

# Experts in Election News Coverage

## *Process or Substance?*

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### **Abstract**

Previous studies have shown that experts appearing in the media are increasingly speculating about trends and developments rather than presenting their own research. With respect to political journalism, this raises the question of whether increased use of expert sources has also led to an increased focus on process relative to substance in election news coverage. The study, conducted in 1998 and 2007, surveys what types of experts are referred to in the election coverage, what topics the experts comment on (in particular whether they focus on substance or process), and whether the number and types of experts as well as topics have changed over time. As expected, there is an increase in newspapers' references to experts in their election campaign coverage. However, contrary to our expectations, in both 1998 and 2007, there is an equal number of articles referring to the election campaign's political content (i.e., they mentioned the topics promoted by the political actors during the campaign) and to the political process. And extremely few articles included meta-discussions.

**Keywords:** process news, meta-coverage, election coverage, experts

### **Introduction**

Immediately after having taken office on April 5, 2009, Denmark's new Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen criticized the media's political commentators for focusing on the political process rather than on the substance of politics ([politik.jp.dk](http://politik.jp.dk), 17.04.09). In his critique, the Danish Prime Minister joined a host of voices not only in Denmark, but also internationally who find that political journalism has moved too far towards focusing on process rather than substance, and that this change has been reinforced by the media's increased use of references to experts, pundits, political commentators and the like. While there have been a number of studies investigating the relative coverage of substance and process in political journalism (Blumler 1997; Brants & van Praag 2006; Capella & Jamison 1997; Gulati, Just & Crigler 2004; Goddard et al. 1998; Wilke & Reinemann 2001), the specific role of experts in news coverage has attracted little research attention. The present study investigates reference to experts in the coverage of Danish national elections in four Danish newspapers in 1998 and 2007, respectively. In a previous study on television news during the same period, we have shown that the number of media pundits and experts did indeed increase in election campaign coverage. However, the findings show that, overall, rather few media pundits and experts appear

in television news and that the increase of their appearances has been limited (Hopmann & Strömbäck 2010). This raises the question of whether the observed increase is a common phenomenon across different types of media outlets or specific to television. Therefore, the present study surveys what types of experts are being referred to in the election coverage, what topics the experts comment on (in particular whether they focus on substance or process), and whether the number and types of experts as well as topics have changed over time.

### **More Process, Less Substance in Political Journalism**

Before the 1960s, journalism was almost identical to descriptive reporting. Journalists were to bring their audience to a scene of an event and describe what had happened. Not any event; only newsworthy events. Because journalists had no means of independently assessing the importance of an issue or an event, they had to rely on the actions and statements of authoritative sources to decide what was newsworthy. Politics was perceived as the fundament of democracy and as newsworthy per se. The attitude towards politicians was respectful, cautious, and reactive. In this ‘sacerdotal’ (Blumler & Gurevitch 1995) approach to journalism, the authoritativeness of a source was, in practice, effectively determined by his or her constitutional role (Pedersen & Holst 2000).

The success of the new, emerging medium – television – was instrumental in changing journalism. It made little sense to describe to viewers what they could already see happening on the screen. Instead, journalists gradually adopted a more interpretive style of reporting: they described both what had happened and explained why it had happened.

This development also affected the print press. Newspapers could not survive by only retelling events that their readers had previously seen on TV or heard about on the radio. To secure their own niche on the news market, print journalists had to analyse, interpret, and explain. They did so by going deeper into the matter than was possible on TV, with its inescapable time constraints. More recently, the rise of the Internet – and with it, news reporting that is virtually contemporaneous with the news itself – has further accentuated the need for the print media to dig deeper still.<sup>1</sup>

In the past, newsmakers were the ones who benefited most from descriptive, sacerdotal news journalism: the journalist’s job consisted of describing events, which typically meant reporting what newsmakers had done or said. With the rise of interpretive journalism, journalists assumed a more independent approach to news reporting. The actions and statements of newsmakers were still important events to cover, but the news message included not just what a newsmaker had done or said, but also the interpretation and explanation presented by the journalist. ‘The descriptive style places the journalist in the role of an observer. The interpretive style requires the journalist to act also as analyst’ (Patterson 2000, 250). A good news story is not supposed to merely describe a series of events (the news story per se), which would be a fairly concrete undertaking. Instead, a news story is supposed to outline the different perspectives involved – by explaining the background, interpreting the significance and assessing the possible future consequences of what has happened.

Journalists realized that the sacerdotal journalistic approach to news reporting addressed the needs of the senders (e.g., politicians or interest groups) rather than those of the receivers/consumers (readers, listeners or viewers). As both the content and form of

journalism changed, the needs of consumers came to be paramount. When the content of the news – that is, newsmakers’ actions or statements – was reported without critical questions, interpretation or explanation, newsmakers themselves were perhaps well served, but not necessarily anyone else. Likewise, the form of the news – which was no longer limited to describing events and communicating what the viewers themselves could see happening on the screen – evolved into a livelier style of reporting that was built around story lines and that emphasized strong visuals within a fast-paced format, thereby increasing receivers’ interest in, and comprehension of, the news (Epstein 1973). As Reuven Frank, the president of NBC News, instructed his reporters: ‘Every news story should, without any sacrifice of probity or responsibility, display the attributes of fiction, of drama. It should have structure and conflict, problem and denouement, rising action and falling action, a beginning, a middle and an end’ (Robinson & Sheehan 1983, 226). News reports became news stories. The news selection criteria came to include timeliness, importance, sensation, conflict, and identification (Meilby 1996). In the ‘pragmatic’ (Blumler & Gurevitch 1995) approach to news journalism that emerged, political events were evaluated against such news selection criteria and were not automatically given special attention. The pragmatic orientation implied that the ‘amount of time or space allocated to [political events] will be determined by strict considerations of news values, in competition with the newsworthiness of other stories’ (Semetko et al. 1991: 6)

Journalism’s greater independence from politicians and other newsmakers also increased scepticism towards them. Both continuing and consolidating this trend, the field of investigative journalism emerged in the wake of the Watergate scandal (Patterson 2000). The lesson for journalists was that politicians could no longer be taken at their word. As members of a newly adversarial press, journalists felt embarrassed at having been the lapdogs of newsmakers. Instead, they focused on journalism’s role as the watchdog of democracy, sometimes even turning into attack dogs.

The change towards interpretive and investigative news journalism – that is, that news journalism reported on reality as it was, not as newsmakers wanted us to see it – meant that control over news shifted from newsmakers to journalists. A ‘political logic’ was gradually replaced by a ‘media logic’ (Mazzoleni 1987), meaning that ‘the requirements of the media take center stage and shape the means by which political communication is played out by political actors, is covered by the media, and is understood by the people’ (Strömbäck 2008, 234). Political actors no longer encountered microphone holders, but professional journalists who examined their proposals, actions and statements critically. They found that they constantly had to defend themselves. And that they acted in relation to an agenda set by others, not by them. Newsmakers tried to regain control of news making and become more proactive by professionalizing their political communications (for example, by using press secretaries and other public relations specialists and hiring communications experts and journalists with insider knowledge of the media’s functionings) (Swanson & Mancini 1996).

However, the struggle for control over political communications continued. The journalists saw the professionalization of political actors as a manifestation of PR and manipulation. Journalists depend on political actors as sources for their news coverage. But when they can only reach political actors through a professional communications filter, it becomes more and more difficult to judge the goods politicians are trying to

sell. It is the equivalent of being dependent on the toothpaste manufacturer's PR department when a journalist wishes to critically assess whether teeth really whiten as much as promised in the ads. This situation forced journalists to provide consumer information to the public – to analyse and describe how politics is “sold” to the voters via professional marketing. In other words, as a reaction to the professionalization of political communication and in order to get ‘behind’ the spin of politicians, journalists began to focus on the processes leading to political decisions – that is, the tactics and strategies of politicians (Blumler 1997; Brants & van Praag 2006; Capella & Jamison 1997; Goddard et al. 1998; Gulati, Just & Crigler 2004; Wilke & Reinemann 2001). They sometimes even focus on how well they succeed or not in getting behind the spin of professional communication, also known as “meta news coverage” (Esser et al. 2001; Esser et al. 2006).

As indicated above, the professionalization of political communication, including its impact on journalism, journalistic products, politics, readers, viewers and listeners, is well described in the academic literature. However, one aspect that has not been covered in any detail concerns the impact of this professionalism on journalists' choice of sources, especially their use of experts. The increased focus on process in news coverage often concentrates on the actions of political actors in fora typically not open to the public and on political actors' thoughts and motives for action – all phenomena of which very few sources will have firsthand knowledge, if any. Journalists, on the one hand, need to cover the process of politics; on the other, they have few firsthand sources who can or are willing to supply reliable information. Thus they must rely on plausible interpretations of such actions, thoughts and motives. Conventional journalistic practice and ideology prescribing that journalists have no independent voice of their own prevent them from making such interpretations by themselves. Journalists, if they are to cover process, cannot afford to be seen as simply having forced their own thinking into the articles. Instead, they need ‘compensatory legitimation’ (Weiler 1983) – that is, they draw upon the authority of experts, persons who are perceived as having neutral knowledge and as not being part of the conflict, to make the interpretation for them (Albæk et al. 2001, 2003).

Indeed, a recent longitudinal Danish study demonstrated that journalists do in fact refer to experts (defined as scientific researchers at independent research institutions) much more often today than earlier. This study goes as far back as the early 1960s and demonstrates the explosive increase in references to experts in the mass media in the 1990s – throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s the level of expert involvement remained on a steady and rather low level (Albæk et al. 2001, 2003). The study also documented a significant shift in what researchers comment on and in the categories of researchers appearing in the media. Relatively speaking, researchers communicate their research results in the media much less today than they did forty years ago; instead, they increasingly comment on political and other issues that are not part of their own areas of study, but that have become part of the public agenda through the efforts and actions of people outside academia. A generation ago, the knowledge produced by university researchers was what made them especially useful for journalists; today, by contrast, it is the capacity of researchers to comment on and assess the events of the nation and world – give expert opinion – rather than on research developments, that creates the need for expert comments, interpretations and opinions (cf. Albæk 2011). And it is researchers from the

social sciences who typically work most closely with the issues covered in contemporary news journalism rather than researchers from the natural and medical sciences.

The present study intends to follow up on the just-mentioned study by focusing on references to experts in election news coverage. Previous studies on news coverage indicate that the focus on process may be greater during election than non-election periods (Binderkrantz & Green-Pedersen 2009). Much is at stake for political actors during election campaigns, as electoral success is paramount in the pursuit of political power (cf. Walgrave & van Aelst 2006). Thus, political actors' strategic communication is intense during elections campaigns, as are journalists' attempts to get behind the scene to inform the public about the strategic actions taken by political actors. But because journalists have difficulties finding reliable sources on events taking place behind the scene, we expect them to rely on expert judgments instead. In other words, we expect an increased focus on process in news coverage over time, and we expect this increased focus on process to correlate with increased reference to experts. In order to investigate the expected change over time, we conducted a longitudinal study of news coverage during the 1998 and 2007 national Danish elections. This time period was chosen because it immediately follows the time period in which studies have documented the beginning of an increased focus on process in election news coverage internationally. We therefore expect this international trend to have reached Denmark during the chosen time period.

On the basis of the above considerations, we expect the study to demonstrate:

- An increase in the number of references to experts,
- An increase in process coverage,
- An increase in meta-coverage,
- A predominance of scientific experts, especially social science experts.

## Design

All news articles related to election campaigns in newspapers typical chosen as representatives of broadsheet and tabloid papers – *Politiken*, *Berlingske Tidende* (now renamed *Berlingske*), *Jyllands-Posten* (typical broadsheet and most read "quality" newspapers) and *Ekstra Bladet* (a typical tabloid paper, the most-read of its kind) – were registered in the periods February 20 - March 11, 1998 and October 25 - November 13, 2007, i.e. from the day the election was called through election day both years. The election campaign lasted exactly 21 days both years when we include the days on which the elections were called and held. We therefore do not have to correct for the duration of election campaign in our calculations.

We chose the 1998 and the 2007 elections for two reasons: First, we know from prior research that the use of experts in the news media only became widespread during the 1990s (see above). Second, within this period of time, we saw the kind of development in the Danish media market that, according to the above-cited theoretical discussion, leads to increased use of experts and experts commenting on the political process. In other words, from 1998 to 2007, the media market became significantly more competitive and commercialized: The existing newspapers experienced decreasing subscription

numbers and revenues from printing commercial ads, and the international *Metro* concern launched the first free daily paper (*MetroXpress*) in Denmark in 2001. In the aftermath, most of the leading media companies followed suit and launched their own free paper, and Denmark saw large-scale mergers and substantial inflow of foreign capital in the early 2000s (Jensen 2003). Looking at the electronic media, the semi-commercial broadcaster *TV2 Denmark* did receive a minor license fee from the state when it was established in 1988, but since 2004 and onwards, the station has been financed solely by ads and other commercial revenues. The government even has plans to sell the station. Moreover, both *TV2* and the public service broadcaster, the *Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR)*, launched 24-hour news channels in 2006 and 2007 (a few months prior to the 2007 national election), respectively – and today, the Internet and the different media’s websites have gained ground as a news source in Denmark (Schrøder 2010). Summing up, even though it is difficult to pinpoint any exact point in time when the commercialization of the Danish media took place, significant transformations did occur within the period under study here.

Articles referring to experts were read and coded for various conditions. A broad conception of “expert” is used: everyone who is assigned the role of expert in a news article, i.e., who acts in the capacity of someone with special knowledge in a given field. This includes, e.g., a fashion expert who comments on the wardrobes of female politicians. An article is included if an expert is quoted or if the expert or his/her products (scientific reports or the like) are mentioned.

The study focuses on journalistic news products. Consequently, articles authored by the newspaper’s own journalists or commentators in which they might be said to act as experts are excluded from the analysis (cf. Hopmann & Strömbäck 2010). Such articles are normally published in the newspapers’ opinion sections and are not considered journalistic news products proper. Articles are included when a newspaper’s commentators or journalists act as experts in a news article they have not authored – in their own or other newspapers.

In connection with the 2007 election, articles authored by one commentator from each of the four newspapers, who simultaneously appeared frequently as expert in the electronic media during the election campaign were coded, however, in the same way as other expert articles.<sup>2</sup> During the 1998 elections, the newspapers did not make use of this kind of political commentators/pundits. These articles are *not* included among the expert articles in 2007, but the coding enables us to compare articles authored by political commentators with ordinary journalistic articles in which experts appear.

The coding unit is the individual article. The articles were coded using the following criteria: (1) Topic of the article; content (are one or more political topics mentioned, and if so, which?) or process (are the parties’ strategy, politicians’ personality, the media’s treatment of the election campaign, or the parties’ standing, also in the opinion polls, mentioned?); (2) Are political parties or combinations of parties mentioned (government, opposition, etc.). If an article discussed *both* political content and the political process, it is coded in both categories. (3) Which type of expert does the article refer to? The coding was carried out by three coders. The intercoder reliability for all variables is higher than 0.8 (Pearsons’ R).

## How Many Articles and Experts?

The total number of election campaign articles in the analysed decade dropped dramatically from 1,163 in 1998 to 862 in 2007 (see Table 1), i.e. a total decrease of 26 per cent over the analysed nine-year period.

**Table 1.** *Election Campaign Articles in Danish Newspapers with Reference to Experts, 1998 and 2007*

	1998		2007	
	Number of articles	% with experts	Number of articles	% with experts
Politiken	321	8	173	11
Jyllands-Posten	426	5	289	22
Berlingske Tidende	243	10	273	14
Ekstra Bladet	173	6	127	1
Total	1.163	7	862	14

The decrease is probably linked to the growth in online newspapers. Still more news is published as a *new* story in the papers' online version, but is not printed in next day's paper version because it is no longer news. *Politiken*, for example, prints the most important online news from yesterday in a box in the first section of today's printed paper. Overall, this change means a reduction in the number of news articles in the printed paper and a relatively higher priority on background, analysis and op-ed (see *Politiken*, October 1 2006). *Berlingske Tidende* has not (yet) made similar changes, which probably explains the increase in number of election campaign articles from 243 to 273, while the other three papers have experienced significant drops in the number: *Politiken* from 321 to 173, *Jyllands-Posten* from 426 to 289 and *Ekstra Bladet* from 173 to 127.

One might imagine that the relatively higher priority on op-ed, background and analyses in *Politiken* would mean longer articles, especially because the newspaper was criticized for its relatively many, very long articles when it launched its new format. However, as Table 2 shows, this increase in length did not occur, at least not in election campaign articles with expert references: The articles in *Politiken*, *Jyllands-Posten* and *Ekstra Bladet* were almost 25 per cent shorter in 2007 than in 1998. *Berlingske Tidende*'s articles were only 15 per cent shorter, and *Berlingske* still has the longest election campaign articles with expert references.

**Table 2.** *Size of Articles with Reference to Experts (average number of words per article)*

	Politiken	Jyllands-Posten	Berlingske Tidende	Ekstra Bladet
1998	770	651	897	578
2007	598	550	704	452

Generally, very few experts appear in election campaign articles in the four analysed newspapers. And only a few of these articles – 24 altogether in 1998 and 2007 – were written by the expert him/herself. Table 3 shows that in both 1998 and 2007, more than two thirds of the articles refer to only one single expert, and 22 per cent refer to two. The journalist may of course have contacted several experts to gather background material,

but usually only one – and in some instances two – experts appear in the dramaturgy of the article.

**Table 3.** Number of Experts Referred to in Election Campaign Articles in Danish Newspapers, 1998 and 2007

		Politiken	Jyllands-Posten	Berlingske Tidende	Ekstra Bladet
1998	1	17	14	17	7
	2	7	4	5	2
	>=3	1	3	3	2
	Total	25	21	25	11
2007	1	13	40	24	1
	2	3	16	6	0
	>=3	3	8	8	0
	Total	19	64	38	1

Table 3 also shows an increase during the period in the total number of election campaign articles that refer to experts, from 82 to 122. However, the figures cover significant variations across newspapers. In 1998, the three morning papers referred about equally to experts. But with an increase from 21 articles in 1998 to 64 in 2007, *Jyllands-Posten* clearly beats *Berlingske Tidende*'s increase from 25 to 38 expert articles during the period and *Politiken*'s drop from 25 to 19.

*Ekstra Bladet* distinguishes itself from the three morning papers in two ways: First, the number of election campaign articles in general and the number of election campaign articles with reference to experts are significantly smaller than in the three morning papers in both 1998 and 2007. Second, there is a dramatic drop in the number of election campaign articles referencing experts, from 11 in 1998 to just one in 2007. If we look at the content of *Ekstra Bladet*'s articles, the drop may seem smaller at first sight: In 1998, the purpose of referring to experts in five of the articles – i.e. almost half – was not to shed light on the substance of the election campaign, but explicitly to make fun of election researchers.

The fact that the number of articles about election campaigns has generally dropped also makes it interesting to look at the relative share of election campaign articles that include experts. As Table 1 shows, there was an increase in the four newspapers from 7 per cent in 1998 to 14 per cent in 2007. *Jyllands-Posten* had the largest increase from 5 to 22 per cent; *Politiken* a small increase from 8 to 11 per cent; and *Berlingske Tidende* from 10 to 14 per cent. *Ekstra Bladet*'s share dropped from 6 to 1 per cent, but keep in mind that the absolute figures are very low.

### Who are the Experts?

According to Table 4, researchers appear much more frequently as experts in election campaign articles than the other expert groups combined, i.e. in close to three thirds of the cases, with relatively fewer researchers in *Jyllands-Posten* than in *Berlingske Tidende* and significantly fewer in *Ekstra Bladet* (for a similar conclusion, see Bro *et al.* 2005; Journalisten, 19.11.2007). When we look at the other expert groups, two things are worth noting.

**Table 4.** *Number of articles with reference to experts by expert type, 1998 and 2007 combined*

Expert type	Politiken	Jyllands-Posten	Berlingske Tidende	Ekstra Bladet
Researcher	30	44	46	4
Commentator	3	5	6	0
Bank employee	0	2	3	0
Public sector employee	2	7	1	1
Think tank	1	6	0	0
Other	7	19	5	6

First, it is a common perception that political commentators take up more space in the media than earlier. However, this is not the case: The four newspapers studied here make very few references to commentators (articles written by the newspapers' own commentators are not included in the table). In addition, some of the references in 2007 refer to the conflict that broke out between Naser Khader, the leader of the party "Ny Alliance" (New Alliance), and Henrik Qvortrup, chief editor of the weekly *Se og Hør*, who as former spin doctor for Danish Prime minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen often appears in the electronic media as an expert. In other words, these articles concern a meta-discussion (1) about the actual conflict between Khader and Qvortrup and (2) about whether the two national Danish TV channels, DR and TV2, could use Qvortrup as a commentator in the remainder of the election campaign now that he had become part of it.

It is possible that the political commentators take up more space in the electronic media, which for dramaturgic reasons need to present a political analysis as a dialogue between the anchor person or a news programme journalist and the expert. The electronic media cannot let their in-house commentator analyse the day's events as a monologue in the same way as the printed media can let their in-house commentators write a column. At a minimum, they have to do an interview, in or outside the studio. However, as it would be problematic to show the media's own commentator repeatedly on screen in the long run, using other experts is a must.

One possibility is to use researchers, but few are trained to appear on TV or on radio, and owing to professional boundaries, many researchers feel that they stray beyond their professional competences when they are asked to evaluate the day's events. In these cases, the newspapers' in-house commentators are an obvious alternative. They are used to make broad analyses because they do not feel as constrained professionally as the researchers do, and in addition they have media training.

The newspapers adhere to a different logic. They see the competitors' commentators exactly as competing in-house experts. And there is no reason to promote the competitors by using their commentators. As the chief editor of *Jyllands-Posten* says: "We newspapers would never dream of letting the others comment in our paper. Newspapers have their own commentators" (*Journalisten*, 19.11.2007).

Second, it is a common notion in the public debate that think-tanks have become more prominent in the media during recent years. Especially since the bourgeois think-tank Cepos has successfully promoted its publications, analyses, conferences and meetings – and in some cases defined the political agenda. However, think-tanks are far from

playing a central role in the newspapers' election campaign coverage. They only appear to a very limited extent as expert sources in the four newspapers.

As mentioned, researchers are clearly the most commonly used expert type in election campaign articles. Among them, the vast majority – 94 per cent – is from the social sciences. But it would not have to be that way. Social science researchers are not experts on all topics that appear on the political agenda during an election campaign, for example on how quickly cancer patients should get treatment, on global warming or animal welfare.

Table 5 shows that, among the social science experts, almost two thirds are political scientists and some 20 per cent are economists. This finding is not surprising considering that political scientists study politics, including elections and parties.

**Table 5.** *Number of Social Science Experts Appearing in Election Campaign articles in Danish Newspapers, by research field (1998 and 2007 combined)*

	Politiken	Jyllands-Posten	Berlingske Tidende	Ekstra Bladet	Total
Political science	18	22	30	3	73
Economy	5	9	10	2	26
Law	2	3	6	0	11
Other	1	3	2	0	6

A positive development regarding gender equality is that the number of election campaign articles referring to female experts has doubled. However, this should be seen in light of a less uplifting fact, namely that in 1998 only ten election campaign articles referred to female experts. In 2007, still only 16 per cent of the election campaign articles with expert references refer to female experts.

### What are the Articles about?

As mentioned, the coding of articles with expert references distinguishes between articles with political content and articles about the political process (including interpretation of opinion polls).

**Table 6.** *Content and Process Focus of Election Campaign Articles with Reference to Experts in Danish Newspapers (per cent)*

	1998		2007	
	Process	Content	Process	Content
Politiken	36	68	43	61
Jyllands-Posten	43	81	42	67
Berlingske Tidende	96	40	82	42
Ekstra Bladet	45	36	100	0
Total	57	59	52	58

*Note:* Following the coding instructions, articles could be coded as discussing both the political process and political content, hence the percentage values do not need to sum up to 100.

The four analysed newspapers combined have approximately the same number of expert articles about content and process in the 1998 and the 2007 election campaigns (see Table 6): 59 and 57 per cent, respectively, in 1998 and 58 and 52 per cent, respectively, in 2007 (note that the same article can be coded as discussing both politics and process). Thus, there are no indications that the newspapers use experts more to analyse process than content, or that there is more focus on process today than there was ten years ago (rather, there are slightly fewer expert articles on process).

However, the newspapers also differ in this respect. If we leave out *Ekstra Bladet*, which had very few expert articles, a picture emerges in which *Berlingske Tidende* published twice as many articles on election campaign process than on political topics. The opposite is true for *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken*.

The large newspapers today print and comment on ongoing opinion polls in their election campaign coverage. This might lead us to believe that the newspapers contact experts – election researchers – to get an interpretation of or comment on trends in the opinion polls. This does not seem to be the case, however. There are very few expert articles on opinion polls: nine in 1998 and 13 in 2007.

As mentioned, the international literature has pointed out that news journalism today features more meta-analysis and discussion. In this particular area, it might be obvious for journalists to ask outside experts to take a look at their own and their colleagues' election campaign coverage. That does not happen either: The number of expert articles including meta-discussion is negligible: seven in 1998 and 13 in 2007.

## About Social Science Researchers and In-house Commentators

Because social science researchers comprise the vast majority of experts referred to in election campaign articles, it is relevant to examine to what extent this expert group appears in articles on content and articles on process (see Table 7). It turns out that the second largest group of social science researchers – economists – in almost all cases appear in articles on election campaign content, and in less than a third of the articles on election campaign process. Conversely, political scientists appear in two thirds of the cases in articles on process and in a little over one third in articles on content. The result is not surprising given the research fields of the two sciences: Economists do not study the political process scientifically, whereas this aspect is in focus in much of the social science research.

**Table 7.** *Political Content and the Political Process Focus in Election Campaign Newspaper Articles with Reference to Social Science Researchers, Sorted by Research Field (1998 and 2007 combined, per cent).*

	Political scientist	Economist	Legal expert	Other
Process	68	31	45	67
Contents	37	96	64	67

*Note:* Following the coding instructions, articles could be coded as discussing both the political process and political content.

If we look at the articles written by the four newspapers' in-house commentators during the 2007 election campaign, 96 per cent discussed the political process, and 58 per

cent also included the topics of the campaign. In other words, there is a clear majority of articles focusing on process, but more than half of the articles discuss the content of the campaign as well. In that regard, the political scientists most closely resemble the political commentators, compared to the other expert types.

In contrast to the perception in the public debate that political commentators were very prominent in the 2007 election campaign (Journalisten, 19.11.2007), this was also not the case if we look at the articles written by the commentators themselves: Four commentators wrote a total of 45 articles in the election campaign – i.e., 0.5 per cent of all election campaign articles.

## Conclusion

Based on the available literature on the subject, we expected an increase in newspapers' use of experts during the period 1998 to 2007. In absolute numbers, there is an actual increase for the four newspapers overall, but with individual differences. Furthermore, when the total number of election campaign articles dropped dramatically during the same period (except in *Berlingske Tidende*), the share of expert articles rose (except in *Ekstra Bladet*, whose share of expert articles is highly sensitive to fluctuations due to the low absolute number of articles).

The overall conclusion is that there was an increase, as expected, in the newspapers' references to experts in their election campaign coverage, although the increased use of experts did not occur as rapidly as the general increase in the newspapers' use of experts up through the 1990s. The reason may be that the high rate of increase in journalists' use of experts has slowed down. It could also be that they use experts in a specific situation (election campaigns) and that they use relatively few. We must therefore be careful about drawing wide-ranging conclusions. Having said this, generally speaking the findings reported for newspapers are similar to our previous findings for television news coverage during the same period (Hopmann & Strömbäck 2010).

Although the number of female experts doubled between 1998 and 2007, we still have to conclude that virtually all experts referred to in the media during election periods are men. Furthermore, they are primarily researchers. Not only are they researchers: They are social scientists. And not only are they social scientists: They are political scientists.

Next, the international literature led us to expect a marked shift during the period 1998-2007 from expert articles about election campaign content to articles about the political process, including opinion polls and meta-discussions of the media's own coverage of the election campaign. However, that expectation is not confirmed. In both 1998 and 2007, an equal number of articles referred to the election campaign's political content (i.e., they mentioned the topics promoted by the political actors during the campaign) and to the political process. Moreover, only very few articles included meta-discussions. The reason that the share of articles referring to the political process decreased during the 10-year period investigated may be that an increase in process coverage peaked prior to 1998.

## Notes

1. *Politiken* was the first Danish newspaper to recognize that readers were no longer getting their news from the printed press. In practice, *Politiken* assumes that its readers keep themselves informed regarding current events via the newspaper's Internet portal, while the print version of the newspaper is increasingly devoted to background information, analysis and commentary. Other Danish newspapers are in the process of following in the steps of *Politiken*.
2. Articles by Peter Mogensen, *Politiken*, Thomas Larsen, *Berlingske Tidende*, Ralf Pittelkow, *Jyllands-Posten* and Hans Engell, *Ekstra Bladet*.

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