnout between the national and EP election in Greece, whereas in Cyprus there is.

Nonetheless, with a few exceptions, there is on average a large difference between the turnout in the EP and national elections. Even when the turnout is quite low in the national elections, such as in Poland where the turnout in the most recent national election was 48.92%, the turnout in the EP election, three years later, was at the significantly lower 23.83%. Thus, Sweden is in no way unique in having a much higher turnout in the national election than the EP election, as is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Turnout in the EU Member States

Member State	2009 EP election	2014 EP election	Most recent national election (parliamentary)
Austria	45.97%	45.39%	74.91% (2013)
Belgium	90.39%	89.64%	89.37% (2014)
Bulgaria	38.99%	35.84%	51.05% (2014)
Croatia	Non member	25.24%	54.17% (2011)
Cyprus	59.4%	43.97%	78.70% (2011)
Czech Republic	28.22%	18.2%	59.48% (2013)
Denmark	59.54%	56.32%	87.74% (2011)
Estonia	43.9%	36.52%	64.23% (2015)
Finland	38.6%	39.1%	66.85% (2015)
France	40.63%	42.43%	55.40% (2012)
Germany	43.27%	48.1%	71.55% (2013)
Greece	52.61%	59.97%	63.87% (2015)
Hungary	36.31%	28.97%	61.84% (2014)
Ireland	58.64%	52.44%	70.05% (2011)
Italy	65.05%	57.22%	75.19% (2013)
Latvia	53.7%	30.24%	58.80% (2014)
Lithuania	20.98%	47.35%	52.93% (2012)
Luxembourg	90.76%	85.55%	91.15% (2013)
Malta	78.79%	74.8%	92.95% (2013)
Netherlands	36.75%	37.32%	74.56% (2012)
Poland	24.53%	23.83%	48.92% (2011)
Portugal	36.77%	33.67%	58.03% (2011)
Romania	27.67%	32.44%	41.76% (2012)
Slovakia	19.64%	13.05%	59.11% (2012)
Slovenia	28.37%	24.55%	51.73% (2014)
Spain	44.87%	43.81%	68.94% (2011)
Sweden	45.53%	51.07%	85.81% (2014)
United Kingdom	34.7%	35.6%	65.77% (2010)
EU average:	42.97%	42.61%	N/A

Source: TNS/Scytl in cooperation with the European Parliament (2014) for the EU results and Idea.int (2015) for the turnout in the national elections.

3) Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this research is to contribute to the explanation of the low turnout in the European Parliament elections by investigating whether there are differences in the media representations of the EP election and the national election. The research question is hence:

What are the differences between the media representation of the European Parliament election and the national election in 2014?

By analysing newspaper articles, the thesis' objective is to examine variations in the representations of each election and describe the differences between the two. Thus, by comparing the two representations, the thesis will analyse whether there are different messages conveyed with respect to each election and, with the aid of previous research and theories, attempt to explain why that might be. This thereby leads us to the additional research question:

Do the media convey one message/story about the European Parliament election and a different one about the national election and, if so, why?

Further, since the mass media are the main source on which the decision whether or not to vote has to be based upon (McCombs & Shaw, 1972:176), it is vital to examine whether there are differences in these media representations as this can arguably greatly affect the turnout. The term "media representation" is an established concept that has been used in studies about media representation of public opinion (Brookes et al, 2004) and media representation of feminism (Jaworska & Krishnamurthy, 2012) to name a few. It is here defined as the way in which the media, which in this thesis most often refers to newspaper articles, portray the two elections. News stories can be illustrated in various versions depending on who writes them and for what purpose and it is these alternating portrayals that the term "media representation" here refers to.

The use of the words "low turnout" refers to the low turnout in the EP elections as opposed to the national elections in most MS. As shown in table 1, the turnout in the EP elections is mostly significantly lower than in the national elections and this research strives to contribute to the understanding of this phenomenon which constitutes a critical aspect of the democratic deficit.

Moreover, since this thesis is looking at the differences in media representations, the effect and influence of political parties on the turnout will not be included. The

thesis focuses on the influence of the media and its potential effect on the turnout, thereby deliberately excluding the political parties. However, political parties naturally also play a key role in affecting the turnout, since increased campaigning can mobilise the electorate, and their exclusion from this study is thus a delimitation.

4) Previous Research

*This chapter will discuss the previous research in relation to the EP elections and also reasons why people **do not** vote in elections as well as why they **do**. The research on why people do or do not vote will be imperative for the empirical analysis where the findings in the articles will be analysed in relation to it. The final section will also describe the academic contribution of this thesis.*

4.1) The European Parliament Elections

The idea behind the establishment of direct elections to the EP was to establish a clear link between the citizens of the Union and the decision-making at EU-level. The elections were also intended to contribute to the creation of a common European identity and to legitimise policy by having a normal electoral process. Thus, it would create a public space where the citizens could exercise more direct control over their collective future. Yet critics of the EP elections questioned whether direct elections alone could mobilise the public to pay greater attention to European issues as they feared that the EP elections might be contested mainly on national matters (Marsh & Slava, 2010:1). Also, the EP elections differ from national elections in the sense that no government is formed as an outcome of the elections which, according to Thomassen (2009:6-7), is a most obvious manifestation of the democratic deficit.

Moreover, Marsh and Slava (2010) argue that EP elections are less important than national elections which consequently explains the low turnout. They claim that if voters perceive the EP elections as less significant, and if the media also share this perception, then the public will feel that the benefits of voting decrease whilst the

costs of finding the relevant information increase. The result of this is, thus, that there is a decrease in the mobilisation effects of these elections (Marsh & Slava, 2010:9).

However, some scholars have questioned the general assumption that the public perceive the EP elections as less important. Research by Blondel et al (1997) showed that when people were asked how much it mattered, who won an EP election and who won a national election, the differences between the two answers were only slight and certainly not substantial enough to explain why people who vote in the national elections fail to vote in the EP elections. However, this sharp critique has hardly been subjected to any evaluation since the time it originally came out (Marsh & Slava, 2010:11). Yet, it is interesting to consider that Blondel et al (1997) were right and that the individual actually might care about the elections because, if this is the case, then perhaps the low turnout can be better explained by the lack of activity by the media and political parties (Marsh & Slava, 2010:11).

4.2) Why do People *not* Vote?

According to Clark (2014:339), one of the most common explanations of the low turnout in the EP elections is that the public do not care about EU politics. The EP elections have been characterised as “second-order” elections, which are defined as elections where less is at stake than in national elections, and the second-order nature of these elections leads to a lower turnout (Marsh & Slava, 2010:8-9). Hence, perhaps the low turnout can be explained by the fact that the public perceive the EP elections as unimportant. Indeed, Clark’s own research has shown that perceptions of the EP itself have a vital effect on voters’ decisions to participate in the elections (Clark, 2014:339-340).

In addition, members of the electorate might abstain from voting if they have a different opinion than their party on an important political issue. The voters who experience such a psychological conflict may instead abstain rather than cast their vote on a different party. This situation is considered to be relatively frequent in Sweden during EP elections since many voters, who have distinct party affiliations,

quite often have a more negative opinion about the EU than their party of choice (Oscarsson & Hedberg, 2010:53).

Moreover, whereas a common explanation of the low turnout in the EP elections is the public's lack of interest, British scholars argue that low turnout in national elections has been due to anticipated landslides. They claim that the closeness of the electoral competition can help explain turnout in national elections stating that expected landslides produce low turnouts whereas close elections result in high turnouts (Pattie & Johnston, 2001:286). Further, according to Gallego's (2009) research on the turnout in the national elections in Sweden, Norway and Germany, those who do not vote in Sweden and Norway are young and poorly educated citizens. In comparison, age is less relevant in Germany where young and highly educated citizens vote at high rates whereas poorly educated citizens of all ages are increasingly withdrawing from electoral participation (Gallego, 2009:38).

Flickinger and Studlar (2007:389) argue that the turnout in the previous national elections greatly affect the turnout in the EP elections, which in turn indicates the significance of habitual voting when explaining turnout (Franklin and Hobolt 2011:75). Also, distance to the nearest polling station has been proved to matter. Research by Orford et al (2009:212) has shown that people who have farther to travel to the nearest polling station are less likely to vote in European and local elections even after controlling for social factors such as deprivation.

Furthermore, Strömbäck (2014) claims that, at the same time as people themselves affect the quality and character of the democracy in their role as citizens and consumers, so does the quality and character of the democracy affect how the public act in their role as citizens. This is because the way that the democracy works contributes to the creation of expectations and norms in society which in turn affect the public's actions and opinions (Strömbäck, 2014:40). Thus, the quality of the democracy also affects how the electorate behave.

4.3) Why *do* People Vote?

According to a landmark study by Anthony Downs in 1957, the decision whether or not to vote can be explained as a matter of costs and benefits. He developed his theory from the economist rational choice framework and argued that citizens weigh the time and effort it takes to prepare to vote, as well as the actual voting, against the benefits of voting. The benefits of voting depend on how much the citizen prefers one candidate over another and hence the less the citizen cares about who wins the election, the lower the motivation to vote will be (Goldfarb & Sigelman, 2010:276).

Yet, even if the citizen strongly prefers one candidate over another, s/he may not vote as it is unlikely that this one vote would change the outcome of the election. It thus seems that the costs will almost always outweigh the benefits and yet very many people do vote. Anthony Downs tried to explain this by arguing that the citizens may feel that there is a benefit in voting since by doing so they help to sustain the fundamental institution of participatory democracy and that is such a benefit that it will outweigh the costs for most citizens (Goldfarb & Sigelman, 2010:276-277).

However, as argued by Goldfarb and Sigelman (2010), there is a flaw to this logic. If we know that our vote will not affect the outcome of the election, how can it then be argued that one citizen's vote will have a significant impact on the long-term viability of the participatory democracy? Thus, they argue that there are flaws with Down's explanation and state that, within the framework of the rational model, there appears to be two logical possibilities why individuals do vote. The first one is that citizens mistakenly believe that their vote will affect the outcome and the second one is that they value voting per se and hence derive utility gains by performing an act for which they have a taste. This second explanation thus relates to the idea that many people believe that they have a civic duty to vote (Goldfarb & Sigelman, 2010:277).

Moving on, Blais & St Vincent (2011:395) argue that there are three main reasons that affect whether a person decides to vote or not. Firstly, the person might perceive that the benefits outweigh the costs or, secondly, the person might simply want to express an opinion or, finally, the person may feel that s/he has a civic duty to vote. According to a Canadian study, the two most important traits that determine whether a person is likely to vote or not is their political interest as well as a sense of civic duty (Blais & St Vincent, 2011:395). In addition, education affects the sense of civic duty and is often considered as one of the most important influences on individual turnout. According to Jackson (1995:294) education affects both the sense of civic duty, political awareness and political efficacy which in turn affect the turnout.

4.4) Academic Contribution

As previously mentioned, research has shown that perceptions of the EP does affect the turnout and the lack of proper media attention thus arguably contributes to the public's perception of the EP and indeed the EU itself. Previous research in this field has, for example, been conducted by a quantitative content analysis of newspapers and television programmes in all Member States (de Vreese et al, 2006) and by qualitative interviews with middle-ranking and senior Directorates Generals and Members of the European Parliament (Anderson & McCleod, 2004).

Clark (2014) based his study on quantitative survey-data and Spanje and de Vreese (2014) used pure quantitative methods to evaluate the impact of the media on the turnout. Although this study does compare the number of articles written about the national and the EP election, it will differ from these studies since its main focus will be on an in-depth qualitative text analysis of newspaper articles in one MS.

Also, according to de Vreese et al (2006:478), empirical knowledge about the media's coverage of the EP elections is needed in order to update the discussion on the democratic deficit in the EU as well as the communication deficit. Thus, the relevance of this research lies in its ability to increase the empirical knowledge in this field, by conducting research which differs from previous studies in that it

compares articles written about the national and EP election, for the purpose of revealing whether different messages are conveyed.

In addition, this thesis is an attempt to contribute to the existing research on the democratic and legitimacy deficits in the EU by bridging the gap between the media representation of the EP elections and the low turnout, which is a vital aspect of the democratic deficit. Also, the thesis will partly contribute to the research on the communication deficit in the EU, which is predominantly based on interviews with EU officials and Brussels-based correspondents and tends to focus on either the different EU institutions' communications or on journalists and e.g. what influences EU news and editorial policies (Martins et al, 2012:306). Although this study will not examine the flaws of the communication from the EU per se, it will analyse the way that the EP election is represented in the media, which might partly be explained by the inability of the EU institutions to communicate their importance. Hence, the study will contribute to the research on the democratic deficit, which is part of the legitimacy deficit, and communication deficit by arguing for a possible connection between the media representation of the EP election and the low turnout as opposed to the media representation of the national election and the higher turnout.

5) Theory

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the media's influence on voter behaviour, the selection of news and the media's relationship with the EP elections. The reasons behind the media representation of the EP election and the low turnout can be related to and explained by theories of EU legitimacy and identity which both relate to the question of what the EU actually is. These theories will be presented in this chapter and then captured in the concluding discussion in order to help explain and discuss why there might be a tale of two elections.

5.1) The Influence of the Media and the Media and the EP Elections

In their often-cited article from 1972, McCombs and Shaw state that newsroom staff and editors play a vital role in shaping political reality by choosing and displaying news. They claim that by reading newspapers, the readers not only learn about certain given issues but also about the amount of importance that they should attach to the issue. This depends upon where the article is placed in the newspaper as well as how much information is given in it. In addition, they stress the importance of mass media in politics by stating that it is often the only contact that the electorate have with politics. The information that is given by the mass media hence becomes the main source on which the decision to vote, and also how to vote, has to be based upon (McCombs & Shaw, 1972:176). It has also been concluded that the mass media play a vital role in informing the electorate of the different political issues and candidates. In addition, the public learns from the mass media in direct proportion to the amount of emphasis that the media puts on a certain political issue (McCombs & Shaw, 1972:177).

Further, Strömbäck (2014) writes that the political communication is vital since it is through this that the political actors, media and citizens meet. It is here that the different versions of reality are created, where opinions are formed and where most people get their information and knowledge about politics and society. According to Strömbäck (2014:160), there are two guiding principles that decide what makes the news, namely interest and significance. Interest refers to the level of interest that the media perceive the public to have in relation to a certain story. This is a

demand-based way of selecting the news that get published. For example, if the public is interested in sports then the media should provide such news. The second principle, significance, refers to what the media believe that the public should be aware of. The role of the media, from this perspective, is to provide the citizens with enough information so that they can form an independent opinion about the issue even if they might be more interested in other types of news (Strömbäck, 2014:160).

Moving on, previous research has shown that the EP elections do not receive much attention from the media (de Vreese et al. 2006) which might be a contributing factor to the low turnout. If the public is not sufficiently informed about the elections then it might explain why they do not perceive them as important. Thus, according to de Vreese et al (2006:478), a prerequisite for evaluating the democratic processes in the EU and for updating the discussion on the democratic deficit as well as the communication deficit, empirical knowledge about the media's coverage of the EP elections is needed. The media's role in contributing to or alleviating the democratic deficit lies in their ability to contribute to a shared European identity and framework of reference (de Vreese et al. 2006:478).

In addition, according to a study by van Noije (2010:259), on the type and amount of EU news that could be found in the Dutch, British and French media, it was concluded that the prominence of EU news appeared unrelated to the EU's growing authority in all three countries. Whereas crises and the furthering of the integration process did receive media attention, the everyday politics remained invisible (van Noije, 2010:259).

5.2) The Legitimacy of the EU and EU Identity

According to Beetham and Lord (1998:5-6), the criteria for legitimacy in a liberal democracy often consists of having a written constitution, which limits political authority in terms of its scope and duration, popular sovereignty and a political authority that protects the rights of the citizens. The legitimation in a liberal democracy is also expressed through general elections and the popular authorisation of government (Beetham & Lord, 1998:8). However, the question remains whether

these criteria are appropriate for the institutions of the EU. Beetham and Lord (1998:11) argue that an excellent way of approaching this question is to consider whether other models of legitimacy might apply. The two other legitimacy models are the international institution model and the technocratic model.

In the international institution model, legitimacy is indirect, from the point of view of citizens, as it is much based upon the legitimacy of the member states from which the international institution itself derives legitimacy (Beetham & Lord, 1998:11). However, this legitimacy model is not appropriate for the EU since the EU, for example, is the source of authoritative allocations and rules that affect the citizens directly and which consequently require their acknowledgement of them as binding (Beetham & Lord, 1998:13).

The technocratic model of legitimacy, which focuses on governmental performance, is not a viable alternative to the liberal-democratic legitimacy model either since technocratic rule suffers from the characteristic delusion that the decision-maker always knows best. The technocratic rule is thus vulnerable once demands for popular accountability and authorisations are raised (Beetham & Lord, 1998:22). Thus, the only appropriate legitimacy model for the EU is the liberal-democratic model. However, the criteria for this model are not all met in the EU thereby causing a “legitimacy deficit”.

The legitimacy deficit in the EU is expressed in performance, democracy and identity, which are relevant for the legitimacy of the EU. In terms of performance, one aspect relates to the disagreement about the scope and character of the tasks that the EU should undertake (Beetham & Lord, 1998:23). This is arguably linked to the disagreement of the very definition of the EU itself which will be further discussed in section 5.3.

The legitimacy deficit expressed in the so-called democratic deficit is the most frequently discussed element of legitimacy in the EU (Beetham & Lord, 1998:26) and a central concept in this thesis. Aspects such as the lack of European Parliamentary power in policy-making and the unelected nature of the Commission are contributing factors to the democratic deficit as well as a lack of popular support and engagement in the EU amongst its citizens (de Vreese et al,

2006:478) Although there are many aspects of the democratic deficit, this thesis will mainly concentrate on the lack of public engagement amongst EU citizens which is most notably expressed in the low turnout in the EP elections.

Moreover, the final liberal-democratic criteria relevant for the legitimacy of the EU is identity. The concept of a European identity does not mean a replacement of national loyalties but rather a reduction of the exclusivity of political loyalties at the nation state level (Beetham & Lord, 1998:30). The lack of a shared European identity is considered a serious obstacle to the further development of political legitimacy at EU-level (Beetham & Lord, 1998:33). Instead of one European identity, there exists a number of European identities consisting of everything from cosmopolitan Europeanists and bureaucrats crafting a Europe centred on Brussels to anti-globalization Euro-sceptics and xenophobic nationalists and they are all involved in constructing an evolving European identity (Katzenstein & Chekel, 2009:213). In addition, the EU consists of 28 MS and has 24 official languages (Ec.europa.eu, 2015) so the absence of a common European identity is understandable. Although there was great variety in the old EU, with only 15 Member States, this variety has increased even more with the 2004/2007 Eastern Enlargements (Katzenstein & Chekel, 2009:214-215). This is problematic since the lack of a common European identity affects the public's loyalty to the authority of the EU which in turn calls the legitimacy of the EU into question.

In addition, the creation of EU citizenship, legally confirmed in the Treaty of Maastricht which entered into force in 1993 (Maas, 2014:800), can arguably be seen as an attempt to contribute to the creation of a common identity. Indeed, Craig and De Búrca (2008:847) argue that the introduction of citizenship in the Maastricht Treaty was a key component of the symbolic move from the European Community to the more political EU. Hence, as the integration progressed, efforts to conceptualise a common identity were arguably also implemented.

Further, the traditional view is that the freedoms and rights associated with citizenship are linked to the emergence of the modern state (Hix & Høyland, 2011:273). Thus, the introduction of EU citizenship can perhaps be seen as a step towards the creation of a more state-like entity, capable of commanding the loyalty of its citizens. However, the introduction of the legal concept of EU citizenship was greeted with criticism. One of the critiques focused on the absence of reciprocal

duties that could have given rise to a more participatory or active citizenship (Craig & De Búrca, 2008:848). This critique was arguably justified since the introduction of citizenship does not appear to have created a sense of duty to vote in the EP elections, which can be considered as a minimum criteria for participatory citizenship.

5.3) The Concept of the EU

There are several theories explaining the process of European integration. Whilst some authors believe that integration is driven by the MS, others put focus on the significance of supranational institutions. According to Moravcsik (1998), who represents the intergovernmental approach to European integration, the integration process should be viewed as “a series of rational choices made by national leaders” (Moravcsik, 1998:18). In contrast Weiler (1991) emphasises the importance of the supranational European Court of Justice arguing that, from a legal perspective, it has created something similar to a federal state. Hence, Weiler’s arguments differ from Moravcsik’s intergovernmentalism and are instead more similar to the theory of European integration known as neo-functionalism. Neo-functionalism focuses on the supranational institutions and views them as key drivers of European integration. It also emphasises the importance of spill-over effects, which means that cooperation in one area will lead to the need of cooperation in another (Strøby Jensen, 2010:72). In short, intergovernmentalists believe that the MS are in charge of the integration process whilst neo-functionalists claim that the supranational institutions and spill-over effects push integration forward.

Moving on, Beck and Grande (2006) see the need for rethinking the idea of Europe. They argue that there is no turning back to the glory days of nation states but that we, at the same time, cannot think of the EU as a state but instead as a new cosmopolitan society or empire (Beck & Grande, 2006:39). Similarly, Habermas (2012:2) argues that the EU can be understood as a significant step along the route to a politically constituted world society. As the world is changing and evolving, we could soon be moving from an international community to a cosmopolitan world community. Although both Habermas (2012) and Beck and Grande (2006) argue for the need for the European project to evolve to a cosmopolitan society, it is

debatable how this would work and how it would be rooted in public support in practice. Yet, what can be taken from their arguments is that the EU is an entity that is *sui generis* and thus difficult to define.

Moreover, although some scholars have argued that we should not think of the EU as a state, the formulations in Article 10 of the Lisbon Treaty does give the impression that the EU is a form of state founded on representative democracy with a Parliament where its citizens are supposedly directly represented. Thus, there are elements of the Lisbon Treaty that suggest that we are moving towards a federal state and, if this is the case, then a low turnout will be an even larger problem and threat to democracy in Europe than it is today.

5.4) Operationalisation of Theoretical Concepts

The theoretical concepts discussed in chapters 4 and 5 will be captured throughout the empirical analysis and the concluding discussion in order to better understand why the media might portray the elections differently and the possible effects that this can have on the turnout. For example, the previous research relating to the rational choice theory of voting will be used in the analysis to evaluate whether the media decrease the costs of voting by providing the reader with sufficient information.

Theories relating to the guiding principles for selecting news will, for example, be analysed in the concluding discussion to help explain why the media might focus less on the EP election. In addition, theories about the legitimacy and concept of the EU will be captured in the concluding discussion when attempting to explain *why* a tale of two elections might be conveyed.

6) Research Design

This chapter discusses the research design and methodological approach. The choice of design and method as well as sampling procedures will be presented and motivated together with the analytical approach.

6.1) Choice of Design and Method

In order to answer the research questions and achieve the aim stated in chapter 3, a qualitative text analysis of newspaper articles was conducted. Whilst it cannot be proved that the media's actions are a direct causal mechanism of the low turnout in the EP elections, a qualitative text analysis will increase our knowledge and understanding of how these elections are represented in the media. Thus, since the media is the main source on which the decision whether or not to vote is based upon (McCombs & Shaw, 1972:176), this will contribute to our understanding of the low turnout in these elections.

Due to the scope of this study, one country was selected and its newspaper articles around the time of the EP and national election was analysed and compared. The reasons for this selection will be further discussed in section 6.2.

6.1.2) Qualitative Text Analysis

There are many advantages of text analysis. A close analysis of texts can expose presentational subtleties and texts can influence our perception of the world, the people in it and how and why they act in certain ways (Silverman, 2011:230). There are also different methods of textual analysis. For mass communication, content analysis is an accepted method of textual investigation. In this method, researchers create a set of categories and consequently count the number of times that a particular word or phrase fall into a specific category (Silverman, 2011:64). However, a problem with content analysis is that it fits better into the quantitative version of analysing data although it can be used qualitatively as well. The advantages of this method for qualitative researchers is that it offers a certain convenience, due to the fact that it can help to simplify and reduce large amounts of data into more organised categories (Silverman, 2011:66-67). Yet, content analysis was not chosen as the method for this thesis. This is because it fits better into quantitative analysis and, by counting the number of times that

a specific phrase falls into a category, I believe that the subtleties and underlying narrative that this thesis seeks to uncover would be more difficult to find.

Other methods of text analysis include the WPR approach which is an acronym for “What is the Problem Represented to be?”. This approach is mainly used for policy analysis and operates on the basis that how certain “problems” are represented in policies affect the specific understanding of those problems and that these understandings matter. The way that different “problems” are represented has a significant effect not only for what is perceived as problematic but also for what is silenced and consequently how the public think about certain issues and their place in the world (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010:111-112).

The WPR-approach was initially very appealing for this study as it helps uncovering different representations and points to the importance of looking at what is silenced. However, I first wanted to test it on the material to see if it was indeed the best suited method for this study. Thus, I decided to conduct a pilot study where I used two articles, one about the EP election and one about the national election, and analysed each from three different analytical frameworks namely the WPR-approach, frame analysis and narrative analysis. The purpose of this pilot study was to find out which of these analytical frameworks was best suited for the purposes of this research which is to find out whether the media convey different stories about the elections. The pilot study revealed that the WPR-approach was not best suited and instead the choice fell upon frame analysis which will be discussed in the following paragraph.

According to Nelson et al (1997:567), “framing is the process by which a communication source, such as a news organization, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy”. They state that how people reason about certain political issues might be shaped by how the mass media frame these issues. By framing a social or political issue in a specific way the news organisations declare the likely consequences of a problem as well as the underlying causes, thereby establishing the criteria for evaluating any potential remedies of the problem at hand (Nelson et al., 1997:567-568). In addition, Iyengar (1991) states that the media either exemplify a thematic frame, which means that it is focused on broader social trends, or an episodic frame, which means that it is focused on an individual case. He argues that the way the media frame these stories have significant consequences for how the readers make attributions about the solutions to, and causes of, specific social problems (Iyengar, 1991 cited in Nelson et al., 1997:568). Since this thesis is investigating whether there are two different stories/messages conveyed in the media, with regards to each election, this method is appropriate for the purposes of this thesis. By analysing how the media framed each election,

it was be possible to see and compare the messages that were being conveyed. Thus, since we know that framing can affect how the readers reason about political issues, this was also a useful method to help explain why there is such a low turnout in the EP election which is another purpose of this thesis.

Narrative analysis is yet another form of text analysis, which was also used in the pilot study. Narratives are constantly used in order to structure our experiences and make the world around us more understandable (Robertson, 2005:224). Robertson (2005:224-225) argues that people act in certain ways due to projections and expectations that are derived from a number of available public, social and cultural narratives. The studying of narratives can thus be used to generate insights about politics and society as well as identity. One way of conducting a narrative analysis, often used for interviews, is to pay special attention to what is said first, the input speech, and what is said last, the output speech (Robertson, 2005:231-232). This can arguably also be used for articles since the beginning and ending of an article can often tie the narrative together and emphasise the main point of the story. Yet, Robertson (2005:260) also states that there is methodological diversity surrounding how exactly a narrative analysis should be conducted but that it, however, can be used as a source of inspiration. Hence, frame analysis was used as the main method but was complemented by narrative analysis as a source of inspiration.

6.2) Sampling Procedures

The newspapers selected for this study consist of the largest newspapers and opinion articles/debating articles in Sweden since these reach the highest amount of people. The newspaper that has the highest number of readers per day is Metro which had 1 293 000 readers per day in 2013. Metro is followed by Aftonbladet with 863 000 readers, Expressen with 814 000 readers, Dagens Nyheter with 810 000 readers, Göteborgs-Posten with 458 000 readers, Svenska Dagbladet with 435 000 readers and SydSvenskan with 247 000 readers (Metro, 2013). Although it ideally would have been desirable to use articles from all these newspapers, the scope of this thesis prevents that. To use such a large number of articles would not be possible within the stipulated timeframe without compromising the quality of the text analysis which would consequently defeat the purpose of the thesis.

However, many of these newspapers have similar qualities and thus it is arguably unnecessary to use all of them.

Both Aftonbladet and Expressen are tabloids and hence I decided to use only one of these two for the purposes of this research. Since Aftonbladet reaches more readers than Expressen, the choice fell upon this paper. Indeed, Aftonbladet actually reaches the largest amount of readers, 3 384 000, in the whole of Sweden if one includes their web-site, mobile-app and web-TV as well as the actual paper (Aftonbladet.se, 2014). In addition, Aftonbladet is an independent social democratic paper (Aftonbladet.se, 2000) thereby representing the left side of the political spectrum. In contrast, Dagens Nyheter is an independent liberal quality newspaper (Dn.se, 2008) thus representing the more right side of the political spectrum. Since it is also the quality newspaper that reaches the highest amount of readers, it was selected for this research. Finally, Aftonbladet and Dagens Nyheter are both national papers based in Stockholm and hence I also wanted to include a more regional perspective which is why I chose to include Göteborgs-Posten. This is the largest regional newspaper based in the second largest city with a liberal agenda (Gp.se, 2015). In addition, all newspapers are owned by different companies (Schibsted.com, 2015; Bonnier.com, 2015 & Stampen.com, 2015) which makes the selection varied and representative of various views and opinions.

The selection of articles consists of newspaper articles, editorials and debating articles. In addition, due to time restraints, the articles were taken from the two week period prior to each election when the interest for the elections should be at its peak. Indeed, according to a study by Blais (2004:802), conducted in the US, Canada, New Zealand, Britain and the Netherlands, one voter out of six on average change their mind in the month prior to Election Day.

Moreover, although newspaper articles are far from the only media source that can influence the electorate, research has shown that it is newspapers, and not for example television news, which play a vital role in informing the voting population (Druckman, 2005:463). Hence, newspaper articles seem to be the best choice for investigating how the elections are represented in the media and how this might affect the electorate's inclination to vote. In addition, the MS

subjected to this study is Sweden since it recently, in 2014, had what has nationally been known as a “super-election year”, due to the fact that both the national election and the EP election were held in the same year. Also, since there is such a large difference between the turnouts in the national elections as opposed to the EP elections in Sweden, this makes it a suitable MS to study as something is obviously causing the low turnout in the EP elections.

6.3) Choice of Analytical Approach

In order to conduct the analysis, I based it on a set of questions which had been designed for the purposes of conducting a frame analysis of the news media and thus were appropriate for the present purposes. The questions (Appendix 1) were taken from the University of Vermont’s web-page and had been posted as part of a university course for the purpose of helping students conduct a frame analysis of news media (Uvm.edu, 2015a). Since academic journal articles rarely publish explicit questions that can be practically used, I decided to base my analysis on these questions instead. In addition, since the course instructor was Professor Thomas Streeter (Uvm.edu, 2015b) who has conducted and published much research on media and communication (Uvm.edu, 2015c), it can be presumed that the questions had been created based on previous experience with frame analysis. Hence, the questions are arguably a suitable starting point for conducting a frame analysis of newspaper articles.

Moreover, I started the process by selecting a total of 72 articles that were going to be subjected to an in-depth frame analysis. The articles were chosen based on the headlines with the intent to ensure that they were varied in terms of content and could consequently provide a substantial foundation for the analysis. Also, the articles were chosen to be relatively evenly distributed over the two week time period prior to each election. Of the 72 articles, 12 from each newspaper were about the EP election and 12 from each newspaper were about the national election. In each of these articles, I looked at broad forms of emphasis such as headlines and what was put first and last in the story. In addition, I analysed master themes and narratives, looked for stylistic clues and wrote down the most important quotes. Also, I thought about other ways of telling the relevant facts, what the underlying assumptions of the frames I found were and what they excluded from the discussion (Uvm.edu, 2015a). Although I based my analysis mainly on the questions stated in Appendix 1, I did conduct it against a background of narrative analysis

and kept in mind the concepts of, for example, input and output speech. By conducting the analysis in this way, I attempted to find out whether the media were telling two different stories.

In addition, since this is a qualitative study, the main analysis was thoroughly conducted on a total of 72 articles. After the analysis was conducted, I summarised a number of common themes. However, to ensure that these themes were representative of all the articles written in the two week period prior to each election, I then went through the headlines of all the 794 articles written in that period and skimmed through a number of them to ensure that the majority of the articles would fit into my identified themes. Most of them did fit and, if there was a new theme or significant article that was important, I added it to my overall analysis (see Appendix 2) thereby increasing the credibility of this study.

6.4) Credibility and Generalisability

According to Silverman (2011:360), both reliability and validity are important issues to consider when conducting research as they affect its credibility. Reliability often refers to the replicability of the research i.e. whether or not another researcher could repeat the project and arrive at the same results and interpretations (Silverman, 2011:360). In terms of analysing texts, issues of reliability arise through the categories used to analyse the different texts and thus it is important that they are used in a standardised way so that another researcher would arrive at the same results (Silverman, 2011:364). Whereas this could quite easily be done for content analysis, it is perhaps more difficult for the frame analysis. Although the questions (see Appendix 1) could be used by another researcher on the same material, there is arguably some room for interpretation and there is no guarantee that another researcher would arrive at the exact same results. Yet, the questions are arguably sufficiently specific so that it is likely that another researcher would arrive at similar results.

To continue, validity refers to the truthfulness of the findings (Silverman, 2011:360) and is a concept that is central in social science methodology (Kvale, 1995:19). The validity of the frame analysis will be dependent upon the researcher's own position and the possibility of misinterpretation. The texts themselves will be valid, not in the sense that they necessarily contain the truth, but since they do show how these elections are represented in the media. Thus, the main threat to the validity of the study is the risk of misinterpretation, which is something that the

researcher needs to be and is aware of, but which hopefully will be minimised by the quality of the analytical questions.

Furthermore, generalisability refers to how representative the results are of the general population. In qualitative research random samples of cases cannot be assembled and, instead of attempting to generalise, qualitative researchers must strive for theoretical inference (Silverman, 2011:386) or theoretical transferability.

Sweden is a case where there is a great gap between the number of people who vote in the national elections and the EP elections. Although it can never be said that this is simply due to the representation of the EP elections as opposed to the national elections in the media, it can nonetheless be concluded that this is a contributing factor since we know that the media is influential and that most politics is experienced through the media. Thus, if the research shows that the media representation of the EP election portrays it as less important in Sweden then we can also assume that, if the media portray these elections in a similar light in other MS, then this can perhaps contribute to explaining the low turnout in the EP elections in these countries as well. Hence, the findings might be theoretically transferable to other MS and can also draw attention to certain key features that could be subjected to further research in other MS.

Moving on, a total of 72 articles were subjected to the in-depth frame analysis out of 794 articles written in the two-week period prior to each election and an even larger number written in total about the elections. Also, this is only from three Swedish newspapers out of many. Nevertheless, whilst it is not possible to generalise the results of the analysis of only 72 articles, it is arguably a sufficient amount of articles to discover the main stories that the media were conveying. Thus, it is also possible to make theoretical inferences from the material. In addition, after having conducted the analysis, I went through the headlines of all the 794 articles to ensure that the main themes were covered which, whilst it is still not possible to generalise, at least further adds to the credibility of this study.

Finally, Silverman (2011:87-110) argues that ethics play a central role in qualitative research and should hence always be considered. However, one of the benefits of

doing a qualitative text analysis of newspaper articles is that it is very unlikely to exploit, deceive or in any way hurt anyone and thus ethical considerations will not play a major role in this research.

7) Analysis and Results

This chapter will present and analyse the results of the empirical study. First, a comparison between the number of articles written about each election will be made followed by a discussion on the common themes found in each set of articles. Lastly, a comparison between the framing of each election will be presented. Throughout this chapter, the empirical material presented will be analysed utilising the concepts and theories discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

7.1) The Number of Articles

The EP election in Sweden took place on the 25th of May and a search, typing in the search words "eu-valet", in the Swedish database "Mediearkivet" (the Media Archive) in the two week period before the election (2014-05-12 – 2014-05-25) gives a search result of 110 articles by Dagens Nyheter, 108 articles from Aftonbladet and at first not a single one from Göteborgs-Posten when searching in the category of the Swedish printed media. In order to find these articles it was necessary to specify that I only wanted to have articles from Göteborgs-Posten at which point I did find 57 articles. Also, the search process has here been specified in order to strengthen the reliability of this study by facilitating the replicability.

Moving on, an initial search for "riksdagsvalet" (parliament election) in the Media Archive, in the two week period prior to the general election (2014-09-01 – 2014-09-14) gave only 24 articles by Dagens Nyheter, 23 articles by Aftonbladet, and 10 by Göteborgs-Posten. Clearly the search words were not appropriate and instead I only searched for "valet" (election) in the same period. This gave more convincing results with 223 articles written by Dagens Nyheter, 162 by Aftonbladet and 134 by Göteborgs-Posten.

Table 2: Number of articles

Newspaper	Articles written about “eu-valet” 2014-05-12 – 2014-05-25	Articles written about “valet” 2014-09-01 – 2014-09-14
Dagens Nyheter	110	223
Aftonbladet	108	162
Göteborgs-Posten	57	134
Total :	275	519

The results shown in table 2 already gives us an indication that the media do perceive the national election to be more important since more articles have been written about it. The total number of articles written about the EP-election were 275 as compared to 519 articles about the national election. The amount of articles about the national election is almost twice as many as those written about the EP election. However, it should be noted that a small number of articles in Dagens Nyheter were actually about the Scottish election, held on the 18th of September, and a couple of other articles were also not about the national election but contained the word “valet” which in Swedish also means “choice”. Nonetheless, the vast majority of the articles were about the national election revealing a significant difference between the number of articles written about the national and EP elections.

7.2) Common Themes: EP Election

7.2.1) The Rise of the Extreme Right

Many articles emphasised the rise of extremist parties. An example is a debating article, by the Social Democratic politician Mikael Damberg, which criticises the rise of the extreme right and states that we all have a duty to fight the growing fascism in Europe. Whilst he does emphasise the importance of voting, he ends by saying that today he will vote for “more jobs, fair conditions and a belief in the future for our youth” (Damberg, 2014:6). The problem is that he does not say who he will vote for and the article more or less implies that it does not matter who you vote for, as long as it is not the Sweden Democrats (SD), which is the extreme right

party in Sweden. Although Damberg (2014:6) does stress that it is important to vote, it is difficult for the reader to know what and who to vote for and, since most people know that it is impossible for SD to get a majority in the EP since Sweden only has 20 seats, perhaps this does not motivate some citizens enough to actually vote.

Moreover, the rise of the extremist parties in France and the UK was also discussed. The headline on the front page of Dagens Nyheter (2014:1) on the day of the election stated: “There are many good reasons to vote today. Keeping extremism at bay is one of the most important.” Again, the media are framing the election as a battle between extremist parties and all the others. Whilst this framing might motivate some people to vote, it is debatable whether it is sufficient to mobilise the large masses since there are many parties to choose from who are not SD which is not discussed in those articles.

In addition, when I went through the headlines of all the articles written in the two week period prior to each election, I attempted to sort the articles into the different themes and thereby noted that the largest category of the articles about the EP election were the ones about the rise of the extreme right. Approximately 50 articles were written about the rise of the extreme right both in Europe and Sweden as compared to approximately 30 of the articles about the national election. This might be explained by the fact that the rise of extremist parties is happening in many European countries, which makes it more of a European issue, but also by the fact that it is a quite simple concept to understand. Since many are fairly unaware of how the different EU institutions work and on what they decide, the rise of the extreme right is something that everyone can understand and relate to.

7.2.2) For or Against EU Membership

Some of the articles had an underlying tone and theme which seemed to suggest that the EP election, which was always referred to as the EU-election, was about whether or not we should continue to be part of the EU. One article stated that we had to remind ourselves about the true core of the EU which is “the EU as a peace project” (Hjörne, 2014b:2) and thus “it is important to vote for a party that is pro EU” (Hjörne, 2014b:2). The managing director for the Business Research Institute

concluded and said that “Swedish voters have a lot to gain from a deepening of European integration in terms of the four freedoms” (Karlsson, 2014:39-40). In addition, it could be argued that the articles written about the rise of the extreme right also strengthens the idea that this election is about whether you are for or against the EU since the extreme right tend to be nationalistic parties that oppose the EU.

Moreover, according to Strömbäck (2014:160) the two guiding principles for selecting news are interest and significance. Hence, the large focus on the rise of the extreme right might be explained by the fact that it interests the readers and that they can relate to it. It is arguably also of great significance to be aware of the rise of extremism so that the readers have the possibility to affect such a development by voting. I would consequently argue that the debaters as well as the newspapers themselves are attempting to convey a story of openness and tolerance and being for the EU versus extremism and being against the EU. As the three candidates for the Feminist party, Feministiskt Initiativ (FI), wrote in a debating article “we want to see an open Europe” and we want to be a “counterforce against the nationalistic, fascist and racist parties that are now mobilising” (Gärning et al., 2014:6). Their line of reasoning is building on the general story conveyed in many of these articles which together are creating a narrative of good versus evil.

7.2.3) The Second-Order Nature of the EP Elections

In another article about the rise of the extreme right, the author ends by saying that the EU-election can be seen as a protest election. He continues by arguing that it is easier to punish the established parties in these elections since the consequences will not be too severe (Hansson, 2014:14-15). This line of reasoning enforces the idea that the EP election is not as important as the national election which might affect the electorate’s decision whether or not to vote. Also, such comments weaken the strength of the “good versus evil” frame, which the articles about the rise of the extreme right were creating. Indeed, the differences between the EP election and the national election is further highlighted by Hansson’s (2014:14-15) next argument which is that this time there are signs that the extremist parties might also

gain support in the future national elections in many countries stating that it is first then that “there are serious reasons to feel concerned about the development”.

In another article, a female student is asked how she is going to vote and she answers that education and healthcare are the most important questions to her and says that she will “refrain from voting now” (Johansson, 2014b:42-43). Since education and healthcare are not issues on which the EU mainly decides, this quote further emphasises the second-order nature of these elections. Thus, this might help explain the low turnout since, according to Marsh and Slava (2010:8-9), the second-order nature leads to a lower turnout.

Yet, whether or not they are perceived as second-order elections does partly depend on how the media frame it. In an article in *Dagens Nyheter* by journalist Stenberg (2014a:10-11), she starts by discussing what the election debates have focused on and then provides the reader with five questions to think about when deciding who to vote for. The fifth one states: “Never mind that those interested in the EU will cry out to Heaven and forget these questions. Vote for the party that you want to give a good start in the national election” (Stenberg, 2014a:10-11). This quote clearly shows that the author perceives the EP election as less important than the national election. Thus, such comments might contribute to the feeling that these elections are second-order which can help explain the low turnout. Indeed, as argued by Marsh and Slava (2010:9), if the voters perceive the elections as unimportant and if the media then share this perception, then the turnout will be lower.

The idea that the EP elections are second-order elections is further strengthened by the fact that an opinion poll, asking which questions were most important to the electorate in the EP election, showed that many voters thought that domestic issues were the most important (Rosén, 2014:8-9). According to an executive at the company that had conducted the survey, David Ahlin, the results should be interpreted as evidence that many people are not quite certain about what is decided at EU-level and that domestic politics still weighs heavily in the EU elections (Rosén, 2014:8-9). Indeed, Stenberg (2014b:8) concurs and says that the EU election has developed into a dress rehearsal for the national election. The focus on

domestic issues makes it more difficult for the electorate to understand what the EU does decide about and which questions are important for this election. However, it is significant to note that if the politicians are focusing on domestic issues and the media reflect this then it is difficult to blame the media for reporting what they hear. Stenberg (2014b:8) does in fact state that the EP has increased powers and decides on issues that affect our everyday lives, which is why she thinks that the EP election is worthy of a different debate than the one about the national election. It is also interesting to note that this is the same author who previously said that you should vote for “the party that you want to give a good start in the national election” (Stenberg, 2014a:10-11).

7.2.4) The Important Election Issues

There appeared to be an agreement that the issue of the Danish pigs that were infected with antibiotic resistant bacteria helped to kick start the debate on the EP election. Ewa Stenberg from Dagens Nyheter wrote that it was the Danish pigs that got the EU debate going which was good since she said that the election campaign had, up until then, been quite short and technical (Stenberg, 2014a:10-11). Lena Mellin from Aftonbladet concurred and wrote that the Danish pigs made the EU-election understandable (Mellin, 2014a:9). The fact that the election was difficult to understand before the Danish pigs entered the debate highlights the complex nature of this election. If the debates and issues are too difficult to comprehend for the average voter then it is perhaps not strange that the turnout is low.

Moreover, Mellin (2014d: 9) reported on the debate between the top candidates in the EP election and stated that they discussed animal protection rights in relation to food and Kärman (2014a:8) wrote an article about the different parties’ position in relation to the free trade agreement with the USA. Moreover, the environment and, consequently the predicted electoral success of the Green Party was another popular theme in the articles written about the EP election. “The rise of the Green Party is probably due to the fact that the environment and climate is the absolute most important question to the electorate”, wrote Hjärne (2014b:2) for Göteborgs-Posten and Rosén (2014:8-9) from Dagens Nyheter also agreed.

Whereas these questions are arguably relevant, it is highly questionable whether they are considered equally important as education and healthcare to the majority of the electorate. This consequently contributes to the framing of this election as less important. In addition, since the election campaign was described as “short” and “technical” (Stenberg, 2014a:10-11) and since you, during long parts of the debate between the top-candidates, “needed a fair bit of prior knowledge in order to keep up” (Mellin, 2014d:9), this further emphasises the framing of this election as complicated. Although the media are probably reflecting the campaign and debate, they are conveying the complexities of this election and that might consequently create a situation where the voters’ perceive that the costs of voting outweigh the benefits, in accordance with Downs’ rational choice theory of voting (Downs (1957) cited in Goldfarb & Sigelman, 2010:276). The media could alternatively have put more focus on explaining the issues to their readers thereby increasing the prior knowledge of the electorate and helping them to better understand the more technical aspects of the debate.

7.2.5) Turnout and Advance Votes

The fact that there was a new record in advance votes in this EP election was mentioned in a couple of articles. “The advance voting is breaking all the records” wrote Johansson (2014a:34-35). However, the author adds that this does not have to mean that the turnout will be higher in this election than the previous EP election (Johansson, 2014a:34-35). Another article also mentions the turnout in the EP election and questions how low it can get, which the author claims is an existential question for the EP (Melin Ström, 2014a:15). She says that if the EP is going to be the voice of the people then a sufficiently large part of the people have to cast their vote in the election (Melin Ström, 2014a:15). These articles show that the turnout is at least partly discussed and that the media are aware of it which is arguably positive.

Furthermore, Aftonbladet emphasised the importance of voting in the EP election by writing #jagskarösta (#iwillvote) on top of the pages that contained articles about the election. Although Aftonbladet was overall the best when it came to stressing the importance of voting in this election, this sentiment was also expressed in the

other newspapers. In a debating article written in Dagens Nyheter, the Prime Minister himself tells us that “your vote is important” (Reinfeldt, 2014:6). Whilst this might arguably encourage people to vote in the EP election which is good, a deeper analysis of the debating article reveals another underlying purpose. Whereas he does tell us that how we vote in the EP election will affect our everyday lives, he also stresses that since 2006, incidentally the year he became Prime Minister, more than 250 000 jobs have been created and that Sweden is the only country in the EU that has managed to decrease the deficit and at the same time invest in care for the elderly and education (Reinfeldt, 2014:6). The debating article is undoubtedly a preparation for the national election, in a rather transparent disguise, thus emphasising the argument that the EP elections are second-order elections (Marsh & Slava, 2010:8-9).

7.2.6) The Silences: The Powers of the EP and other EU Institutions

As previously mentioned, the framing of the EP election in the media, in simplified terms, focuses on a “good versus evil” scenario in the shape of pro-EU and democracy or against the EU and for intolerance. However, there are arguably other aspects which could have been included in the articles.

In a debating article, Karlsson, explains that there is a “significant lack of knowledge about what the EU does and why” (Karlsson, 2014:39-40). Whereas he is quite right and does attempt to tell the reader some of the achievements of the EU, there is an overall lack of information in the newspaper articles about the powers of the EU and its institutions. The fact that EU law has been superior to national law since the 1964 landmark case *Costa v. ENEL* and that all Treaty provisions have direct effect in MS, as laid down in the case of *Van Gend*, are probably facts which most people rarely consider or reflect upon.

The EU has exclusive competences for regulating the single market including managing the competition, trade policies and external customs (Hix & Høyland, 2011:3). The exclusive competences also include monetary policy for those who are members of the Euro-zone, common fisheries policy and subsidy and price setting of production under the Common Agricultural Policy (Hix & Høyland,

2011:6). There are also shared competences, which means that EU policies often supplement existing policies at the national level, and these include, among others, immigration and asylum, labour market regulation, regional spending, environmental regulation and public health concerns such as food safety (Hix & Høyland, 2011:3 & 6). The third area of policies in which the EU is involved is called “coordinated competences” and these are policies where the primary competence remains at the national level but, due to spill-over effects, the national governments have agreed that they need to coordinate these domestic policies at the EU level (Hix & Høyland, 2011:3). The coordinated competences include a vast number of policies from health and education to foreign and defence policies (Hix & Høyland, 2011:6).

It is hence obvious that the EU is involved, to a larger or lesser degree, in almost all policy areas that affect the lives of EU citizens and whatever laws they make are superior to the national laws. As we move towards an ever closer union, the spill-over effects are likely to increase and more competences will thus be transferred to the supranational EU-level. Indeed, as argued by Kim and Jung (2010:53), the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 even suggests that the EU could be moving towards a federal state.

Bearing this in mind, it seems strange that the media do not spend more time on informing the citizens of the powers of the EU as well as the functioning of the different EU institutions. It is arguably important for the electorate to know who the different political parties are and what influence the EP has over policies. Although there were a few attempts at enlightening the readers, most notably a series of short informative texts by Lena Mellin known as “Mellin’s EU-school” (see e.g. Mellin, 2014e:24) in *Aftonbladet*, there should arguably have been more focus on informing the readers thereby facilitating their involvement in the democratic process and decreasing the costs of voting.

The lack of information in the media is perhaps a reflection of the fact that it is difficult to know exactly what the EU is. As discussed in the theory chapter, both Habermas (2012) and Beck and Grande (2006) debate how the EU should be understood and it is evident from their arguments that the EU is an entity that is

difficult to define. As such, it is perhaps quite understandable that people have a hard time comprehending the complex nature of the EU. This might explain why journalists mainly focus on a simple story of “good versus evil”, which might motivate certain citizens to vote, but which is not enough to mobilise others.

7.3) Common Themes: The Swedish National Parliament Election

7.3.1) The Future is Your Choice and Your Vote Matters

The editorial in Göteborgs-Posten the day before the election, stated that the future was in the hands of the electorate (GP, 2014a:2). Similarly, on Election Day, Aftonbladet wrote that the media had not decided the election this year either but that the voters would (Mellin, 2014b:18). The same author had a second article in the newspaper that day with the headline “Today it is you who decide” with the word “you” in capital letters and underlined emphasising the importance of voting but also of how you vote; “vote with care. And responsibly” (Mellin, 2014c:11). By framing it in this way, the reader is urged to understand the significance of the election and consequently encouraged to vote. It could hence be argued that, since voting is framed as being important and an opportunity to change your future, the benefits of voting might be perceived as outweighing the costs. Indeed, as argued by Downs (1957) the voters might weigh the time and effort it takes to vote against the benefits of voting, which the media are here strongly stressing (cited in Goldfarb & Sigelman, 2010:276).

The idea that the election will change the future is a way of emphasising its importance and Dagens Nyheter puts focus on this by having a 17 pages long news report entitled “The Future of Sweden!” the day before the election. The reporter has travelled from North to South and spoken to children about their everyday lives and hopes for the future (Sundström, 2014:10-27). One of the interviewed children, Alve aged 11, says that he would be “scared and disappointed if the majority voted for something bad” (Sundström, 2014:26-27).

Interviewing children is a concrete way of showing the readers that the election is important for future generations and highlights the importance of voting and doing

it responsibly. Perhaps this representation of the significance of the election also implicitly invokes the idea that we have a civic duty to vote. It is evident from the articles and the long news report that the readers have the possibility to contribute to the creation of a better future and thus they are indirectly also saying that the readers have a duty to do so. Since Blais and St Vincent (2011:395) state that a sense of civic duty can affect whether or not a person decides to vote, the media are arguably contributing to increasing the turnout in the national election by implying a sense of civic duty

7.3.2) The Importance of Democracy

The importance of democracy is stressed in several articles. On the day of the election, Hjärne (2014a:2) wrote “and democracy is the best because then everybody gets to decide” for Göteborgs-Posten and Mellin (2014c:11) stated that “today is Election Day, the great festival of democracy” clearly highlighting the prominence and importance of democracy.

In the two week period before the election, Dagens Nyheter arranged several political debates for first-time voters by having a school bus travelling around to upper secondary schools. The purpose of this was to increase the political awareness among young people and, as stated by their editor-in-chief Peter Wolodarski, “to get first-time voters to become politically engaged and vote” since “the democracy becomes better if more people are engaged” (Delin, 2014:2). This involvement by the newspaper shows that they believe that democracy, and voting in the national election, is important and should be greatly encouraged.

In contrast, an article in Göteborgs-Posten five days before the EP election tells us that the schools are finding it difficult to make time for the election. This EP election was the first time that schools were offered the possibility to hold school EP elections but the interest in doing so was reported to be low mainly due to the timing of the election which did not suit the schools. The article also stated that there is a long tradition of holding school elections in connection with the national election (Johansson, 2014c:36-37). Although the main reason for the low interest in the EP elections was allegedly bad timing, the contrast between the level of interest from

both schools and media puts focus on the differences between the framing of the national and EP election. The newspaper could, for example, have written a story about one school that did hold a school EP election and instead emphasised the value of that schools contribution to democracy.

Also, these contrasting articles highlight the importance of education in relation to political awareness and turnout. As argued by Jackson (1995:294), education affects both the sense of civic duty, political awareness and political efficacy which in turn affects the turnout. Hence, perhaps it could be argued that the low interest in the EP elections in schools contributes to the low turnout in these elections.

Moreover, the idea of civic duty, which both Jackson (1995:294) and Blais and St Vincent (2011:395) say affects turnout, is explicitly stressed in one of the articles. The article is about two immigrants from Lebanon who have volunteered to help out on Election Day and who think that it “should be a civic duty” to do so (Sandblom, 2014:40-41). The two volunteers emphasise that “it is good to get involved” and say that there are many countries where the citizens do not get to vote. “It is important that everyone use their democratic right to vote” says one of the two volunteers in the article (Sandblom, 2014:40-41). This article contributes to the overall framing of the national election as a precious occasion which celebrates democracy and highlights the importance of everybody doing their civic duty by voting.

7.3.3) The Important Election Issues

In a debating article in Aftonbladet, the rapper Petter writes that education should be one of the most important questions in the election since the foundation of our society is based upon everybody getting a good and fair start in life (Askergrén, 2014:6). A sentiment with which one can assume that many agree. Education is most likely a very important question to many voters and it remains, to a very large extent, a national competence.

Further, Heimerson (2014:20) writes that “the defence is the most important question in this election” stating that “the most important task of the State is to protect the borders of the nation”. This phrasing is particularly interesting since he

clearly sees Sweden as a nation state in need of protecting its borders (from Russia) and he does not appear to assume that the other EU MS would come to our aid. Although there is a Common Security and Defence Policy within the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU (Civitas.org.uk, 2015), there is no European army and thus Heimerson (2014:20) is arguably not wrong in assuming that Sweden needs to fend for itself. Hence, since the defence is an important question, and to a large extent remains a national competence, this article contributes to framing the national election as more important than the EP election.

Moreover, a couple of days before the election, Dagens Nyheter published an article stating that the queues at the Emergency Room (ER) were getting longer (Ritzén, 2014:4-5). The article is about the terrible situation at the hospitals in Stockholm, which is described as an “ER chaos”, and at the end of the article the seven major parties, excluding SD, briefly state how they want to solve this. Healthcare is an important election issue and thus this article contributes to the overall narrative of this election, which is continuously conveying the sentiment that it is important.

Other issues that were discussed in the national election articles include care for the elderly (Franchell, 2014:2), creating jobs (GP, 2014b:8-9), the economy and taxes (Olsson, 2014:8). These are all questions that are presumably considered to be relevant to the majority of the electorate and consequently they contribute to the framing of this election as important. The fact that they are, most likely, considered to be significant to the readers also explains why the media have chosen to put more focus on this election. Strömbäck (2014:160) argues that the guiding principles for what makes the news are interest and significance and thus, since many find these questions both significant and interesting, the newspapers arguably dedicate more time and space to articles discussing these issues.

7.3.4) Rise of SD and FI

Although there were fewer articles written about the rise of SD in the national election than in the EP election, this was nevertheless a reoccurring theme together with, yet in a smaller scale, the potential electoral success of FI. One of the articles about SD was about racists comments made online by some of their members

(Kleberg, 2014:8) and another criticised SD's party programme and stated that, since SD were predicted to get over 10 % , there are reasons to be worried (Larsson, 2014:52-53).

The articles about FI were much fewer and one of the articles encouraged the readers to think before they voted for FI (Kielos, 2014b:2) implying that if you want to help people working in the “welfare state which is in crisis” then you should not vote for FI but instead for a party that can get rid of the government. The articles about SD and FI were less prominent in the national election which might be explained by the fact that smaller and extreme parties tend to do better in the EP elections and are thus given more room there. In contrast, the larger parties are the dominant players in the national election where there are also more “important” election questions stealing the focus.

7.4) Comparing the Elections

This section will compare certain aspects of the media representation of the two elections such as the difference in the reports on political contestation. It will also highlight the main points of contrast between the common themes in each election.

7.4.1) Political Contestation

In the articles about the EP election, there were few reports on the political contestation between the different party candidates. There were articles portraying the top-candidates and, after the top candidates' debate, there was some reporting on this but in general there was little focus on, and contestation over, the political issues. Indeed, the EP election campaign itself had been described as short and technical (Stenberg, 2014a:10-11). Hence, it was not always evident where the candidates and their parties would stand in the EP. This highlights yet another problem with the EP elections which is the lack of focus on the political parties in the EP, which are not the same as the national ones. It consequently becomes difficult for the electorate to understand who they should vote for and why, which might be a contributing factor to the low turnout. Furthermore, Follesdal and Hix (2006:534) argue that there is a lack of political contestation in the EU, which they find problematic. They claim that the lack of party competition is disturbing since

they believe that political contestation is needed in a democratic polity. Thus, it can be inferred that the lack of political contestation forms a crucial aspect of the democratic deficit.

Moreover, the articles about the national election contained much political debate, thus clearly differing from the articles about the EP election. One article told us that the opposition leader promised 20 000 trainee positions in the public sector whereas the government highlighted that they had provided Sweden with excellent and strong state finances (GP, 2014a:2). Another article reported on the final debate between the two Prime Minister candidates stating that the opposition leader might consider reinstating conscription whereas the Prime Minister stressed that the old conscription defence was ineffective (Kärman, 2014c:12). Yet another article, about a different party leader debate, told us that the “big battle” between the opposing blocks was about creating jobs. The opposition leader attacked the government and said that “it is evident that after their eight years, the result is much worse school results and higher unemployment” (Holmqvist & Karlsson, 2014:8-9). The articles about the national election make it easy for the reader to understand which parties represent what beliefs and thus they can easily compare the parties’ opinions with their own beliefs thereby facilitating the voting decision. The media are consequently lowering the costs of voting, which according to Goldfarb and Sigelman (2010:276) consists of the time and effort it takes to prepare to vote, and, by doing so, they arguably help increase the turnout in the national election.

However, whilst there was less focus on political contestation in the articles about the EP election, the top-candidates were all interviewed in both *Aftonbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* (see e.g. Kärman, 2014b:11 & Röstlund, 2014:14). The interviews with the top-candidates were arguably an initiative which gave the readers a good opportunity to become familiar with them. Thus, although often framing the election as being for or against the rise of extremism, the newspapers have at times, yet in a smaller scale than in the articles about the national election, also made attempts to show the parties’ positions, thereby increasing the readers’ knowledge.

7.4.2) Closeness of the Electoral Competition

Another aspect of the focus on political contestation, in the articles about the national election, is the emphasis on the closeness of the electoral competition. “The gap between the blocks has decreased dramatically” writes Kielos (2014b:2) for Aftonbladet and Törnmalm et al (2014:8-9) from Dagens Nyheter agree and say that “with only a few days left until the election, the distance between the political blocks is decreasing”. On Election Day, the editorial in Göteborgs-Posten stated that it would be “a battle to the end” (Hjörne, 2014a:2) between the two blocks. This creates a feeling that your vote still matters and that it is not too late to change the outcome of the election which consequently encourages people to vote. According to Pattie and Johnston (2001:286), the closeness between the electoral competition does affect turnout and the turnout is likely to increase if it is a close election. Hence, by stressing that the gap between the blocks is decreasing, the media arguably help to increase the turnout in the national election.

In comparison, there is almost no mentioning of the closeness between the blocks in the articles about the EP election. This might be due to the lack of political contestation but also because the outcome of the EP election does not result in a government formation. Indeed, the closeness of the electoral competition’s effect on the turnout, in the national election, can probably be related to the fact that whoever wins gets to form a government. This is arguably a crucial difference between the two elections and, according to Thomassen (2009:6-7), the fact that no government is formed after the EP elections is a distinct expression of the democratic deficit. Also, it arguably makes it more difficult for the electorate to see a clear outcome after the EP election, which consequently might lower the turnout.

7.4.3) Main Differences between the EP Election and the National Election in the Media

The rise of the extreme right, and to a lesser extent FI, was mentioned in relation to both elections although greater emphasis was put on the rise of the extreme right in the articles about the EP election framing it in a “good versus evil” manner. The rise of the extreme right was also partly used, in the articles about the EP election, to frame the election as a situation of voting for or against EU membership, which was more or less a non-issue in the articles about the national election.

Whilst many articles about the national election stressed that the future of the country was in the hands of the electorate and emphasised that the votes mattered, the sentiment that the EP elections were second-order elections was conveyed in several articles. Also, opinion polls showed that the electorate often cared about domestic issues when asked what issues were most important to them in the EP election (Rosén, 2014:8-9), indicating that the voters either did not know what competences the EU has or that they view it as a preparation for the national election. In addition, the debating article by the Prime Minister, urging people to vote in the EP election (Reinfeldt, 2014:6), did on closer inspection appear to be a reminder of the achievements of the government and a preparation for the national election.

Further, the importance of democracy was stressed several times in relation to the national election and Dagens Nyheter even arranged for a bus to go around to schools organising debates in order to raise political awareness amongst first-time voters (Delin, 2014:2). In contrast, an article about the EP election revealed that few schools had time to arrange school elections in connection with the EP election (Johansson, 2014c:36-37) thus painting a picture where the national election is put on a pedestal whilst the EP election is something second-order which people might engage in if they have time.

There was also a distinct difference between the election issues discussed in the media prior to each election. This is however quite understandable since the national parliament and the EP do not have the same competences. Nevertheless, the fact that the media report on issues such as healthcare, education and unemployment in relation to the national election as opposed to the environment, food and animal rights in the EP election contributes to the contrasted framing of each election. Although animal rights and the environment are arguably important issues, education, healthcare and the job market are probably higher on the list of most voters' priorities. Thus, the focus on these issues in relation to the national election contributes to the overall framing of that election as a very important election where the voters have the possibility to change their futures. In contrast,

the emphasis on the environment, food and animal rights in relation to the EP election contributes to the framing of that election as a second-order election.

Finally, I have attempted to be objective and include all sides of the story when presenting the results in order to strengthen their validity. It was, for example, important to note that there were articles focusing on the importance to vote in the EP election and that the top-candidates were interviewed to stress that these results were not manipulated and one-sided. By doing this, and yet hopefully producing convincing arguments that the overall framing of the EP election was that of a second-order election, the results are arguably valid. Whilst it is impossible to know whether another researcher would have arrived at the exact same results, the process and method described in chapter 6 is arguably sufficiently explicit to ensure that, if the study was repeated, the results would be similar thereby strengthening the reliability of the results. Thus, although another researcher might have chosen different examples to present, the overall results of this research are arguably valid and reliable.

8) Concluding Discussion

In the previous chapter, I have attempted to answer my first research question which was:

What are the differences between the media representation of the European Parliament election and the national election in 2014?

I did this by presenting and analysing the various themes, which the newspapers focused on in each election, and can consequently conclude that there were several differences. The articles about the EP election heavily emphasised the rise of the extreme right, which sometimes seemed to become a discussion about whether we should be for or against the EU which in itself was a reoccurring theme. The turnout in the EP election was mentioned in some articles as there was a new record of advance voting and the top-candidates were all interviewed in two of the newspapers but there was, overall, little focus on the political debate and contestation. Yet, certain election issues were brought to light and these were the environment, animal rights in relation to the health of the Danish pigs, food and the free trade agreement. Thus, the media representation of the EP election, which also consisted of fewer articles than the ones about the national election, was, in many respects, a portrayal of a second-order election.

In comparison, the media representation of the national election highlighted the importance of that election by utilising rhetoric such as “Today it is you who decide” with the word “you” in capital letters and underlined (Mellin, 2014c:11) and claiming that the future is in the hands of the electorate (GP, 2014a:2). The articles about this election stressed the important election issues such as education, healthcare, creating jobs and care for the elderly and the readers were often informed about the different parties’ positions. In addition, whilst the rise of SD was a reoccurring theme in these articles as well, they were given less space than in the articles about the EP election. In sum, the media representation of the national election differed from the representation of the EP election by stressing other election issues, with more emphasis on the political contestation over these issues, as well as having a higher focus on the importance of this election for the future of Sweden and democracy.

To continue, by analysing the differences in the media representation of the two elections, it became possible to answer the first part of the second research question:

Do the media convey one message/story about the European Parliament election and a different one about the national election and, if so, why?

The media has indeed conveyed two quite different stories about the two elections. The tale about the EP election tells the story of a second-order election where it is even acceptable to write, in a quality newspaper, that the voters can "vote for the party that you want to give a good start in the national election" (Stenberg, 2014a:10-11). The election issues discussed, the lack of political contestation and absence of emphasis on the powers of the EU and its institutions contribute to the overall framing of the election as being a less important election, thus subtextually conveying a message that this is a second-order election. Although the importance of voting in this election is at times mentioned in the media, the arguments for voting are often connected with the rise of extremism thus framing the election as being a "good versus evil" scenario. Whilst this framing does convey a message of the importance of keeping extremism at bay, it is a single-issue argument and thus arguably less compelling than the messages conveyed in relation to the national election.

The national election is framed as being very important and conveying the message that it is vital to vote to affect the future of the country. The emphasis on the importance of democracy, and that the voter has the ability to make a difference by voting, together with the high salience issues that were described and debated in the articles convey the message that it is crucial to vote in this election. Thus, the media have conveyed two different stories about the elections and the contrasting narratives suggest that it is more important to vote in the national election. Consequently, since there is a much higher turnout at the national election and since we know that the media are influential, it could be argued that these contrasting messages are affecting the turnout level at each election.

Moving on, now that it has been established that the media have conveyed two different tales and messages about the elections, the final question of "why" still remains. Hence, this will be discussed in the following section.

8.1) Why a Tale of Two Elections?

The previous section touches upon one of the most obvious reasons of why there is a tale of two elections, which is the difference in competences between the national parliament and the EP. The national parliament remains in charge over tax distribution and the majority of aspects in relation to significant election issues such as education and healthcare. Thus, the media mirror the reality, which is that the EU has little influence over such matters, and thereby two different stories begin to take

form. The EP election is framed as being a second-order election and this portrayal is arguably reinforced by the proximity in time to the national election.

In addition, Follesdal and Hix (2006:534) claim that there is a lack of political contestation in the EU. This means that there is little debate over the political leadership, which is a great contrast to the situation in the MS. Such debates arguably interest and engage the electorate which is why the media write about it in the articles about the national election. However, when there is a lack of such contestation, which it is in the EU context, it naturally becomes difficult for the media to report it. Also, the lack of political contestation in the EU is, according to Follesdal and Hix (2006:534), problematic since a democratic polity requires contestation over the political leadership and its absence in the EU is thus a part of the democratic deficit. The lack of political contestation arguably contributes to the low turnout, since it makes it difficult for the electorate to understand what their choices are, which is yet another aspect of the democratic deficit. Hence, this contributes to the explanation of why the media are conveying two different tales.

Moreover, the EU is *sui generis* and understanding how it works is quite complicated. Thus, another reason why the media put less focus on the importance of the EP election might be because neither they nor the electorate are particularly well-informed. The lack of sufficient information and education about the EU might cause readers to be less interested in the EP election and the journalists to find it less significant. Hence, since Strömbäck (2014:160) argues that the two guiding principles for choosing news are interest and significance, this could help explain why the media write fewer articles about the EP election, which contributes to the framing of that election as second-order. This creates an evil circle since, if the media do not deem it significant, then the public might never get interested and thus they will never be sufficiently informed. Also, since education affects both the sense of civic duty, political awareness and political efficacy (Jackson, 1995:294), the lack of emphasis and information about the EP elections both in schools and in the media might in turn affect the turnout in these elections. In addition, since the concept of EU citizenship is relatively new as opposed to citizenship of the nation state, the sense of a civic duty to vote in the EP election has probably not yet

sufficiently developed in the electorate which might help explain the respective turnout and framing of the elections.

Also, whereas most voters probably see the nation state as a legitimate authority, the legitimacy of the EU is more debatable. However, it could be argued that the EU is an international institution and thus derives its legitimacy from the MS and, as argued by Beetham and Lord (1998:11), if they are legitimate, so is the international institution. By accepting this definition of the EU, the low turnout in the EP elections is not problematic since the EU has derived its legitimacy from the MS. It can perhaps be assumed that some view the EU as an international institution, which might contribute to the explanation of the framing of the EP election as a second-order election and the low turnout.

The discussion of the legitimacy of the EU thus becomes a debate over the definition of the EU. From the intergovernmentalist theory of European integration, it becomes easier to view the EU as an international institution. Yet, from a neo-functional perspective of European integration, where the supranational EU institutions and spill-over effects are seen as the drivers of integration, a democratic element is arguably necessary for the EU to be considered legitimate. Indeed, Beetham and Lord (1998:22) have concluded that the international institution model of legitimacy cannot be applied to the EU. Instead, they argue that the appropriate legitimacy model for the EU is the liberal-democratic legitimacy model in which legitimation is expressed through general elections and the popular authorisation of government (Beetham & Lord, 1998:8). Thus, in order for the EU to be a legitimate authority, it could be argued that the turnout in the EP elections have to be at a reasonably high level and not 42.61% which it is today (TNS/Scytel in cooperation with the European Parliament, 2014). The low turnout in the EP election is hence an aspect of the democratic deficit, which in turn is a part of the legitimacy deficit. Also, another explanation for the low turnout might be that the electorate do not believe that the EU is legitimate and, as such, they refuse to cast their vote.

In addition, the legitimacy deficit in the EU expressed in performance, identity and democracy (Beetham & Lord, 1998:23) is arguably reflected in the media

representation of the EP election. The definition and role of the EU is not clear, a collective European identity does not exist and the EU only has one elected institution and the outcome of its election does not result in a government formation. These aspects arguably affect the media representation of the EP election as opposed to the national election, where the legitimacy of the institutions are usually not questioned, thereby contributing to the explanation of why there is a tale of two elections. It can also be inferred that, at the same as the media representation of the EP election can contribute to the low turnout, which forms a part of the democratic and legitimacy deficit in the EU, so can the legitimacy deficit affect the media representation and framing of the EP election.

However, the media should arguably focus on the democratic deficit in the EU as well as the legitimacy deficit and inform the citizens of the functioning of the EU so that they can make better informed decisions. The media are influential and, by informing the electorate, they might contribute to the mobilisation of some forces to decrease the powers of the EU and others to increase it, provided that the EU develops towards a more democratically functioning and legitimate federal state. Regardless, increased knowledge of the current functioning of the EU ought to also increase the interest in the EP elections and lower the costs of voting, which consequently might raise the turnout.

8.1.2 “A Multitude of Member States and yet Solitude”

As previously mentioned, the lack of a collective European identity is one aspect of the legitimacy deficit, which is reflected in the media representation of the EP election. Indeed, the focus on the nationalistic parties illustrate the lack of a collective European identity, which Beetham and Lord (1998:33) argue is a serious obstacle to the further development of political legitimacy at EU-level. According to de Vreese et al (2006:478), the media’s role in contributing to or alleviating the democratic deficit lies in their ability to contribute to a shared European identity and framework of reference. Whereas the media tried, to a certain extent, to stress the importance of not letting the extreme right bring Europe into darkness, there were arguably few articles that contributed to the creation of a common European identity. In fact, the inclusion of domestic issues made the EP election seem like a

dress rehearsal for the national election which contributed to its framing as a second-order election.

Moreover, perhaps the most telling manifestation of the national focus was the fact that there was virtually no debate or mentioning about the Economic Crisis. This is quite remarkable since it has been the topic of much debate and distress for many EU countries. This can, most likely, be explained by the fact that Sweden has done so well in relation to the Economic Crisis that it is no longer a great concern for the country. This highlights the absence of a common European identity and solidarity with other MS, which are arguably aspects of the lack of federalism and a strong common European media in the EU. To paraphrase Dickens, there appears to be “a multitude of Member States and yet solitude”.

Although there is a sense of solitude in the framing of the EP election, Sweden is not unique in having a much higher turnout in the national elections. This is the case in almost all MS and consequently some of the results of this study might be theoretically transferable to other countries. The lack of focus on political contestation in the media, for example, is likely to exist in other MS as well since this is lacking in the EU. Also, whilst it is not possible to know what the media put focus on in other MS, the results of this thesis highlight certain vital differences between the two elections such as the different election issues discussed and the varying levels of importance attached to each election in the media. Such aspects could be applicable to other MS although further studies of the media representation of the EP elections in other countries is needed in order to strengthen these arguments.

8.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis has attempted to show the differences in media representations between the national election and EP election in Sweden in 2014. The results of the study clearly showed that there were differences and that the EP election was framed as being less important than the national election. Thus, since the media is the main source on which the decision to vote is based upon (McCombs & Shaw, 1972:176), the media’s framing of the EP election arguably contributes to the low turnout in the EP election as opposed to the national election. This thesis has thus contributed to the explanation of the low turnout in the EP election by showing that the media do tell one story about the EP election and another about the national

election. The low turnout in the EP election is a crucial aspect of the democratic deficit in the EU, which in turn is part of the legitimacy deficit, and consequently this thesis has contributed to the research in these areas.

Whilst the thesis has given several possible explanations of why the media have framed the EP election as less important, which some might say is true, it finally argues that the importance of one election in relation to another is a matter of definition. As the powers and influence of the EU grow with each consecutive treaty, the election to its only elected institution ought to grow in significance as well. If we are moving towards a federal state, it is crucial that the democratic deficit is removed and that the European electorate engage in the elections. It is here that the media play a vital role and their duty of informing the citizens of significant matters should be stressed in relation to the EP elections in order to prevent a situation where we find ourselves part of a federal state without a functioning democracy. Although we do not have a definitive definition of what the EU is, we do know that it is powerful and that issues of identity and legitimacy must be addressed to strengthen and preserve European democracy. The citizens need to be informed in order to be mobilised and politically engaged and thus it is vital that the media frame the EP election as equally important as the national election. Ultimately, the media have a key role in raising political awareness, which can help raise the turnout, and thus they need to convey the message that the European Parliament elections are of central importance for the future of democracy in the EU.

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Appendix 1

The questions on which the frame analysis was based:

I. Identify repeated patterns in news coverage, using various techniques

A. Read a lot of news coverage of a particular story and/or theme

B. Look for broad forms of emphasis or selection, such as

1. headlines
2. what is put first and what left for later in a story
3. placement of stories in the news (front page vs. page 20; top of the newscast vs. bottom)

C. Look for master narratives or themes

1. who are the villains and who are the good guys?
2. what is assumed to be the source of conflict?
3. what stories or aspects of stories are not being covered?

D. Look for stylistic clues such as:

1. Language choices ("gunned down" vs "accidentally hit by stray fire")
2. Modes of reference ("Castro" vs "Fidel")
3. Use of quotes and attribution ("avowed socialist Bernie Sanders"; "so-called Peace Movement")

E. Think about other ways the relevant facts could be turned into stories

1. Look at news coming from a different point of view (e.g., Arab media on middle eastern politics; right- or left-wing news outlets, etc.)

2. Think about possible other ways of telling the story

II. Explain the underlying assumptions of the frames you discover

A. What do these frames imply is important (e.g., fund raising success in political campaigns.)? What do they take for granted? (E.g., if the stock market goes up it is good for the country)

- B. What do these frames exclude from discussion?
- C. What world views or "tacit little theories about what matters" are these frames reinforcing?
- D. Would different frames lead to a better society?

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