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# An Indigenous Public Sphere? The Media and the 2009 Sámediggi Election Campaign

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**Abstract:** This article discusses media coverage of the Norwegian Sámediggi election campaign in 2009, focusing on the research question: *Did Sami voters, scattered over a vast geographical area and split into multiple language groups, have a public space in the media, where Sami politics could be discussed ahead of the Sámediggi elections in 2009?* Our findings show there was indeed a public space for Sami politics, but unequal communication opportunities for Sami voters, depending on language and geography. In the north the media provided a bilingual public space, as both Sami and Norwegian newspapers covered the election. Voters in the south were offered less news and debate about the Sámediggi election and coverage was most likely to be in Norwegian. One explanation for these differences is that the number of Sami voters is small, and further south the voters are fewer and more scattered. The differences were also explained in terms of relevance of issues. The degree of conflict and controversy over Sami politics is higher in Finnmark than in other parts of Sápmi and Norway.

**Key words:** Media, Sami, Parliament, Sámediggi, election, Norway

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1. The authors are listed in alphabetical order and have contributed equally to the text.

## Introduction

The political situation of the Sami people has improved over the past decades, making it a veritable success compared with the situation of most indigenous peoples in the world. The Sami have their traditional settlement areas in northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Norway, Sweden and Finland have all recognized the Sami as a separate people whose culture is different from that of the majority population<sup>2</sup>. Through the establishment of popularly elected Sami Parliaments, *Sámediggi*, in each of these three countries, the states have recognized that the Sami as a cultural minority. The *Sámediggi* elections have rendered Sami cultural affiliation democratically relevant, in that each country has set up its own popularly elected Sami Parliament to act as the Sami people's democratic mouthpiece. Sami democracy as expressed through the electoral channel is different from other elections because the voters are defined ethnically as opposed to geographically. *Sámediggi* elections are based on the principle of ordinary proportional representation, where each vote counts equally. This article studies the portrayal of the Norwegian *Sámediggi* election campaign in the media, and the role played by the public space that the media constitute for Sami democracy.

Any democracy requires transparency, a public sphere and an open and accessible political debate. By 'public sphere' we invoke the Habermasian notion of a public space open to all citizens where social, political and cultural issues are displayed and debated<sup>3</sup>. The public display of politics is at the very centre of election campaigns, as campaigns are focused on staging debate, discussion and choices open to citizens. Public debates force politicians to justify their policies and provide knowledge and insight to voters. Public debate may unveil irrationality and power games, making them easier to manage and interpret. The news media are pivotal to the public sphere, not only because they provide space for dialogue and debate, but also because they highlight, represent and make political alternatives apparent to the voters<sup>4</sup>.

As is the case in all democratic polities, a well-functioning Sami democracy requires a well-functioning public sphere. In order for parties and candidates to present and argue their views, as well as for voters to obtain information and knowledge, there need to be public spaces where the issues and actors of Sami politics are displayed and open for debate. Typically, these spaces will be mediated in some form or another. For Sami citizens, finding these spaces may be challenging, as they live scattered over vast areas, speak several different variants of Sami and are small

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2. Mörkenstam 2005; Smith 2011.

3. Habermas 1989; 1992.

4. Ekström 2006; Hopmann, Vliegthart, De Vreese & Albæk 2010; Thompson 1995.

minorities compared to the majority population. In Norway, where our data are collected, there are also quite large differences between the core Sami areas in the very north and the Sami settlements further south. Focusing on such differences, we believe that the communicative conditions for Sami citizens vary between the Sami constituencies. By communicative conditions we refer to, first, the opportunities for access to information and public spaces for discussions for Sami citizens, and second to the availability of election information in different languages. In practice we look at news coverage of the Sámediggi election in Norwegian and Sami media and at the opportunities for citizens and candidates to present themselves and their political views. For Sami citizens, access and availability of information and spaces for communication not only may be different from the majority population, but also unequally distributed within the Sami electorate. These differences have a bearing on the quality and particularly the extension of the Sami public sphere.

Following this reasoning, we have formulated the overall research question as follows: *Did Sami voters, scattered over a vast geographical area and split into multiple language groups, have a public space in the media where Sami politics could be discussed ahead of the Sámediggi elections in 2009?* This broad research question was operationalised and broken down into four sub-questions: *How was the media coverage of the Sámediggi election, geographically, linguistically and politically? Were there differences in the coverage between Norwegian and Sami media and of Norwegian and Sami parties? And if so, what does this say about the conditions for Sami political communication?*

These research questions were specified in hypotheses and assumptions that are referred to in the sections below. They were all based in theories and previous research on the roles played by the media in election campaigns and for minority groups. Before returning to the analysis of media coverage of the Sámediggi election, we provide a brief introduction to the Sámediggi and Sámediggi elections in Norway.

## Brief description of the Sámediggi and Sámediggi elections

The Sámediggi in Norway was established after the Norwegian Parliament passed the Sami Act in 1987, and the first session of the Sámediggi convened in 1989. Every four years a total of 39 representatives are elected within seven constituencies comprising the whole of Norway (figure 1).<sup>5</sup> Only voters who are registered

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5. The Sami Parliament electoral system, including the distribution of mandates on constituencies, has been revised, and included more than 39 MPs between 2005 and 2009. From 2009-2013, the number is 39.

on the Sami electoral roll can vote or stand for election in the Sámediggi elections. Anyone past the age of 18 who wishes to register on the electoral roll must sign a declaration that they fulfil two criteria: (1) they consider themselves as Sami, and, (2) that either they or a parent, grandparent or great-grandparent speaks or spoke Sami as their home language, or that one parent is or has been registered on the Sami electoral roll. Registration is voluntary. While all Norwegian citizens over the age of 18 have the right to vote in Norwegian parliamentary elections, only a total of 13,890 people had enrolled on the Sami electoral roll and were entitled to vote and stand for election in the 2009 Sámediggi election. The number of registered voters was nearly tripled in relation to the first election in 1989, and is expected to increase further. In 2009, more than half of the registered Sami voters lived in Norway's northernmost county, Finnmark, explaining why this county returned most members of Sámediggi. The Sámediggi building and central administration are also located in Finnmark, and it is here that the Sami language, culture and land claims are strongest. Sámediggi elections are held on the same day as elections to the Norwegian parliament, and Sami voters can vote in both.



Figure 1: Map of Norway showing the seven Sámediggi constituencies © 2013 Sámediggi.

As illustrated in figure 1, the seven Sámediggi constituencies encompass all of Norway. Constituencies 1–6 coincide with the traditional Sami settlement area, while the seventh constituency, Lulli-Norga (South Norway), can popularly be described as the constituency for «emigrated Samis», i.e. Sami citizens living in non-traditional Sami areas. The constituencies of the Sámediggi elections are not identical with the constituencies for the Norwegian Parliament. The latter are made up of the counties. Norway's northernmost county, Finnmark, makes up one Parliamentary constituency, but comprises three Sami constituencies, Nuortaguovlu, Ávjavári and parts of Davveguovlu, which also stretches into Troms County. The other four Sami constituencies are either part of one county, e.g. Gaiseguovllu, or cross one or more county borders, e.g. Viesttarmeara, Åarjel-Saepmie and Lulli-Norga. The Sami constituencies to some extent reflect linguistic borders, as Davvi (Northern) Sami is most frequently spoken in the four northernmost constituencies, Julev Sami in (parts of) Viesttarmeara, and Åarjel (South) Sami in Åarjel-Saepmie.

Sámediggi elections are based on proportional representation, and the number of mandates returned by each constituency varies according to the number of registered voters. In 2009, the number of parties and/or lists of candidates running for election in the constituencies spanned from 5 to 11. Altogether voters in the seven constituencies could choose between 54 different electoral lists, representing four Sami organisations and political parties, seven Norwegian parties, and eight independent lists of candidates.<sup>6</sup> Each electoral list was given a grant from the Sámediggi for the election campaign.<sup>7</sup> Norwegian political parties (i.e. the Labour Party, the Conservative Party, the Progress Party, the Socialist Party, the Liberal Party, the Centre Party, and the Christian Democratic Party) participated in the 2009 Sámediggi election alongside Sami parties and organisations (i.e. Árja, Sámeálbmot Bellodat/ Sami People's Party, SáB), Norgga Sámiid Riikasearvi/ Norwegian Saami Association, NSR<sup>8</sup> and Sámiid Álbmotlihttu/Sami People's Association, SÁL). The eight independent lists did not belong to any of the established organisations and each mainly ran in one constituency only.

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6. We distinguished between Sami parties and lists that were formed for and among Sami citizens and did not put up candidates for the Norwegian Parliament, and Norwegian parties that put up candidates for both elections.

7. At the 2009 elections, the Sami Parliament allocated NOK 2 million for campaigns, which was divided equally between the 54 electoral lists. The lists had to be approved by the electoral boards in order to receive grants.

8. We use the official Sami titles of the parties for the Sami parties, and the official English titles for Norwegian. In the case where an official English title exists, e.g. as for NSR, it is used here.

The Norwegian Saami Association (NSR) and the Labour Party (AP), since the first election in 1989, have returned the two largest groups to the Sámediggi. Thus, the Sámediggi has a kind of two-party system<sup>9</sup>. However, smaller lists have always gained some representation. The 2009 election did not change the positions of the two dominant parties, although their support was somewhat weakened and their numbers of elected representatives were reduced compared to the election four years earlier. Out of the 39 seats in the Sami Parliament, NSR won 13 (two in co-operation with Sámeálbmot Bellodat) and the Labour Party (AP) returned 14 members of the Sámediggi. The NSR obtained 21 % and AP 26.8 % of the votes, confirming their solid bases among Sami voters. More surprising were the declared «winners» in the 2009 election, namely a new Sami party, Árja, and the Norwegian Progress Party (Frp), each returning three representatives. Árja challenged the dominance of the NSR with a focus on traditional Sami values and won 10 % of the votes. The right-wing Frp had participated in 2005 without success. In 2009, the party campaigned in the Sámediggi election with one main slogan, abolishment of the Sámediggi, and was supported by 7.8 % of the Sami voters.

## Expectations about the media and election campaigns

While Norwegian Parliamentary election campaigns are covered extensively by national newspapers and television, with frequent appearances of the party leaders<sup>10</sup>, the Sámediggi election in 2009 was not blessed with anywhere near the same amount of attention. The Sami candidates seldom appeared on nationwide television, radio or newspapers. Despite this fact, different media to varying degrees covered the Sámediggi election campaign. Norway has a highly decentralized newspaper structure consisting of a few national newspapers and about 200 regional and local newspapers<sup>11</sup>. The two major television stations, *NRK* and *TV2*, had a few broadcasts, as did *NRK*'s national and regional radio programmes and sometimes other local radio stations. All the established media have online editions too. In addition, social networking sites, websites and social media like blogs, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube* were used in the election campaign. In the analysis below, we have concentrated on regional, local and Sami newspapers, both for reasons of capacity and because these media were among the voters' main sources of information about elections, local as well as Sami. Previous studies showed that regional and local newspapers and Sami broadcasting were the main sources of information

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9. Gaski 2008.

10. Aardal, Krogstad & Narud 2004; Allern 2011; Karlsen 2011b.

11. Høst 2011.

for Sami citizens, along with family and friends<sup>12</sup>. A survey among Sami voters after the 2009 Sámediggi election confirmed that local and regional newspapers, NRK Sápmi and discussions remained important. The two Sami newspapers Ságat and Ávvir were indeed less important than most Norwegian media<sup>13</sup>.

The media would be expected to play several roles in the Sami election campaigns, among them channels and intermediaries for different political stances; arenas for political debate; agenda-setters; and critical «watchdogs» confronting politicians with their arguments. They were likely to influence what was perceived as important and were gatekeepers, deciding which views and voices were to be heard, and as such they can be regarded as independent actors with their own values and interests. Because there was no previous research on Sámediggi election campaigns, we drew on knowledge about the media coverage of municipal, county and general election campaigns to support our assumptions about the coverage of the 2009 Sami electoral campaign. We assumed that a separate Sami political public sphere existed in its own right and not only as a subcategory of the national political sphere. Further, we expected that the general election campaign affected the Sami public debate in the same way as Jacobsen and Skomedal<sup>14</sup> pointed out: National issues and national candidates were part of the local and regional coverage of the elections. In the same way that local and regional politics are integral parts of national politics, Sami politics will also be part of local, regional and national political discourses. Accordingly, we assumed that the Sámediggi election campaign received roughly the same degree and type of coverage as the local campaigns of the candidates running for seats in the Norwegian Parliament. In the constituencies, local and regional media cover the Norwegian Parliament election campaign with a focus on the local and regional candidates. Local and regional newspapers are key arenas for local, regional and parliamentary politicians engaged in an election campaign in their own constituency, alongside local and regional broadcasts by the national broadcasting company NRK<sup>15</sup>. In some respects the Sámediggi election is quite similar to local elections, and was probably treated as such by the media too. Consequently, we assumed that Norwegian local media covered the Sámediggi election campaign in those areas where the Sami population traditionally has been visible, and that Sami media covered the election campaign across the constituencies.

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12. Skogerbø 2003.

13. Karlsen 2011a p. 264.

14. Jacobsen & Skomedal 2008.

15. Ervik 2009; Hansen 2008; Karlsen & Skogerbø 2010; Skogerbø 2011.

## Expectations about the media and minorities

One of the clearest findings from Nordic and international research is that journalism on minorities is not routinised in the majority media<sup>16</sup>. Studies from Finland and Norway show that the Sami minority is marginalized in the majority media, and that the coverage often pertains to either conflicts or human interest. In a study of the coverage of Sami affairs in the Norwegian media, for example, Skogerbø<sup>17</sup> found that there were significant geographical differences in the scope of Sami issues reported in Norwegian media, with a clear division between media located within and outside Finnmark, the county that houses most Sami voters. Finnmark is home to many of the central Sami institutions and media, and is the geographical area where Sami claim rights over land and water to some extent have been recognised through the Finnmark Act<sup>18</sup>.

We expected that the differences between Finnmark and other Sami areas still existed and that they would apply to media coverage of the election. First, that *there would be quantitative differences in the number of items related to the Sámediggi election campaign in media located within and outside of Finnmark*. According to our assumptions, local newspapers in Finnmark were likely to cover both the Norwegian Parliamentary election campaign and the Sámediggi election campaign. Voters in constituencies outside Finnmark would probably have a harder time finding information about the Sámediggi election and it would be equally difficult for Sami parties and candidates to get access to local and regional media.

Looking at how minority media cover their target groups, we often find a sizeable gap between the aspirations minority media have for their own activities and the resources available to them. This is less true for the Sami media in Norway, however, which receive earmarked funding through subsidies to newspapers and licence fees. Norway's public broadcasting company NRK has a Sami branch, *NRK Sápmi*. The Sami media are multidimensional and include all types of content: news, culture, sport, features, content aimed at children and young people, etc.<sup>19</sup>. In 2009, two Sami newspapers, *Sáogat*, in Norwegian and *Ávvir* in Northern Sami, were published five days a week. In addition, *NRK Sápmi* produced Sami-language radio and television programmes. Television news and other Sami-language programmes were subtitled in Norwegian, and *NRK Sápmi* also published news and covered the Sámediggi election in Norwegian on their website. Drawing on previous research on minority media our second assumption was that *Sami media*

16. Browne 1996; Cottle 2000; Eide & Simonsen 2007; Ross & Playdon 2001.

17. Skogerbø 2000.

18. 2005.

19. Skogerbø 2001.



would cover the Sámediggi election more extensively than the Norwegian media. This may be expressed both quantitatively, in terms of the fact that there were more newspaper items reported in the Sami media than in the Norwegian media, and qualitatively, in terms of greater breadth and nuance in the views and positions reported. We knew little about the differences between the Sami media. Skogerbø<sup>20</sup> pointed out that the Sami newspapers showed characteristics typical of local newspapers and had problems covering and reaching the entire Sami media audience as a whole. A major challenge facing the Sami media is that their readers are scattered and speak different languages. Both the vast area and the language barriers make it difficult for Sami newspapers to reach a majority of Sami voters<sup>21</sup>.

## Methods and data

The data collection was delimited to media coverage of the last month, the «short» election campaign<sup>22</sup> of the 2009 Sámediggi election campaign, 15 August to 14 September 2009. It should be noted that people could pre-vote in the Sámediggi election from the beginning of July. Prior to the 2009 election, the electoral system for the Sámediggi election was changed such that voters in municipalities with fewer than 30 Sami on the electoral roll had to vote in advance. The Sámediggi election campaign was therefore probably conducted over a longer period of time than just the last month before the election.

Our analysis covered 11 regional or local newspapers and two Sami newspapers. They differed considerably concerning geographical areas of coverage and number of editions per week. Taken together, the newspapers covered the Sami constituencies to a greater or lesser degree, with the exception of the southernmost constituency, Lulli-Norga. In this constituency, which covered 13 Norwegian counties, no traditional Sami settlements and housed a large number of local media, it was impossible to identify any individual media that could be expected to focus on the Sámediggi election campaign.

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20. Skogerbø 2000.

21. Skogerbø 2000.

22. Narud & Waldahl 2004.

Our sample included eight regional and local newspapers published outside Finnmark.<sup>23</sup> From Finnmark, we included three local and regional newspapers<sup>24</sup> and the two Sami newspapers, *Ságat*<sup>25</sup> and *Ávvir*.<sup>26</sup> *Ávvir* had most of its subscribers in five municipalities in Ávjovári and Nuortaguovllu constituencies, where large shares of the inhabitants were Sami speakers. *Ságat* primarily covered the same five municipalities, but had offices in all seven constituencies too. The Sami newspapers, however, had a significantly smaller circulation than the Norwegian newspapers, although their geographical coverage area supposedly was significantly larger. The medium most likely to reach many voters was *NRK Sápmi*, through its website and multilingual television news subtitled in Norwegian or Sami. *NRK Sápmi* was excluded from this study for reasons of capacity, although both radio and television news reports were likely to be important sources of information for Sami voters<sup>27</sup>.

The sample was restricted to newspaper items that explicitly mentioned the Sámediggi election, and did not include newspaper items about other aspects of Sami politics that were raised in the Norwegian parliamentary election campaign. All the newspapers' printed editions were reviewed, with the exception of one newspaper that was analysed in the fulltext pdf-version in the electronic newspaper archives *A-tekst*. Altogether, we analysed 726 items in 13 newspapers. Included in this number were advertisements and letters to the editor, a total of 403. These items were analysed separately. Concerning reliability and validity, the sampling was done as meticulously as possible, and no systematic errors were found. The coding of items was done according to rather simple classifications of media, types of items, main actors and identification of the main issues in the election cam-

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23. *Arbeidets rett* (Áarjel-Saepmie), three-day newspaper, circulation: 8,148; *Adresseavisen* (Áarjel-Saepmie), daily newspaper, circulation: 73,434; *Trønder-Avisa* (Áarjel-Saepmie), daily newspaper, circulation: 22,416; *Avisa Nordland* (Viesttarmeara), daily newspaper, circulation: 22,014; *Fremover* (Viesttarmeara), daily newspaper, circulation: 7,980; *Harstad Tidende* (Viesttarmeara), daily newspaper, circulation: 12,072; *Framtid i nord* (Gaisi), four-day newspaper, 4922; *Nordlys* (Gaisi), daily newspaper, circulation: 24,458. These circulation figures are from Aviskatalogen <http://www.aviskatalogen.no/jsf/home/index.jsf>, accessed on 16 March 2011.
  24. *Finnmark Dagblad* (Davviguovlu), daily newspaper, circulation: 7,713; *Altaposten* (Davviguovlu) daily newspaper, circulation: 5,117, *Finnmarken* (Nuorttaguovlu), daily newspaper, circulation: 6,359. These circulation figures are from Aviskatalogen <http://www.aviskatalogen.no/jsf/home/index.jsf>, accessed on 16 March 2011.
  25. According to the Association of Local Newspapers on Norway's website <http://www.lla.no/medlemsaviser/avis.cfm>. *Ságat* was not a member of the Norwegian Media Businesses' Association and therefore not listed on the Aviskatalogen website.
  26. The two Sami newspapers were both issued in Ávjovári. *Ságat*, issued five days per week, circulation 2,728. *Ávvir*, issued five days per week, circulation 1,027 in 2009.
  27. Josefsen & Skogerbø 2011; Karlsen 2011a.

paign, as they were reported by the sampled media. The items were coded and analysed using the statistics software SPSS and relatively simple and descriptive statistical analyses were carried out.

## The Sámediggi election in the newspapers

As Figure 2 shows, the Sami newspapers indisputably provided the most comprehensive coverage of the Sámediggi election. Of the 726 newspaper items that mentioned the election, *Ságat* had 242 items, while *Ávvir* had 128. None of the Norwegian newspapers published equally much about the Sámediggi election. The three newspapers in Finnmark carried more items about the election than newspapers outside Finnmark. The latter group had relatively few items, from 3 to 39 about the Sámediggi election campaign, while we found between 51 and 81 items in the Finnmark newspapers. Figure 2 shows that our assumptions about differences in the election coverage were supported, and that differences between Sami and Norwegian media were even larger than we expected.

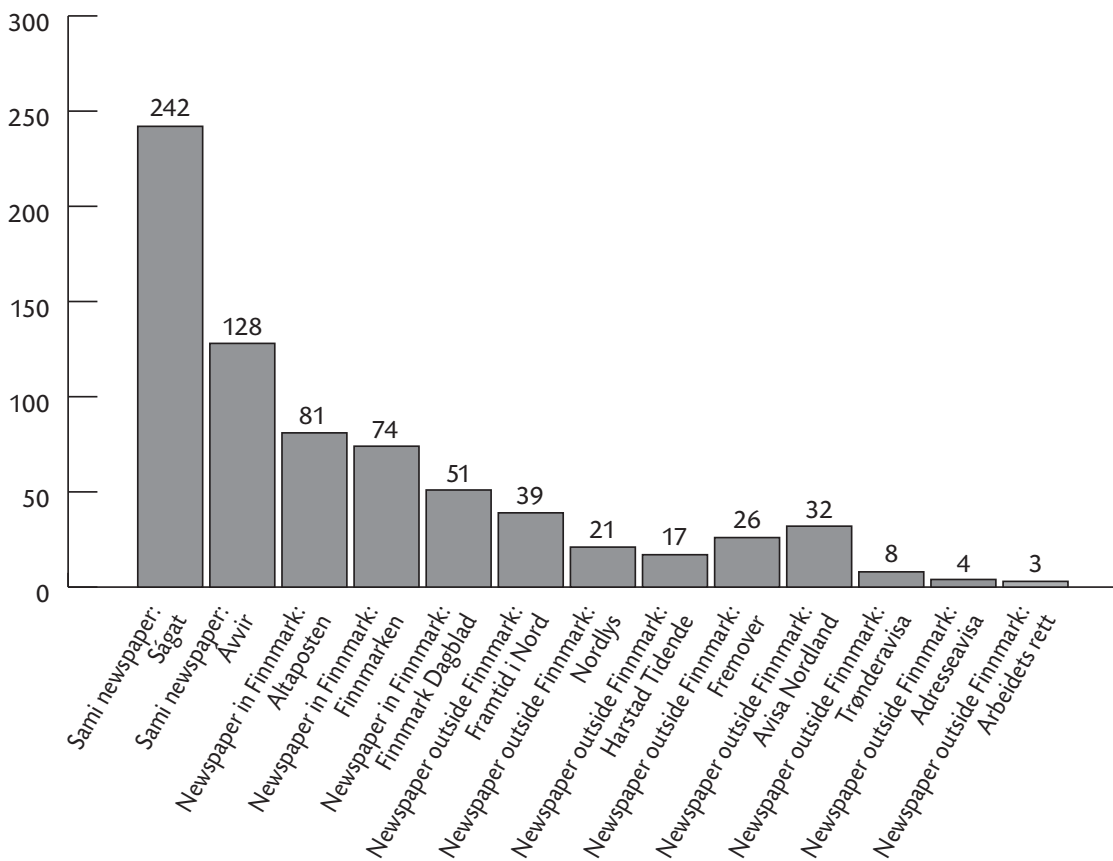


Figure 2: Number of newspaper items about the Sámediggi election, 15 August to 14 September 2009. N=726.

When we excluded advertisements (N=119) and letters to the editors (N=284), the picture changed somewhat, as figure 3 shows. Editorial items made up less than half of the sample, indicating that the newspapers carried a large number of letters to the editor and were indeed open to debate and exchange of opinions among voters and candidates.

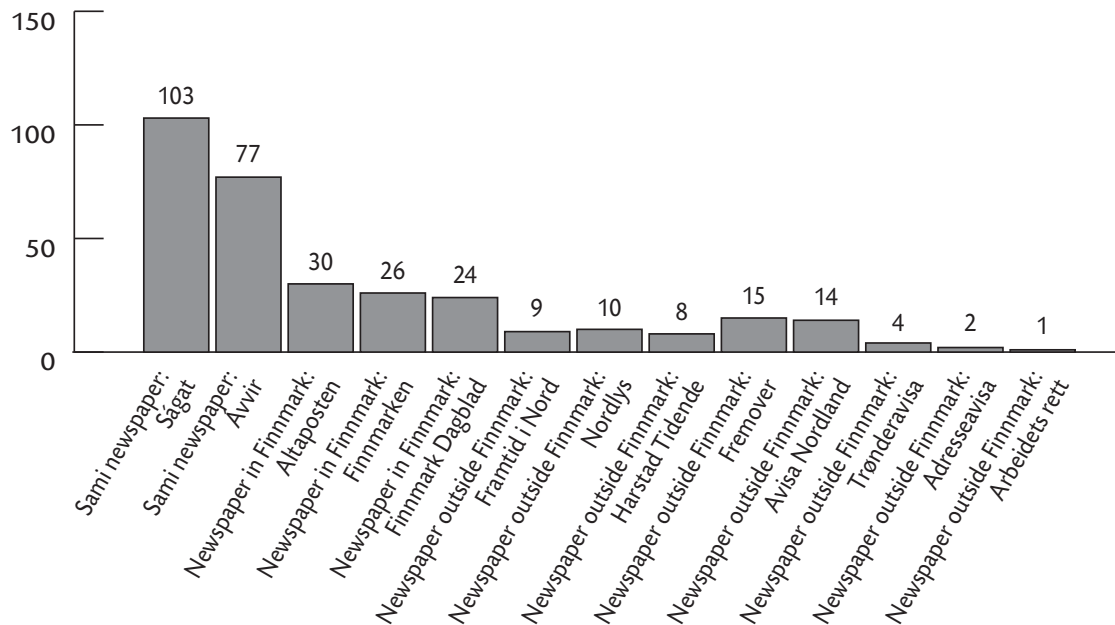


Figure 3: Numbers of editorial items in the sample of newspapers in the period of 15 August to 14. September 2009. N=323.

Unfortunately we cannot say whether media coverage of Sámediggi elections has changed over time, as there are no comparable previous studies. Our findings indicate only that the Sámediggi election 2009 did not attract much journalistic attention outside Finnmark. Local newspapers seem to have given less priority to matters pertaining to the Sámediggi and Sami politics than to local issues. It is likely that the Sámediggi election campaign was overshadowed by the parallel General Election campaign, featuring well-known national politicians, both among the local candidates and when top politicians campaigned nationwide. In contrast, Sámediggi candidates would rarely be well-known even in their own constituency, and Sami political issues were only to varying degrees relevant to voters outside Finnmark. We believe that the Sámediggi election campaign was less intense than the General Election campaign and for that reason, too, generated fewer media stories.

## Different types of media items

For candidates and parties, the election campaign is about being visible to the voters, and getting media coverage is the most effective way of achieving visibility simultaneously for many voters across distances. So how was the Sámediggi campaign covered by the media? The sheer number of items only indicates that the Sámediggi election was visible in some form or other. Table 1 shows that the newspapers mainly covered the election in news stories (210) and notices (56). There were relatively few front page stories about the Sámediggi election (17), slightly more editorials (24), and few other articles (opinion articles, culture, etc) (16). The Sami parties and candidates were present in the newspapers in all types of editorial items. In table 1 we have separated the coverage into three media groups; the Sami newspapers, the Norwegian local newspapers issued in Finnmark, and newspapers issued in other Sami constituencies.

**Table 1:** Distribution of the type of item according to newspaper for the period 15 August to 15 September 2009. Absolute figures.

	News	Front page	Notice	Editorial	Other	Total
Sami newspapers						
Sáгат	66	4	20	8	5	103
Ávvir	51	4	6	9	7	77
Newspapers in Finnmark:						
Altaposten	25	1	1	2	1	30
Finnmarken	13	4	9			26
Finnmark Dagblad	19	1	2	2		24
Newspapers outside Finnmark:						
Framtid i Nord	6	1	2			9
Nordlys	6		2	1	1	10
Harstad Tidende	4		1	1	2	8
Fremover	11		3	1		15
Avisa Nordland	6		8			14
Trønder-Avisa	1	1	2			4
Adresseavisa	2					2
Arbeidets rett		1				1
Total	210	17	56	24	16	323

Assuming that news and opinion items are the most important for making Sami politics, parties and candidates visible to the voters, we found that *Ságat* and *Ávvir* undoubtedly emerged as the main stages for Sami politics (Table 1). Of a total of 24 editorials on the election, *Ságat* published eight and *Ávvir* nine; and of a total of 16 other items, like editorial opinions and cultural items, *Ságat* published five and *Ávvir* seven. *Ságat* also had the most news stories about the election: almost one-third of the news stories in our sample were in this newspaper. *Ávvir* was responsible for a quarter of the news stories published in the 13 newspapers. We can therefore conclude that there *was a distinct Sami public space for the Sámediggi election campaign that was not linguistically delimited, rather it was constituted by both Ságat and Ávvir.*

The public space was not delimited to the Sami newspapers. Local Norwegian newspapers also deemed the Sámediggi election newsworthy and interesting enough for their readers to cross the editorial threshold. The newspapers in Finnmark published 57 news items about the election, while newspapers outside Finnmark taken together had over 17 % of the total news stories. The number of newspaper items per constituency varied according to our expectations. The most items came from Ávjovári constituency, home to all the presidential candidates and most Sami institutions, and the fewest items from Åarjel-Saepmie. It is interesting to note that of the 17 front-page stories in our sample, nine were from Norwegian newspapers and two from Norwegian local newspapers in Åarjel-Saepmie constituency, suggesting that sometimes the Sámediggi election was newsworthy enough to enter the top local media agenda, even in areas where coverage of the election was marginal (table 2).

Table 2 confirms that the newspapers reached voters in different constituencies, but the amount of news and other items in the newspapers varied considerably. The Norwegian local and regional newspapers covered the Sámediggi election as a local issue: e.g. *Finnmarken* published issues concerning Nuortaguovllu constituency, *Altaposten* primarily focused on Davveguovlu and to some extent Ávjovári constituencies, and *Finnmark Dagblad* covered both Davveguovlu and Ávjovári constituencies. Outside Finnmark we found the same pattern, reflecting that the newspapers addressed a local or regional audience. Table 2 shows how the local and regional newspapers published items about the Sámediggi election from their own districts. There were rather large variations in the amount of attention given to the Sámediggi election by each newspaper, revealing a pattern that the farther south in Sápmi, the fewer items we found per newspaper. Table 2 thus supports our hypotheses that newspapers in Finnmark covered the election most extensively, and, further, that local media indeed worked as an arena for Sami candidates, too.

Table 2: Distribution of the constituencies according to newspaper for the period 15 August to 15 September 2009. Absolute figures.

	No specific constituency	Nuortaguovlu	Ávjavári	Davveguovlu	Gáiseguovlu	Viesttarmeara	Áarjel-Saepmie	Lulli-Norga	Total
Sami newspapers:									
Sáгат	31	12	22	7	6	13	2	10	103
Ávvir	17	14	24	3	8	4	2	5	77
Newspapers in Finnmark:									
Altaposten	9	1	7	13					30
Finnmarken	7	17	2						26
Finnmark Dagblad	11	1	7	4	1				24
Newspapers outside Finnmark:									
Framtid i Nord				2	7				9
Nordlys	9				1				10
Fremover	1					14			15
Harstad Tidende	1					7			8
Avisa Nordland	2					12			14
Trønder-Avisa	2						2		4
Adresseavisa	1						1		2
Arbeidets rett							1		1
Total	91	45	62	29	23	50	8	15	323

Table 2 further demonstrates that the Sami newspapers covered all constituencies to some degree. Not unexpected, Áarjel-Saepmie was mentioned only in a few newspaper items, in Norwegian as well as Sami newspapers. Still, the two Sami newspapers had items from all constituencies. Table 2 reinforces the impression that the Sami newspapers assumed responsibility as news channels and arenas for public debate for Sami citizens, measured in the number of newspaper items about the Sámediggi election and their geographical diversity. To sum up, two important findings should be highlighted. First, that the Sami newspapers constituted a Sami public space that covered, although with unequal force and focus, all Sami constituencies. Second, that the Sámediggi election campaign attracted journalistic attention from Norwegian newspapers. The amount and intensity of the coverage by these media was dependent on the visibility and relevance of Sami voters and

issues to the local audiences. As the Sami population is smaller and more scattered in the southern parts of Sápmi, so was the media coverage.

## Representation of the parties in the media

Despite the fact that the Sámediggi election was small in terms of the number of voters, there were many different political parties and lists of candidates. Altogether 19 parties, organisations and independent lists had candidates running for election. However, the number of newspaper items that referred to each party or list varied enormously, as can be seen in figure 4. In 119 of the 323 newspaper items it was not possible to identify one single party or any party, whereas 204 items focused on one particular party or list.

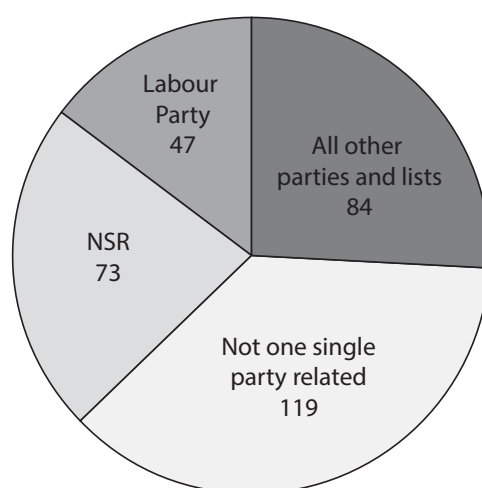


Figure 4: Distribution of media coverage according to the parties. N=323.

Unsurprisingly, figure 4 shows that the Norwegian Saami Association (NSR) and the Labour Party (AP) featured in 37 % of all items. Since 1989 these two parties have returned the two largest party groups to the Sámediggi. NSR held the Presidency from 1989–2007, whereas AP took over the leadership after a parliamentary crisis in the Sámediggi and negotiated continued Presidency after the 2009 election, in coalition with Árja and other small parties. Accordingly, the two parties had many incumbent candidates with experience in conducting election campaigns. They had also, through many years of political activity in the Sámediggi, developed consistent policies on most salient issues. They had candidates standing for election in all constituencies, and they were generally more experienced than candidates running for small parties and independent lists.

There were rather striking differences between the parties concerning the coverage they received in the press. The similarity between the Labour Party (AP)



and the Norwegian Saami Association (NSR) stood out. Although NSR was the main actor in slightly more news items than AP (figure 3), the two parties received more journalistic attention than all the other lists, organisations and parties in the campaign taken together. Table 3 shows the distribution of media attention that the parties received, categorised after type of item.

**Table 3: Distribution of types of newspaper items according to coverage of political parties and lists. Absolute figures.**

	News	Front page	Notice	Editorial	Other	Total
Not only one party	65	4	28	17	5	119
NSR (Norwegian Sami Association)	47	4	12	1	9	73
AP (Norwegian Labour Party)	41	2	3	1		47
Árja, Sami party	13	2	2	1	1	19
Frp (Norwegian Progress Party)	4		2	1	1	8
Lists/parties that appeared in newspaper items and <i>won</i> mandates in the election in autumn 2009:						
4 Sami parties / lists <sup>1</sup>	4	2	1	1		8
1 Norwegian Party <sup>2</sup>	5			1		6
Other lists/parties that appeared in newspaper items and <i>did not win</i> mandates in the election in autumn 2009:						
6 Sami parties / lists <sup>3</sup>	19	2	6			27
4 Norwegian Parties <sup>4</sup>	12	1	2	1		16
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>323</b>

1 Independent Sami lists: The Nomadic Sami List, Nordkalottfolket, Sami living in southern Norway, Áarjel-samieh gielh.

2 Norwegian party: Høyre (The Conservative Party).

3 Sami individual lists / parties: Sjaddo, SFF (Sami League of Nations), SfP (Sami People's Party), Ofelaš, Fellelista shared list, Non-nomadic Sami list.

4 SV (Socialist Left Party), V (Liberal Party), Krf (Christian Democratic Party), SP (Centre Party).

Table 3 reveals differences between the political parties and groups of parties in relation to their success in the election. NSR and AP won most mandates in 2009, as they had done in previous elections. Árja and the Progress Party (Frp) won three mandates each in the 2009 elections and were, as mentioned above, hailed as the winners of the election. These four parties are therefore singled out in the analysis in order to get a picture of the media coverage. Other organisations, parties and

lists were included in the other four categories in table 3. They have been categorised as «Norwegian parties» and «Sami lists» as well as according to whether they received a mandate in the election or not. Table 3 shows a marked difference in media coverage between the four parties at the top of the table and the smaller lists that returned representatives to the Sámediggi. Looking at news articles only, 88 of a total of 210 news articles focused either on NSR or AP. Árja came third with 13 news items, whereas only four news articles dealt exclusively with Frp. For other parties, coverage varied between none and eight news items. In other words there were substantial barriers for media coverage for candidates from other than the two dominant political parties, to the degree that one may wonder how they managed to reach their voters at all. None of the parties got many front pages but NSR topped the list with four. There were few editorials on the political parties as well. Seventeen editorials, 65 news items and 28 notices concerned the Sámediggi election, without reference to one party exclusively. Our findings have so far shown that the two dominant parties, the Labour Party (AP) and the Norwegian Saami Association (NSR), obtained most of the media attention and generated most editorial coverage.

In order to take a closer look at this finding, we selected the four parties that obtained most media coverage and looked at the differences between coverage in the newspapers issued in Finnmark (table 4).

**Table 4: Number of newspaper items (news, notices, editorials and opinion) for four parties. Absolute figures.**

	Ságat	Ávvir	Alta- posten	Finnmark Dagblad	Finn- marken	Total
Not one party	42	26	6	11	10	95
NSR	28	17	6	3	5	59
AP	12	10	5	5	4	36
Árja	10	5	2	1	0	18
Frp	1	3	2	0	1	7
Total	93	61	21	20	20	215

Table 4 demonstrates that the newspapers published many articles that either concerned the Sámediggi election in general or dealt with more than one party. *Ságat* had most such articles. In articles where only one party was identified, the Labour Party (AP) and the Norwegian Saami Association (NSR) attracted similar attention from the Norwegian newspapers, whereas NSR was the most popular party in the Sami newspapers. Frp ran for election in all Sami constituencies, but the

party attracted little media coverage compared to all the other three parties, including Árja. The fact that NSR obtained more editorial coverage in *Sáogat* than in *Ávvir* has several explanations, among them that the layout and number of news items and notices generally is much higher in *Sáogat* than in *Ávvir*. Other explanations suggest both that the party was one of the two main contestants, but also that the party may have directed its communicative activities towards the Sami media newspapers in order to reach the voters, too. More surprising is the fact that the Labour Party and Árja received similar coverage in *Sáogat*. Considering the large difference in positions between the parties, AP received less and Árja more attention than might be expected. One reason for the equal coverage may have been that the leader of Árja was regarded as a potential presidential candidate in a coalition leadership of the Sámediggi. Considering coverage in the Norwegian newspapers, the figures are too small to allow definite conclusions, but they indicate that Sami and Norwegian parties were covered on equal terms in Sami and Norwegian media.

Some Sámediggi politicians have claimed that they do not get editorial coverage in the media. Our findings support this complaint: Small parties and lists were only rarely mentioned in news articles, in Sami as well as Norwegian media. The Labour Party (AP) and the Norwegian Saami Association (NSR) dominated news coverage of the parties, and there was far less mention of other parties. It is conceivable that politicians and parties wrote letters to the editor as a means of compensating for their inability to get other forms of media attention. Below we will therefore investigate letters to the editor as an indicator of political parties' and lists' efforts to appear in the media.

### **Letters to the editor – a channel for Sami candidates?**

Small parties and lists, however, were not very noticeable in letters to the editors, although some candidates from minor parties were active. On this arena, too, NSR and AP dominated. In general, letters to the editor was a much used channel into the newspaper columns, and the volume of letters was nearly as high as the number of journalistic items, 284 in all.

Table 5: Parties'/candidates' letters to the editors in newspapers. Absolute figures.

	Not only one party	NSR	Ap	Árja	Frp	Norwegian parties who got mandates	Norwegian parties who did not get mandates	Sami lists who got mandates	Sami lists who did not get mandates	Total
Sami newspapers:										
Ságat	16	23	23	6	3	4	14	3	12	104
Ávvir	1	15	4	5	1	2	4		2	34
Newspapers in Finnmark:										
Altaposten	4	9	8	1	3	1	7	5		38
Finnmarken	3	8	9	1	3	1			9	34
Finnmark Dagblad	3	1	6	1	2		2	1	1	17
Newspapers outside Finnmark:										
Framtid i Nord		5	6		1	1	8			21
Nordlys	3	2	3		1		2			11
Harstad Tidende		1	2							3
Fremover		2					1			3
Avisa Nordland		3	5				3			11
Trønder-Avisa			2				2			4
Adresseavisa		2								2
Arbeidets rett		1	1							2
Total	30	72	69	14	14	9	43	9	24	284

Table 5 confirms that there were many letters to the editor, indicating that this was an important communication channel for parties and candidates. Candidates from NSR and AP topped the list of contributors and had authored half of all letters to the editor. Virtually all parties and lists produced letters, as only four individual lists or small parties were not represented among the authors. Table 5 further shows that some lists and parties that did not succeed in the election had

produced more letters to the editor than parties that won a mandate. An example is the Centre Party (SP), which neither attracted journalistic attention nor won mandates. SP was responsible for 33 letters to the editor and seems to have used letters as an alternative channel to attract attention from the voters. The many letters to the editor, however, did not generate news about the party. In most constituencies it was unlikely that SP would win mandates, an observation that probably reduced the Party's newsworthiness considerably. As such, SP was unable to compete with other parties for attention, despite the activity of the candidates. The party's candidates wrote far more letters than for instance the more successful Progress Party (Frp) and Árja.

Obviously we cannot assess whether it was easy or difficult for the parties to get letters to the editor published, as we do not know how many letters the candidates sent to the newspapers. Letters to the editor is a well-known and popular form of communication for politicians, especially in election campaigns. They are also popular among readers and constitute a direct channel between politicians and voters. NSR, AP and SP used this channel actively, whereas it appears that other parties and lists did not use it extensively.

## Political advertisements

In general, advertising in political campaigns is defined as communication through a medium, paid for by an identifiable sender, for the purpose of increasing support for political parties or ideas<sup>28</sup>. In the Sámediggi election, newspaper advertising was used to a varying degree by the parties and lists, as illustrated in table 6.

Neither the Norwegian Saami Association (NSR) nor Árja prioritised newspaper advertising. They had only two newspaper advertisements each. For NSR, this was probably an obvious strategic choice since the party could count on massive media coverage. Further, the party had its own election newspaper that was distributed to all the voters. For Árja, omitting advertising seemingly represented a larger risk, since the party was a newcomer challenging the established parties and could not count on attracting journalistic attention to the same degree. Other newcomers, such as single constituency lists Ofelaš and Sjaddo that did not advertise, were hardly mentioned in the news. The Labour Party (AP) and the Progress Party (Frp) each had nine advertisements. Two parties stand out for their advertising activity: The Sámeálbmot Bellodat (SfP) bought 17 and the Sámeálbmot lihttu (SAL) 34 advertisements. The two parties had a much higher share of advertisements than editorial items.

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28. Aalberg & Saur 2007 p. 54.

Table 6: Parties' advertising in the newspapers

	Not only one party	NSR	Labour Party	Árja	Progress Party	Johtisápmelaččaid listtu <sup>1</sup>	Conservative Party <sup>2</sup>	SÁL <sup>3</sup>	Ofelaš <sup>3</sup>	Oktasašlista <sup>3</sup>	SaB <sup>3</sup>	Centre Party <sup>4</sup>	Socialist Party <sup>4</sup>	Total
Sami newspapers														3
Sáгат	3		2	1	6		2	4		2	9	6		35
Ávvir	2	1	2	1		2	1				8			17
Newspapers in Finnmark:														
Altaposten	1		2		1		1	1					7	13
Finnmarken	2						1	8	1	2				14
Finnmark Dagblad	1	1	2		1			5						10
Newspapers outside Finnmark:														
Framtid i Nord	1		1		1		1	1				4		9
Harstad Tidende								6						6
Fremover							1	7						8
Avisa Nordland	4						1	2						7
Total	14	2	9	2	9	2	8	34	1	4	17	10	7	119

1 Sami list/party which won mandate.

2 Norwegian Party which won mandate.

3 Sami list/party which did not win mandate.

4 Norwegian Party which did not win mandate

Sámeálbmot Lihttu (SAL) is a Sami interest organisation founded in 1993 and since then has had candidates running in every Sámediggi election. Until 2005, SAL returned two or three members to the Sámediggi, but has not been represented afterwards, although it had lists in most constituencies. In the 2009 election, SAL had candidates running for seats in six constituencies. Despite the ability to mobilize candidates, the party did not attract much media attention. Few news items (12) concerned the party, and the candidates wrote only eight letters to the editor.

The Sámeálbmot Bellodat (SáB) had one party list and cooperated on a shared list with NSR in two constituencies. This party had 17 advertisements, but was in focus in only three news items and its candidates signed eight letters to the editor. We have not investigated the reasons, but it is conceivable that the figures here reflect that these organisations lacked resources and expertise and relied on advertising as a substitute for other campaign efforts. The Sámeálbmot Lihttu (SAL) and the Sámeálbmot Bellodat (SáB) used advertising the most, and the figures indicate that advertising was their main communication strategy, as opposed to advertising being a supplement to other forms of media coverage. This may also be seen as confirmation that these parties were unable to attract journalistic attention.

## Discussion and conclusions

Returning to our main research question – *Did Sami voters have a public space in the media where Sami politics could be discussed ahead of the Sámediggi elections in 2009* – our findings documented the existence of a separate public space for Sami politics and debate. The two Sami newspapers provided Sami voters with news, information and arenas for debate, discussion and presentation of the alternatives open at the election. In other words, they assumed responsibility for covering the Sami election campaign, both quantitatively and geographically. Norwegian local and regional newspapers had substantial coverage, too, but compared to *Ságat* and *Ávvir* it was limited, even in Finnmark. *Ságat* carried far more news stories and letters to the editor on the Sami election, with *Ávvir* as a clear number two, than any of the Norwegian media. Assuming that debates take place on the news and opinion pages and in letters to the editor, the two Sami newspapers undoubtedly emerge as the main arenas for Sami political debate.

Nevertheless, Norwegian local and regional newspapers in Finnmark and the northernmost Sami constituencies covered the Sami election campaign quite extensively. The situation changed as we shifted focus southwards in Sápmi, the traditional Sami settlement area. The farther south, the less the newspapers, both Norwegian and Sami, wrote about the Sámediggi election campaign. These findings led us to conclude that there were indeed unequal communicative conditions for Sami voters, linked to language and geography. Sami voters in the north had a bilingual public space, as both Sami and Norwegian newspapers covered the election. Voters south of Gaisi had less chance for findings news and debate about the political alternatives in the newspapers, and if so, they would most likely be in Norwegian. *Ávvir* published a few items from these constituencies in Northern Sami, but none in Julev or Áarjel Sami. The public spaces open to Sami voters were, in other words, quite abundant in the north and nearly absent in the south. This

situation provided Sami voters with quite different conditions for obtaining information and participating in publicly mediated debates. Sami politicians had consequently fewer chances for attracting attention and visibility to their campaigns.

One explanation for these differences is quite obvious. The number of Sami voters is small, and the further south, the fewer and more scattered the voters. Whereas Sami people and issues are an inherent part of society and politics in North Norway, they are much less visible in the south. As such, voters in the southern Sami constituencies were marginalized both in Norwegian and Sami newspapers, as they were few, far away from central Sami areas, and generated less news. The speakers of Julev and Åarjel Sami are also small minorities within the Sami population in these areas. Regarded as such, the fact that the Sami election generated two front pages in Norwegian newspapers in Åarjel-Saepmie was more unexpected than the relatively sparse coverage of the election in Gaisi. Considering our findings, it was particularly difficult for Sami politicians running for election in the southernmost constituencies to capture media coverage. One solution for attracting attention was probably to write letters to the editor, but it is also likely that the election campaign was run in other ways. If we look at the total coverage of the election campaign in Åarjel-Saepmie, it was made up of only 11 items in the three local newspapers we analysed, including letters to the editor. It goes without saying that the candidates must use other forms of communication to reach their voters. When numbers are small and the voters are scattered, it is probably equally effective to communicate with individuals directly and through family, friends and acquaintances. From other studies we know that discussions and family, friends, and acquaintances were also important sources of information about political issues in the Sami community<sup>29</sup>. From a democratic perspective, however, it is problematic if there is no public political debate in the public domain that is accessible to the majority of the voters.

The differences between north and south in Sápmi can also be explained in terms of significance of issues. In the north, the number of conflicts and controversies over Sami politics is high and attracts much attention. In Finnmark, the institutionalisation of Sami rights, both linguistic and cultural, started more than two decades ago with the establishment of the Sámediggi. Sami land rights in Finnmark have been intensely discussed, debated and generated political activity for over 30 years. Sami political issues are, accordingly, an integral part of the local and regional discourses in newspapers in Finnmark, and coverage of the Sámediggi election campaign followed the same discursive structure. In the south, conflicts may be equally intense but as the number of Sami citizens

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29. Karlsen 2011a; Skogerbø 2003.



is low, they concern few people, are not necessarily integrated into local politics, and rarely hit the headlines. Sami constituencies are geographically larger in the south, both in terms of actual size and number of municipalities. The Sámediggi elections will thus be of less relevance to readers of local and regional newspapers in South Norway.

In conclusion, conditions for public Sami political communication were not equal for Sami politicians and voters. In the northernmost constituencies, both the Sami and the Norwegian newspapers in particular functioned as channels between Sami politicians and voters. In that sense, we found a clear and evident Sami public sphere. In the southern constituencies, the Sami public sphere was almost invisible. Reinforcing our findings of unequal coverage in the different constituencies are studies of which sources Sami voters depended on for information about the Sámediggi election<sup>30</sup>. Sami voters reported that their most important media sources were local and regional newspapers and NRK Sápmi and discussions. In another study, we found that NRK Sápmi's coverage of the election in the TV-news *Ođđasat* was relatively sparse and did not provide much space to the candidates and parties running for election<sup>31</sup>. About 30 % of Sami voters regarded *Ságat* as an important source of information, whereas *Ávvir* was important to only 14 %, less than any other source. These findings point to a dilemma for the Sami newspapers and the Sami politicians: The newspapers provided space for political communication, but Sami voters did not recognize it<sup>32</sup>. The political parties, lists and their candidates sought them out and used them quite intensively for debate, profiling and presentation of their views, but they still may have reached fewer voters in the Sami than in the Norwegian media. Most of the voters did not regard Sami newspapers as important, yet they were the only media where the political alternatives were clearly visible. This dilemma is inherent to the Sami public sphere and leaves both Sami political actors and Sami media with several strategic problems concerning how to reach Sami citizens in the future.

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30. Karlsen 2011a.

31. Josefsen & Skogerbø 2011.

32. Karlsen 2011a

### **Современная избирательная сфера для коренного населения? СМИ и избирательная кампания в Саамский парламент 2009 года**

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#### **Резюме**

В этой статье обсуждается освещение в СМИ норвежской избирательной кампании в Саамский парламент (Sámediggi) в 2009 г. Исследователи ставят вопрос: есть ли у саамских избирателей, которые рассеяны в обширном географическом пространстве, разделены на многочисленные языковые группы, общая избирательная сфера в СМИ, где они могли бы обсуждать кандидатуры саамских политиков перед выборами в Саамский парламент в 2009? Наши результаты показывают, что такая общая избирательная сфера существовала, но условия для коммуникации и свободного общения для саамских избирателей, зависящих от языка и географического расположения, были далеко не одинаковыми. Так, на Севере СМИ обеспечили двуязычность избирательной сферы, поскольку обозревателями выступали и саамские и норвежские газеты. На юге же избирателям предложили гораздо меньший объем новостей, и показ дебатов о выборах в Sámediggi был ущербнее, да и само освещение выборов, по всей вероятности, велось и будет продолжаться вестись на норвежском языке. Одно из объяснений этим различиям состоит в том, что количество саамов – избирателей довольно мало, и чем южнее, тем меньше и тем более разрозненно живет саамское население. Различия были также объяснены с точки зрения наличия и выраженности уровня проблем. Авторы отмечают, что уровень конфликтности и противоречий во внутренней политике выше по области Финнмарк, чем в других областях проживания саамского населения, и в целом по стране.

Ключевые слова: СМИ, Саами, Парламент, саамский парламент, выборы, Норвегия

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