

Strömback, Jesper, Orsten, Mark and Aalberg, Toril (eds), *Communicating Politics: Political Communications in the Nordic Countries*, Nordicom/University of Gothenburg, Göteborg, 2008, ISBN 9 7891 8947 1634 (pb), 276 pp., €30.

The obvious issue for most *MIA* readers would be the relevance of the experience of Nordic countries with political communications halfway across the world in Australia, New Zealand or elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific. Yet such an issue is seldom raised in relation to books without a regional focus overtly mentioned in the title, and yet are largely North American and Western European in purview and perspective. As the editors of this book point out, there is much to be gained from comparative research to overcome 'naïve universalism' in this and other communications fields.

The first section of the book provides an overview of the political communications system in the various constituent countries, chapter by chapter. This is particularly helpful since those unfamiliar with a region, especially one that is geographically distant, tend to think of 'other' media contexts such as Nordic, Middle Eastern or Latin American as relatively homogeneous.

This book reveals how much diversity there is amongst the Nordic countries, despite their common adherence to the democratic corporatist model. For instance, the Danes have lower newspaper readership and far fewer newspapers than neighbouring states, and their media are only indirectly subsidised by government, thus affording them greater autonomy. Swedish political parties have broad funding sources, the most significant being public funding at the national, regional and municipal levels. In Norway, the press has a tradition of party loyalty, while public service television maintains neutrality, but television stations flex their power and influence to the detriment of the political establishment.

Pivotal to the book is the argument that politics and the media are inextricably intertwined and their practice interdependent. In the second half of the book, the chapters deal with quite unique issues in

those various political and media contexts. As an example, there is a relatively rare analysis of political print ads, in this case looking at the representation of egalitarianism in Denmark through a certain uniformity and artlessness of approach. Then there is a timely discussion of the increasing trend towards political web-campaigning in the Finnish context which, as in much of Europe, reveals a digital divide of audience in terms of income, education and occupation, though the gap in gender is narrowing. Interestingly, use of the web in campaigning is largely correlated to party dominance and there is notable use of it by female candidates who tend to feel misrepresented in the press.

While acknowledging that Nordic countries do share characteristics of the Democratic Corporatist model, the book steers clear of universal prescriptions on political communications, offering no particularly Nordic models as such. At the same time, it fosters much reflection on how other countries around the world might compare with and could gain from the various Nordic countries' experiences, especially their resistance to the Liberal-Pluralist Model increasingly adopted as the norm globally. This book is also an excellent primer on political communications and has refreshingly different issues on its agenda than the purportedly global ones of American and Western European origin.

— Amos Owen Thomas,
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