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The Transformation of ‘the Political’ in Post-War Sweden

Abstract: This paper explores what was explicitly defined as ‘political’ during the post-war era, from 1945 to 1989, in two Swedish newspapers. Based on all extracted text blocks containing the term ‘political’, two research questions are examined: How has the use of the term “political” evolved over time? In which contexts was the concept inscribed, and how did these change over time? Inspired by conceptual history, the analysis is divided into three parts: an examination of ‘political’ through bigram extractions, contextual explorations using topic modeling, and a close reading of one particular topic over time, the topic labeled ‘women’. The result shows an increased use of the term ‘political’ from the 1960s, with more things that were labeled as ‘political’. The analysis reveals that the concept was broadened, but not entirely redefined.

Keywords: media history, conceptual history, topic modeling, post-war Sweden, newspapers, digital history

1 Introduction

30-year-old ‘Sartre’ is looking for love in July 1980. The man, using this signature in his ad in the Swedish newspaper *Aftonbladet*, writes that he is lonely and wants to meet a woman. He likes to play football, read, and listen to ‘good music’. ‘I have pretty strong opinions about most things political (socialist far to the left)’.¹ (AB 1980-07-13, all translations by the authors). The signature Sartre was not the only one declaring his political views in personal ads in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Another unmarried man looking for a 25–30-year-old woman in 1975 writes: ‘You should be politically aware with a socialist conviction. It is not all

¹ All translations by the authors.

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that counts, but it is important' (AB 1975-06-01). A woman in the north of Sweden, also writing in 1975, was hoping to meet a man, 40–45 years old: 'It's a plus if you are to the left politically' (AB 1975-08-03). A topic model on newspaper data from post-war Sweden captures many of these ads in one topic, increasing in weight in the late 1960s and peaking in 1979. This suggests that the 'political' had become a significant part of the private life of many Swedes – not just as an abstract dimension, but as a concrete notion. Moreover, in Swedish newspapers from the 1960s and 1970s, there were also bigrams such as 'political street theatre', 'political bachelor parties', 'political religion', 'political pea soup', 'political gender discrimination', and 'political celebrity journalism' (all are bigrams in Swedish).

Tracking the ways that the term 'political' (in Swedish 'politisk', 'politiska', and 'politiskt') was used over time in post-war Sweden makes it possible to examine discursive shifts. The purpose of this paper is to use computational approaches to study political trends in two Swedish newspapers, from 1945 to 1989, the morning paper *Dagens Nyheter* (DN, liberal) and the evening paper *Aftonbladet* (AB, liberal until 1956, then social democratic). How has the use of the term "political" evolved over time? In which contexts was the concept inscribed, and how did these change over time? The analysis is divided into three parts: an examination of 'political' through bigram extractions, contextual explorations using topic modeling and, finally, a close reading of one particular topic over time, the topic labeled 'women'.

1.1 The Press and the Political Landscape

The years 1945 to 1989 are commonly understood as the classical period of the Swedish welfare state, a time of both political stability and of political disruption. It was, for the most part, an era of governments led by social democrats launching a vast number of social reforms. The range of issues that the state took an interest in included almost every area of the Swedish society (Möller 2019).

In the 1950s, public debate in Sweden was characterized by political consensus: a social democratic dominance on the domestic arena, and sympathies towards liberal western democracies internationally. In a world divided by a communist east and a capitalist west, Swedes who argued for a 'third way' were seen as Soviet allies. In 1952, the influential editor of *DN*, Herbert Tingsten, declared 'the death of ideologies'. The acceptance for alternative political ideas, however, grew steadily from the early 1960s – first in the form of cultural relativism, later on as a radical critique of capitalism and established institutions (Frenander 1999). Furthermore, it is often argued that the new movements of the 1960s renegotiated and broadened the concept of the political (Östberg 2008).

Compared to continental Europe, Sweden's 1968 was less associated with student protests and more with internationally oriented solidarity and activist groups. Many of the democratization reforms fought for in Europe were already happening in Sweden (Östberg 2008). Regarding the impact of the 1960s' radicalism on Swedish society, Bjereld and Demker (2018) emphasize the teardown of traditional authorities: priests, teachers, adults, men, established high culture, and traditional party leaders. The ideological shift was followed by new legislation in many areas, such as tax laws making it worthwhile for married women to work, and a ban on physical punishment of children. A new leftist hegemony was established, and then to some degree overturned by neoliberalism in the 1980s. However, many vital ideas put forward by the left lived on – among them the critique of a powerful and controlling state (Frenander 1999; Boréus 1994).

News media and journalists in the 1960s and 1970s were part of, and contributed to, the general trend of questioning traditional authorities. Far from simply mirroring established politics, they started to raise critical questions and highlight social problems and political corruption. This new kind of journalism covered a broader range of issues. Everyday life, especially the daily work at factories and offices, became frequent topics in newspapers, radio and TV (Djerf-Pierre & Weibull 2001).

Until the mid-1960s, the arts, literature and culture sections in newspapers were dominated by essays and reviews of literature and art. If political ideas were debated, they usually followed established arguments of the editorial page. In the mid-1960s, however, the cultural editors became more independent. The two newspaper sections developed into two separate entities, sometimes arguing against each other, with the arts, literature and culture section often taking more radical positions. Gender equality and the situation within developing countries were among the issues debated. Literature and art continued to be covered, but reviewers started to discuss them in more political terms (Riegert & Roosvall 2017). These so-called left-wing tendencies in the Swedish metropolitan press were part of a general transformation, and at the fore were *AB* and *DN* (Gustafsson & Rydén 2010).

1.2 Theoretical Perspectives

'Politics' and 'political' are key concepts. Following the tradition of conceptual history (Ifversen 2011; Stråth 2013), key concepts are those that are contested and yet inescapable. Users might disagree about their meaning and how to use them, but they still need them. To define them, restrict, expand, or challenge their meaning and use, is part of a political struggle. The redefinition of critical

concepts is hence a way to redefine social reality, to interpret it and frame it, and perhaps legitimize goals and point out the necessity of certain actions. To conceptualize such a struggle as political is an example in itself. Defined differently, ‘political’ would have other meanings.

One way to conceptualize politics is to use spatial metaphors: a sphere, a field or a domain. Issues within the sphere are political. Those outside are not. The boundaries change over time, and non-political issues may become political, and vice-versa (Palonen 2006). Depending on the demarcations, the political sphere may include politics in a formal sense as well as political debate and extra-parliamentary movements. Politicization often refers to the process when boundaries are redrawn, and new issues and topics are introduced on the political agenda. Labeling something as ‘political’ is an essential part of the process. Palonen (2003: 182) states that ‘by politicization, we can mark a phenomenon as political, as a *Spielzeitraum* for contingent action. “Politicization” thus refers to the act of *naming* something as political, including the controversies surrounding the acceptance of this naming’ (Palonen 2003: 182). The expansion of what is defined as political indicates that new kinds of perspectives are introduced – and hence that new possibilities for action are constructed. The feminist redefinition of the personal as something political is one such example.

Building on a conceptual history approach is particularly useful in a computational context. From this perspective, political history is understood as a history of language use, and language use is an area where computational methods show their strength. Research questions are not translated into keyword searches, because research questions are already formulated as questions about keywords and how they are used. Yet, to trace things explicitly described as ‘political’ will not seize everything political. Issues and actors can be political even without the presence of the explicit term ‘political’. In some cases, notions are implicit or absent because most readers will understand that the issues discussed are political. Our approach identifies many instances of labeling that are not part of an ongoing politicization or an expansion of the political sphere, for example, political parties, political elections, political debates. Still, with these limitations in mind, our analysis will provide an overview of emerging themes and of general trends of the ‘political’ in newspaper data, and how these relate to each other over time.

1.3 Methods and Sources

We have examined the ‘political’ in three kinds of contexts: in a micro context using bigram extraction, in a wider text block context using topic modeling, and in a publication context based on close reading, where topic co-occurrence

is related to genres and newspaper sections. With the extraction of bigrams, we analyze the words that follow the attribute word 'political' (in Swedish 'politisk', 'politiska' or 'politiskt').

In order to explore a wider context, we have turned to topic modeling using the Latent Dirichlet Allocation statistical model (LDA, Blei et al. 2003). The model offers an efficient way to study themes in a large corpus by assigning words in documents a probability value based on word co-occurrences. A topic can thus be understood as a discourse or theme occurring in the corpus (Blei et al. 2003; Blei et al. 2012). To estimate the parameters we used Gibbs sampling, one of the standard approaches to estimate topic models (Griffiths and Steyvers, 2004) as implemented in Mallet (McCallum, 2002). We used the last iteration of the Gibbs sampling algorithm to analyze the corpus.

The newspapers used have been digitized by the National Library of Sweden using the Optical Character Recognition (OCR) engine Abbyy and the segmentation tool Zissor. The public search interface provided by the library (tidningar.kb.se) consists of the lion's share of the newspapers published in Sweden from 1645 until today, around 27 million pages. All material published before 1905 is searchable in the public interface. Since we did our research at the Swedish National Library's lab for digital research,² we had access to copyright protected newspaper material 1945–1989. Because the newspaper data is not segmented into articles or sections, we had to base our analysis on a text block level. Text blocks are segments of visually cohesive text, usually a paragraph. The data was prepared in two steps: first, we extracted all text blocks that contained the word 'political' – 390 699 text blocks in total, accounting for about 27 million tokens, with an average of 69 tokens per text block. A recent evaluation of the page segmentation and of the OCR shows a high quality of our corpora compared to other historical newspaper materials, although this is far from perfect (Hurtado Bodell et al. 2020). Secondly, related to our topic modeling, we reduced the corpora further by discarding stop words (a commonly used list of Swedish stop words was complemented with a manually curated list), tokens that only occur five times or less, tokens containing only one character, and non-alphabetic characters.

² 'KBLab'. Text. Accessed 4 August 2021. <https://www.kb.se/in-english/research-collaboration/kblab.html>.

2 The Long Tail of Political Bigrams

As a first step to track the ‘political’ in the two newspapers, we examined bigrams – two adjacent words composed of the adjective ‘political’ and the noun it modifies (e.g. ‘political party’, ‘political future’, ‘political women’). Conceptual history focuses on how specific terms are used, and this approach thus provides a first indication of how ‘political’ was utilized as a qualifier. Plotting the occurrences of ‘political’ bigrams reveals a significant increase from the late 1960s, a decrease from late the 1970s followed by a stabilization during the 1980s (Fig. 1).

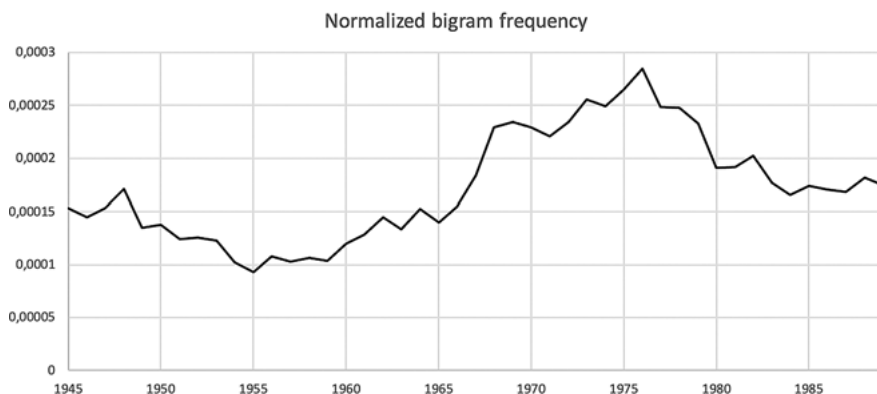


Fig. 1: The normalized frequency corresponds to the total number of ‘political’ bigrams per year divided by the total number of tokens in *Aftonbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter* per year.

The bigram trend only tells us that the usage of the word ‘political’ as modifier increased. Plotting the frequency counts of all distinct bigrams (with ‘political’ as modifier), however, reveals a long tail of ‘political’ vocabulary, with a majority of bigrams only occurring once. The top lists of ‘political’ bigrams are relatively stable for each year and are dominated by themes or events that are traditionally described as political, such as ‘political parties’, ‘political debates’ and ‘political prisoners’ (see Tab. 1). This is true for at least the 100 most frequent bigrams.

The curve of bigram frequency counts – independently of year – drops rapidly and flattens out to a long tail. The graphs in Figs. 2 and 3 show the rank-frequency distribution of distinct ‘political’ bigrams counts for selected years and give a sense of how the proportion of the tail relates to a specific year. More specifically, these figures show the relation between ‘political’ bigram diversity (the frequency rank on the x-axis) and usage (the frequency count n on the y-axis). For example,

Tab. 1: The ten most frequent ‘political’ bigrams in nine different years from 1945 to 1989.

	1945	1950	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985
ed [editor]		editor in chief	editor in chief	circles	(the) parties	prisoners	prisoners	prisoners	editor in chief
prisoners		editorial	circles	(the) parties	diary	asylum	(the) parties	(the) parties	(the) parties
circles		circles	(the) parties	(the) life	prisoners	(the) parties	parties	decision	parties
parties		party	parties	party	parties	reason	(the) prisoners	parties	asylum
(the) parties		committee	(the) situation	issues	party	parties	views	party	prisoners
activity		parties	issues	reason	reason	(the) debate	reason	reason	decision
editor		(the) parties	(the) debate	parties	issues	theater	party	asylum	party
(the) life		(the) situation	party	life	convers-ation	party	opponents	violence	(the) debate
life		refugees	reason	(the) debate	(the) debate	issues	refugees	commentator	reason
(the) situation		issues	(the) life	(the) situation	(the) life	(the) power	activity	issues	issues

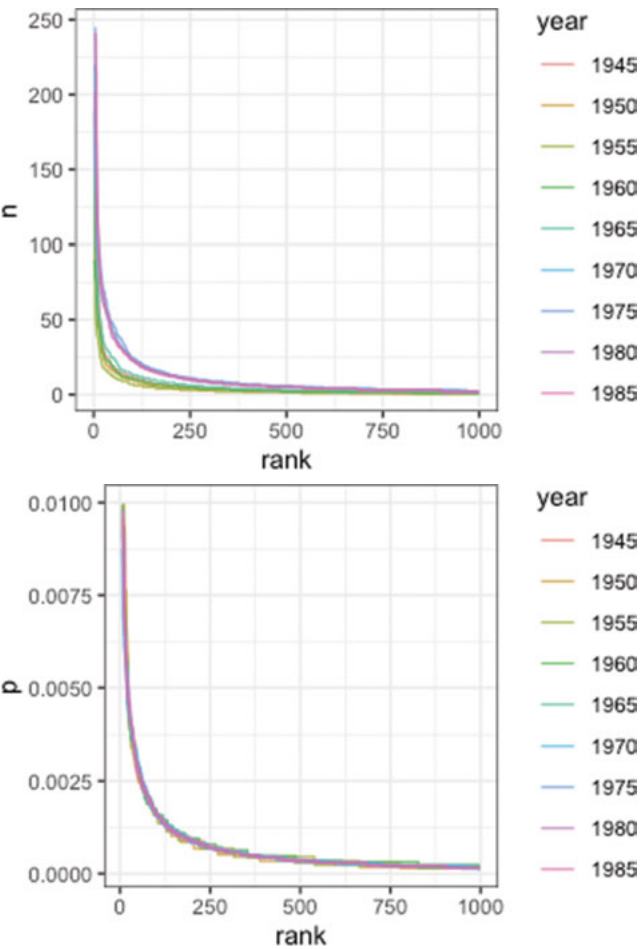


Fig. 2 (top) and 3 (bottom): Rank refers to the frequency rank of each bigram (i.e. the position of a bigram in the bigram frequency count distribution), n refers to the total frequency count of each unique bigram, and p to the (normalized) proportion of each bigram for each year, i.e. the frequency count of a given bigram divided by the total frequency counts of all bigrams. Hence, a higher trend line on the x -axis indicates increased diversity among the bigram for a specific year. The top and the end of the tail in each graph are cut.

taking the year 1970 of Tab. 1 above, the bigram ‘political prisoners’ would be positioned at rank 1 on the x -axis (left) with a high frequency count on the y -axis, resulting in a top-left point on the curve. The longer the tail on the x -axis, the more diverse set of ‘political’ bigrams. Here, we observe that an increase of ‘political’ bigrams counts (n) does cause an increase in the variety of bigrams (rank

distribution). However, this is mainly a function of the increased usage of the word 'political', as it is made clear by the normalized (p) curve in Fig. 3. Hence, when the term 'political' is used more often, it is also used to modify a more diverse set of activities and phenomena qualified as 'political'.

If we compare how many distinct bigrams it takes to reach 50 percent of the total bigram occurrences for each year (Fig. 4), however, it is possible to measure the lexical diversity of 'political' bigrams', i.e. to get a sense of how the usage of the term 'political' becomes more disparate or more concentrated. Hence, as the graph in Fig. 4 displays, 'political' became less consistent from the late 1950s (it takes more bigrams to achieve 50 percent of the total bigram frequency count), more consistent in the 1970s, and stabilized in the 1980s.



Fig. 4: The graph displays how many unique top bigrams (rank) it takes to reach 50 % of the total 'political' bigram occurrences for each year. A higher rank indicates an increased variety and vice versa. Some of the peaks can maybe be explained by election years (e.g. 1956, 1966, 1988), but others not (e.g. 1971, 1983).

Further exploration of the lists of bigrams can provide glimpses into cultural tendencies of how 'political' was used in the two newspapers. One way is to trace individual bigrams, which Fig. 5 illustrates as it displays how 'theatre', 'awareness' and 'language' became modified by 'political' over time.

Overall, the result from studying bigrams of 'political' confirms general observations made in previous research: the 1950s shows lower frequency and less diversity, while the usage increases in the 1960s and becomes more diverse. However, because of its limited word window approach, bigram extraction alone is not sufficient to explore the broader semantic contexts of the term 'political'. Hence, in

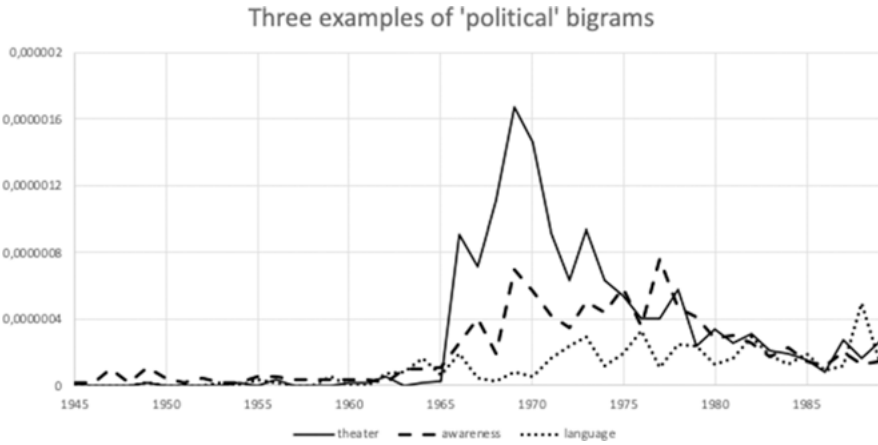


Fig. 5: Three political bigrams: ‘political theatre’, ‘political awareness’ and ‘political language’ (normalized frequency).

order to investigate the contexts of the ‘political’, we have turned to topic modeling, a method that takes every word in the extracted text blocks into account.

3 Analyzing Networks of Co-Occurring Topics

Based on our corpora of text blocks containing the term ‘political’, four topic models were initially produced with 50, 100, 200 and 400 topics (we used ParallelTopicModel, workers = 1, seed = 42). After examining the topics from each output, the model with 200 topics was chosen for the analysis. The models of 50 and 100 topics did not capture a satisfying representation of distinct themes. The 400 topic model, in turn, produced too specific topics, or topics that were too alike.

Topics were labeled manually in order to increase readability. This was done in a three-step iterative process, constantly shifting from topic model to newspaper texts. First, the authors worked together to manually interpret and label the topics from the 200 model, based on each topic’s top list of most likely words. Often, topics could be labeled based on the first 20 words. If not, the top list was expanded to the top 100 words. Topics were deliberately assigned broad labels such as ‘chile’, ‘parties’ and ‘middle east’. This was because a topic like ‘greece’, for instance, encapsulates different aspects related to Greece such as the 1946–1949 civil war or the 1967–1974 military junta. However, since all topics were built up from newspaper texts containing the term ‘political’, all labels imbue a political

dimension. Secondly, and as a way to deal with uncertainty and disagreement of which label a topic should be assigned, the authors traced such topics back to the actual text blocks in which ambiguous topics were most dominant. This was for example the case with topics such as 'human condition' (related to texts about how to be a human in today's world), 'analysis' (various texts with analytical and reasoning characteristics) and 'official statements' (mostly statements given by political figures). Third, to assert that our interpretations were robust, three multiple posteriors were computed with the same and slightly different number of topics as the original 200 model (with 190, 200, and 210 topics). The topics of these additional models were labeled according to the three-step hermeneutic process described above, which generated similar results.³

Our LDA topic model provides a static representation of all 'political' text blocks from 1945 to 1989. Topics' word lists do not change over time, but topics' presence in text blocks do, as well as their co-occurrences with other topics. Hence, an efficient way to explore changes over time is to examine co-occurring topics, corresponding to topics appearing in the same text block. We studied nine five-year periods of co-occurring topics between 1945 and 1989 (1945–1949, 1950–1954, et cetera). This was done in order to examine discursive changes in higher resolution. Here, we treated topics as nodes, and topic co-occurrences in text blocks as edges, with weaker edges filtered out. The graphs, modeled in Gephi, were based on topic pairs co-occurring in at least ten different text blocks, and where both topics made up at least 20 percent each of the text block. In the graphs, node weight corresponds to the sum of a node's edge weight, i.e. the number of documents where the topic is present.

The number of topics differ between the five-year periods, with networks being smaller in the early periods, and larger from the second half of the 1960s. Only nine topics are present in all the five-year periods: 'asylum', 'elections', 'names' (common Swedish names), 'negotiations/agreements' (with top words such as 'demand', 'proposition', 'sides'), 'official/succession' ('post', 'retirement', 'successor'), 'physical descriptions 2' ('standing', 'sitting', 'room', 'house'), 'uk 1' ('British', 'Labor', 'conservatives'), 'us presidents', 'visits/negotiations' ('meeting', 'representative', 'conference'). These topics could be seen as representing the core of the 'political' discourse. In order to study changes over time we manually examined co-occurring topics in the nine different graphs. In our interpretative process, we hermeneutically identified three thematic clusters evolving over time,

³ The topic model used in the analysis is accessible on github.com/welfare-state-analytics, see Topic model in references.

(in the topic 'asylum'); 'hostages' and 'innocents' (in the topic 'violence/terror'). Most of the groups made visible in these topics were victims rather than actors. Nevertheless, they were part of a widening of the reports on political issues. This shift can be understood as a signal for the professionalized and critical journalism in the 1960s and 1970s.⁴ (Petersson & Carlberg 1990; Djerf-Pierre & Weibull 2001).

3.2 The Domestic Cluster

From 1945 to 1964, the cluster related to domestic affairs contains few nodes, but from 1965 to 1989 it expands and includes an increasing number of topics (e.g. see Figs. 7 and 8). During the first two decades, the domestic cluster centers on politics from a top-down perspective, with topics labeled 'proposals/inquiry', 'parties' and 'taxes'. From the mid-1960s, the cluster is complemented by a bottom-up oriented perspective as the topic 'power/democracy' is introduced in the network, mostly related to participation and the condition of democracy in Sweden. The cluster in this later period also connects to 'work' and 'women', topics often representing an individual or personal perspective in the newspaper reporting, situated in or between the domestic cluster and culture. Another change is an increased local and regional focus on Stockholm, especially during the 1980s (both *AB* and *DN* are essentially Stockholm papers).

From 1945 to 1989, the domestic topic nodes with the highest weighted degree are often related to political parties, the public sector, and economic policy. The topics related to political parties mostly contain a generic vocabulary with words such as party names, 'election', 'opposition', 'majority' et cetera. From the late 1970s, however, we find topics that relate to individual politicians ('party leaders' and in the late 1980s 'social democrats') rather than to a generic vocabulary. Somewhat similar topics were also found in the earlier period, then connected to topics related to biographical-oriented content from obituaries and memorial days. In the 1980s, however, co-occurring topics are most often related to politicians' work in parties and parliament. This could again be understood as a signal of journalistic change, an increased individualization in political reporting (Petersson & Carlberg 1990; Ekecrantz & Olsson 1994).

⁴ Petersson & Carlberg 1990; Djerf-Pierre & Weibull 2001.

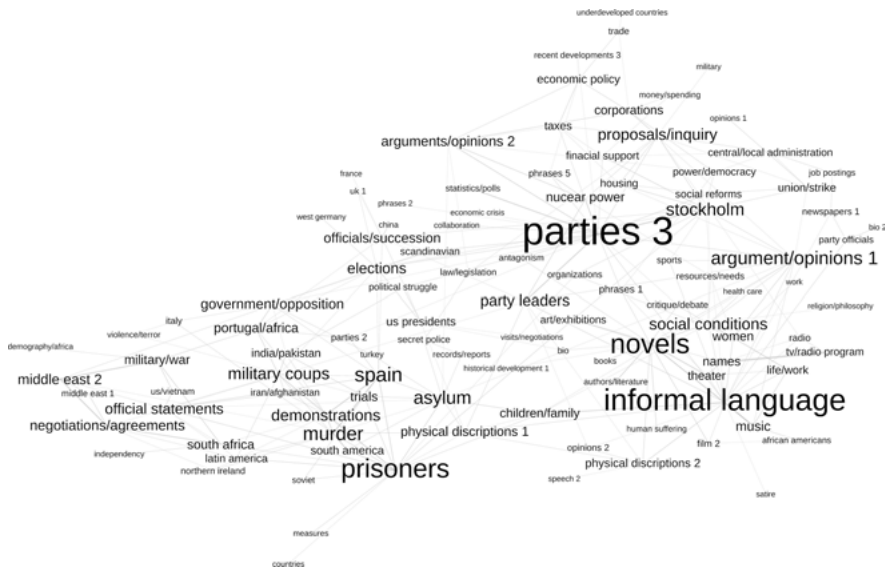


Fig. 7: Co-occurring topics 1975–1979. The international cluster is situated in the lower left part of the graph, the domestic cluster in the upper corner, and the cultural cluster in the lower right.

3.3 The Cultural Cluster

A third cluster relates to culture. From 1945 to 1964, this cluster consists of a few scattered topics related to literature ('authors/literature', 'novels', 'books') and plays ('theater'), as well as broadcasting ('tv/radio program'). In the late 1960s and onwards, a stable cluster emerges that also expands to include topics labeled 'art/exhibitions', 'music' and 'film', at the same time as 'novels' and 'theatre' increase in centrality in the cultural cluster. Furthermore, and somewhat surprising, 'novels' is one of the topics with the highest weighted degree after 1965 (e.g. see Figs. 7 and 8). In fact, *the* highest in the network of 1965–1969, and in the other later networks it is among the top five, equal to topics labeled 'us/vietnam' (period 1970–1974) and 'elections' (period 1985–1989). This indicates a politicization of literary culture as well as culture playing an important part in political discourse (see Appendix 1).

Furthermore, from the late 1960s, culture-oriented topics tend to co-occur with non-culture topics such as ‘social condition’ (with top words such as ‘society’, ‘human’, ‘economic’, ‘development’), ‘human suffering’ (‘world’, ‘life’, ‘death’, ‘people’) and ‘political prisoners’ (‘chile’, ‘amnesty’, ‘torture’, ‘international’). This

since it occurs on different pages and sections, the contexts and meaning of the topic change over time.

When the topic becomes more frequent in the 1960s (see Fig. 9), it is in the contexts of arguments and opinions (see Appendix 2). Our manual examination of text blocks shows that the topic is found in letters to the editors, editorials and reviews in the arts, literature and culture section. Articles called for women to participate in parties and unions, and for men to accept women as political actors. An editorial in *DN*, for instance, explained that ‘we [will] achieve full gender equality in the political process only when women [will] really dare to have a finger in the political pie’ (1963-07-14). Furthermore, hardly any articles written by regular news journalists are found among the texts in which the topic of women is significant in the 1960s.



Fig. 9: The mean weight of the topic ‘women’ in text blocks over time.

Editorials and letters to the editors continued to be published in the 1970s, but the topic is also present in other contexts, most notably in new sections titled ‘The everyday’ (*DN*) and ‘Women’ (*AB*). The presence of everyday life is visible among co-occurring topics such as ‘social conditions’, ‘children/family’ and two topics related to work (see Appendix 2). The personal ads quoted in the introduction indicate something similar: political views had become important on a personal level, while various aspects of everyday life were contextualized as ‘political’. Separate newspaper sections for women and household matters were established already in the nineteenth century, but the sections in the 1970s were different. ‘The everyday’ was where new research on gender equality and gender roles were reported and where journals published by women’s movements were referred. Ordinary women and activists were interviewed about their everyday

life and explained the difficulties of combining regular jobs, household tasks and political activities. This was also where a new movement that organized men was reported: 'We don't want to be the oppressors of women anymore' (*DN* 1975-02-18). Similar interests are visible in *AB*. As a tabloid, it had a tradition of covering the everyday life of various celebrities, but in the 1970s it also started to interview ordinary women about their daily lives. 'How do you do in your workplace, Bettie Liljeqvist?', a headline asked in 1978. Liljeqvist was then the only female steelworker at the company Asea. In the interview, she told the reporter about her fight for gender equality at work (*AB* 1978-06-28). The co-occurring topic 'informal language', capturing words commonly used in spoken Swedish, frames the issues of women as less formal than regular party politics.

Everyday life as a context and framing is less prominent in the 1980. Instead, the topic 'women' co-occurs with topics such as 'organizations', 'stockholm' and 'central/local administration' (see Appendix 2). Editorials and letters to the editors were still published, but the topic was also present in regular news articles in the 'Politics' section, covering party politics on national and local arenas. Women's issues were part of the established political discourse and those being interviewed were professional politicians rather than ordinary women. When *DN* printed the statement 'Sex is political too' in 1984, for instance, it was as a headline for an article referring to the new 'sexual-political program' of the social democrats (*DN* 1984-05-23).

The significance of gender issues in the 1960s and 1970s is well documented in previous research (Östberg 2008; Bjereld and Demker 2018). What our analysis indicates, however, is that the issues moved within the newspapers and that different genres and newspaper sections framed the issues in different ways. In the 1960s 'women' was a topic discussed in editorials, letters to the editor and in articles in the art, literature and culture section. The texts represented individual voices outside of regular news journalism. In the 1970s it was news journalists covering the issues, but in the 'everyday' and 'Women' sections of the newspaper. The sources represented actors outside of the political establishment: ordinary women, activists, researchers. In the 1980s, the topic was instead part of established party politics, covered in articles published in the 'Politics' section. What was once in the margin had become an established part of the political sphere, broadening what 'political' could mean.

4 Concluding Remarks

An attempt to capture the transformation of what is considered political, faces the apparent risk of being either too general or far too narrow. In this paper, we have defined the political as what is explicitly described as ‘political’. To some extent, this limitation is compensated by the analytical scale of using all text blocks that contain the keyword ‘political’, in two major Swedish newspapers from 1945 to 1989.

The extraction of bigrams confirms some of the claims made in previous research: the total frequency hits a low point in the 1950s, the decade when ‘political’ bigrams were less diverse. Figures from the 1960s and 1970s indicate that ‘political’ was used in a broader sense. Examining co-occurring topics reveals similar patterns: new issues became political in the 1960s and 1970s. Still, by combining different approaches, our paper also paves the way for a deeper understanding of changing political discourses in post-war Swedish newspapers. For example, most of the discourses dominating in the 1950s continued to dominate in the 1960s and 1970s: international conflicts, party politics, elections, economic policy. However, and more interestingly, these discourses of domestic and foreign politics were sometimes challenged in dominance by topics such as ‘novels’, indicating a perhaps more vital, or at least different role of culture in the newspaper material than previous research has indicated. Furthermore, following a topic such as ‘women’ through the newspaper pages makes it evident that genre and section are as important as content for the establishment of new political issues. A female reader complaining about the lack of representation in a letter to the editor is one thing, the same issue reported in the regular section for ‘Politics’ is quite another. Hence, to conclude, new issues entered the political sphere without the old ones leaving, suggesting that the ‘political’ was broadened, but not entirely redefined.

In this paper, we manually traced the movement of one specific topic between different sections of the newspapers. Our analysis indicates that the context of publication is vital to the historical significance of a topic. What was a marginal topic when it was part of letters to the editors became accepted as part of established journalism when it was published in the news sections. Thus, topic distributions in the newspaper corpus would be more valuable if we had the ability to calculate its distribution in different sections of the newspapers. An important research task in the future is to train models for the automatic detection of sections in order to enrich the metadata and scale up the analysis.

Appendix 1: Networks of co-occurring topics 1945–1989

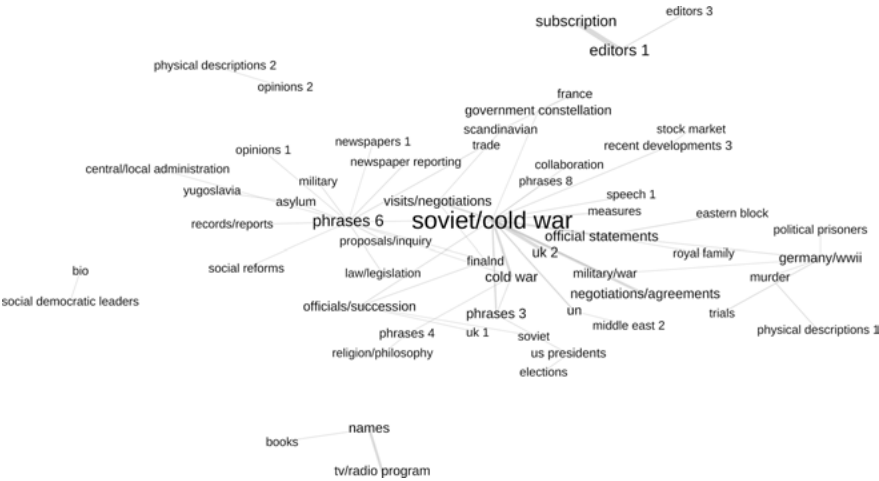


Fig. 10: Network graph of co-occurring topics 1945–1949.

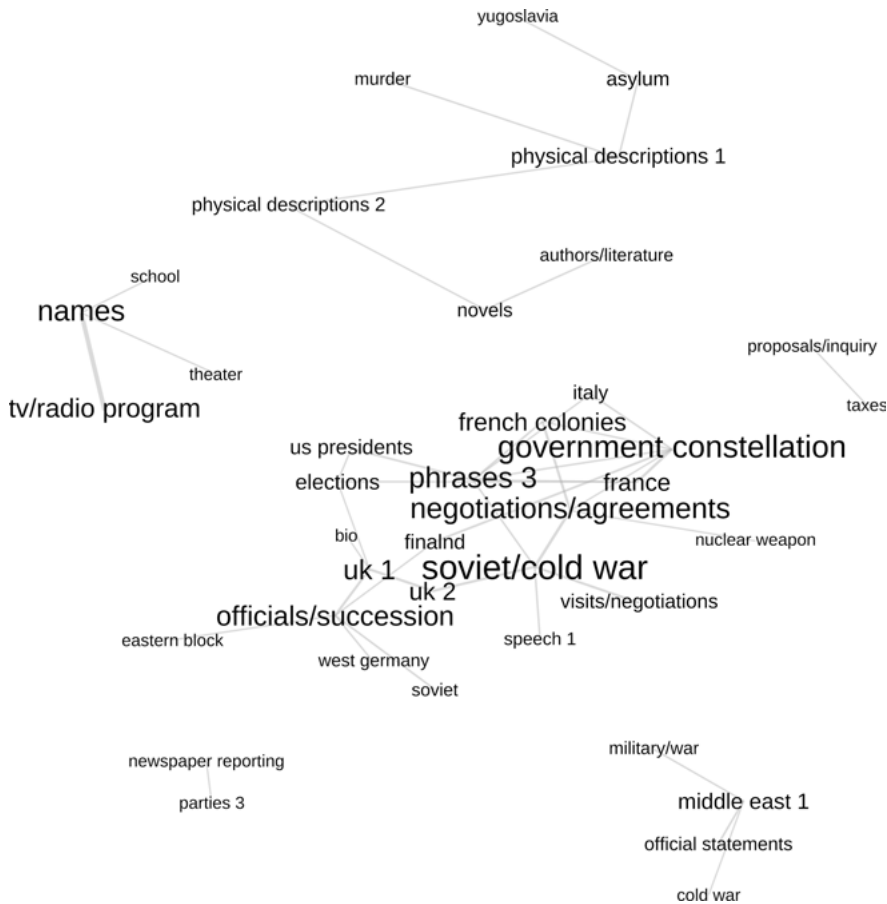


Fig. 11: Network graph of co-occurring topics 1955–1959.

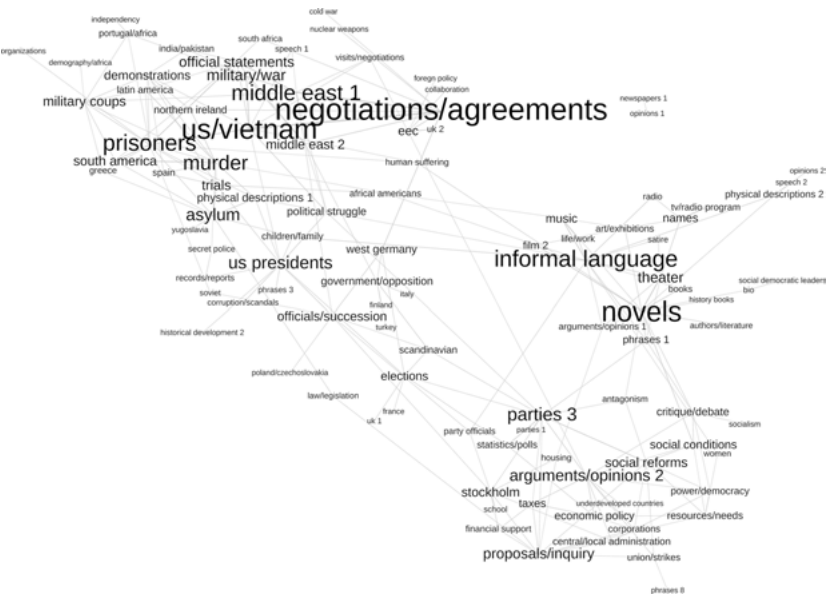


Fig. 14: Network graph of co-occurring topics 1970–1974.



Fig. 15: Network graph of co-occurring topics 1980–1984.

Appendix 2: Co-occurring topics with ‘women’ over time

Topics co-occurring with 'women' (5 times or more; threshold 0.2).

1965-69

arguments/opinions 2, *should, issue, reason, 7*
phrases 1, *surely, seem, of course, 6*

1970-74

social conditions, *society, people, social*, 12
resources/needs, *resources, possibilities, needs*, 11
informal language, *they* (dom), *oneself* (sej), *me* (mej), 10
social reforms, *economic, social, reforms*, 7
argument/opinions 1, *think, know, consider*, 6
children/family, *children, family, parents*, 5
life/work, *people, work, life*, 5

1975–79

informal language, 28
 arguments/opinions 1, 24
 life/work, 20
 social conditions, 15
 organizations, *organizations*, *members*, *activity*, 13
 resources/needs, 12
 work, *work*, *time*, *working hours*, 10
 critique/debate, *article*, *analysis*, *debate*, 9
 phrases 1, 8
 arguments/opinions 2, 7
 novels, *reality*, *life*, *novel*, 7
 art/exhibitions, *exhibition*, *art*, *museum*, 6
 party officials, *chairman*, *vice*, *parliamentarian*, 6
 children/family, 5
 opinions 1, *opinion*, *view*, *position*, 5
 power/democracy, *power*, *democracy*, *politician*, 5

1980–84

informal language, 14
 social conditions, 13
 arguments/opinions 1, 12
 organizations, 12
 stockholm, *stockholm*, *city hall*, *municipality*, 6
 novels, 6

1985–89

social conditions, 8
 statistics/polls, *percent*, *shows*, *number*, 8
 arguments/opinions 1, 7
 central/local administration, *government*, *state*, *municipality*, 6
 informal language, 6

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