HOW

A Functional Analysis of

POLITICAL

the Media's Role in Politics

ACTORS USE

Edited by Peter Van Aelst and Stefaan Walgrave

THE MEDIA
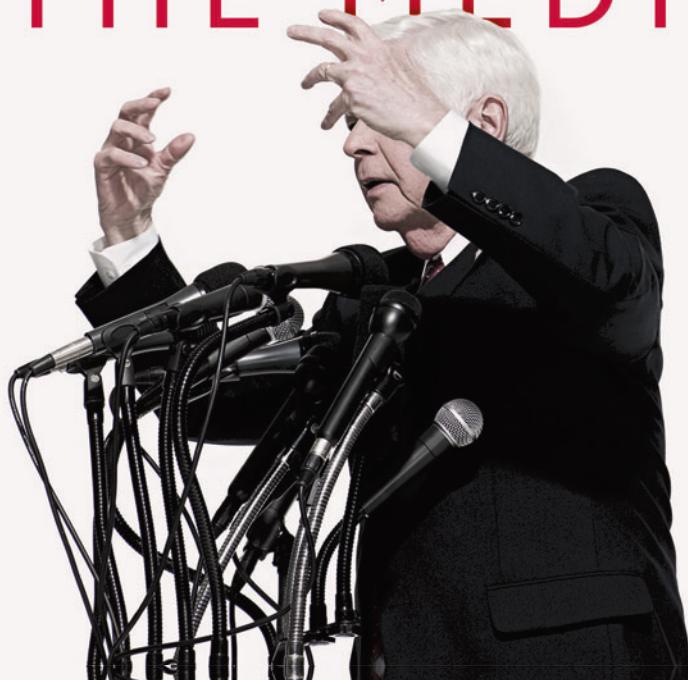
How Political Actors Use the Media

Peter Van Aelst · Stefaan Walgrave
Editors

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A Functional Analysis of the Media's Role in Politics

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Foreword: Political Actors and the Media

In terms of love–hate relationships, few may be more intense than that between political leaders and the journalists who cover their actions. Without the journalists, government leaders would find it harder to get their messages (and names) out to the general public. Other policy makers and advocates would not be able to raise their suspicions, critiques, and complaints about the direction of government policies, nor would they easily be able to present their alternative vision to the public for consideration at the next election. Clearly, politicians and policy professionals of all types depend on the media for both credit-claiming and for generating public concern about policies they feel have gone wrong. At the same time as political leaders rely on the media to get their stories out, so do journalists rely on people in and around government for the substance of their reporting. Journalists compete to be the first to report this or that change in policy, new government statistic, police or crime report, or even the weather, which typically comes from a government source. Most government officials are only too happy to provide the type of information needed for this type of routine media coverage of government actions. But journalists also need the disgruntled losers in the policy process; they need the stories, the complaints, the alternative proposals that were rejected, in a word, they need the combat and the struggle of politics to lure their readers in.

Like any love-hate relation, that between political actors and the media is complex and nuanced. In this book, Peter Van Aelst and Stefaan Walgrave bring together a stellar cast of authors who have each

delved deeply into the nuances of media-government relations in various countries, all based on strong empirical research projects, not just informal essays. The editors propose and the authors address the "information and arena" framework. This brings out collective focus on how the media constitute both an important source of information for those involved in the political world as well as an arena of public debate and discourse separate from, and not controlled by, particular political elites. Therefore, the editors force the authors to address the paradoxes and inconsistencies of media-government relations.

There can no democratic government without robust journalism. And yet governments robustly dislike the media. Political and government leaders are immensely advantaged in their relations with the press, and yet they are not fully in control. Journalists rely on their government sources for officially sanctioned information as well as leaks, unofficial information, and the "inside scoop" that makes their work possible; journalists have both a dependency and a power over their government colleagues. Journalists tend to believe that "bad news" is more interesting, newsworthy, or sells papers better than cheery press releases from government sources. And yet, given the immense advantages that official sources have in the control of information, many times journalists are completely dependent on the government for their content, and they can be manipulated. We only need to look at the initial stages of the US war in Iraq, where journalists took seriously for months unfounded US government assertions of "weapons of mass destruction" under the control of the Saddam Hussein regime. But, as contributor Amber Boydstun pointed out in an earlier study (2013), eventually the government lost control of the narrative associated with the Iraq invasion. Journalists embedded with military units initially reported on the bravery, technological prowess, and successes of US forces, just as their Pentagon handlers presumably calculated they would. But, being on the ground for weeks or months at a time, and looking for stories, they began to make observations that the brass might have preferred to keep unseen: inadequate armor plating on thousands of vehicles, equipment failures, and so on. The initial narrative spun out of control as the weeks went on.

Philosophers sometimes ponder: If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound? In the realm of politics, if a government official implements a new policy, but no one reports on it, did it happen? Yes: the policy will change and government will operate differently. But, no: Voters and citizens may never find out about the policy change and the leader will miss out on the credit, or avoid the

blame. Of course, governments make un-newsworthy policy changes on a daily basis, often for good reasons. And, of course, journalists are more prone to write about failed policies than school buses that get the children to their classrooms on time, just like yesterday, even if they use a more efficient system to do so. In fact, the vast majority of government actions, particularly successful ones, go unreported. Understanding the selection effects that cause journalistic attention to focus on a small and most likely unrepresentative slice of all government action, bringing it to the glare of public scrutiny and demanding accountability, is fundamental to our understanding of government itself. This is especially true since most citizens know, or can know of government only what they read in the papers or hear though other media outlets.

Generally speaking, modern western governments have vast informational advantages over outside actors, at least with regard to the state of public policy. (Private sector actors may have similar information advantages with regard to their own industry, and this "information asymmetry" has long been seen as a key driver of their lobbying power.) But, as this book makes clear, journalists often report on exactly the type of information that political leaders may need the most, and that political outsiders also crave: who is supporting, who is opposing, where is public opinion, what are the interest groups and specialist actors saying, how will this issue play in the next election? Here, political leaders have no crystal ball, and they are utterly reliant on the media to expand their own information networks. In fact, given that issues may be higher or lower on the media agenda, with differential impacts on the political fates of those supporting or opposing the policy in question, political leaders struggle to control that agenda. But they cannot, at least not without the involvement and cooperation of journalists themselves. And given that journalists are looking for different things than political leaders, often diametrically opposite things, this can be a complex dance, indeed. Thinking of the media as an arena of politics, as Van Aelst and Walgrave insist in this book, gives some insight into these interdependencies.

If the politicians depend on the media for certain forms of (political) information which they can never control unilaterally, they also look to the media to understand the level of salience that a given issue may take. Here, they are not merely watching, but they play a role in enhancing or reducing the salience of any given issue by their own actions. Thus, the media represent not just a source of important bits of information, but also a key arena in which the political struggle, and policy process, is played out. Politics is sometimes done in private, but what we know best is that

part that takes place on the front pages and on the nightly news. Political actors cannot govern in any western democracy without a powerful media presence, and they must learn to operate within the "media arena."

Thinking of the media as an arena of politics, separate from party conventions, agency meetings, voter interactions, or parliamentary chambers helps us understand the skill set needed to rise high in political office. Whether it is learned on the job or selected for when career choices advances become possible, high level political leaders must be adept at the media game. In today's politics, it is not optional for a national leader to master the media arena, no more than to be good in oral debate if a minister. Further, these pressures have increased over time, changing the list of criteria we look for in our national leaders. Not all these changes have necessarily been for the best.

While the media have changed politics and while the interactions between political leaders and journalists have been complex mixtures of mutual dependencies and advantage, these differ in many systematic ways, each explored in the chapters to come. One important distinction is the degree of policy focus of the media outlet. These range from highly specialized reporting outlets targeting given public policies to "respectable" mainstream newspapers and news-related television to gossip and entertainment outlets, with other media niches too numerous to mention. Different types of outlets have different implications for politics, obviously. These differences interact with differences across countries in their political party systems, cultural expectations and legal structures relating to openness in government, and so on. Finally, there is great variation in strategies and behaviors by individual policymakers and journalists. With so many moving parts, it is no wonder that we have no single theory about how political actors use the media, or of how the media use political actors. But this book pushes us a long way in the right direction.

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Reference

Boydstun, A. E. (2013). *Making the news: Politics, the media, and agenda setting.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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remarks triggered and stimulated us. We are honored that he wrote the foreword to this book.

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Peter Van Aelst
Stefaan Walgrave

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Information and Arena: The Dual Function of the News Media for Political Elites

Peter Van Aelst and Stefaan Walgrave

Introduction

Why and how do political actors use the news media to reach their political goals? This is the book's central question. We address it using a common framework that we label the "Information & Arena" model. Looking at the news media from a functional perspective, we argue the mass media essentially fulfill a dual function for political actors. We make a distinction between the media as a source of *information* for political actors, and the media as an *arena* for political communication. Within the information function we further distinguish a passive from an active information sub-function. Politicians can learn from the media about the real world, including the opinions of the public and other political actors. Yet, the

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fact that information encapsulated in media coverage is, by definition, also public creates a window of opportunity and politicians can profit from the momentum generated by the media to act based on media information. The arena function also has two sub-functions. On the one hand, politicians try to gain access to the media arena to get attention and favorable coverage for them personally. On the other hand, politicians use the media arena to promote certain issues and their interpretation of these issues.

This introductory chapter first positions our functional approach and shows how it differs from previous theoretical frameworks. Second, we discuss and conceptualize the two central functions, information and arena, and their sub-functions. Third, drawing on the information and arena framework, we formulate four questions that guide the book and indicate how the different chapters of this book help answer them.

How the Information and Arena Model Is Different from Other Theoretical Models

Scholarly interest in the relationship between news media and political elites is not new. Among the first, Dan Nimmo (1964) studied the United States press-government relations more than half a century ago. He focused on possibly diverging patterns in the relationship between politicians and journalists, referring to different degrees of harmony, conflict and (dis)trust. Because both journalist and politicians need each other and have something to gain by this interaction, their relationship is often depicted as one of interdependence, exchange and mutual benefits (e.g. Sigal 1973). Because of this mutual dependency, scholars have argued that both news coverage and political communication by politicians should be regarded as joint, rather than separate, products (Blumler and Gurevitch 1981). At the same time the relationship is inherently guided by tension and conflict. Both partners often disagree on what is considered newsworthy and how it should be reported. These conflicts inspired scholars to study the power struggle, or what Gans (1979) labeled as the tango between journalists and politicians, a metaphor that has been used repeatedly in the literature to find out who had the upper hand. Overall, these pioneers in the study of media and politics were mainly interested in news making—and thus in the influence from politics on media—and less in policy making—the influence from media on politics (but see Cook 1989). More recently, the political

consequences of the alleged intrusion of the news media in the political sphere gained considerable scholarly traction.

However, so far, the media and politics literature has mainly focused on how journalists and their news products have influenced the world of politics. The mediatization literature, for example, analyses mainly how politics has adapted to the rules of the media logic. This work basically studies the media's intrusion into the political sphere and suggests that the media are politically influential (Strömbäck 2008; Esser and Strömbäck 2014). A different approach comes from scholars who study the impact of the news media on political priorities. Students of the political agenda contend that media coverage affects the priorities of presidents, parliaments and parties (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006; Wolfe et al. 2013). Although mediatization and political agenda-setting scholars differ in their account of *how* the media influence politics, they share the idea that political elites and institutions follow the media, and that the media thus possess at least some form of political power. When asked directly, many political elites agree that the media exert substantial power. Recent surveys among politicians in Western democracies found that politicians perceive the media to have a large agenda-setting and "career-controlling" power (Lengauer et al. 2014; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2011).

Apart from the fact that in most of this work the mass media have been posited "against" politics, the relationship between media and politics has hardly been investigated from the perspective of political actors themselves (Schudson 2002: 255). Only more recently, a growing literature is putting the political process center stage by discussing the role of the mass media from the perspective of political actors. The PMP-model of Wolfsfeld (2011), for instance, holds that most things ultimately start in the political realm, then spill over to the media, and that, subsequently, political actors react to the media coverage (they themselves caused). In a similar way, Sellers' (2010) "cycle of spin" starts with politicians willing to promote their message; these politicians take into account how their messages are covered in the media which, in turn, influences their political communication and even the policy debate. Also, Entman's (2003) cascading model departs from the promotion of frames by political and bureaucratic elites but acknowledges the existence of an important feedback role of the news media.

Without denying the importance of the media, all these scholars start and end their analysis with the actions and goals of political actors.

They adopt a political actor perspective and suggest that the media's impact mainly works *via* political actors that are (un)able to employ the media to further their goals (see also Hänggli and Kriesi 2010; Thesen 2014). Such an alternative view of the media-politics relationship departing from the perspective of political elites is also gaining ground in recent studies on the mediatization of politics. For example, Esser and Strömbäck (2014: 227) observe a shift from a "media-centric" to an "actor-centric" perspective in mediatization research. More and more mediatization scholars seem to support the idea that the media matter not so much because political actors are *forced* to adapt to their logic, but rather because they (selectively) *choose* to adapt in so far as it fits their political purposes (see also Landerer 2013; Marcinkowski and Steiner 2014). In other words, instead of pitching the mass media *against* political elites, the emerging actor perspective suggests that the media may have an impact on the struggle of power *among* different political elites. Although gaining ground, the political actor approach still lacks a systematic theoretical account that explicitly incorporates and compares the different functions the media perform for political elites.

Therefore, as a first step towards such a theory, our ambition in this chapter is to provide a functional framework of the meaning and role of the mass media for political elites in Western democracies. The ambition of the book is to empirically examine the two functions that mass media have for politicians in different contexts and using different methods. Our theoretical approach is "functional" as it zooms in on the different functions the media have for politicians. A functional approach was quite common among the pioneers of mass communication research. For example, a long time ago, Harold Lasswell suggested several functions the media have for society at large (Lasswell 1948; see also Graber 2009). Building on his insights, other scholars studied the functions the mass media have for individual citizens, which became known as the "uses and gratifications" approach (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch 1973). These scholars typically generated a list of functions that different media might have in satisfying different sorts of citizen needs (e.g. Katz, Haas and Gurevitch 1973). This mass communication work strongly contributed to a shift in thinking about media effects from "what the media do to people" to "what the people do with media". We believe such a functional approach to be a fruitful way to study the role of media in politics; it directly addresses some of the shortcoming in previous studies on media and politics.

First, a functional approach focuses on *why* politicians use the mass media and provides systematic insights in the motives that underlie their interaction with the media. A functional approach can help us with understanding the reasons why some politicians use the media under certain circumstances while others do not, or are not able to. By focusing on the motives of politicians, a functional actor approach is well-suited for comparative research comparing different politicians in different systems. In fact, similar goals can be expected to motivate elected politicians in many systems but the constraints, resources and incentives provided by the political and media system may vary leading to systematic behavioral differences.

Second, a functional approach is in line with the widely accepted idea among political scientists that politicians are strategic actors with specific goals and ambitions that try to pursue those goals as good as they can (see Chap. 4). It treats the media as a resource that can be used by politicians in the struggle over political power with other politicians. For instance, by attaining media access, anticipating media attention, or rhetorically using media coverage, politicians can improve their position in the political process. In this way, a functional perspective examines whether and how media affect the balance of power *among* politicians, which probably is the main question political scientists deal with— namely who gets what, when and how (see Chap. 2).

The Information Function of the Media

Information is a crucial asset for politicians in their daily work (Baumgartner and Jones 2014). Just like any citizen, individual politicians learn from the media about the world out there, even about the world of politics. What we call information here can be a simple fact, like the actual inflation rate, as well as a government statement about the need to control inflation. So, the media provide politicians with information that they would otherwise not have or not pay attention to. The media do not only make information available but also make it more salient, giving politicians an idea of what issues or persons are currently in the public eye.

There are at least three types of information encapsulated in media coverage. First, media offer easy to digest information about prevailing *problems* in society. The ultimate job of politicians is to deal with societal

problems (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2009) and the media are routinized and specialized detection instruments constantly digging up dirt and signaling problems across many policy sectors. In particular novel information produced by the media, for example through investigative journalism, has a high informative value and is frequently followed-up by political action (e.g. Protess et al. 1991). The attractiveness of the media information about problems lies in the fact that media signals are succinct and focused, which is, according to Kingdon (1984), the type of information that is preferred by politicians. Cobb and Elder (1981: 392) claim that the media are useful for political actors to "reduce the overwhelming information-processing tasks confronting policymakers". Similarly, Kingdon (1984) showed how US members of Congress dealing with an oversupply of information turn to the media to know what really matters.

Second, from the media, politicians also learn about *public opinion*. They do so directly if media messages contain explicit information about what the public cares about and wants (e.g. media stories referring to opinion polls or containing popular exemplars). Politicians also learn indirectly about the public as they consider the news a proxy for the priorities and the positions held by voters (Herbst 1998). Pritchard (1992: 105) calls this the "media-as-surrogate-for-public-opinion" function of the media.

There is a third type of information politicians get out of the media: information about the agenda, the positions and the actions of *other politicians*. Decision-making processes often take place behind closed doors. Politicians thus regularly lack information about what is going on in politics itself, and what other actors are up to. Quite often, information about the policy process leaks out in the press (Hess 1984; Reich 2008). Additionally, the media simply cover politics—the statements politicians make, the plans they launch, the visits they undertake etc.— and for a politician this may yield relevant information about what other (often more important) politicians (e.g. from the government) are up to (Linsky 1986). In sum, politicians also learn from the media because its coverage contains (otherwise hidden) information about other political actors (Brown 2010: 134; Sellers 2010: 8–9).

All this work on how politicians vie for information about problems, public opinion and what other actors are doing suggests that the media are a provider of sheer information for politicians. However, actual empirical work directly investigating the purely informational

sub-function of the media for politicians is as good as entirely missing. Although studies have shown that most politicians are news junkies (e.g. Davis 2007; Van Aelst et al. 2008), we know little about what they learn from it. There are hardly studies on the "media dependency" of political actors, a lacuna that will be addressed in Chap. 7 of this book.

This first information sub-function is purely informational; it relates to the *passive* role of politicians as mere consumers of information provided by the media. Yet, politicians not only passively learn from the information provided by the mass media, they also *actively* use it in their daily work, this is the second information sub-function.

Indeed, the empirical proof of the fact that politicians actively *use* the information provided by the media is substantial. There is a growing body of work about elites' attentional behavior; media signals about issues do get picked up by elites. Observing the media-reactive behavior of political actors, this literature strongly suggests that politicians derive information from media coverage and that they profit from the momentum generated by the information to use it in their work. When the media address an issue, politics follows suit and politicians increasingly start to talk about it (Eissler et al. 2014; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). That media coverage affects the political agenda is empirically proven in both majoritarian and in proportional democracies (e.g. Bonafont and Baumgartner 2013; Edwards and Wood 1999; Soroka 2002; Van Noije et al. 2008; Walgrave et al. 2008). However, politicians are by no means naïve or ordinary news consumers (Davis 2007), but rather rational actors that strategically use the media.

Because typical media messages are better suited to nurture the opposition's goal, destabilizing and embarrassing the government, opposition members more often profit from the window of opportunity provided by media information than members of government parties (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010). Also, parties react more to media when the media cover issues that they "own" than when they cover other issues (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011a, b). Parties are advantaged regarding the issues they are considered to be the most competent on (Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996), which is why they strategically embrace the selective media information that plays to their advantage. Several studies have shown that political actors do not automatically react to media information as it becomes more salient, but mainly or only, when this information fits their already existing issue agenda. So, the news not only provides useful information about topics and events,

but offers a window of opportunity for some political actors to highlight their existing issue priorities (Elmelund-Præstekær and Wien 2008; Kingdon 1984).

Not only does the saliency of the information on issues encapsulated in the news create a window of opportunity for politicians. News media also define and interpret issues. Older work by Kingdon (1984) on US congressmen found that opinionated and framed media information, media signals of which the political meaning has been defined, often has a higher informative value for political elites than bare-bone factual information. Facts that have been predigested require less effort for politicians to make up their mind and adopt a position. So, media frames increase or decrease the relevance of the underlying facts for elites. For instance, Thesen found that opposition parties are especially active on issues when the triggering media story contains a responsibility frame blaming the government for the undesirable state of affairs (Thesen 2013, 2014). Van der Pas (2014) showed that politicians in the Netherlands and Sweden mainly respond to media coverage when the media frames are closer to their own definition of the issue. This emphasizes the strategic nature of political reactions to media coverage—political actors employ media frames when they are congruent with their own position.

The Arena Function of the Media

Politicians get "pure" information from the media and, at the same time, media information, through its salience and framing, creates an opportunity to act. But for politicians to reach out to the public, they need to "enter the media arena" and become the object of coverage themselves. We distinguish two arena sub-functions: getting personal access to the media arena and getting your message across in the media arena.

For ordinary citizens, the news media are the dominant way to learn about most actors, issues and policies (Bennett and Entman 2001; Shehata and Strömbäck 2014). Since politicians in democracies need public support and since the media provide the most important channel to gain such support, political actors have little choice but to play the media game. Besides a direct electoral connection, presence in the media arena can also have indirect electoral effects. Parties may put candidates that successfully enter and perform in the media arena higher on the ballot list or mediatized candidates may attract more funding from sponsors. The importance of entering and performing in the media arena

goes well beyond elections. Kunelius and Reunanen (2012), for instance, show that media attention can also strengthen one's position in the policy process (see also Cook 2005: 143).

In many ways, the media arena is comparable to other arenas, such as the parliamentary arena. Competing actors make statements, undertake actions and try to get the upper hand. Similar to other arena's, the media arena follows standard practices and routines (Sparrow 2006) that are a consequence of the function and aim of the media in modern society. The arena is ruled by news values (Galtung and Ruge 1965; O'Neill and Harcup 2009) and produces news in specific formats (Altheide and Snow 1979). Thus, politicians' media arena inclusion or exclusion is not random, but obeys a number of well-known criteria guiding news makers in their decisions regarding who is in and who is out. In other words, the news media form an institution characterized by recurring patterns of behavior and collectively shared beliefs of what is news (Cook 2005). Journalists' decisions to incorporate events or actors in the news and to give them the space to present their points of view are steered by particular media routines and standards of newsworthiness rather than by what political actors consider to be relevant (Wolfsfeld 2011: 72; Cook 2005: 63). To enter the media arena and to successfully get their version of the facts into the news, politicians need to learn and incorporate these media rules (Davis 2007; Esser and Strömbäck 2014). The media arena is not a level playing-ground and in that respect not so different from the other arenas politicians operate in. Media routines advantage particular politicians, just like the rules in the parliamentary arena favor certain actors (e.g. the priority government initiatives get in most parliaments). Note that for politicians willing to enter the mass media, their competitors are *not* journalists, but rather other politicians (even of their own party) who vie for a place in the media spotlight as well. Journalists and editors impose the rules of the media game to the players, they can be considered as the referees that assess whether the actors play to the rules, but the real competitors are the other politicians. In sum, politicians have a strong interest in entering the media arena to communicate to the public and therefore they have to incorporate the media rules.

Since media attention is skewed in favor of actors with formal political power, getting access to the media arena is highly predictable (Bennett 1996; Van Aelst et al. 2017). Also for common politicians, for which access may even be more crucial, relative small status differences—e.g. for a parliamentarian, being a committee chair or

not—are strong predictors of media exposure (Sellers and Schaffner 2007; Tresch 2009). The news media prefer charismatic, communicative and attractive politicians but, at the same time, highly value the institutional status of elites and rather strengthen instead of challenge the politically defined hierarchy (Wolfsfeld 2011). So, the rules of media access are to some extent specific to the media logic but they are also strongly related to essentially political and often institutional features of politicians (for an overview see Vos 2014).

Frequent media access may be a privilege of the powerful and a necessary condition for self-promotion, it does not automatically imply that the attention is positive. The favorability of news coverage can be crucial in how citizens' perceive a political actor, in particular in election times (e.g. Druckman and Parkin 2005). A lot depends on whether the covered actor gets the chance to promote the issue or frame he or she would like to get across to the public. The US President is seen as the prime example of someone being able to broadcast his messages in the news. The combination of a strong institutional position, professional public relations techniques, and specialists in news management, makes the US government an exceptionally influential communicator often succeeding in getting its message out in the media (Kernell 2007; Manheim 1998). This dominant position may not seem uncommon for scholars of US policy and media, but it is rather exceptional in many other countries. Most governments have less political communication resources and, more importantly, their messages are more often challenged by multiple actors. For instance, in European multi-party systems most political debates involve multiple political parties that each promote their definition and interpretation of the issue at stake. Even in the US, more often than not, frames are contested by counter-frames (Chong and Druckman 2013; Hänggli and Kriesi 2010, 2012).

The fact that the media form an indispensable arena for politicians to show themselves to the public and to highlight their version of reality, does not mean that all battles over the meaning of issues are fought out in the media arena. Sellers (2000) showed that in legislative debates in the US, the majority party mostly prefers to keep the debate inside congress, while the minority party has more to gain by expanding the debate to the media arena. In particular when its frame is more in line with public opinion, the opposition party can win a legislative battle over a party in government by going public. Political actors in a weaker

institutional (minority) position need media access more than those having institutional political power.

Four Questions that Guide the Book

We have argued so far that the media exert a dual function for political actors. They are providers of information that can be passively consumed or actively used by politicians. And, they form an arena actors need access to in order to promote themselves or their issues. We showed these functions and sub-functions implicitly underlie a good many of the extant studies on media and politics. Yet, we think the usefulness of the functional information and arena framework for studying the relationship between media and politics should be further examined and tested as will be done by several chapters in this book. A functional framework not only allows us to conveniently classify existing studies and create some order in the chaos. It also highlights the lacuna in the present literature and shows which questions are left unanswered. We identify four questions will be at the core of this book. The first question deals with our model and its central concepts. The next three questions deal with more empirical aspects that we know relatively little about.

Should the Information and Arena Model be Broadened and/or Refined?

We asked the contributors to this to book to use but also to challenge, broaden or refine parts of our information and arena model. In particular the two central concepts of our model will receive in-depth attention: "the media arena" and "political actors". First, related to the media arena, both Davis (Chap. 9) and Strömbäck and Esser (Chap. 4) provide alternative, more developed conceptualisations of the media arena. Lawrence and Boydstun (Chap. 3) argue, based on the example of the amazing election of Donald Trump as the Republican candidate for the US presidency, that the media arena for political actors should be broadened by including entertainment media. In addition, they suggest to include celebrities as political actors. This raises the question whether also political journalists can or should be conceived as a distinct sort of political actors. Both the chapters of Thesen (Chap. 2) and that of Vliegenthart & Mortensen (Chap. 5) deal with that issue.

What Motivates Politicians to Use the Media?

As argued before, we believe that a functional approach forces researchers to think about the underlying motives of politicians' media behavior. The arena and information model suggest that politicians use the media for different reasons and goes beyond the idea that politicians are only interested in news exposure for electoral reasons. However, studies seldom explicitly study what drives politicians' interactions with the news. It is obvious that media matter for a politician during an election campaign, but it is less clear why seeking (or avoiding) media attention might be relevant for policy making. Chapter 12 of Melenhorst & Van Aelst, for instance, digs deeper in the value of the media for parliamentarians in the case of lawmaking. And also Chaps. 5, 6, and 9 tackle politicians' motives to use the mass media.

How Media Dependent are Politicians?

Our model suggests that the mass media function as an important source of information for political elites. Just like any citizen, individual politicians learn from the media about the real world, even about the world of politics. We expect politicians to learn more from media information about problems and public opinion than about the political game itself, but we hardly have a clue of how pervasive the information function of the media really is. We know that politicians react to and use news coverage strategically, but that does not tell us what politicians actually learn from the news and what they get from other sources. Chapter 7 of Walgrave, Sevenans, Zoizner & Ayling addresses this shortcoming by focusing explicitly on the media dependency of politicians. Also the chapters from Sevenans (Chap. 6) Zoizner, Fogel-Dror & Sheafer (Chap. 8), and Fawzi (Chap. 13) assess, in an indirect way, what kind of information political elites get out of the media.

How do Politicians Differ in Their Use of the Information and Arena Function?

The information and arena functions are more or less central to the goals and functioning of different types of politicians. Talking about *the* functions of the media for *the* politicians may not be a good idea, though. Politicians occupy different positions and work in different institutional settings. A crucial distinction that deserves further attention is the government-opposition

divide. Some studies suggest that differences between government and opposition politicians can be adequately tied to the media's two functions, information and arena. For opposition actors, the media is mostly a valuable source of often negative information that they can actively use to challenge the government. Government actors, on the other hand, have a clear structural advantage when it comes to access to the media arena. However, many of the conditions and mechanisms of these two functions remain unclear. For instance, when can government actors not only enter the arena, but also influence the tone or framing of the coverage? Chapter 11 of Green-Pedersen, Mortensen and Thesen deals with this question, and it is also addressed in Chaps. 7 and 12. In addition, Chap. 10 by Dalmus, Hänggli & Bernhard does not compare between politicians, but compares how *political parties* in different countries use different media strategies during an election campaign depending on the political context.

The information and arena model is used as a basis for the chapters. All authors discuss the role of the news media from the perspective of the political actor focusing on both the opportunities and the constraints the news media provide. In the first four theoretical chapters, different authors extend, criticize and expand the model. The following eight chapters operationalize and examine aspects of the model in different contexts and dealing with different aspects of politics. In the conclusion, we take these empirical findings into account and suggest a research agenda for future studies.

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Conceptualizing Media Influence in Politics

An Intervening Intermediary: Making Political Sense of Media Influence

Gunnar Thesen

Introduction

The core idea of this book, studying how political actors use news, adds emphasis to an emerging perspective in literatures that deal with the relationship between media and politics. Focus is directed at political actors and their strategic motives in the face of mediatized politics. The first chapter sketches a systematic theoretical account of the functions that the media perform in this actor-centric model. Before we start to explore the model empirically, this chapter elaborates on the concept of media influence on politics attempting to put political actors' news use into a broader political science context. All of the chapters in this volume speak about media influence on politics, as each and every study of media and politics have done before us. But what is it? The slightest hope of reaching an answer to this question inevitably involves defining what 'the media' is, what politics is and what influence or power is. The latter two questions, although involving numerous discussions and scholarly texts, are—we will argue—not the real challenge here. Rather it is the first

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one which introduces a puzzle: How can we—from a political science perspective—make sense of the media, and thus of media influence?

The simple argument in this chapter is that media influence on politics should be distinguished from other types of influences that are typically under study in political science. Despite the increasing acknowledgement of media as a political institution and actor (e.g. Cook 2005; Page 1996; Schudson 2002), the media differ significantly from other institutions and actors in the political system. It is an indispensable institution in democratic politics, but still unelected and with no formal authority or responsibilities. And it is a powerful actor in the political sphere, but still does not represent a particular group or a particular interest in the private sphere—as other organizations or associations of civil society do—because its primary goals are journalistic and commercial and not political. These are hardly controversial claims. But they nevertheless hold important implications that studies of media and politics sometimes lose sight of. If we say that politics is about "who gets what, when and how", then the distinct character of the media as a political actor and institution should remind us that media influence is not about what the media "gets". Rather, the media intervenes in politics and the processes that determine who gets what, when and how. Media influence on politics is therefore—from a political science perspective—first of all about how the media affects the distribution of power between *other* political actors and institutions.

We start the chapter with a brief presentation of the literature on political agenda-setting as it could serve as a case illustrating the need to make more "political sense" of media influence. Second, different approaches to the media as a political actor and institution are discussed in more detail, before making the argument that the media is an intermediary political institution and actor that owes its political significance mainly to its ability to intervene in processes where the power of *other* political actors and institutions are our key interest. Next, we suggest distinguishing between two layers in the concept of media influence on politics, focusing respectively on the way in which the media influences (first) and the political consequences of this influence (second). Furthermore, existing research is interpreted in light of these layers, and we return to the case of political agenda-setting and the constitutive idea of this book, looking at how the motives of political actors are central if we would like to make political sense of media influence. The final section summarizes our argument and provides examples of research questions that we think make a lot of political sense.

Political Agenda-Setting: A (Moderate) Success, but "So What"?

Many studies have delved into the crucial and positive role that news media play in representative democracy, for instance through informing citizens, supplying different opinions, providing information on issues and scrutinizing those in power (e.g. Asp 2007). Such a role of course means that the media is a considerable source of power and influence in politics, something that has attracted a lot of attention in studies of the mediatization of politics (e.g. Esser and Strömbäck 2014). The process of mediatization reflects how the media has become the "most important source of information and channel of communication between the citizenry and political institutions and actors" (Strömbäck 2008: 236). This so-called first dimension of mediatization is the cornerstone for any perspective on media influence or media effects in political communication. Together with the increasing independence of the news media from other political institutions (Strömbäck and Esser 2014: 22), this development has made both news content and political actors less dictated by a political logic and more influenced by the journalistic and commercial "media logic".

The literature on political agenda-setting, originally often labelled policy agenda-setting (e.g. Dearing and Rogers 1996), have come at the media-politics relationship from a different angle. The key goal has been to investigate why some issues manage to get the attention of decision makers. Such a topic initially attracted more attention from political scientists than from communication scholars. The approach was originally focused on the limited attention of political actors for a wide range of political issues. Building on the insights of Schattschneider (1960), Cobb and Elder (1972) were among the first who investigated why some issues rise on policy agendas, while others do not. The media was seen as one of the possible factors that could influence the agenda of policy makers, but not a very important one. Gradually the media got more attention in the study of political agendas, but it was seldom the main focus of attention (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Kingdon 2003, but see Linsky 1986). The more recent stream of research which I address here—*political agenda-setting*—focuses explicitly on the relationship between news and the agendas of political actors (c.f. Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006).

As is evident in the review in Chap. 1, a range of work in political agenda-setting has produced models and results that give us a good sense of when and how the media could affect the issue agenda of

political actors and institutions. Hence the literature has, despite being modest in volume compared to *public* agenda-setting, been somewhat successful in explaining patterns of political attention to issues. Yet the claim in this chapter is that it could still do better in terms of its broader contribution to the explanation of political power. Our findings and discussions often seem to suggest that we are interested in the media as a political actor on a par with other actors: we discuss how different aspects of news content and political context increases and decreases *the media's influence* on politics. But who is it that profits when news becomes politics? What are the concrete implications for political power? These "so what" type of questions are crucial if studies of media and politics are to contribute to political science. Our hope is that they will get more attention if we simply start by explicitly discussing how to understand the media as an actor and institution in the political system. And so this is what we will do.

A Political Actor and Institution

As mentioned in the introduction, in order to make sense of media influence on politics we need to be explicit about the concepts involved. We will spend only marginal time on defining politics and influence, simply because it is the role of the media in the political system that is most challenging and crucial to our goal in this chapter. Almost 60 years ago, Harold Lasswell (1936) provided a famous and to the point definition of politics as being about *who gets what, when and how*. Although more of a catch-phrase than a proper definition, it is a surprisingly robust perspective that aligns fairly well with for instance Easton's influential definition of politics as the "authoritative allocation of values for a society" (1965: 3). Or with the more recent reminder from Schmitter (2010: 317), emphasizing that "political science is supposed to explain how power is exercised and what its effects are".

A concept of power or influence would normally relate to interests or ideas, and the ability of some actors to transfer *their* priorities or conceptions onto others, make others think and/or do what they otherwise would not (e.g. Dahl 1957). Political power has several dimensions and is accordingly studied in numerous ways. For our purpose, it is important to emphasize that the study of media power does not concentrate on formal authority, coercion or control. Nor is it about indoctrination (Schudson 2002: 265). Instead it is the study of influence, and the

way in which the media has the ability to shape political processes and outcomes largely by changing the incentive structures of other actors (c.f. social power in a rational choice perspective; see Dowding 1996). By selecting and framing issues, the news media present advantages (and disadvantages) for political actors. A story on growth offers incumbents an opportunity to claim credit and build support for policy choices, while a story on challenges and decline put pressure on the government to prioritize differently and/or change policies. Conversely, good news could silence opposition actors, while bad news offers incentives to speak up and criticize.

The efforts of political science to explain power, to study who gets what, for a long time neglected journalism and the media. To make things even harder, communication scholars have—in line with journalists—tended to downplay the political role of the media at the expense of an emphasis on journalistic norms of objectivity and impartiality (Page 1996; Cook 2005). Apart from a few notable exceptions (e.g. Cater 1959), the idea of the media as a political actor and political institution is fairly new and arguably long overdue (e.g. Page 1996; Sparrow 1999; Schudson 2002; Cook 2005). But what does it mean that the media is a political actor and a political institution? Page (1996) argues that news organizations and journalists have political goals, goals that are pursued through the production of news. Page's account is arguably most applicable to situations where news media explicitly attempt to affect political decisions. UK news media for instance take political stances in editorials, with the case of Brexit among the most recent and obvious examples.

Other contributions on the political role of the news media have looked less at purposive political behavior, and more at how news production ends up (not necessarily intentional) fulfilling political functions. These perspectives naturally concentrate on how news stories, as opposed to editorials (and partly op-eds), could affect politics. This focus aligns well with many of the contributions in the present volume that look at how political actors use the content of the news, rather than at alliances between parties and different editorial offices. Schudson (2002) emphasizes that the news media's primary contribution lies in their day-to-day production and communication of meanings, symbols and messages that shape the public and politicians, thereby influencing political outcomes. Cook (2005) however, provides the most thorough examination of the news media as a political actor and institution, emphasizing for the most part the latter. The media constitutes an institution because of endurable and taken-for-granted

patterns of social behavior resulting in news making processes that are similar from one news organization to the next (ibid.: 84). Moreover, the media is political because politics is implicitly part of its news production values (ibid.: 62). Despite standards of objectivity, those who work in the media "cannot but exert power, because they select and process politically relevant content and thus *intervene* in both the formation of public opinion and in the effects of its diffusion—in agenda setting, or the priming and framing of issues" (Habermas 2006: 419).

This change in the understanding of the media might very well be one of the factors increasing political scientist's attention to news (Schudson 2002: 250). But although the media is a political institution and actor—it is very *different* from many of the key actors and institutions that political scientists are used to working with. First of all, it is an unelected institution with no formal position in political processes, no authority and no responsibilities. This is also the foundation of several media-sceptic and critical analyses of media influence. Some portray media as an exogenous force, a colonizer of politics, arguing that "by marginalizing parties and the intermediary system, the media diminish the opportunities that civil society might have to exert influence on political inputs" (Meyer 2002: 108). Concerns about the potential negative effects of mediatized politics are, to varying degrees, shared by most scholars interested in media and politics. But the institutional perspective on media's role in politics nevertheless approaches these questions from the notion that the media is an integral part of politics. Instead of marginalizing the intermediary system, the media is conceptualized as part of this system. It is an intermediary institution that shares characteristics with other intermediaries, most notably political parties and the interest group system (Cook 2005: 109–110). Cook emphasizes the similarities between these intermediaries in his effort to establish the media as a political institution. But for our purpose, it is the distinction between them that is of most interest: parties and interest groups "are formed and maintained for the strategic and collective pursuit of openly and specifically political aims. The news media are not" (ibid.: 110). Despite sharing a position as simultaneously inside and outside government, the media is set apart from other intermediaries because it is an "unauthorized" yet influential outsider and insider in politics. This makes it all the more difficult to make political sense of media influence, which is why it is crucial to understand the media's placement in society, to understand the link between this intermediary institution and the signals that it communicates to and within the political system.

Newton (2006) offers a starting point for this discussion, noting that many defenders of the "media as a strong force" assume that:

> the media are quite separate and distinct from society, firing their poison arrows into it from a distance. In fact, the mass media are an integral part of society, sharing many of its values, operating within many of its constraints (organizational, economic, cultural and legal), drawing its journalists from it, and reflecting its concerns to a greater or lesser extent. In other words, the media are deeply embedded in and part of society. (Ibid.: 215)

Not only then is the media embedded in politics, it is also embedded in society. But as an intermediary in politics, the question is whether it should be treated as other "embedded" actors in the intermediary system. On one hand, one could argue that news media in representative democracies are functional equivalents to interest groups and political parties. They act as mediators located between the private sphere and the state, communicating interests or social problems to the political system. On the other hand, the media differ from interest groups and parties in several crucial aspects making the above perspective hard to sustain. Most importantly, the link between news institutions and the interests or problems mediated by them is weak, non-institutionalized and grounded in a commercial and professional principle, rather than a democratic principle.

As an actor in the political sphere then, the media does not represent particular groups or particular interests in the private sphere. It does not function as an interest aggregator or a champion of specific values or causes, unlike other actors in civil society. Parties and interest groups link the private sphere and the state, and the interests and ideas that they represent structure their political role, determine their input to the political system and legitimize their position as political actors. Admittedly, many news organizations still have strong links to particular groups and clear political leanings. Moreover, their audience often shares parts of their political worldview. The media is consequently a political actor, as already discussed and as can be witnessed through their explicit political stances. But unlike for other political actors, political goals are not the primary goals of news organizations. The primary goal is professional and commercial: they make and sell news. Other actors might also have commercial goals as primary goals, but when they act in the political sphere they then seek to influence policies in order to achieve these goals. For news organizations, professional and commercial goals might also overlap with political orientations sometimes producing news that potentially could

fulfill a variety of goals. But this is not given, as journalistic norms and commercial considerations will produce news that sometimes communicates the voice or interest of one group and at other times another. If there indeed is a consistent political goal or political self-image in news organizations, one that is part of and consistent with both professional and commercial goals, it is the idea of the media as a vox populi, a voice of the people in opposition to political elites (Petersson 1994). This is also an interpretation which figured in the debates about the role of the news media in the Brexit campaign. But even this important part of journalism does not allow for a consistent political voice in news organizations when principles are translated to concrete news stories; the "voice of the people" on Monday oftentimes contradicts the one on Tuesday.

THE INTERVENING INTERMEDIARY

The discussion so far serves to highlight that the political role of the media, the reason why we think of the media as a political actor and institution, is disconnected from many of the core concepts (like representation, accountability, delegation etc.) used to make sense of and study other intermediaries in the political system. Despite arguments about media's role in communicating societal problems to the political system, feeding signals into politics that can help government do a better job, there is not a strong basis for perceiving the political role of the media as a democratically based 'input' function. The news media do serve functions that potentially *support* processes of political representation and accountability (e.g. Asp 2007), but it is not a representative or accountable political institution in itself. Admittedly, this is slightly self-evident. But we still think it is important to discuss it explicitly as it holds implications for the way we understand and study media influence on politics.

The point is that our perception of the media as a political actor and institution is based first and foremost on *the impact* that the media has on political outcomes and political processes. When political scientists talk about how actors influence politics, it is usually based on the—perfectly sensible—assumption that this influence serves these groups themselves (or someone represented by these groups). Businesses, interest groups, parties or other actors affect politics, meaning that they ("who") get some sort of values, resources or benefits ("what"). Studies of media influence on politics are not—in the same way—studies of what the media "gets". Note also that even when journalists create their own stories, for instance through investigative journalism, this still does not

mean that the media "gets" anything. Not to say that the distinction between waiting for authoritative sources to say something and self-made stories is irrelevant. It clearly matters for the media's role as an independent and autonomous agenda-setter (Sevenans 2017). The point is just that even when self-made stories have political consequences, the origins of the story is not necessarily sufficiently interesting in itself: in order to make political sense of such a case we must know how it affected who got what or the allocation of values in a society.

This distinction between the media and political actors that "get" something should not be conflated with the debate about the media's ability to exercise an independent influence on politics. We are *not* saying that the media merely reflects the positions and views of other, "real" political actors. It that was the case, the task of identifying how the media affects political power most likely would be much easier. Many scholars agree that the media rarely initiate the coverage of political stories (Kingdon 2003; Wolfsfeld and Sheafer 2006; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2011). Cook (2005) brings up a similar interpretation when debating Kingdon's perspective: "Kingdon was partially right. To the extent that journalists wait for authoritative sources to do or say newsworthy things, their role in agenda setting is unlike that of other political actors." However, the media not only reflects or convey the interests and messages of others. The work of journalists and news organizations transform the signals communicated from "authoritative" (as well as less authoritative) sources. As a bare minimum, even the most media "sober" scholars emphasize that news play a role in magnifying or amplifying issues. Cook is furthermore quick to stress that this is not an exhaustive framework for understanding media influence because "the news media do more than reflect or merely pick and choose from among what others are doing" (ibid.: 12). Both "authoritative sources", i.e. parties and interest groups, and journalists affect which issues and problems get media attention simply because news must be both *important* and *interesting*:

> Politicians dictate conditions and rules of access and designate certain events and issues as important by providing an arena for them. Journalists, in turn, decide whether something is interesting enough to cover, the context in which to place it, and the prominence the story receives. (Ibid.)

In effect, even though powerful political actors—from politicians to organized interests—are by far the most important suppliers of input to the media, these actors usually cannot control how their interests and

ideas are presented and interpreted in the media, or how other actors receive and respond to them (Jarren and Donges 2006). The issues—and frames—that at any point in time are deemed newsworthy will be communicated. Although fairness and balance are important norms in news-making, the news criteria applied by the media (e.g. power/relevance, negativity, competition/conflict, personalization etc.) shape news content in a way that never sums up to a mirror image of the interests and ideas of other political actors.

Nevertheless, returning to our main point, the selection of issues and frames is neither a reflection of what journalists and news institutions want. It reflects their professional priorities and the many values, criteria or norms that shape the news production process. By extension then, when for instance voters adopt frames or issue priorities from the media, their opinions, attitudes or political actions do not reflect the political interests of the media. The media hold the power to make other actors think or do what they otherwise would not. But since this power mostly does not reflect the political priorities of news organizations, nor in a straightforward and consistent way those of other actors, the media's role in politics is best captured as *influence by intervention* in political processes.[1] The news media is an intermediary institution in the political system that by mediating and transforming (amplifying, muting, distorting) signals from other actors acquires the ability to change political processes. Not only by affecting their existence (initiate, stop) and pace (slow down, speed up), but also by altering the stakes involved or redistributing the advantages and disadvantages of the actors that take part in the processes and that seek to influence their outcome. To once again repeat our main point, these are interventions that—from a political science perspective—first of all are interesting because they affect the distribution of political power. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of media influence on politics we therefore need to know which actors, interests or ideas that are served by the media's *intervention* in political processes.

Two Layers of Media Influence … and How to Approach the Second One

We think it is fruitful to summarize our claim by distinguishing between what could be framed as two layers in the concept of the media's political influence. The media should be considered—as we have seen—a political

actor and institution because the selection and framing of news is inherently political: the choices that journalists and news organizations make do not equally favor all actors and messages (e.g. Cook 2005: 165). The media therefore has *the ability to influence political processes and outcomes.* The first layer is about the media's ability to influence *in itself*, more so than the actual outcomes in terms of 'who gets what'. The mediatization literature often speaks to this layer, as it studies the increasing influence of media in politics for instance through changes in communication media, such as the development of new media and increasing spread or use of different media. But also agenda-setting research that concentrates more concretely on identifying the conditions under which the media can set political agendas, and less on the implications that this has for different political actors or interests, contribute to this layer.

These are important research fields, but as we have argued above, the distinguishing characteristics of the media as a an intermediary and intervening—but not representative or accountable—political institution and actor simply means that such a focus does not necessarily provide us with sufficient information about "who gets what". The second layer therefore directs attention to the *outcomes*, explicitly studying which actors and interests win and lose when media intervenes in political processes. Much of the framing literature speaks to this layer, because framing processes are often theorized from the point of view of political actors and political power. This is evident in studies of media slant/bias (e.g. Druckman and Parkin 2005; Watts et al. 1999) and in a range of contributions on issue-specific framing (e.g. Cohen and Wolfsfeld 1993, Shah et al. 2002), where the research questions that motivate the studies all start with the idea that media content favored some political actors or ideas at the expense of others.

Studies of agenda-setting indicating that specific issues in the news, or generic news frames or issue attributes like conflict or economic consequences, increases the likelihood of political attention are not equally informative from the perspective of the second layer. This challenge is related to how the agenda-setting literature has promoted a shift "from the issue of power to the power of issues" (c.f. Dearing and Rogers 1996). Arguably, this shift has delivered contributions in terms of research showing that news coverage of issue content matters for political agendas. Nevertheless, it has also entailed that that research questions often have been formulated on the basis of news content and that studies naturally have

focused more on media influence in itself, and not so much the outcome of this influence or the distribution of power between political actors.

Admittedly, the analytical distinction between the two layers is not always clear-cut. Very often both mediatization and agenda-setting studies that start off with a focus on the first layer still bring forward important and interesting perspectives on how media influence alters political processes when implications of the research are being discussed. But there are ways in which to explore the second layer more systematically. If the media's role as a political actor and institution rests mainly on its impact on political processes and outcomes, on how it distributes power between other actors in politics, the systematic study of media influence on politics should to a greater extent use this as its *starting point*. It is our contention that this book, and the perspective that it builds on, is an important path towards such a goal. Focusing on the motives and strategies of political actors that deal with news means paying attention to politics, political processes and political outcomes. As pointed out repeatedly, ultimately media influence is not about what the media gets. It's about what other political actors get. The motives of these actors therefore need to be centre stage in theoretical arguments.[2]

Returning to the case of political agenda-setting again, there are examples of this approach in recent works that apply theories of party competition to understand how the media's agenda-setting power influences politics. One example is the political agenda-setting literature's use of the issue ownership theory, showing how political parties use news to shift the political agenda towards favorable issues (e.g. Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011; Thesen 2013). The information and arena model adds to this stream of research, providing a theoretical framework for thinking about how political actors could benefit from news content. It furthermore effectively demonstrates how the agenda-setting theory depends on theoretical supplements. In order to make the leap from investigating the power of issues to addressing the issue of political power, political agenda-setting research should to a larger extent use the second layer of media influence as a starting point and collect theoretical input from other fields of study where the question of power and influence are closer at hand. If we manage this, it is our belief that studies of media and politics would be better equipped to fend of "so what" questions and contribute even more to political science.

What Next? Summarizing and Looking Ahead

In sum, although we agree that the media clearly is a *political* institution and actor, the media is first of all an intervening and intermediary institution in the processes that determine who gets what, when and how. The concept of media influence involves a broad and continuously changing communication of a variety of interest, opinions and problems in society and in politics. We have stressed that the signals that news media communicate do not reflect their own political interests, and that they are not linked to these signals in the same way that other political actors are, actors that aggregate and represent. Neither is this communication a straightforward reflection. Their role as an intermediary does not equal a function as a mirror image of other political actors, simply because the media filter, magnify and frame issues, according to both how politically important and how publically (commercially) interesting they are. Through this negotiation of 'newsworthiness' (Cook 2005), the media *intervenes* in political processes by shaping political debates, affecting opinion formation and decision-making. Our goal has been to emphasize that this second layer of media influence—the outcomes of media intervention—deserves more attention in studies of the relationship between media and politics.

One of the reasons for this is that we have only started scratching the surface in terms of showing how the media matters to politics. To use an overstatement, the point is that in this era of mediatized politics—which one might define differently, but which no one disputes—you will hardly find any field of political science that, either explicitly or implicitly, does not rely on assumptions about the relationship between media and politics. In many cases, there is room for political agenda-setting and related fields of study to empirically put these assumptions to the test, and thus contribute to the task of explaining who gets what, when and how. Recent studies of opposition parties' policy influence (Seeberg 2013), support parties and minority rule (Thesen 2015), party support (Walgrave and De Swert 2004; Thesen et al. 2016) and the lobbying of interest groups (De Bruycker and Beyers 2015) serve to illustrate this potential. But there are more questions out there, more changes in political systems and political behavior that could do with alternative or supplemental explanations.

One example relates to how mediatized politics interacts with the way different political systems handle the demands of organized

interests through traditions and institutions of corporatism and pluralism. In more corporatist systems, for instance, it has been argued that the negotiated consensus reached by interest groups through corporative institutions work to constrain their party political counterparts in parliament (Nørgaard and Klemmensen 2009). Thus, the level of party competition and conflict on typical corporatist issues (i.e. work environment, labor market policies, pensions and benefits) is reduced. Does this mean that such issues are less prone to media-based politicization by competing parties, and that pluralist systems are characterized by political issue debates (on such issues) where the media plays a larger role? Furthermore, to what extent has the mediatization of politics over the last decades made the media more able to stir party competition on corporatist issues also in corporatist systems? Could it be argued that the media thus have contributed to the weakening of consensus politics, ultimately playing a part in the decline of corporatism experienced in, for instance, Scandinavia (Rommetvedt et al. 2013)? It is our ambition that more attention to the "second layer" of media influence hopefully will allow us to answer such questions, thereby increasing the political science relevance of political agenda-setting and other fields of study where media influence on politics is center stage.

Finally, it is worth underlining that that goal here has not been to claim that only certain perspectives merits attention in this field of study that is necessarily situated at the intersection between political and communication science. We need more and better research related to both layers of the media's political influence, as a focus on each separately in itself would be insufficient. Rather the motive has been to re-focus on the issue of power in order to understand how we could make more political sense of media influence in representative democracies. A task which is all the more complex and all the more important given that we are studying an institution that might be partially protected by constitutions but that is nevertheless not designed according to democratic rules or ideas about representation or accountability.

NOTES

1. Note that this is related to, but different from, the concept of media interventionism (e.g. Strömbäck and Esser 2009), which refers to a purposive reporting style where journalists play a more dominant and visible role.
2. Although we focus on the motives of political actors like parties, interest groups and the like here, they are of course not always centre-stage.

News content has political consequences regardless of the motives of such actors, not least because it is the public that lies at the heart of media's influential role in politics.

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Celebrities as Political Actors and Entertainment as Political Media

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The aim of this book is to bring a diversity of scholarly perspectives to bear on the question: How do political actors use the media? In this chapter, we advocate a fuller, more diverse approach to how we define both "political actors" and "the media". Specifically, we draw on recent literature pointing to the ways in which entertainment can function as political media in order to expand Van Aelst and Walgrave's model of the "media arena". Additionally, we draw on prior literature and recent events to highlight the emerging importance of celebrity entertainers (e.g. reality TV stars) as political actors, not only within entertainment formats but also within the traditional media arena. The upshot, we argue, is that the "Information and Arena" model of media and politics captures a useful but only partial set of media dynamics. As illustrated in the startling election of Donald Trump as US President in 2016, politics today is increasingly saturated with entertainment platforms and values,

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creating unprecedented opportunities for unconventional political actors to enter and succeed in politics and underscoring the importance of entertainment in shaping how citizens interact with politics.

In this chapter, we synthesize and build on past studies to argue that entertainment formats can (and often do) qualify as political media formats, which can sometimes deepen the troubles of some political actors, but which other political actors can use to their advantage. Moreover, entertainers can (and sometimes do) qualify as political actors, often endowed with a disproportionate ability to shape media coverage precisely because of their genesis in the "not news" arena. We extend this work, providing an updated way to think of "political actors" and "the media" in today's entertainment-saturated information environment, where the wall between politics and entertainment is highly porous. We close with a snapshot analysis and discussion of media coverage of Donald Trump's primary campaign.

Expanding the Media "Arena"

Van Aelst and Walgrave's Information and Arena (I&A) model offers an "actor-centric" model of media and politics, highlighting how politicians attempt to use media to further their political goals. The actor-centric focus is valuable but, we argue, may be limited by its conventional approach to defining "political actors" and "news media." We'll return below to the crucial question of who counts as a political actor and how non-traditional political actors may exploit the media arena differently than the traditional politicians the I&A model focuses on. Before taking up that question, however, we examine what counts as "the media" in the I&A model.

The I&A model "treats the media as a resource that can be used by politicians in the struggle over political power with other politicians. For instance, by attaining media access, anticipating media attention, or rhetorically using media coverage, politicians can improve their position in the political process" (Van Aelst and Walgrave, p. 5). The model focuses on "whether and how media affect the balance of power *among* politicians, which probably is the main question political scientists deal with—namely: who gets what, when and how" (ibid., p. 5). The model offers a useful schema for organizing our understanding of how (traditional) political actors interact with (traditional) media. Presumably, the model is intended to apply to the array of news outlets that in the contemporary

era produce news in print, broadcast and digital formats, including social media. Yet other than general references to "the mass media", the model does not specify which media it applies to, potentially limiting its scope. This absence of detail presents an enormous theoretical and empirical opportunity—and a challenge, too—because although "the mass media" have always been complex, and the boundaries between "news" and "entertainment" have always been porous, these complexities and this porousness have increased over time. The very notion of the media as an arena for political action is expanded when we consider the continued dissolution of boundaries across types of media that used to be considered distinct genres.

Van Aelst and Walgrave acknowledge that a key dynamic in media arenas comes from the structure of media and political systems cross-nationally. The US President, for example, is likely to face a different set of opportunities and constraints than a back-bench Member of the British Parliament, given not only their different levels of political authority but also the different media systems within which they operate. This acknowledgement can be expanded to a wide range of variation across systems, but also to accommodate a more complex understanding of "the media arena" within any one country. The US in particular, with its highly developed yet highly fragmented and competitive news media marketplace—and as the world's primary source of Hollywood-esque entertainment—may present the most dynamic and complex media arena for politicians to navigate and for scholars to understand.

Recognizing the growing complexity of media systems around the world, the I&A model can benefit from a more complex and nuanced treatment of media that are relevant to politics. Groundbreaking recent work by other scholars who have attempted to theorize the new media environment include Chadwick's work on the "hybrid media system" (Chadwick 2013). "Hybridity" is a hallmark of today's media, he argues, as rapidly evolving media systems layer new technologies and possibilities upon old, yielding media systems that cannot be described as "either/or" but rather in terms of "not only/but also." Hybrid media systems are marked by fluidity, constant reformulation, and processes of simultaneous integration and fragmentation. Thus, Chadwick contends, "Political communication is in transition. While broadcasting still remains at the heart of public life, the nature of mediated politics is evolving rapidly and is being pushed and pulled in multiple directions by multiple actors" (2013, p. 59). As political communication increasingly

flows not just from the top down but from the bottom up and laterally across a wide array of media platforms, political actors gain multiple platforms for political action and must constantly assess and adjust strategies accordingly.

Thinking in terms of *media regimes* can also enhance insights from the I&A model. Communication scholars Williams and Delli Carpini (2011) argue that dominant empirical and normative models of the media are products of a bygone era—the Age of Broadcast News. "Over the last two decades," they write, "economic, cultural, political, and technological changes have challenged the stability of the [previously] existing [US] media regime," encouraging us to consider "the relative merits of *Saturday Night Live*, *CBS Evening News*, Fox News, Twitter, Facebook, the *Huffington Post*, and the *New York Times* as sources of political information" (2011, 19). In other words, traditional public affairs news delivered through authoritative media outlets is on the decline. Several scholars argue that in many countries, news outlets are producing less "serious" news (Gunther and Mughan 2000; Zaller 1999), and doing so for shrinking audiences (Benson 2010; Stroud 2011).[1] The blurring of lines between information and entertainment and between fact and opinion are the hallmarks of the new media environment. Today's media regime is also characterized by *hyperreality*—the blending of media rituals, such as popular selection of winners in TV reality shows with the simultaneous public election of an actual president—and by *multiaxiality* in communication flows, meaning that many far-flung platforms can serve as sites of politically-relevant information and action.

Drawing upon these models, we can see that in the US and elsewhere, the "media arena" has increasingly become a dynamic, multi-level system—an array of arenas, each interconnected strongly or indirectly with the others, in which various arenas are structured by somewhat different logics and incentives, but all with the same end goal of attracting public attention/support. Information is quickly and widely shared but also easily de-contextualized or re-contextualized to fit the incentives and logics of various media outlets, including citizen-generated social media, partisan media and also, importantly, entertainment media. Politicians' messages and performances that "work" on one stage (e.g. by going viral) may fall flat on other platforms, and will most certainly be re-purposed on others. And, as we highlight in the next section, these various forms of media are increasingly shaped by the values, incentives, and expectations of entertainment.

The "Not News" Arena: Entertainment as Political Media

The increasingly complex array of media arenas is deeply shaped by values, expectations and behaviors borrowed from the realm of entertainment. As Altheide and Snow (1979) recognized some time ago and scholars like Altheide (2004), Baum (2002), Bennett (2005) and Williams and Delli Carpini (2011) have updated for an evolving media regime, although "news values" (i.e. the traits that make one news item more publishable than another) have always overlapped with "entertainment values" (e.g. sensationalism, drama, celebrity), today's news values are more entertainment-driven than ever before. Today, traditional news commonly features stories and figures from the entertainment world, and in many ways is driven as much by entertainment values as by informational values. It has become increasingly difficult to speak of the "news" media as something distinct from the larger entertainment-industrial complexes in which they are enmeshed, not to mention the general cultural shift toward entertainment values observed by Boorstin (1962), Postman (1985), Gabler (2011) and others. Entertainment influences politics today not only because entertainment values have increasingly seeped into media that used to (at least avowedly) eschew "entertaining" their audiences, but also because audiences for various forms of entertainment have multiplied as the options for entertainment media have proliferated, allowing increasing numbers of citizens to opt out of traditional news entirely (Prior 2005).

Indeed, entertainment so thoroughly infuses today's multiaxial media environment that it demands a rethinking of the "arenas" on which political actors act, the "actors" whose actions must be accounted for, and the "information" that shapes and results from that action. The importance of rethinking our understanding of arenas, actors, and information becomes especially acute when considering the declining trust that citizens around the world have in media, a distrust that extends to social as well as traditional media (Media Intelligence Service 2016; Swift 2016).

In terms of information, including entertainment in our models of politics helps to account for an already well-advanced development highlighted by Williams and Delli Carpini (2011): Rather than rely on the crumbling categories of "real news" versus "entertainment," we need a new orientation toward the wide varieties and forms of information citizens now encounter. In place of the old news/entertainment dichotomy,

Williams and Delli Carpini suggest the concept of "politically relevant information". No matter its form or source, politically relevant information includes any media content that "shape[s] opportunities for understanding, deliberating, and acting on (1) the conditions of one's everyday life, (2) the life of fellow community members, and (3) the norms and structures of power that shape these relationships" (p. 122).

By this definition, movies or pop songs or reality TV shows may be as politically relevant as the morning newspaper or the evening TV news (Tennenboim-Weinblatt 2013; van Zoonen 2005)—the traditional information sources closely studied by political scientists—particularly to the extent that traditional news consumption is declining as more people opt for entertainment fare over public affairs (Prior 2005). Indeed, Hollywood interpretations of politics can affect citizens' perceptions. For example, when Pautz (2015) showed study participants one of two movies—*Argo* or *Zero Dark Thirty*—she found that one-quarter of participants changed their opinion of the government after watching the movie.

In terms of the media arena, the growing pervasiveness of entertainment media—and the many hybrids of entertainment and news—create opportunities for nontraditional media formats and nontraditional political actors to wield considerable political influence. Put simply, entertainment media offer resources (and pose challenges) for political action in addition to those presented by traditional media.

Thus, we need to include in our definition of "the media" all those entertainment formats that serve to deliver politically-relevant information to citizens, from talk shows to infotainment programs to late-night comedy and beyond (Baum 2005; Jones 2010). Satirical political shows like *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show*—and their counterparts across the globe such as the UK's comedy quiz show *Have I Got News For You?*—give entertainers like Stephen Colbert and Jon Stewart a level of political influence that would have been unimaginable for entertainers fifty years ago. Likewise, ostensible entertainment programs like Amy Schumer's show on Comedy Central and Garfunkel and Oates' videos on YouTube broadcast policy signals about issues like feminism, gun control, and religion cloaked in raunchy, humorous skits.

To envision the importance of including entertainment media in our definition of "the media", consider the sex scandal of US Representative Anthony Weiner in 2011—a scandal made possible by Wiener's own social media proclivities. In this case, celebrities like Jimmy Fallon (who

parodied Weiner on *Saturday Night Live*) and Jon Stewart (who, despite being Weiner's personal friend, covered the scandal repeatedly on *The Daily Show*) served in dual roles—whether intentionally or not—as both entertainers and as political actors, shaping the discussion of the scandal by "real" political actors and news media alike, and undoubtedly influencing public reaction. And *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show* served as both entertainment and political media formats, providing venues outside the bounds of traditional news media in which to dissect and interpret the scandal, though certainly not to Weiner's advantage. The entertainment-based negative media coverage of Weiner's social media actions helped put an effective end to his political career.

Traditional political actors have long been able to use entertainment media for their own ends; just think of US Presidential candidate Bill Clinton playing the saxophone on *The Arsenio Hall Show* in 1992. And with the evolving media landscape, it stands to reason that traditional political actors increasingly *must* use entertainment for political aims; think of Sarah Palin appearing on *Saturday Night Live* in the final month of the 2008 US Presidential race, presumably in an effort to counteract the fallout from impersonations of Palin by SNL's Tina Fey; Barack Obama's multiple discussions with Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show* during his presidency; and former French president Nicolas Sarkozy's orchestration of a "meet the public" television show in 2010 prior to key regional elections, hosted by a popular TV anchor whose show typically featured "regional issues like saucisson-making" (Samuel 2010).

Entertainment platforms, in other words, help constitute the media "arena" in which political actors act. By making these appearances, political actors can hope to reach a broader audience than would normally tune in to hear a dry political speech and, crucially, to improve their image by showcasing their likeability and humor, thus engaging in the more personalized and intimate style of communication demanded in an era of personalized, "intimized" politics (Holtz-Bacha et al. 2014; McGregor et al. 2016; Stanyer 2012; Van Aelst et al. 2012).

Incorporating entertainment into our definitions of "the media" also takes account of the pervasive role—for better or worse—that the entertainment industry plays in society's political expectations and perceptions. From the social media escapades of Anthony Weiner to the reign of Silvio Berlusconi, traditional news coverage is surely influenced by news outlets' understanding of their audiences' taste for entertainment. Around the world, the modern entertainment backdrop of reality shows

like *Big Brother* and fictional shows like *Game of Thrones* sets a higher bar for news outlets to satisfy their audiences' thirst for the juiciest parts of politics. Moreover, the salacious nature of such high-drama politics fits perfectly with the format of infotainment and entertainment shows—more easily, in fact, than with traditional journalism, which is constrained by professional standards of objectivity and good taste. And in a broader sense, pervasive entertainment may shape the scripts by which publics understand and interact with political stories. Around the world, political actors seem to understand the evolving (and largely entertainment-based) media landscape. Some (like Berlusconi) use it to their advantage (Campus 2010). Others (like Wiener) find it their undoing.

CELEBRITIES AS POLITICAL ACTORS AND POLITICAL ACTORS AS CELEBRITIES

For all these reasons, we must account for the role of entertainment media in the evolving media landscape to fully understand how political actors interact with media to achieve their goals. We must also go a step further to account for how the evolving media environment is creating opportunities for nontraditional actors to play significant roles in political life. An important question when considering hybrid media systems, Chadwick asks, is "Who is emerging as powerful in this new context?" (p. 3). Today's hybrid media system, shaped by entertainment values and blurred boundaries between "news" and "not news," has given rise to unprecedented opportunities for nontraditional political actors, particularly those who can deliver performances with high entertainment value.

In describing their I&A model, Van Aelst and Walgrave limit their discussion of "political actors" to political elites/politicians but note that additional research should focus on "distinguishing kinds of politicians while examining how and why they differently employ the media's information as well as arena function" (2016, p. 508). One important dimension of variation is between traditional and nontraditional political actors, particularly those that hail from the world of entertainment.

Although celebrities are rarely mentioned in political science literature, they can have enormous political sway. Perhaps best recognized is the role of late night satirists Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, around whom a mini-cottage industry of research has grown. Though scholars disagree on the extent to which these kinds of TV shows can actually educate viewers (e.g. Hollander 2005; Prior 2003; Young 2004)—and

the extent to which they may merely feed cynicism and political disaffection (e.g. Baumgartner and Morris 2006; Becker 2011; Elenbaas and De Vreese 2008)—it seems increasingly apparent that celebrity satirists cannot be ignored in the study of political communication.

Focusing only on these explicitly political entertainers, however, overlooks the variety of actors who move across the boundaries of entertainment and news, and the variety of paths traversing those increasingly porous boundaries. For example, a growing literature traces the rise of "celebrity politics". Marked by "concerted attempts to mix renown with commonality" (Wheeler 2013, p. 62), celebrity politicians "'perform' across a range of media to define their personas, demonstrate their fortitude and enhance their appeal to the electorate" (p. 87). Indeed, they "have incorporated matters of performance, personalization, branding and public relations into the heart of their political representation" (p. 87). Importantly, celebrity politicians are attuned to and incorporate the products and tastes of pop culture, thus broadening their appeal.

Celebrity politics is not new. Particularly if one employs an expansive definition, celebrity politicians go back at least to US President John F. Kennedy (Wheeler 2013). Over 30 years ago, Neil Postman (1985) among others observed that politicians were being "assimilated into general television culture as celebrities" (p. 135). At the turn of the present century, political scientists West and Orman (2003) argued that the celebritization of politics was displacing traditional political skills of bargaining and compromise and putting a new premium on media management that trivialized politics. In the US, Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger (among others) preceded Donald Trump as entertainers who entered politics. And dyed-in-the-wool politicians from at least Kennedy on have long understood the importance of entertainment. Bill Clinton is widely seen as having blazed a contemporary celebrity-politician path in the early 1990s, a path Barack Obama and his campaign team skillfully extended in 2008—the year that also saw "the apotheosis of a celebrity-driven campaign" in the vice presidential bid of Alaska governor Sarah Palin (Wheeler 2013, p. 88).

But scholars of the phenomenon seem to agree that celebrity politics has become more pervasive, tied to the rise of public relations, marketing, mass communications (and now, social media) technologies and the mass public's declining attachment to and identification with formal political institutions. Indeed, celebrity politics are just one expression of the larger phenomenon of "celebrity power", in which "the disciplinary

boundaries between the domains of popular culture and political culture have been eroded through the migration of communicative strategies and public relations from the entertainment industries to the organization of the spectacle of politics" (Marshall 1997, p. xiii).

In response to these developments, pop culture scholar John Street (2004) has distinguished between two types of celebrity political actors. The "celebrity politician" (or "CP1") is someone who hails from the world of politics but apes the strategies and performances of entertainers. By contrast, the "CP2" is an entertainment figure who "pronounces on politics or claims the right to represent peoples or causes" without seeking formal political office, but "with a view to influencing political outcomes" (2004: p. 438). To put the distinction bluntly, a CP1 is at core a politician who employs entertainment tactics, whereas a CP2 is at core an entertainer who dallies in politics. Street's model of these two types is profoundly useful but, as we argue below, insufficient for understanding a political actor, like Donald Trump.

Street describes the CP1 as "the legitimately elected representative (or the one who aspires to be so)—who engages with the world of popular culture in order to enhance or advance their pre-established political functions and goals" (p. 437). Citing the examples of actors Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Ronald Reagan along with former pro wrestler turned governor of Minnesota, Jesse Ventura, Street also included in this CP1 category the "elected politician (or a nominated candidate) whose background is in entertainment, show business or sport, and who trades on this background (by virtue of the skills acquired, the popularity achieved or the images associated) in the attempt to get elected." In short, CP1s are elected or would-be politicians who use entertainment toward being or remaining politicians, either by trading on their background in the realm of entertainment or by associating themselves with that realm in order "to enhance their image or communicate their message" (p. 437).

The CP2 is instead not a politician first and foremost but, rather, an entertainer who hopes to reach into the world of politics and cast some influence. Examples are numerous today: Think George Clooney, Bono, the Russian girl band Pussy Riot and a number of other emissaries from the world of pop culture who become high-profile political activists.

In describing both the CP1 and the CP2, Street aims to blur the accepted categories of "politician" and "entertainer"—and defend the democratic capacities of pop culture—by showing how the roots

of politics are found as much in aesthetics and performance as in policy rationality. Successful politicians succeed in part—perhaps in large part, he argues—because of their ability to *aesthetically* appeal to publics. Paraphrasing Corner (2000), Street (2004) argues that "through a mediated public performance, politicians try to demonstrate certain political qualities and connect them to political values" (p. 446); "adoption of the trappings of popular celebrity is not a trivial gesture towards fashion or a minor detail of political communication, but instead lies at the heart of the notion of political representation" (p. 447). Representative politics, in Street's view, is as much about affective as instrumental relationships between publics and their leaders. In contrast to the conventional view that politics should not be tainted by entertainment values, Street ultimately argues that "all politicians are celebrity politicians" (p. 447) because politics inherently involves the art of representation.

Street's argument adds to the I&A model by expanding the category of "political actors" who may use the media arena to achieve political goals. Beyond that observation, we argue that the demands and opportunities for entertainment-infused political performance in today's hybrid media system are enhanced and, arguably, qualitatively different.

Which bring us back to the case of Donald Trump. Is he a CP1, a CP2, or something else?

Entertainment, Politics, and the Rise of Trump

Many factors undoubtedly contributed to Donald Trump's rise and unexpected victory in the 2016 US presidential election, including a sluggish economy, a growing populist sentiment and Trump's skillful evocation of racist and xenophobic tendencies. But it is also crucial to theorize the role that entertainment played in his campaign.

At first blush, we might put Trump squarely in the category of a CP1. He is, after all, President of the United States, and thus a legitimate politician. But when we dig more into Street's distinction between the CP1 and the CP2, categorizing Trump becomes more difficult. Despite Street's observation, noted above, that politics and entertainment are deeply intertwined, his typology of "CP1s" and "CP2s" is still premised on a fundamental boundary—a divide, however thin—between politics and the entertainment world. We believe this boundary is now so porous as to effectively no longer exist.

So much about Trump's candidacy and presidency thus far has been premised on what Street called the "gestures associated with celebrity politics" (2004, p. 444) that one wonders where the entertainment leaves off and the politics begins. Street distinguishes between CP1 and CP2 primarily based on whether the actor holds or seeks formal political office. If they don't, and if their professional roots lie in the entertainment realm, they are necessarily a "CP2". Thus, according to Street's typology, Trump is merely a CP1, since he clearly desires and has achieved political office, now holding levers of real political power. However, in implying a clear distinction between the "serious" politics of a CP1 and the entertainment identity of a CP2, Street's model rests on a quaint notion that there is a clear cut-off between "real" politics and entertainment. As Trump's candidacy demonstrated, Street's categorization system does not account for the very real interplay between politics and entertainment that has always existed but, arguably, is on sharper display than ever before in today's political system. Donald Trump's candidacy seems to have transgressed the boundaries between those two realms: Politics as performance art.

In order to understand Trump's political rise, in other words, we must think of him as fundamentally an entertainer (the intuition behind the CP2 category from Street's model) who has used his entertainment status to his advantage in his (CP1) aims to enter the "real" world of politics *but has continued to operate by the rules of entertainment* more than those of politics. Street's typology suggests that CP1 s will at some point gain the aura of "legitimate" politicians, as did entertainers-turned-politicians like Reagan and Schwarzenegger, who rebranded themselves as more or less conventional politicians. In contrast, Trump (thus far, at least) continues to behave in many ways as an entertainer, from his early morning Twitter rants to his *Bachelor*-like reveal of his Supreme Court nominee (Silman 2017). Thus, what remains to be explored is the gray area between the categories of entertainment and politics. In an entertainment-saturated media environment, what counts as "legitimate" politics today?

Trump's transgressive performance of politics suggests giving serious consideration to the way in which he traversed the porous boundary from entertainment to politics and how his entertainment roots may have eased his reception into the political realm by citizens and journalists, laying the ground for his ultimate electoral victory. We can theorize at least two potential ways of thinking about how Trump's

dyed-in-the-wool status as an entertainer may have furthered his successful efforts to become a "legitimate" politician—yet have allowed him (for the time being, at least) to still operate according to the norms and expectations of politics as much or more than the rules of conventional politics.

First, we explore the idea that Trump's established brand-name status served as a springboard for his 2016 campaign, allowing him to start well ahead of (most of) his Republican opponents in the twin goals of gaining media attention and gaining votes in the primary race. Second, we explore the idea that Trump's entertainment status served as a kind of Trojan Horse, allowing his political candidacy to slip into media attention and voters' considerations in a way that a traditional politician with equally inflammatory rhetoric would not have been able to. These two ideas are neither mutually exclusive, nor are they an exhaustive set of options for understanding Trump's journey from entertainer to politician. But considering both ideas may help us better understand not only the success of Trump's candidacy but also the evolving relationship between entertainment and politics.

The Benefits of Brand Status

The first of these two ideas is deeply intuitive: One reason that Donald Trump's entry into the race for the 2016 US Republican primary was met with such media hype and public attention was because he was already an entertainment household name (think 14 seasons of *The Apprentice*, a very popular reality TV show). Even though Trump was one of the last Republican primary candidates to announce his candidacy, a Gallup survey of registered Republicans in July 2015, found that 92% recognized the name Donald Trump. Compare that number to the percentage of Republicans who recognized the name Jeb Bush (son and brother to two former US Presidents, at 81%), not to mention Ted Cruz (at 66%) and Marco Rubio (at 64%) (Dugan 2015).

The fact that Trump already had brand status when he announced his candidacy on June 16, 2015 surely explains some if not most of the media and public attention he received. Indeed, the *New York Times* (Confessore and Yourish 2016) calculated that, as of March 15, 2016, Trump had received nearly $2 billion in "free media" (i.e., news coverage beyond the $10 million he had spent on advertising)—five times that of the Republican candidate with the next-highest amount of news
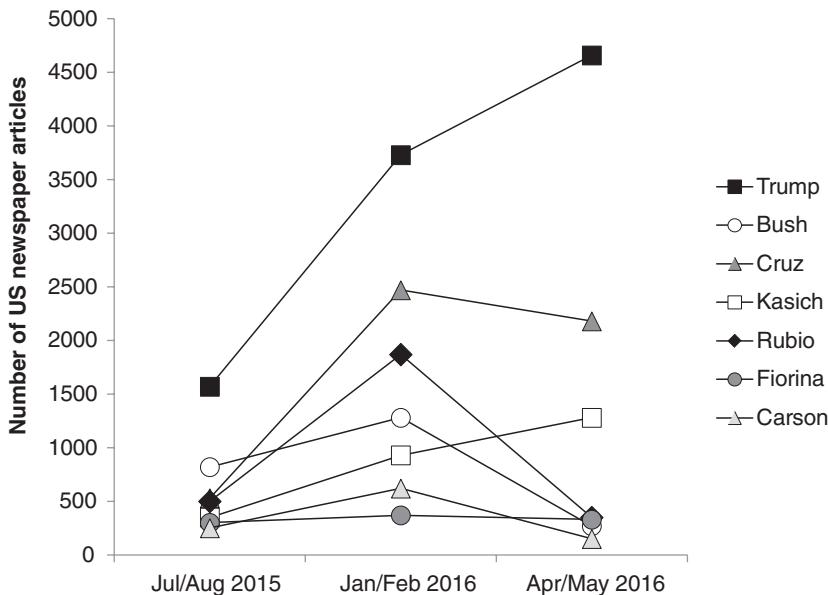
Fig. 3.1 Levels of US newspaper coverage of the 2016 Republican primary candidates

coverage, Ted Cruz, with $313 million in free media (Cruz had spent $20 million on advertising).

We wanted to see for ourselves how much news coverage Trump received relative to the other 2016 Republican primary candidates. We compared snapshots of US newspaper coverage at three different stages in the primary campaign: From July 15 to August 15, 2015 (the second full month after Trump announced his candidacy); from January 15 to February 15, 2016 (spanning news coverage of four Republican primary debates, three of which Trump attended); and from April 15 to May 15, 2016 (covering approximately two weeks before and after Trump became the presumptive Republican nominee on May 3).[2] Like Confessore and Yourish (2016), we found that Trump certainly did receive the lion's share of US news coverage in all three time windows (Fig. 3.1).

What Fig. 3.1 (and the *New York Times* analysis) does not account for is the fact that not all this media coverage was positive, as Patterson (2016) has shown. To examine the amount of positive versus negative coverage for ourselves, we took a random sample of 10% of the articles shown in Fig. 3.1
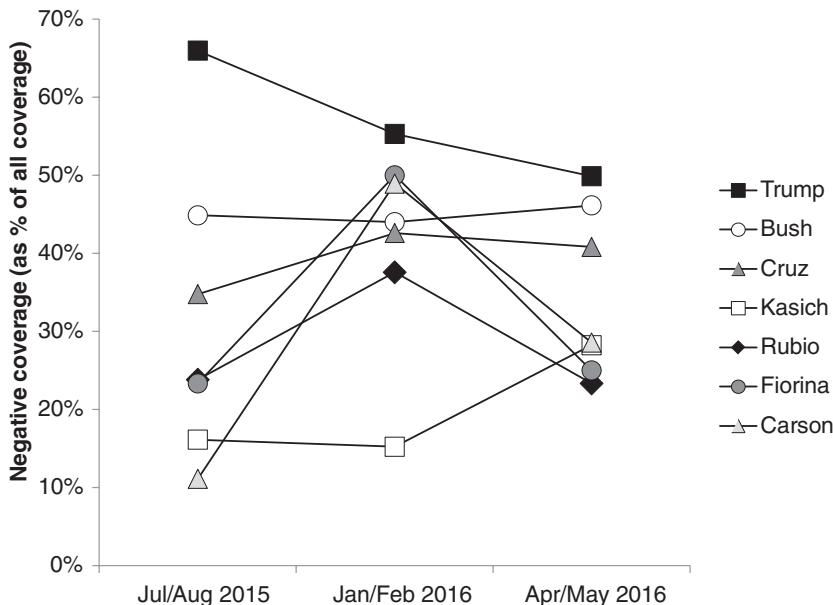
Fig. 3.2 Negative news coverage of the 2016 Republican primary candidates

and coded them according to the tone of the coverage for each candidate: positive (e.g. explicitly supportive editorials, objective news about high points in the candidate's campaign), negative (e.g. explicitly critical editorials, objective news about struggles in the candidate's campaign), or neutral. As Fig. 3.2 shows, the media hype surrounding Trump was not all good news for his campaign; he received more negative news coverage (calculated as the percentage of negative articles out of all articles sampled) than any other Republican candidate in all three time windows. Figure 3.2 suggests that Trump's rise did not depend on positive coverage (though it was almost certainly aided by the sheer volume of coverage he received).

Indeed, the nature of the news coverage about Trump was not always in line with what we would expect of a traditional politician (or even a CP1). In Fig. 3.3, we present data from keyword searches that track the relative frequency of news articles that contain the term "Donald Trump" as well as terms signaling five different types of discussion—entertainment, fascism, sexism, racism, and Trump's non-presidential-ness—monthly from May 2015 to April 2016.[3] These data suggest that
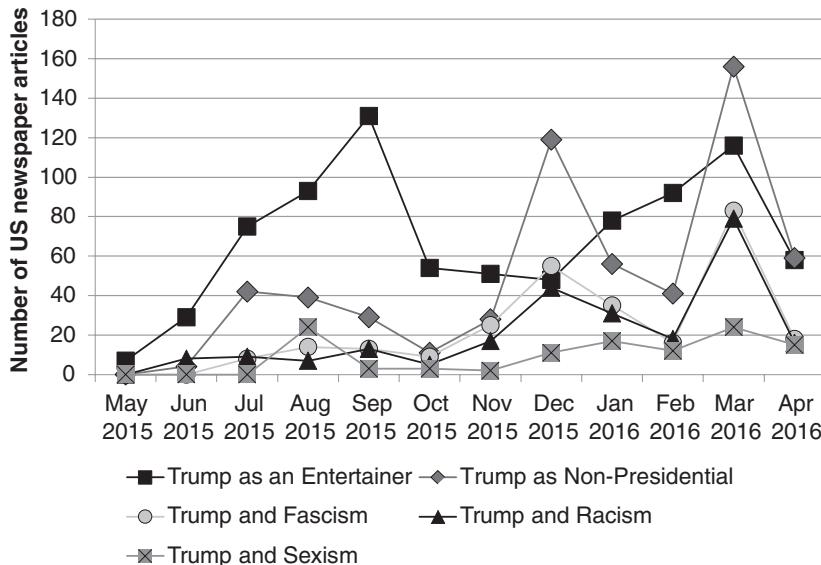
Fig. 3.3 Diverse portrayals of Trump as a presidential candidate (May 2015–June 2016)

even as Trump's coverage was growing less negative overall, references to highly problematic features of his rhetoric increased, though fitfully).

These data suggest that, just because Trump's brand name may well account for how much coverage he received, it does not necessarily mean he was considered a "serious" politician, at least at the beginning. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many journalists did not consider him as such. For example, as Gold (2016) reports: "David Remnick, editor of *The New Yorker*, told his readers last summer that Donald Trump was running for president to promote his own brand and that the 'whole con might end well before the first snows in Sioux City and Manchester.'" That verdict was, it seems, practically unanimous: "The chance of his winning [the] nomination and election is exactly zero." (James Fallows of *The Atlantic*); "Trump is absolutely a joke." (Bob Garfield, host of NPR's "On the Media"); "Donald Trump is not going to be the Republican presidential nominee in 2016." (the Washington Post's Chris Cillizza) (all quoted in McPhate 2016). Or consider the July 2015 decision by *The Huffington Post* to put all its coverage of the Trump campaign in its

Entertainment section (Grim 2015). "If you are interested in what The Donald has to say," *The Huffington Post* wrote, "you'll find it next to our stories on the Kardashians and The Bachelorette." (By December 2015, the tone and tenor of the coverage had changed. In a piece titled "We are no longer entertained," Ariana Huffington described Trump's campaign as "an ugly and dangerous force in American politics" and vowed her outlet would put Trump back in the "politics" category [Huffington 2015]).

This brings us to the second idea we want to examine about the blurred distinction between entertainment and politics in Trump's case, namely the idea that Trump's entertainment status gave him a grace period in which news outlets and voters did not evaluate his political candidacy with the same level of serious scrutiny that a traditional politician would have received.

The Stickiness of Categories

Beyond the fact that Trump's brand status might have fueled the level of news coverage he received and the readiness with which citizens recognized his name, a second idea is that Trump brought the entertainment arena with him into the political arena in ways that confound distinctions between the two and thus confounded the judgments applied to him. Specifically, Trump's genesis in the entertainment arena may have allowed his political candidacy to sneak up on journalists and voters. Coming from the world of entertainment may have given Trump a real advantage, allowing him (at least initially) to be treated more like a celebrity than like a politician, and thus subject to less—or at least a different sort of—scrutiny.

Put simply, crucial to understanding Trump's political success is understanding the *kind* of political actor he appears to be. Because Trump came to the political scene from the world of TV entertainment, many people (initially, at least) may not have seen Trump fundamentally as a politician but, rather, as an entertainer. We might even wonder if, because they conceptualized him as an entertainer, both citizens and media may have given him a greater license for incendiary comments and unconventional behavior.

A long literature in social psychology points to the "stickiness" of human thought, telling us that once we conceptualize an object in a certain way, it can be quite difficult to *re*-conceptualize it in a different way (e.g. Duncker 1945). For example, once we conceptualize a cubic shape on the wall as a shelf, it is difficult for us to re-conceptualize the cubic shape as a box in which to store things, and vice versa. This notion of "functional fixedness" can, we argue, apply to political candidates as well

as objects. Once conceptualized as an outlandish reality TV host, it was difficult to re-conceptualize Donald Trump as a politician—let alone, as a serious politician who might become America's next president. Thus, when he said outlandish things in the political space during the 2016 Republican primary (and perhaps even extending through the general election, and perhaps even today), journalists, pundits and voters may have been cognitively less jarred, because we are already quite used to entertainers saying outlandish things. Citizens who disagreed with the content of Trump's messages may have been just as outraged by Trump's rhetoric as they would have been if Trump were a traditional politician. However, citizens who agreed with the content of his message may have been able to align with Trump more readily than they would have been with a traditional politician, because if it had been a traditional politician making the same statements, supportive citizens would first have had to get over the confusion of a politician acting so un-politician-like.

This point is crucial, because Trump's successful entry into politics can in part—perhaps in large part—be attributed to how he communicates in ways that traditional politicians generally have not done. Most notably, perhaps, was Trump's heavy reliance on controversial statements throughout his campaign; an approach he seems to have carried into the White House. Undoubtedly one of the main reasons news coverage of Trump overshadowed that devoted to other candidates in the 2016 primary was that Trump repeatedly said things that were salacious and sometimes outright sexist, racist and xenophobic, allowing him, as one leading political strategist put it, to own the news cycle day in and day out (Greene 2016). Of course, Trump is hardly the first politician to rely on controversy. As Van Aelst and Walgrave say, one of political elites' tried and true "access strategies…is making a controversial statement" (2016, p. 507). But Trump perfected the strategy by saying things so jaw-dropping that media of all kinds could not resist covering him. Indeed, the president and CEO of CBS, Les Moonves, "told a recent investor conference that the Trump-dominated campaign 'may not be good for America,' but 'it is damn good for CBS….The money's rolling in and this is fun…. Bring it on, Donald. Keep going'" (quoted in Crovitz 2016).

These blurred boundaries between entertainment and politics, and the antics of unconventional political actors who hail from outside of traditional politics, are certainly not US-only phenomena. Italy's Silvio Berlusconi is but one other example of a political actor whose

entertainment roots seemed to endow him with heightened media attention and a more lenient public. Lest we think Donald Trump is unique in his ability to rile up a nation's media with inflammatory comments, we need only remember Berlusconi's declaration that "I am the Jesus Christ of politics. I sacrifice myself for everyone" (Jebreal 2015). No, Trump is not unique. And given the increasing porousness between entertainment and politics around the world, it is likely that we will see an increasing array of political actors like Trump and Berlusconi in the future.

Conclusion

We have argued that today's blurred boundaries between "entertainment" and "news" have opened a variety of pathways for those from the entertainment field to enter and shape the political field, and for political actors of all stripes to use (and be used by) entertainment media. In order to understand how political actors use the media, as the Information and Arena model attempts, we simply must account for entertainment—that is, for forms and formats not usually understood as "news". Moreover, we must account for the rise of unconventional political actors who may transgress boundaries between entertainment and politics. Finally, we have argued that the common currency across media platforms today are often the postures, performances and self-presentations of entertainment and celebrity.

Notes

1. The shifting media landscape is, of course, not the same around the world. Garden (2010), for example, finds that newspapers in Australia are faring better than those in the US and UK.
2. Using these three time ranges, we searched all US newspapers archived in LexisNexis for articles that included the full name of each candidate in quotation marks and either the word "president" or "campaign." For example, for Trump we used the following keyword search string: "Donald Trump" AND (president OR campaign).
3. We used the following keyword searches:
   For entertainment: "The Apprentice", entertainment, entertainer, celebrity
   For fascism: fascism, Nazi, Hitler
   For sexism: sexist, misogyny, misogynistic
   For racism: racism, bigot
   For non-presidential: dangerous, fear mongering, offensive, irresponsible

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Political Public Relations and Mediatization: The Strategies of News Management

Jesper Strömbäck and Frank Esser

Introduction

While the history of political public relations is as old as politics itself, dating back at least to ancient Rome when Quintus Tullius Cicero wrote what was probably the first publication on political public relations and electioneering (Freeman and Cicero 2012), until the last few years there was very little theory and research focusing on political public relations (Strömbäck and Kiousis 2011a). Even though public relations *as practice* was pioneered in the context of politics (Cutlip 1995), and always has constituted an intrinsic part of politics, *theoretically* there has been a disconnect between research on politics, political communication, public relations and adjacent fields (Strömbäck and Kiousis 2013). As a result, our understanding of how mass media function as a source of information and an arena for political actors (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016), and

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how political actors attempt to act strategically to reach their goals in democracies where politics has become highly mediatized, has suffered.

Against this background, this chapter will seek to analyze why and how political actors attempt to manage the news media to further their strategic goals. To that end, the chapter will seek to bridge the gap between theory and research on mediatization, political public relations and political parties as strategic actors. With respect to political actors, we will focus on political *parties* and their *leaders* in *parliamentary* systems.

Political Actors as Strategic Actors

The starting point for our analysis is the notion that political actors are rational and strategic actors, in the sense that they (1) have their goals, (2) use available means and (3) choose their plans of action in attempts to realize those goals. This notion is key, not only in research on political party behavior (Downs 1957; Sjöblom 1968), but also on *political public relations.* Broadly speaking, political public relations refers to the management process by which political actors seek to influence and to establish and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with key publics to help them achieve their strategic goals (Strömbäck and Kiousis 2011b, Kiousis and Strömbäck 2014). In terms of political parties, these publics can be internal as well as external, and more or less friendly or hostile to the political party, but have that in common that they have a potential or actual impact on the parties and their chances of realizing their strategic goals. In order to achieve their strategic goals, political parties thus need to manage the relationships they have with different publics (Kiousis and Strömbäck 2014, 2015; see also Grunig and Hunt 1984; Ledingham 2006). As media intervenes in these processes, as we will see, news management is an essential part of political public relations.

In terms of overall strategy, these might vary between parties. A common distinction in this context is between *vote-seeking, office-seeking*, and *policy-seeking* parties (Strøm 1990). Although simplified, the defining characteristic of *vote-seeking parties* is that their main goal is to increase or maximize their share of the vote. *Office-seeking parties*, in contrast, seek to maximize their control over political office, whereas *policy-seeking parties* seek to maximize their effect on public policy (Strøm 1990; Müller and Strøm 1999). These are ideal types, of course, not only because parties usually want to increase their votes as well as their control over political office and their impact on policy-making, but also because

parties are no monoliths. Different actors within parties often have different views of what the priority between votes, office, and policy impact should be, and one key challenge facing the leadership of political parties is to reconcile different views within parties and in relation to the electorate with respect to what the overall strategy should be.

The notion that political parties are no monoliths also lies at the heart of Sjöblom's (1968) theory on party strategies in multiparty systems. According to that theory, the most general goal for any political party is that it "shall make the authoritative decisions in accordance with its evaluation system" (p. 73). Political parties are thus assumed to be goal-directed, to want something beyond existing for its own sake, and in order to evaluate different options they are facing, they need to have an evaluation system.

This is particularly important considering that political parties act in several arenas, each accompanied by a specific strategic goal and with constraints in terms of their members or key publics and decision types. Following Sjöblom (1968), the arenas that political parties act in are the *electoral*, the *internal*, and the *parliamentary arena*. In the *internal arena*, the strategic goal is to maximize internal cohesion; the members are the party members; and the key decisions they have to make are whether or not to support the party's leadership and policies. In the *electoral arena*, the strategic goal is to maximize the share of votes; the members those entitled to vote; and the key decisions they have to make are whether to vote and what party to vote for. In the *parliamentary arena*, the strategic goal is to maximize parliamentary influence; the members are representatives for the different parties; and the key decisions they have to make are related to when to seek collaboration or conflict with each other. Aside from this, a fourth arena that has become increasingly important over the years should be added: a media arena. We will come back to this.

The challenge for political parties is that there might often be conflicts and a need for trade-offs between the goals associated with each arena. Too much emphasis on reaching the strategic goal in one arena might even hurt the efforts at reaching it in another. In the electoral arena, a party might for example increase its support by abandoning policies that are unpopular among segments in the electorate, but to the extent that these policies have support within the party, such a move might damage internal cohesion. Another scenario might be that an opposition party increases its influence in the parliamentary arena by collaborating with the government, but that might cause a backlash in the internal

and electoral arena if members and supporters think that collaborating with the government amounts to selling out. Attacking the government might on the other hand bolster support among members and supporters, but also decrease parliamentary influence.

Virtually every day, political parties and their leadership thus face strategic challenges with respect to how much priority they shall give to the strategic goals in the internal arena, the electoral arena and the parliamentary arena; how they can reconcile the interests and demands from members and publics in each of the arenas; and how much weight they shall give to the overall evaluation system, including the interpretation of the party's ideology, when conflicts appear with the wants and needs of external publics. Important to remember are that political parties are complex, and that the environments in which they operate include multiple publics whose wants and needs often diverge but they cannot ignore (Hughes and Dann 2009). If the only goal was "to maximize political support", as Downs assumed (1957, p. 11), the life of political parties and their leadership would be much simpler.

Even more importantly, the life of political parties would be much simpler if they did not have largely independent news media – alongside other forms of media such as web-only and social media – to deal with. But deal with the news media they have to. The key reason is the process of mediatization that has taken place over the last decades.

STRATEGIC PARTY BEHAVIOR AND THE MEDIATIZATION OF POLITICS

One of the most transformative social change processes affecting politics during the last decades is the mediatization of politics (Kriesi et al. 2013; Strömbäck 2008). While there are different definitions, here we define the mediatization of politics as a "a long-term process through with the importance of the media and their spill-over effects on political processes, institutions, organizations and actors have increased" (Strömbäck and Esser 2014a, p. 6).

Important to note is that mediatization is a *structural* process, through which the media over time "have become an integral part of other institutions' operations, while also achieving a degree of self-determination and authority that forces other institutions, to greater or lesser degrees, to submit to their logic" (Hjarvard 2013, p. 3; See also Asp 2014; Strömbäck and Esser 2014b; Strömbäck and Esser 2015; Udris and Lucht 2014). From an institutional perspective, the differentiation

and institutionalization of the media in their own right is thus a precondition for the media's independent influence in political and other processes (Marcinkowski and Steiner 2014).

Also important to note is that *media influence* is much broader than *media effects*, usually conceived of as effects on the individual level of analysis (Schulz 2004). Following from the notion that mediatization is a process of structural change, media influence refers to "all activities and processes that are altered, shaped or structured by the media and the perceived need of individuals, organizations and social systems to communicate with or through the media" (Strömbäck and Esser 2014a, p. 11). To the extent that political actors, organizations or institutions alter their ways of thinking, organizing, or behaving because of media, it can thus be conceived of as a form of media influence and as a reaction of political actors to their perception that media have become an influential factor in their environment.

While media is a broad term, the kind of media that matters most is the news media. While it is undisputed that many consumers turn away from established media channels, it is worth noting that traditional news media—in their offline or online formats—still constitute the most important source of information about politics and current affairs for most people (Mitchell et al. 2016). Most news that is shared on social media also has their origins in traditional news media (Bright 2016; Newman 2011). Important to note is furthermore that political actors continue to perceive the news media as a powerful institution (Van Aelst et al. 2008; Strömbäck 2011). Since perceptions of media influence have an impact on how political actors behave (Cohen et al. 2008), this is important for an understanding of the news media's actual influence. Research also shows that news media can have significant effects both with respect to the public and political actors (Nabi and Oliver 2009; Van Aelst et al. 2014). In addition, the institutionalization of news media logic—understood as a transorganizational agreement on news processes and content (Cook 2005; Esser 2013)—means that it exerts an influence going beyond traditional news media themselves.

While the mediatization of politics is always a matter of degree, and varies *across countries* as well as across political actors, organizations and institutions *within countries*, there is little doubt that politics in contemporary advanced democracies is highly mediatized. Hence, political actors, organizations and institutions cannot afford not to take news media and news media logic into consideration. Not if they are strategic actors.

How News Media Intervene in Parties' Different Arenas

Considering the mediatization of politics, it is evident that theories on political parties as strategic actors that do not incorporate the various roles and functions of news media are flawed. As suggested by Van Aelst and Walgrave (2016; see also Chap. 1), news media have two key functions for political actors, such as political parties. The first is as a key *source of information*. Simply put, the news media "provide politicians with information they would otherwise not have or not pay attention to" (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016, p. 499). The second is as an *arena*, used by political actors to reach out to the public at large but also to influence intra-political processes. Both these functions are crucial, and by "performing both functions at the same time […] the news media form a formidable resource for politicians affecting the power balance among political actors" (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016, p. 501).

The media arena should thus be considered a fourth arena in which political parties are active (Nord 1997) alongside the parliamentary, the electoral and the internal arena. In the media arena, they strategic goal is to maximize positive publicity; the members are journalists and editors, and the key decisions they have to make are related to which political actors and issues should receive attention and how they should be framed in the media coverage (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013).

Important to note though is that news media is *not just* an arena separate from other arenas. Because news media function as information provider and arena for publics *within* each of the four arenas, the news media have a *dual and integral role* in all political processes, including how parties attempt to act strategically and manage their relationships with key publics in the parliamentary, the electoral and the internal arena.

The Internal Arena

Beginning with the *internal arena*, the strategic goal is to maximize internal cohesion. Among other things, this requires the parties to nurture the relationships with their internal publics—of which there are several. Among these are those who have leadership positions within the party, those who are representatives for the party, those who are employed by the party and those who are members within and volunteering for the party. In addition, within each party there are usually several factions based on different opinions with respect to policy as well as strategic matters.

The implication is that there are several publics within each party, some more and some less happy with the leadership and how the party is being run. From a strategic point of view and to strengthen internal cohesion, it is thus crucial that the party leadership has an up-to-date overview of the publics within the party and seeks to nurture the relationship with those publics that are critical and might turn hostile.

In these processes, the news media intervenes indirectly as well as directly. First, even for party members, the news media have an information function. How news media cover the party and how internal publics, based on the media coverage, perceive and evaluate how the party is doing will thus have repercussions on the internal arena. While positive coverage is likely to stifle dissent, negative coverage might trigger it. Second, since conflict and negativity belong to the most prominent news factors (Esser et al. 2017; Harcup and O'Neill 2016), and internal conflicts are usually deemed newsworthy, the news media are always interested in finding—and thereby amplifying—critical voices within the parties. Relatedly, publics within a party that are unhappy with the leadership or direction of the party might use the news media to voice their dissent. Regardless of whether news media actively search for critical voices within a party or critical voices strategically use news media to voice their dissent, when dissent is covered by news media, it might trigger further dissent. Such processes present a serious challenge to internal cohesion.

To realize the strategic goal of maximizing internal cohesion, political parties thus need strategies not only for managing the relationships with internal publics but also for protecting the organization against public attention to internal dissent and conflicts. Following from this, the strategic goal for parties' news management efforts with respect to the internal arena is to keep internal dissent out of the media coverage.

The Parliamentary Arena

Turning to the parliamentary arena, the strategic goal is to maximize parliamentary influence while the members are elected representatives for the different parties. While the most important determinants of a party's parliamentary influence are factors such as the share of seats in parliament and whether the party belongs to the government, these are not the only factors that matter. Of importance are also how effective the parties are at placing their issues on the political agenda, at framing policies and policy proposals, and at negotiating. In this context, the news media may play an important role.

First, the news media is one of political actors' key sources of information about what *other political actors* are thinking and doing (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). This is an important part of the information function, as information about what other parties are thinking and doing helps parties to plan their moves. Second, political parties can use the news media to signal their preferences to other parties or backbenchers within the own party (Esbaugh-Soha 2007). Third, by acting to put their issues on the media agenda, political parties may attempt to take advantage of the fact that news media have an influence on the agendas of other parties, parliament and government (Walgrave et al. 2008). This is part of the strategy of "going public"—appealing to news media and public opinion in efforts to exert pressure on other policymakers (Kernell 2007). Fourth, influencing how news media frame various issues, political parties can try to force other parties' to adhere to or position themselves in relation to the framing preferred by a party. Fifth, opposition parties can exploit the fact that voicing criticism toward government increases their chances of getting media attention; heightened sensibility toward the news media also influences the choice of questions opposition politicians ask in parliament (Santen et al. 2015). Sixth, news media may intervene in negotiation processes. Such interventions may complicate negotiations, for example by prematurely demanding policy commitments, focusing on conflicts within or between parties or by bringing to the front stage discussions that were meant to remain back stage (Spörer-Wagner and Marcinkowski 2010).

While not exhaustive, these examples illustrate that news media are one key resource of power in the relationship between policy actors (Kunelius and Reunanen 2012) and how news media has become an integral part of the parliamentary arena. To realize the strategic goal of maximizing parliamentary influence, parties thus need strategies for managing the news so that they focus on the issues and frames preferred by the party while not disrupting negotiations by bringing to public attention discussions that are meant to remain confidential.

The Electoral Arena

With respect to the electoral arena, the strategic goal is to maximize the share of votes while members are those entitled to vote. To realize that goal, news media are crucial. The main reasons are that news media, for

most people, still constitute the most important source of information about politics and current affairs (Mitchell et al. 2016), and that most of what is discussed and shared in offline and online networks originate with news media (Newman 2011). Regardless of what publics in the electoral arena the parties have a relationship with, their efforts at managing the relationships with different publics are heavily influenced by the news media. This holds for their relationships with voters at large, specific voter groups, various interest groups and non-governmental organizations.

Focusing on voters at large and setting more stable, sociodemographic factors aside, research has shown that people's vote choice is influenced by a number of factors. Among these are what issues people think are the most important in conjunction with what issues are owned by different parties (Petrocik 1996); how people think about issues and problems, including in what direction the country is heading (van der Eijk and Franklin 2009); how voters perceive the parties and their policies as well as their leaders or candidates (King 2002); and strategic considerations related to, among other things, possible government formations and how to ensure that the vote is not wasted (Ocarsson and Holmberg 2016).

In all these respects, news media and their coverage have an influence. As shown by numerous studies, among other things the news media have effects on the public agenda (McCombs 2014) and what issues people consider when evaluating the parties (Iyengar and Kinder 1987), on what issues voters perceive the parties to own (Thesen et al. 2016), on how voters evaluate and understand different political issues (Lecheler and de Vreese 2016) and how voters evaluate the parties and their leaders (Balmas and Sheafer 2010). Or, phrased differently, the media can have significant first- and second-level agenda setting effects, priming effects, and framing effects. To a significant degree, they shape the "pictures in our heads" that we draw upon when forming our opinions and casting out votes.

To realize the strategic goal of maximizing the share of votes, and maintaining good relationships with different publics on the electoral arena, the parties thus need strategies for managing the news so that they receive as extensive and positive coverage as possible and so that the news media focus on the issues and frames preferred by the party. While news media do not decide elections, election campaigns are permeated by news media. As a consequence, the strategic goal in the electoral arena is closely intertwined with the strategic goal in the media arena.

The Media Arena

In the media arena, the strategic goal is to maximize positive publicity while the members are journalists and editors, i.e. those who have an influence over the news media coverage. In this context, positive publicity is not restricted to publicity that is positive in tone. Rather, positive publicity is publicity that aligns with the strategic goals that the parties have for their news management efforts in the internal, the parliamentary and the electoral arena: to keep internal dissent out of the media coverage, to keep the news media from to disrupting negotiations by bringing to public attention discussions that are meant to remain confidential, and to influence the news media to give the party and its leader or candidates as extensive and positive coverage as possible while focusing on the issues and frames preferred by the party.

The notion that the strategic goal on the media arena is closely intertwined with the strategic goals in the other arenas notwithstanding, it is in the media arena that the parties' news management efforts take place and where they have to manage their relationship with journalists and editors. It is also in the media arena where the tensions between the parties' interests and news media logic become most apparent.

Following news media logic, the news media are rarely interested in providing the kind of news that political parties want them to. Rather, they are interested in political news stories that on the one hand protect their professional autonomy and legitimacy as information providers and watchdogs (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2014), while on the other hand they should be inexpensive to cover (Hamilton 2004), adhere to news values such as conflict, drama, entertainment and visual attractiveness (Harcup and O'Neill 2016), be conducive to storytelling techniques such as dramatization and personalization (Hernes 1978), and be effective in the competition for audience attention. Hence, more often than not, news media tend to focus on other issues and aspects than those that political parties would want them to. And even if at least larger and/or governing parties may be successful in terms of influencing the media agenda, the news media always have the last words in terms of deciding what sources to quote and how to frame political actors or issues (Strömbäck and Nord 2006; Zaller 2001).

Of course, there are variations across countries and the degree to which political news coverage is guided by news media logic versus political logic (Esser et al. 2017). On a general level, it is nevertheless safe to say that political news is highly mediatized and shaped by news media logic (Esser and Strömbäck 2014; Strömbäck and Esser 2015).

To act strategically in any of the arenas in which political parties act thus requires strategic news management and relationship building with journalists and editors. Political parties might often be critical towards the news media, but can in most cases not do without them. Political parties need the news media, and often more than the news media need them. That holds particularly true for parties that are out of power or lack access to information that has extraordinary news value. That leads to the question: how do political parties strategically attempt to manage the news.

Mediatization and Strategic News Management

From a theoretical perspective, the most important mechanism behind the mediatization of politics is *adaptation* to news media and news media logic (Asp 2014; Hjarvard 2013; Strömbäck and Esser 2014a, b). From an actor-centric perspective, the key driving force behind the mediatization of politics is however not news media forcing themselves upon passive others. Rather, the driving force is political actors' reacting towards the importance of news media by adapting to news media logic with the purpose of using the news media to reach their strategic goals. Sometimes called *self-mediatization* (Esser 2013; Meyer 2002), this perspective highlights how political actors contribute to the mediatization of politics and how mediatization is the result of the interactional relationships between political actors and news media (Asp 2014; Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016).

On a strategic level and as an organizational mindset, the most important components of strategic news management are an informed understanding of how news media operate and of how to adapt to news media logic as an integral part of all strategic and tactical discussions within the party. This is important not only with respect to the top leadership within the party, but should permeate the party organization at all levels. Related to this, a second important component of strategic news management is to build an infrastructure within the party with the dual function of (a) directly managing the news media and responding to their wants and needs, and (b) training those within the party on how to manage the news strategically as well as on a tactical level. At the end of the day, the main competitors in the fight for news media attention are other parties, and in that context, news media act as arbitrators (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). By being better than competitors in strategically giving the news media what they are looking for—in terms of information

high in news value, packaged to increase its news value and scheduled to fit the news media's production processes—political parties can gain the upper hand in the struggle for media attention.

From a strategic point of view, adaptation to news media and news media logic should however be perceived as a means towards reaching the strategic goals of the parties. This calls for long-term thinking so that the short-term quest for media attention does not divert from the long-term strategic goals. Important to think about for political parties is thus how they want to be perceived by the media. To illustrate the relationship between strategic goals and operative tactics, we would like to propose a typology that distinguishes two dimensions (inspired by Benoit 2014; Pfetsch 2007):

- The first dimension describes two types of strategic news management, one that "promotes own policies and personnel" and another that "deflects criticism and attacks opponents".
- The second dimension differentiates between two objects of news management, namely policy ("issue as message") and character ("person as message").

If the two dimensions are combined, they lead to a four-field matrix, as shown in Table 4.1, where various tactics can be allocated to styles of strategic news management. The tactics listed in cells 1 and 2 of the table illustrate a proactive incorporation of news media logic and are mostly used for a party's positive self-presentation. The tactics listed in cells 3 and 4 illustrate a reactive incorporation of news logic and are used, at least in the case of attack politics, for negative other-presentation.

Before we describe some tactics in more detail it is worth noting that journalists have shown to be receptive to tactics of news management if they are carried out in ways that are not perceived as endangering the journalists' integrity and professional autonomy, or undermining the legitimacy of their coverage. These tactics can be expected to be particularly successful if they help lowering journalists' costs for producing stories—with cost understood as investments in time, cognitive effort and money. In this case, these tactics represent "news subsidies" (Gandy 1982). As news subsidies, their value lies in the extent to which they succeed in lowering the cost of covering the news while at the time adding to a story's news value without compromising the stories' credibility and the journalists' sense of autonomy.

Table 4.1 Strategies and tactics of news management

	Promoting own policies and personnel	*Deflecting criticism and attacking opponents*
Issue as message	(1) Strategic agenda setting, priming, and framing	(3) Strategic agenda cutting and message control
Person as message	(2) Image and event management	(4) Attack politics

Among the strategies to promote one's own policies (cell 1), one can differentiate between strategic agenda setting, strategic priming and strategic framing (Esser and Spanier 2005). *Strategic agenda setting* means promoting a party's own issues vis-à-vis the media by taking actions and staging events that are so compelling that reporters will feel obliged to report them as news. This strategy is mainly targeted at shaping the media agenda and therefore also referred to as agenda building. Activities used to achieve this goal include gearing an issue to the news values of conflict and drama, using media contacts to discreetly leak an issue to a consciously chosen journalist, or launching an issue publicly at an effectively staged event (see, for example, Esmark and Mayerhöffer 2014). *Strategic priming* is aimed more at the public, less at the media. It uses a broad set of messages ("signs") in a wide range of communication channels to activate in the minds of citizens a set of criteria ("schemas") with which citizens will evaluate a political actor. Polling is crucial to determine which issues (or values, candidate traits) should be highlighted and how they resonate with voters. Ideally, voters will be primed particularly on those issues that are to a party's advantage and, equally important, draw a defining distinction to the main opponent. This theory of deliberate priming (Medvic 2006) is turned into practice by political communication strategists who determine scientifically what issues their client should emphasize and how those issues should be framed. *Strategic framing* refers to structuring the meaning and significance of a political message in order to influence the version of the story that the media will feature. This process of putting a favorable interpretation on information is intended to determine the parameters of a debate before it even begins. Oftentimes, however, politicians are drawn into situations where they cannot only emphasize their own issues and frames but must address issues benefitting an opponent. Strategic framing can help in these cases to position oneself in such a way that the opponent's advantage is minimized and the issue sufficiently neutralized. All the tactics of

cell 1 would be most effective for a party if the respective issues, cues and frames saturated all available communication channels and captured more attention than competing messages—by using channels under the control of the party (websites, social media, YouTube, advertising) and under the control of the media (news coverage, commentary).

Image management is intended to develop and improve a politician's positive image (see cell 2 of Table 4.1). The exploitation of personality features caters to the human interest dimension and the media's fixation on political stars. But—from a politician's perspective—image and issues must marry up and clarify, in credible terms, his or her overall profile and campaign theme. Image management includes professional preparation and training prior to important media appearances, often with the help of consultants specialized in influencing public perceptions. Effective symbols, strong visuals and celebrity testimonials are used to emphasize support, authority and leadership qualities. Image management is often combined with *event management*, referring to planned events staged primarily for the purpose of being reported. Because of their scripted and often reality-obscuring character, these events are also called pseudo-events (Boorstin 1962).

Oftentimes, the motivation for news management is not promoting own strengths but deflecting from weaknesses, for instance in response to damaging news reports by a skeptical press corps. This brings us to cell 3 of Table 4.1 and the tactics of *agenda cutting* and *message control*. If it is not possible to control the flow of political communication proactively, news managers may resort to the tactic of de-thematization, a diversionary technique that tries to divert attention from a potentially hurtful issue (Pfetsch 2007). Common tactics include not commenting on the issue, playing down its newsworthiness, or creating another newsworthy event that distracts media attention from negative issues and proactively promotes positive issues (Bachl and Brettschneider 2011). Related *spin control* tactics include deescalating a news cycle by reshaping an emerging crisis frame and implementing a centralised message control mechanism to avoid an inconsistent, contradictory public image. It is also important to provide a quick response with one's own definition of the situation and prevent the news media from filling the information vacuum created by a crisis. In reputation-threatening situations, it is important to be able to rely on dependable relationships with journalists and editors that have been cultivated over a long period of time. Reputation repair strategies include denial, evading of responsibility,

reducing offensiveness of the event, corrective action, providing justification, offering counterframes, or attacking the accuser (Benoit 1997).

The last point brings us to the tactic of *attack politics* in cell 4 of Table 4.1. Attacking an opponent's personality, record or opinion coincides with the media's preference for negative news. News managers—sometimes with the help of outside groups—can use this inclination to launch messages that lower an opponent's public perception by emphasizing the allegedly deficient nature of his or her qualifications or political character. Common negative campaign techniques include painting an opponent as soft on crime, dishonest, corrupt or a danger to the nation. It is a reliable tactic for capturing the news media's attention, appealing to their penchant for conflicts (Pfetsch 2007).

Of course, this list of news management tactics is not exhaustive. As the relations between media and politics changes, and as information technologies evolve, new ways of trying to influence the media will be developed. Because of this, what is most important from the perspective of managing the news in highly mediatized democracies is not the specific tactics used, but rather whether and how the tactics follow from the parties' strategies. We will come back to this in the conclusion.

Conclusion

In highly mediatized democracies, managing the news is not optional. Regardless of whether they do it reactively or proactively, political actors have to manage the news and adapt to the fact that news media have become largely independent and highly influential.

This holds particularly true for political parties as strategic actors. In contemporary, highly mediatized democracies, the news media permeate all arenas in which political parties act and virtually all relationships that political parties have with different publics. To cultivate their relationships with key publics in the internal arena, the parliamentary arena, the electoral arena and the media arena, political parties thus need to understand how these relationships are influenced by news media and have strategies and tactics for managing the news. And to achieve the strategic goals in the internal arena, the parliamentary arena and the electoral arena—maximize internal cohesion, parliamentary influence, and the share of the vote—they need strategies and tactics for managing the news. In essence, to act strategically in any of the arenas in which parties act requires strategic news management. It is and should be seen as an integral part of contemporary political public relations.

On a very general level, the foundation of strategic news management and the key mechanism of the mediatization of politics is *adaptation*. Largely, it is by understanding and adapting to news media and news media logic that political parties can try to use the news media for their own purposes, by aligning the wants and needs of the news media with that of the political party. As noted by Cook (2005, p. 163), by adapting to news media "politicians may then win the daily battles with the news media, by getting into the news as they wish", even if they at the same time "end up losing the war, as standards of newsworthiness begin to become prime criteria to evaluate issues, policies, and politics". From that perspective, it is by accepting that the territory has shifted toward a mediatization of politics that political parties can become effective in their political public relations and news management efforts.

Important though is that the parties' news management strategies and tactics and how they act in the media arena should follow from their strategic goals on the internal arena, the parliamentary arena and the electoral arena. The very same news management strategies and tactics could in fact contribute to as well as undermine how successful the parties are at reaching their strategic goals, depending on how they are carried out and the extent to which they are aligned with the strategies of the party. If not, the tactics might be effective in a short-term perspective, but not in terms of helping the parties reach their strategic goals. To illustrate the relationship between strategy and tactics, we have proposed a typology of political news management approaches that future scholars may find heuristically useful.

In sum, when politics has become highly mediatized, adapting to news media and news media logic is a fundamental aspect of strategic news management and political public relations, but adapting to news media and news media logic without a purpose is not strategic. It is surrender.

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Too Powerful or Just Doing Their Job? Explaining Differences in Conceptions of Media Power Among Politicians and Journalists

Rens Vliegenthart and Morten Skovsgaard

Most people learn about politics through the media. As a result media coverage has become more important to politicians in order to gain support from the voters. As is argued in the introduction of this volume, media can both fulfil an informational and arena function. Irrespective of which function is central, politicians deal with journalists on a daily basis and have a clear incentive to adapt to a news media's logic—either to make strategic and timely use of the information provided by media, or to gain access to and perform well in the media arena. This centrality of media also explains the increasing number of

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spin-doctors and other people employed to assist politicians in their communication with the media (e.g. Cook 2005; Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013).

It also begs the question whether the media have become too powerful, which has been heatedly debated, both among scholars as well as in the larger public debate. Multiple agenda setting studies have shown that media are indeed able to influence the political agenda, but only under certain conditions (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010). Politicians do not passively undergo the (agenda setting) effects of media (Helfer 2016; Vliegenthart et al. 2016), quite the contrary: they strategically decide to use (or not use) media attention for certain political issues for their own purposes. That the media's ability to set the political agenda is at least partly contingent on other political actors' strategic interests questions how much influence the media actually have. Media's influence does not per definition entail politicians being passive objects, but attributing a great deal of agency to political actors does put strong claims about "the almighty media" in a different light. In that context, it is remarkable that asking the actors involved (journalists and politicians themselves) directly rather than relying on coding of media content and for example parliamentary records as the typical agenda setting study gives a more straightforward answer: media matter for politics—almost unconditionally. And at first sight, it is even more striking that politicians almost univocally agree this influence to be present and large, more so than journalists do. While politicians tend to emphasise the strong influence of media over their work, journalists tend to downplay this impact. A wide gap in perceptions has potential implications for the press-politics relations and ultimately also for the public's perception of politics and the media. If journalists perceive media influence on politics to be relatively limited they are less likely to critically reflect on their daily practice and change their behaviour to moderate their influence on politics. Politicians can be expected to counter the perceived media influence by trying to control information (even) more tightly. Spin-doctors and political consultants might be hired to communicate more strategically. The likely outcome is an escalation of the mutual suspicious relationship between journalists and politicians with journalists producing more meta-coverage of the strategic motives

of politicians in manipulating the press (e.g. Esser et al. 2001). Ultimately, it might be at the core of high levels of cynicism towards both set of actors among the public (e.g. Capella and Jamieson 1997; Hopmann et al. 2015).

In this chapter, we discuss and empirically test several explanations for this remarkable difference in perceptions. Thus, our focus on journalists and politicians and differences in their perceptions of media power matches the functional, actor-based approach in this book. We think that both the *information* function and the *arena* function are of importance. The information that is produced and distributed by media and that has a potential impact on politicians behaviour is important to consider, but also different perceptions on the accessibility of the media arena are underlying different assessments of media power. The reliance on for example mediatization literature is a clear reflection of this.

Derived from literature on mediatization, journalistic role perceptions and political agenda setting, we formulate three (complementary) explanations. First, politicians and journalists might have fundamentally different conceptions about the role of media in modern Western democracies, resulting also in different perceptions about what (too much) media influence is. Second, we argue that these different perceptions reflect a fundamental imbalance in power relations: due to mediatization, politicians on the one hand perceive the omnipresence of media and the impact on their daily work where they feel they need to adjust to a media logic. Journalists on the other hand might not fully realize all aspects in which politicians adjust their behaviour in light of (potential) detrimental media coverage and feel that politicians still control the flow of information they need to produce interesting news. And finally, based on the strong adherence to objectivity as a professional norm it might be a "discomforting proposition" for journalists that they exercise power. Thus, they will feel anxious about discussing the impact of their work in political terms and feel more comfortable denying it.

Overall, this chapter will provide some first insights on an interesting question that has so far been neglected by students of media and politics and furthers our understanding of the ever-intriguing relationship between politicians and journalists.

Understanding Perceptions About Media Power

Having Different Role-Conceptions

A first explanation for the difference in perceived media power between journalists and politicians might lie in a fundamental difference in perceptions of what the media's role in Western democracies ought to be. These normative assumptions are often not explicated—neither in the daily work of journalists and politicians, nor by media consumers. However, when assessing whether the media have (too) much influence on politics the normative ideas about the role media ought to play in democracy and by extension how much political influence they ought to have serve as an important benchmark (Strömbäck 2005).

In the literature on journalists' roles in society one of the most prominent distinctions is between a passive and an active role (e.g. Janowitz 1975; Johnstone et al. 1972–1973; Patterson 1998; Skovsgaard et al. 2013). This distinction in regard to the ideal-type role of journalists is likely to provide an important benchmark for actors to make assessments about the relative power media have. If one thinks the role of media ought to be passive and limited to factual reporting about relevant political information, one's assessment of media's power is more likely to be high. If one considers the required role of the media as active in closely monitoring politicians and behave as a true "watchdog" in exposing the actions of politicians and others in powerful positions, the assessment of actual media power will be measured against a different benchmark and based on that the media are less likely be assessed as too powerful.

In studies on role conceptions of journalists, we indeed see that they emphasize the watchdog role, particularly in well-established Western democracies (e.g. Hanitzsch 2011). Thus, this role corresponds with a high level of independency and influence, and given their support to this role, journalists might be less likely to agree with statements that are conceiving this influence as (too) large. Politicians are more likely to express a preference for a more passive role of media as a transmitter of political information and thus emphasise the watchdog role less than journalists. Consequently, they are more likely to believe that media influence is (too) large.

If role conceptions indeed play an important role in varying perceptions about media power, we would expect (a) differences across

journalists and politicians to decrease when we control for role perceptions and (b) journalists to put more emphasis on the watchdog role of media compared to politicians.

Politics Dominated by Media Logic

One of the most popular theories in recent studies about the interaction of media and politics is that of *mediatization*. Mediatization goes beyond the notion of mediation—i.e. transmission of communication through media—as a broader and more dynamic concept referring to integrated processes of increasing media importance and influence within modern societies (Couldry and Hepp 2013; Esser 2013; Hjarvard 2013; Esser and Strömbäck 2014). Accordingly, mediatization has been defined as a long-term process through which the importance of the media and their spillover effects on institutions, organizations and actors has increased (Esser and Strömbäck 2014). The mediatization of politics then inherently boils down to the increased importance of media to set the informal rules of the political game. There is little politicians do nowadays without taking the potential publicity consequences into consideration. It does not come as a surprise that these politicians perceive media to be omnipresent and their influence to be large.

Is that any different for journalists? Of course they are aware that they are central actors and thus an inherent part of a mediatized political context. But they are likely not to experience their influence on politics as much and as directly as politicians do. The relationship between journalists and politicians is characterized by mutual dependence and can be understood from an economic perspective (e.g. Fengler and Ruß-Mohl 2008; Van Aelst et al. 2010). That is, each of the two set of actors possesses goods that is in demand by the other and that they are willing to trade. Journalists want information and quotes from politicians for their stories, while politicians want (preferably positive) attention to get their message across to voters and other political actors (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). The importance of this interaction is evident in a mediatized society. The demand for attention and visibility in media coverage explains why politicians adapt to a media logic in their communication, why they employ professionals to help them communicate and interact strategically with journalists, and in turn also why they experience a large media influence on politics. Following the notion of trade or exchange of

goods journalists naturally have another perspective on the relationship. They experience that their access to the information that they are trading for is restricted by politicians who communicate strategically in order to gain favorable media coverage and they also witness that politicians respond to those who give them favorable coverage. In addition, politicians increasingly use social media platforms to address—and sometimes interact with—voters directly, thus circumventing the media or avoiding additional critical questions on their quotes (Jacobs and Spierings 2016). In such a situation, journalists can be expected to experience that politicians have the power to—at least to some extent—control the supply of information and at the same time take advantage of a media logic that implies that politicians—at least the ones in central positions—should be covered regardless of how they restrict the access to information. This leaves journalists with a notion of relatively less influence on politics.

If this explanation has validity, we would anticipate (a) politicians to reflect more and provide elaborate accounts of the impact media have on their daily work and (b) journalists to emphasize their dependency on politicians for information.

An Uncomfortable Idea

Objectivity has been called the defining norm of modern Journalism (Patterson 1998: 28), and the adherence to this professional norm has through the 20th century been a key factor in journalism's democratic legitimacy (McNair 1998). A recent Danish study of the professional values of journalists confirmed that journalists support the importance of objectivity, balanced reporting, and emphasis on hard facts, while inclusion of value judgments are largely rejected by the journalists (Skovsgaard et al. 2013).

The notion of objectivity as excluding one's own beliefs and emphasizing balanced reporting based on hard facts carries an implicit notion of limited influence on politics. If journalists are simply "mediating the message" and are merely a balanced and factual broker between politicians and citizens, there is little room for independent or "real" media influence. However, in practice, being an objective transmitter of information might be less self-evident than it seems due to an overload of information. News production thus inherently implies selection. Gatekeeping and selection processes are steered by journalists

choosing and emphasizing some pieces of information over others. These mechanisms do not imply that journalists consciously exercise influence on politics through their choices. On the contrary, the influence is often unintentional and rooted in a media logic (e.g. Altheide and Snow 1979; Cook 2005) and in professional news values (O'Neill and Harcup 2009). In other words, even if journalists aim to produce balanced and fact-based journalism and limit interpretation and value judgments they do have considerable influence on politics. However, at the heart of the objectivity norm is the idea that rather than influencing politics, which was the aim of journalism during the era of the party press (e.g. Kaplan 2006), they should provide unbiased information that offers citizens the opportunity to form their own opinions. Thus, the deeply rooted objectivity norm is at odds with the idea of having a large influence on politics since the objectivity norm in the eyes of journalists creates trustworthiness and offers them a shield against media criticism and claims of biases that influence politics (e.g. McQuail 2005; Skovsgaard et al. 2013; Tuchman 1972). Since the objectivity norm is tied to the professional ethic of journalists it does not constrain or impact politicians in their assessment of media power. In short, the idea of large media power is uncomfortable for journalists and will result in a (partial) denial of such power, while this is not the case for politicians.

If indeed the "uncomfortable truth" idea has some validity, we would expect journalists to emphasize the objectivity norm more frequently and elaborately, while politicians might emphasize other, more subjective aspects of media coverage.

Methods

The outlined explanations are not easy to empirically validate. Therefore, we draw on survey data as well as qualitative interviews. First of all, we outline the differences that exist across politicians and journalists on their perceptions of media power using a five-country survey among political journalists and members of parliament, that has been collected a few years ago (for more information, see Van Aelst et al. 2010). Here, they are asked a wide variety of questions on the media-politics interaction.

Our first analysis tries to account for the differences that exist between politicians and media by focusing on the extent to which these differences can be explained by different perceptions on the watchdog role of

journalists (our first explanation). To explore our second (politics dominated by a media logic) and our third (an uncomfortable idea) explanations we draw on semi-structured interviews with two Danish journalists and two (former) politicians (a Danish and a Dutch). The journalists have both covered politics for several years. One is employed by a number of regional newspapers and the other at a national newspaper and both have their office in the parliamentary buildings. The Danish politician is a former minister and member of the parliament for several years. Thus, she has broad experience with journalists and the media in different positions in her political career. The Dutch politician is a former member of parliament, who has also formerly worked as a journalist and is currently a widely consulted expert on politics. All interviews were held between March 15 and March 24, 2017 by one of the authors, either face-to-face or by phone.

Results

The survey asks 15 items to measure perceptions about the media-politics interaction on a 5 point scale, ranging from 1 ("totally disagree") to 5 ("totally agree"). A principal component analysis with VARIMAX rotation reveals that three factors are present. The first one focuses on the media and behaviour of journalists and is for this paper substantially most relevant. We use the items that load 0.50 or higher on this factor. Together they form a reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.79). We use the mean score of those eight items ($M = 3.10$, SD = 0.69) as our measure of perceived media power. All of the items directly refer to the impact of media on politics, or indirectly to the detrimental role media play in the current political landscape.

The mass media have too much political power.
The public was better informed about politics when the mass media were not that commercial yet.
The motivation that drives most political journalists is the desire to exercise political power themselves.
It's the media who decide which issues are important; politics have little impact on this matter.
The mass media make and break politicians.
The power of the media is overrated (reversely coded).

Table 5.1 Predicting perceptions about media power among political journalists and MPs

	B (SE)
Journalists	−0.697*** (0.037)
Netherlands	−0.362*** (0.055)
Norway	−0.294*** (0.051)
Sweden	0.015 (0.056)
Denmark	−0.394*** (0.051)
Constant	3.761*** (0.045)
adjusted R-squared	*0.301*

Note Belgium is reference category; $N = 1.326$; *** $p < 0.001$

> Current media coverage contributes to political distrust.
> The main thing journalists are after these days is a sensational story that draws a large audience.

If we compare politicians and journalists, we indeed find that the latter score is significantly lower on perceived media power ($M_{politicians} = 3.52$, $M_{journalists} = 2.83$, t-value = 22.00, $p < 0.001$). Table 5.1 shows that this finding is similar if we control for cross-national perceptions in a linear regression. Thus, the basic assumption that politicians perceive media power to be larger than journalists do is convincingly confirmed.

Analysis 1: The Gap Explained—Different Role Perceptions

Furthermore, also role conceptions are asked, again on 5-point scales ranging from 1 ("completely unimportant") to 5 ("very important"). From the five items, two factors are extracted, from which the first one corresponds with a watchdog conception of journalism. The two items listed below form a reliable scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.67). We use the mean score of those two items ($M = 3.71$, SD = 0.86) as our measure of a watchdog role perception. Journalists score is significantly higher on this scale than politicians ($M_{politicians} = 3.21$, $M_{journalists} = 3.96$, t-value = −16.70 $p < 0.001$). The second item directly refers to the watchdog role, while the first one more indirectly touches upon making relevant information also accessible to the public.

> Provide analysis and interpretation of complex problems.
> Investigate claims and statements made by the government.

Table 5.2 Predicting perceptions about media power among political journalists and MPs

	B (SE)
Journalists	−0.566*** (0.042)
Watchdog perceptions	−0.136*** (0.021)
Netherlands	−0.368*** (0.054)
Norway	−0.363*** (0.052)
Sweden	−0.004 (0.055)
Denmark	−0.395*** (0.050)
Constant	4.204*** (0.081)
adjusted R-squared	*0.323*

Note Belgium is reference category; $N = 1.326$; *** $p < 0.001$

The regression analysis reported in Table 5.2 shows that those people who consider the watchdog role of the media important score lower on their perceived media power. This effect does not differ for politicians and journalists (interaction between journalist and watchdog variable is not significant) and confirms the notion that journalists differ in their perceptions of media power, partly due to the fact that they consider the watchdog role of media more important, confirming the first explanation we proposed. The fact that in this model a highly significant difference between journalists and politicians remains does indicate that these role perceptions can only account for part of the difference between the two groups: the difference between journalists and politicians on the media power scale decreases from 0.697 to 0.566. Overall, these results provide evidence for the importance of role perceptions for the assessment of the right level of the media's influence on politics, but they also show that this is not the full explanation.

Analysis 2: The Gap Explained—Dominance of Media Logic

The second potential explanation for the gap between journalists and politicians in their assessment of media power is that a media logic dominates politics as suggested by the mediatization theory. To explore this we rely on interviews with politicians and journalists in Denmark and the Netherlands. These interviews show that journalists do not deny that they have a potential influence on politics. However, they also stress that there are clear limitations to their influence. Talking about media hypes which could be seen as the peak of media influence on politics a Danish journalist emphasised

that such media hypes only occur when people are interested in acting as sources and thus accentuate the dependency on politicians for information:

> The media cannot create a media hype by themselves. It only becomes a media hype when it reflects an imbalance or crisis internally between politicians. If nobody answers our questions we have nothing. (Journalist 1)

Thus, while the journalist in the interview also acknowledges that the media influence the political agenda she emphasizes that journalists depend on sources to get their stories. She highlights that politicians, because of their status as valuable sources, have bargaining power in the mutual relationship with journalists.

In another interview a journalist pointed out that some politicians are more attractive for the media and thus have easier access to media coverage than others:

> There is an immense difference between Lars Løkke [The Danish Prime Minister] and a recently elected backbencher in parliament. People from the smaller parties can have a really hard time getting through to the media. If Løkke calls and offers us an interview we would say yes almost no matter what because it is always good to have the opportunity to interview the Prime Minister, and we can ask him our questions in addition to what he wants to talk about. (Journalist 2)

Even though politicians realize that they possess a valuable resource that is in demand by journalists they find it hard to fully utilize that resource to not play along on terms set by the media. The Danish politician emphasised that she is in competition with other politicians to gain what the media have to offer—the visibility and the chance to get messages across to voters:

> All politicians at least some of the time have an interest in pursuing a conflict because it breeds attention and attention is the road to winning votes. […] Basically, in politics if you are not heard then your political program is superfluous. It is the dissemination of the political program that leads to influence because voters need to hear about it to understand it and sympathize, or not sympthise, with it. Otherwise you are irrelevant, which is almost the worst case scenario. So the media define the relationship, but we also have a responsibility because we pursue coverage ourselves. But you can be caught in a vicious circle that if you want any

attention you need to buy into the terms, which are the 24–7 news cycle. (Politician 1)

She agrees that politicians hold a resource that is important to the media and therefore have a responsibility for playing into the media's hands. However, the competition with other politicians for media attention makes it difficult just to ignore the media because then another politician would take her place and get the attention. This is the reason why the media or rather the media logic, understood as journalists' professional practices and the conditions under which the news is produced, to a large extent defines the relationship and politicians adapt to the media logic:

> What the media pay attention to is also what occupies the public sphere and way too often that is also what politicians end up focusing on. In that sense the media have an enormous influence. Not necessarily on the basic political work that is going on behind the public debate but on the public sphere between politicians and voters. This is to a very large extent defined by the media and it is extremely difficult to set a positive agenda if there is no conflict and it is difficult to introduce another issue if an issue with a clear conflict is dominating the coverage at the time. (Politician 1)

The feeling that it to a large degree is necessary to adapt to a media logic seems to be amplified by an impression of omnipresent media that ask for reactions around the clock. She points to the mental pressure of having to constantly pay attention to the media as one of the explanations of why many politicians think that the media are too influential. The point of the media logic as omnipresent in the work of politicians is supported by a Dutch politician who used to work as a journalist. She also points out that part of the adjustment to and adaption of the media logic is invisible to journalists:

> Journalists are only aware of part of the political process. Behind the scenes, within the meetings of parliamentary fractions, media coverage plays a large role: bad publicity really does something. Even if you don't agree with the coverage, it has consequences: you adjust your political strategy and even the content of parliamentary interventions. It is a kind of disciplining that journalists don't see. (Politician 2)

Our interviews indicate that both journalists and politicians acknowledge that they possess a resource that the other part wants (access to visibility and information respectively) and that they have quite some influence on politics. However, a clear difference in their interpretation of the media influence also appeared.

While journalists emphasize that politicians to some extent can make or break a story because journalists need them as sources, politicians experience the media as an omnipresent actor that they need to adapt to if they want to get political influence as well as get re-elected. Journalists are unaware of at least part of their influence on politics because politicians' adjustment to the media logic to some extent is based on the anticipation of media behaviour and it takes place "behind closed doors". Thus, the journalists do not experience the media pressure the way that politicians do. This discrepancy in assessments between journalists and politicians indicates that mediatization with an increasing adaption of the media logic among politicians provides a promising explanation for the gap between journalists and politicians in their assessment of media influence on politics.

Analysis 3: The Gap Explained—An Inconvenient Truth

Our third explanation is connected to objectivity, which is a strong professional norm among journalists that could make it uncomfortable for them to admit to having extensive influence on politics. Again we rely on our interviews to explore whether this appears to be the case.

We do find an indication that journalists see themselves as "mediating the message". In the interviews journalists answer that their primary obligation is to describe to people what is going on in politics:

> You have that ideal picture of yourself as standing outside of everything. […] In the newsroom it is a standing joke who dares to call me and ask me to grade the ministers in the newspaper for their performance. Because the answer is no! (Journalist 1)

That does not mean that the journalists reject the idea that they influence politics. In fact they readily acknowledge that they do because they know that by covering some issue they can set an agenda and that media coverage can also lead to changes in proposed policies here expressed by one of the journalists:

> We have an influence because when we describe politics the politicians have to be able to defend it to the public […] It is a repeated litmus test whether what they propose and pass through parliament can stand the test of being on the front page. […] Proposals change when they are described in the media and there are reactions to them. In that sense, the media has a lot of influence. (Journalist 2)

Even though the journalists acknowledge that they have quite some influence on politics they clearly adhere to the objectivity norm and they do not necessarily perceive a conflict between political influence and objectivity. What seems to be the critical point for them is that as a journalist you should not pursue any kind of agenda:

> We should not force specific political attitudes through. If we have a story and dug out something criticisable it is fully legitimate to pursue it. Then you talk to politicians who also pursue the story […] But you should know what your role is, that you are a journalist. If that politician [the source], is involved in a bad affair the next day then you go for the story about him or her as well. (Journalist 1)

Thus, acknowledging some kind of influence on politics is not the same as admitting to having too much influence. As long as there is no intention of pursuing a certain agenda behind the coverage:

> There is a big difference between recognising that you have an influence and saying that it is too big. […] If a minister resigns as a consequence of our investigative journalism we do not celebrate that a minister resigns. Exactly because we do not have opinions and do not aim for some particular outcome we do not keep account of or conclude if some outcome [of our journalism] was good or bad. (Journalist 2)

Also, the adherence to fact-based reporting based on sources is apparent when the journalists talk about their potential influence, for instance in connection to political scandals:

> We describe issues or problems that are already there. We never write anything without sources and particularly when we cover political scandals there are a lot of sources, often 10, 20, 30 sources. (Journalist 2)

Even though the interviewed journalist readily acknowledges that the media has an influence on politics through their coverage she also agrees that the objectivity norm does make the proposition of media influence on politics somewhat uncomfortable:

> My initial thought when asked about the media's influence on politics was 'no we do not' [have an influence]. We are merely describing. […] It does not come natural to journalists to acknowledge [the political influence]. (Journalist 2)

This quote shows how the objectivity norm is central to the journalistic self-understanding. The journalists see their purpose as describing to the citizens what is going on in politics. However, they do not deny that they influence politics through the choice to describe some aspects of the political reality over others. What is crucial to them is that their choices and their descriptions are not driven by any particular agenda and that they are equally critical towards politicians from all parties and all ideologies. Sometimes the coverage has consequences for some parties or politicians and benefits for others, but the next day, next week or next month the tables have turned.

In sum, the objectivity norm does not prevent journalists from acknowledging that they have political influence. But at the same time they stress that their coverage is based on professional norms of independence, neutrality, news values and source-based reporting. In the journalists' view these norms ensure that their political influence is not excessive and unfair, and therefore it is less likely that they perceive their political influence as too large. The interviewed politicians, on the other hand, did not refer much to the objectivity norm, but focused on different kind of coverage journalists produced. For example:

> Media make politics into a game, they focus on actors instead of issues, also in how they organize the work: especially television has people working as 'party watchers' instead of 'issue watchers' – this results in less truly substantial coverage'. (Politician 2)

Thus, our interviews indicate that the deeply rooted objectivity norm might explain part of the gap between journalists and politicians in the assessment of the media's political influence, though journalists seem

to be well aware that adhering to that norm does not exclude media influence.

Conclusion and Discussion

The interaction between politicians and journalists is object of a lot of scientific study and public debate. The mutual dependency is widely recognized, but most research, at least in the Western European context, is devoted to media's influence on politics. Scholars have found this to be a highly contingent process: the size of the influence depends on a wide range of factors. One that was identified, but not elaborately discussed so far is the differential assessment by journalists and politicians. Both agree that media matter for politics, but a lot more according to politicians than to journalists. In this chapter, we have proposed three possible explanations for this gap. First, the role conceptions of journalists might offer an explanation. Second, from a mediatization point of view, we argue that it is different positions and thus perspectives that are at the heart of journalists' and politicians differential assessments of media power. Third, we suggest that a strong political influence might be an inconvenient reality for journalists who strongly adhere to an objectivity norm that appears to be at odds with political influence.

Using results from surveys among parliamentary journalists and MPs in five West-European countries, we first of all show that, indeed, MPs attribute considerable more power to media than journalists do. We can explain part of this difference by the fact that, indeed journalists score higher on the active watchdog role perception than politicians. Consequently, what politician might deem too much media influence on politics could be regarded as appropriate by journalists. Next, interviews with politicians and journalists supported the idea that politicians experience a pressure to adapt to a media logic to get messages across to their voters. Journalists, on the other hand emphasise that they depend on politicians as sources and cannot create media hypes or wall to wall coverage of a political story without the active participation of politicians. Finally, the interviews with journalists showed that even though they recognise some level of political influence they also stress that in line with the journalistic objectivity norm they do not pursue any particular agenda and they are equally critical toward all sides of the political spectrum.

In sum, we provide a first exploration of three possible explanations for politicians' and journalists' different assessments of the media's influence on politics. The analyses provide empirical support for all three explanations and indicate that they should be considered for future research in the perceptions of the media's influence on politics. While the interviewed politicians and journalists do not make a clear distinction between the information and arena functions of the media, the arena function is more prominent: politicians emphasize the necessity of *access* to the media arena and getting favorable (issue) coverage, while journalists merely reflect on the behaviour of politicians in the public realm and less so in the more formal institutional settings such as parliament.

What the results foremost show is that power and influence both carry a strong subjective element. It depends on one's normative framework of references as well as position in the power game. This is an important lesson, especially for those studying the intriguing relationship between journalists and politicians and in particular those who are eager to "take sides" in the discussion about who leads and who follows.

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The Media as a Source of Information

What Politicians Learn from the Mass Media and Why They React to It: Evidence from Elite Interviews

Julie Sevenans

As outlined in the introductory chapter by Van Aelst and Walgrave, the mass media fulfill an informational function in policymakers' work. This manifests itself in two ways. For a start, political elites are—just like ordinary citizens—*passive consumers* of the information provided by the mass media. They learn about problems that exist in society and solutions for these problems, about the public opinion and about the strategies and tactics of other political actors. In addition to that, politicians can *actively use* this information in their daily work. They take formal, political action upon issues that are high on the media agenda.

What drives the latter subfunction—namely political elites' media responsive *behavior*? In part, it is a direct consequence of the first subfunction; that is, politicians simply learn from the media which topics deserve attention and how urgent problems are (Baumgartner et al. 1997). Besides that, politicians may have strategic motivations to respond to the media. They seize instances of heightened media

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attention as an ideal moment to take action on an issue. For instance, they may think that their chance of gaining sufficient support for a legislative proposal is larger when they can "surf the news waves" to put this proposal in the spotlight (Wolfsfeld and Sheafer 2006).

The precise learning and motivational processes underlying politicians' media responsiveness differ from one case to another. Imagine, for instance, two Members of Parliament (MPs) who interrogate the minister about a fraud scandal in the healthcare sector, in response to a report on the matter published by the newspaper. One MP may take action simply because he got informed about the scandal through the media and thinks policy measures need to be taken. The other MP may have known that the problem existed for years—due to insider contacts in a healthcare organization—but may now use the momentum created by the media to attract public attention to the fact that the minister from a competing party has failed to take timely measures. The former MP reacted to the media because they informed him about the problem. The second MP reacted because the increased public attention motivated her to do so. And this is not a simple dichotomy: different learning and motivational processes may be simultaneously at play.

I argue that understanding these underlying learning and motivational processes is important, because they determine what precise role the news media play in politicians' agenda choices (Eissler et al. 2014). Do the media sometimes offer a necessary and indispensable stimulus for a politician to take action—that is, do they really reveal information the politician would otherwise not be aware of (e.g. Cook et al. 1983)? Do they merely fulfill a reinforcing role, encouraging the politician to take action at a specific point in time (e.g. Tan and Weaver 2007)? Or is the relationship coincidental, and would many politicians take action regardless of the news coverage on the topic (e.g. Delshad 2012)?

This chapter aims to answer these questions *from the viewpoint of politicians themselves.* The aim is to explore which learning and motivational processes drive political elites' media responsiveness—and so what precise role the media play in their behavior—according to these elites themselves. In other words, I want to understand how the media's second informational subfunction for elites (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016)—whereby elites take action upon information covered by the mass media—comes about. More precisely, I (1) depart form a literature review that integrates the various theoretical accounts about what politicians learn from the media and why they are motivated to react (Sevenans 2017). I (2) test to what extent political elites themselves confirm the existence of these processes, by means of in-depth interviews. And, I (3)

specify the various roles the media may adopt in the work of politicians, which are dependent on these learning and motivational processes.

In what follows, I will briefly summarize the literature review and explain the data gathering, before moving straight ahead to answer the core questions of the chapter: how do politicians (assert to) respond to the media? What do they (say they) learn from the media? Why do they (say they) respond to it? And, what (do they think) are the implications for the role of the media in politicians' work?

Learning and Motivations as Drivers of Agenda-Setting

The learning and motivational processes proposed in this chapter are based on a thorough review of the literature on (1) *political agenda-setting*, studying the correspondence between media and political agendas in the aggregate (see e.g. the recent comparative study of Vliegenthart et al. 2016); and (2) *media responsiveness*, focusing on how individual legislators respond to the media in their work (see e.g. Davis 2009). For the full-fledged literature review and integration of the existing mechanisms, I refer to Sevenans (2017). Here, I give a brief summary.

When reacting to news coverage politically, politicians may—according to the literature—learn in at least four ways. These learning processes partly correspond to what Van Aelst and Walgrave (2016) call the "passive informational subfunction" of the media; however, here I focus on types of learning that are at play when politicians *do* act upon it (active informational subfunction). First, and most significantly, the media may really *reveal* information to politicians, which they would otherwise not (yet) be aware of. The media are quick in covering what happens in the world; they have access to many different sources; and journalists are not seldom experts on certain policy domains (Davis 2009). Hence not only pieces of investigative journalism (Elmelund-Præstekær and Wien 2008), but also "ordinary" news coverage may deliver new information to politicians. Second, the media may *amplify* information. They constantly select some news facts while ignoring others; sometimes giving disproportionally much (or little attention) to a news fact, compared to its "objective" seriousness (Boydstun 2013). As such politicians may learn from the media about the importance of a news fact; about whether it should be prioritized or not. Third, the media *interpret* or frame the "raw" information signals they convey to politicians, and to the public at large (de Vreese 2005). This interpretation may affect whether politicians judge the news story as something they should act
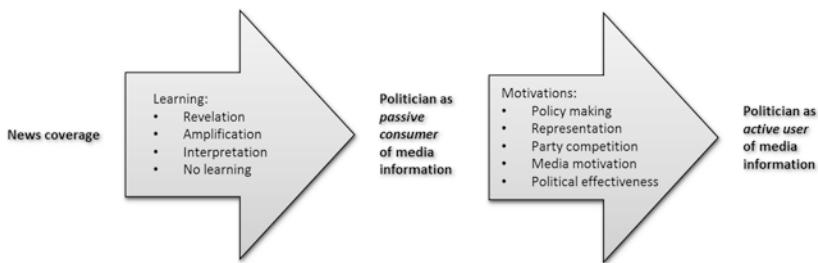
Fig. 6.1 Overview of learning and motivation processes

upon. Finally, it is possible that politicians respond to news coverage, but that they actually *learned nothing* from the media at all. The mechanisms are listed in the left-hand side arrow of Fig. 6.1.

Regardless of what a politician learns from the media, she may decide to take political action upon a news story—this is what Van Aelst and Walgrave label the "active information function" of the mass media. I explore the possible motivations underlying this function in depth. I identify five motivations that may drive media responsiveness. They are listed in the right-hand side arrow in Fig. 6.1. The upper three motivations reflect key goals that politicians may have in general and about which extensive literatures exist. First, many politicians—and political parties more broadly—may respond to a news story because they aim to have *policy* impact on the respective issue domain (Strøm 1990). Second, their reaction may be driven by *representational* motives: they may think their voters want them to undertake action upon a news story (Page and Shapiro 1983). Third, politicians may use information from news coverage as a means to fight the *party competition* and attack their political opponents (Green-Pedersen 2010). The lower two motivations, then, can be seen as "intermediary goals" to reach the three abovementioned motivations; however, as I will argue later in this chapter, they can be freestanding goals as well. *Media motivation* refers to the simple idea that politicians undertake a certain action to elicit media coverage about themselves. Media access is seen as crucial for electoral success (Vos 2014), and it is thought that "surfing the news waves" is a good strategy to get in the media yourself (Wolfsfeld and Sheafer 2006). *Political effectiveness*, finally, may be a motivation as well. Just like any human being, politicians like to be successful, irrespective of how precisely. They may think that media

coverage, for all abovementioned reasons, increases the chances that they will manage to get an issue on the political agenda.

Different combinations of learning and motivational processes underlie different instances of active media use by political actors. As a consequence, the media may play different roles in politicians' daily work. They may be the *necessary condition* for a political initiative—that is, the politician would not take the initiative upon the issue, if the media did not cover the issue in the first place. They may create a *favorable circumstance* for the initiative to be taken, reinforcing or accelerating politicians' plans for action. Or, they may actually *not matter at all*; even if it seems as if the politician responds directly to the news coverage. In what follows, I will elaborate on these roles and how they are, according to politicians, linked to the various learning and motivational processes. Before that, I will briefly discuss the data collection.

In-Depth Elite Interviews

To explore elites' perceptions of the abovementioned mechanisms, the chapter relies on data from interviews with Belgian and Dutch-speaking MPs, party leaders and ministers.[1] Between March and September 2015, my colleagues and I interviewed politicians in a face-to-face setting.[2] The broader topic of the interviews, which took on average one hour, was "information processing by political elites".[3] For this chapter, I analyze the transcripts of one specific question dealing with media responsiveness (for this question, $n = 136$):

> Can you give an example of a news fact that recently triggered you to undertake action? And, following up on that,
>
> - in what way did you react? Did you send a Tweet, did you talk to colleagues, did you introduce a bill, and so on?
> - what was the goal of your reaction, and have you reached it?
> - imagine the news story had not been in the media. Would you probably still have undertaken the action? Why, or why not?"

In other words, we asked politicians to give a "top of mind" example of an instance where they were responsive to the media; and we requested them to reflect upon how and why they acted in a rather abstract manner. I analyzed the interview transcripts carefully, looking

for confirmation or disproval of the various mechanisms listed in the theoretical model. In the results section, I report *counts* of how many times a mechanism was spontaneously mentioned. In addition to reporting counts, I will cite the most interesting *quotes* to illustrate the various learning and motivational mechanisms.

Before moving on to the results, I briefly want to consider the type of conclusions that can be drawn from these data. First, it is possible to say something about the mere *existence* of the various mechanisms thought to underlie politicians' media responsiveness—or more specifically about elites' *perception* of that existence. Second, we get an impression of the *importance* of various mechanisms, in the sense that some mechanisms are brought up more often than others. We get to know what politicians' "top of mind" considerations are when being responsive to the media. Third, there is a lot of material to *illustrate* how these mechanisms work, under what circumstances they occur, and so on. I try to select illustrative quotes that seem to reflect broader trends.

However, this is not a systematic test of the mechanisms. There was a lot of variation between interviews (different interviewers, slightly different question wordings, different duration), so not every conversation led to equal opportunities to discuss each mechanism. Maybe most importantly, we asked politicians to talk about *one specific instance* where they took action upon something that was in the media—although the politicians sometimes try to generalize beyond their own example as well. Their reflections made with regards to this particular example may not be applicable to any given context. I can in that sense not conclude, for instance, that a mechanism does not exist. At best, I can say that it was not mentioned as a main "top of mind" consideration. The counts are only indicative of the underlying patterns; they do not offer "hard proof" of what is going on. Wrapping up, there are a number of limitations. Even when bearing these in mind, I think the data are valuable and can provide new insight into what politicians learn from the media and why they react to it.

How Politicians Respond to the Media

The basic assumption underlying this chapter is that most policymakers are responsive towards the media now and then. The interview data confirm this assumption. Almost all politicians interviewed could give an

example of a recent situation where they reacted to something that was in the media. The examples were diverse. Many politicians referred to a news fact about an issue they are specialized in—often, they are member of the parliamentary committee dealing with the specific topic. They told us that they asked a parliamentary question about a news report; a few even introduced a bill. Some politicians chose an example where they merely took public stance with regards to a news story, for instance by giving an interview about it for the newspaper.

Only 10 out of 136 respondents explained that they had not taken recent action upon the media, either because the topic they are working on does not often get media attention; or because they have a lot of political experience and are "*not the type of politician anymore*" who tries to gain quick wins by responding to media coverage. Some of these politicians explain how media attention for an issue can even be discouraging to take action upon the issue. They say a policy field quickly becomes "too occupied" after it has received media attention. Politicians have to be proactive and make the news, instead of being reactive and follow the news.

> [*If the information would not have been in the media*] I would certainly have taken the action, and it would have been even more interesting, because then you are the one who can make the news. (id 196)

Yet, even those 10 politicians who claim they are not responsive to media, acknowledge that *other* politicians are, and that political initiatives are not seldom a simple response to news coverage. I will now take a look at the mechanisms driving this responsiveness.

What Politicians Learn from the Mass Media

Revelation

Revelation is the term I use to address the most fundamental way in which a politician can learn from the media. The idea is that the media were the first source for politician regarding a particular piece of information. Without news coverage, the politician might not be informed about the matter.

The mechanism is brought up by 39 (out of 136) respondents. Three "types" of revelation can be distinguished. First, the media appear to simply provide a good "summary" of an otherwise uncontrollable

information stream. Some politicians doubt whether they would have been informed about the facts they were acting upon, if these facts had not been in the media.

> Of course, it's information from a report, called the 'Health survey', that is simply made public by the media. But I did not know that this survey was published now, that it was available; and it [*the news coverage about the report*] is a good summary … This signal function. That's what really interests me about the media. I use the media mostly because of that: not for opinions, but I think they are very effective in quickly passing on the right information: reports, facts, the real information stream. (id 8)

> I was informed by the media, of course, and it is hard to say whether the information would eventually have reached me in the next days or weeks. (id 5)

Second, a special type of information passed on by the mass media is information coming from other (political) actors. It is not seldom the case that statements, made by certain actors in the media, provoke parliamentary action by other actors. In line with this idea, Davis (2009) speaks of the media as "information intermediaries" in the political sphere. Not only *what* others say, but also *the way* they say it, publicly, in the media, may trigger reaction. A lot of the respondents, when asked about a recent initiative taken upon a news story, refer to a story that was actually "created" by other politicians:

> [*I took action upon*] the federal budget control. Unfortunately, we were obliged to await the press conference and to receive most information from the press, not because we like to base ourselves on the press, but because the government has chosen to announce this via the press. (id 63)

> In this case I wouldn't [*have taken the actions if they had not been in the media*], no, because my viewpoint was exactly a reaction to others' reactions. To counter them, to nuance it. So I reacted, not so much to the news fact itself … but to the [*media*] reactions of certain people on that fact. (id 65)

Finally, the media sometimes spread information that would otherwise not be produced at all. A typical example is "investigative journalism"—whereby news outlets denounce a certain practice or problem—which has been shown to potentially alter politicians' attitudes and lead to substantive policy change (see Cook et al. 1983; Elmelund-Præstekær and Wien 2008). The respondents, however, indicate that this is rare in the

Flemish context. Only two politicians refer to an example where they responded to investigative journalism. Five politicians complain that so little thorough investigative journalism is published these days.

Amplification

Amplification is the learning mechanism that is most often mentioned by politicians. In total, 44 respondents explicitly refer to the idea that the media did not necessarily provide the "raw" information that triggered their reaction, but that they were a crucial indicator of the *importance* of the information; of what is a priority and what is not (Jones and Baumgartner 2005). In addition to that, the mechanism is implicitly present in much of what politicians say about media use. Although not every MP's example of media responsiveness was driven by amplification, they almost all confirm that this is what the media often do:

> The press is important, not in the sense that it makes the dossiers, because they often already exist, but because it digs them up again. (id 106)

> You always need the media some way or the other. Either they directly offer you [*the information about*] the topic; or they are a sort of spark that sets things on fire. They always do something. I cannot believe that anything happens in politics without the media being involved. (id 144)

Interestingly in this regard, politicians use the media as a "thermostat" that indicates the ideal moment to take action upon the issues they are specialized in. Many specialists deal with "their" topic on a daily basis, but it is when the topic attracts media attention, that they seize the moment to take action. They use coverage to substantiate the need for their initiatives (Melenhorst 2015).

> Most of the time I would act the same way [*even if the information was not in the media*], but I can say that I give priority to something that is made more actual, seemingly more actual, because it is in the media. (id 153)

As such, the media can really accelerate the realization of substantive types of political action—such as legislation—because they increase the urgency of doing so. As Elmelund-Præstekær and Wien (2008) demonstrate, the media's power here lies not so much in them delivering new information, but rather in changing what is prioritized and what is not.

> I think that the news stories we heard about asylum seekers … led to action; that the time period within which their dossier needs to be processed is now shorter. I think this shakes politicians awake. … Or for instance, the [*media*] dossier about the railroads, about the strikes during the autumn, caused us to be already dealing with the bill about guaranteed service which is in the government agreement [*but with which we would otherwise not be dealing yet*] … It [*the media*] accelerates things, which are actually already planned or in an agreement. (id 119)

Interpretation

Behavioral studies have shown that the media frame information, and that this framing moderates the likelihood of politicians being responsive to the media. For instance, politicians are more responsive to news coverage that frames an issue in line with the party's interpretation of it (van der Pas 2014).

This idea does not really find support in the data, though. No politician explicitly says that they took action because of the way the media interpreted the information. I am not sure why this is the case. Maybe this mechanism requires reflection from politicians in a too abstract way. Politicians take news coverage for granted as it is. Probably, they do not distinguish between "raw" information and the media's framing of it. For instance, they perceive conflict as being inherent to a given news fact; rather than that the media "created" the conflict frame. Another possibility is that it has to do with the relative homogeneity in the Belgian media system. It could be that in countries where the media landscape is more fragmented or polarized—such as in the US—reactions to the media's (more explicit) interpretations of events are more outspoken (Bennett and Iyengar 2008).

This does not mean that interpretation does not occur as a learning process underlying media responsiveness. But politicians themselves apparently do not analytically distinguish it from the other mechanisms. The other learning processes, such as "revelation" and "amplification", probably *imply* an interpretation effect which I could not grasp here.

No Learning

Finally, 20 politicians say that—with regards to their example of a news fact upon which they took action—they did not learn anything from the

media. That is, they knew about the information beforehand, and the media also did not amplify the information.

> In this case, I knew everything before it appeared in the media. From people in the field. And via my network, I knew that the debate, or the problem, was going to occur. (id 133)

> These are dossiers that exist. It is not the case that I waited for 'the' news to react. (id 155)

Why Politicians React to the Mass Media

Policy-Making

A first core goal behind politicians' actions is pure policy-making. Twenty-four politicians explicitly refer to it as the goal behind their exemplar action and even more of them implicitly say that changing policy was one of their objectives. The examples are straightforward. Some "make" policy themselves in response to a media story, by writing or co-sponsoring a bill, for instance. Others try to further the policy-making process by urging the responsible minister to take action upon the topic.

> … I mainly want the minister to take action about this. (id 6)

> I have written … a bill, and I know that this will take time, it is now being circulated amongst the two other coalition parties, who will check whether they want to add or change something. (id 69)

Representation

Second, politicians confirm that representational motivations are a key driver of their media responsiveness. The motivation is spontaneously named in 20 interviews. Politicians respond to issues that attract media attention because they think the public deems these issues important as well. The media are used as a reflection of the public opinion (Herbst 1998); and politicians also think they make the public opinion (Cohen et al. 2008). Either way, it encourages politicians to use the media in their political work:

[*Reacting to the media happens*] mostly in the policy domains ... which the public deems really important. Safety, justice, police; then education, labor. Of which they recognize its importance. Those are the policy issues where people act, react, via the media and which, as a politician, you cannot put aside. (id 70)

I think that most MPs rely on media reports, well, because those have the largest impact on society. It sounds cliché, but we are elected by the population, so they talk to us on the street and ask 'But this is not right?' and 'Will you do something about it?'. The man on the street reads the news as well, and if you as a parliamentarian don't do anything about it, then why did they elect you? (id 15)

Interestingly, some MPs indicate that the media can really fortify public opinion, forcing politicians to respond. A minister told us about a peculiar situation he had experienced in this regard. After he announced his decision to stop subsidizing a public radio broadcaster, some people were very unhappy with the decision and they managed to get a lot of attention for their discontent in the media. The minister explained how he used the media to get an idea of the public opinion: "*You try to gauge the atmosphere: how many people are they, and how angry are they?*" (id 172) After several days, he felt forced to reverse his decision, and the floor was open for debate again. He said that "*whether or not we wanted it, the emotion was so strong that we had to take it into account.*"

Party Competition

Reactions to media coverage can also be driven by motivations related to party competition (Green-Pedersen 2010). The parliamentary arena hosts a continuous "attack and defense game" between the government and the opposition or between parties with different views on how problems should be solved. News coverage, amply reporting about this party competition on a daily basis, is used as ammunition by politicians to fight the partisan game. The motivation is referred to by 17 respondents:

To defend the policy of my party, and to alert to the slogan-wise language of the opponent. That was the objective. (id 25)

A reason to react [*to the media*] is of course, that you see a political advantage in doing so ... because you feel personally attacked. (id 149)

Media Motivation

Many of the politicians, when giving an example of media reactivity, refer to a related attempt to get into the media themselves. In other words, the media's *arena* function may serve as a direct motivation for politicians to exploit its information function (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016)—the two functions are closely linked. This is actually the motivation that comes up most often (spontaneously mentioned in 31 interviews). Only 5 politicians denied that they cared about whether or not their initiative would make it into the media. Politicians feel that it is really important that their efforts—be it to improve policy, represent the public or fight the party competition—are communicated towards the public at large.

> For me, this was the moment to write a press release myself, with the minister's answer [*to the parliamentary question*], and launch this again, to put myself in the picture, to show that I take these issues on board. So that people know that I am dealing with it. (id 69)

In particular, they feel that it is easier to gain media access when you react to something that is already in the media, than when you have to introduce a whole new topic.

> The media are a self-feeding system … It is much less evident, when you react to something that has so far not gained media attention … to have the same effect. On Wednesday [*day of Flemish plenary meeting*] you mainly look for media attention, all parties do that. And you are led by what was already in the media. (id 167)

> The media make things actual, so that, when you do something with it, the chances are largest that you are noticed and that you can bring yourself into the debate. And, as a politician, you need to focus your efforts, and the goal is often to become more widely known. (id 81)

As the latter example shows, media motivation is not only an intermediary motivation—one that serves more fundamental policy-making, representational or party competition (or personal re-election) goals. It is, or has become, a motivation for action on itself as well (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013).

Most politicians are a little media savvy, they want to be in the spotlight as much as possible. … I think, especially now with 'Villa Politica' [*broadcasting of the plenary meeting*] in Flanders, that this is actually more important for them, than the content of their message. And this is normal, because people … say that they saw you on TV last week. When you ask them what it was about, they are wrong or they don't remember; but yes, they saw you on TV. … They see that you are busy and that is in many cases more important than the content of your message. (id 224)

Political Effectiveness

Simply being politically effective is a final motivation why politicians respond to the news. The idea—referred to by 18 politicians—is that in order to turn an initiative into a success, a politician is inclined to react to the media. They experience that initiatives taken in response to the media, for all abovementioned reasons, are more often successful than other initiatives. The media make it easier to get something on the political agenda.

Sometimes, there are things that we already discussed in parliament, for which there was no media-attention. But if they suddenly appear in the newspaper, the effect duplicates. You look for such instances because they offer leverage, to make things move politically speaking. (id 167)

Very often we get information about which we say: 'I should do something with that'. But you can't do everything, so what do you choose? Well, those things that will get broader attention of course. (id 77)

The observation that the chances to succeed politically increase when reacting to the news of the day is partly the consequence of institutionalized practices as well. Some politicians, complaining about the short-term thinking of many politicians, explain how some parliamentary instruments have become media-oriented by definition:

Parliamentary questions are mostly about things that were in the newspaper. But you are only allowed to ask a question if you can demonstrate that they are topical. You intend to ask a question, you have to motivate why it is topical, and the only way you can do that is by saying that it was in the newspaper. (id 202)

The parliamentary chairman is strict in this respect. He requires you to demonstrate the topical value of your initiative. (id 205)

The Media's Role

In 91 out of the 136 interviews, we asked the following sub-question: "*Imagine the news story had not been in the media. Would you probably still have undertaken the action? Why, or why not?*" With this sub-question, we tried to gauge how fundamental the role of the media in politicians' work is. Are the media a *necessary condition* for certain political actions to be taken; do they merely offer a *favorable circumstance* to do so; or don't they play any role? While some politicians' answers to this sub-question where already shown above—to illustrate various mechanisms—I report counts for this question specifically here. I look at which mechanisms are connected to which media role.

The response to the sub-question was negative in one out of four instances (26%). Politicians say they would not have taken action if the information had not been in the media. Their response is relatively often driven by "revelation"; they would not have been informed at all, if they had not learned about the information via the media.

> No, because I didn't know it. In this example, the information delivered by the media was really new. (id 43)

Revelation is not required for the media to be a "necessary condition", though. Some politicians would simply not take their initiative if the issue was not made so newsworthy by the media (amplification). Or, it can be that a politician was motivated to take action because of media attention.

> It is the topicality of the issue that makes me take action. I did not think it was newsworthy enough to ask a question about. But then I was convinced that other parties were also going to react, so my question was included. (id 52)

> The fact that it came in the media [*was crucial*]. Because emotions are important. To make something work in politics, in particular when you are from the opposition, you need to be able to arouse emotions … Especially when it touches the public opinion, when it is in the media, on television, it is followed up. (id 57)

Another 12% of the politicians doubted about whether or not they would have taken action. They are unsure whether they would have learned about the issue elsewhere. Or, they say that their motivation to

act depends, for instance, on who would alternatively inform them about the issue. The media give an issue credibility and perceived relevance—which is something other sources not always do.

> It might be difficult to get to know this via another source. … But imagine someone would call me, my reaction would be the same. (id 216)

> It depends. On which interest group would contact me, and what it would be about. If it is a topic about which I have a full-fledged dossier, yes. But if it is something about which I know only this interest group cares about, which is not supported by society … then I will be less inclined to follow. (id 139)

The majority of politicians (62%) say that the media did not change a thing. There was no learning—the politician had alternative information sources at his or her disposal—and they were motivated regardless of the media coverage on the issue.

> I would have reacted anyway, because this is a topic that I follow. (id 96)

Some politicians, however, explain that while the media may not have determined *whether* they took action, they did impact *how* they took action. For instance, some politicians took action sooner than they had planned; the media determined the *timing* of their initiative. Or, they took a different *type* of action. The media open the way for quick actions in the plenary meeting. Without preceding news coverage, they would wait and ask, for example, a less visible question in a specialized committee:

> Things would go differently … On the day of the publication of the first newspaper article in De Tijd [*Financial newspaper*] I interpellated the minister about this. The momentum of publication is an argument to ask a parliamentary question. The topical value could clearly be demonstrated. This would have been different, if I just had the information. They I would maybe have brought it up in a conversation … and the question had maybe been treated in the committee. (id 167)

Conclusion

This chapter shows that political elites acknowledge being responsive to the media. During in-depth interviews, almost all Flemish politicians (MPs, ministers, party leaders) are able to give an example of a recent

initiative taken upon news coverage. Furthermore, they offer anecdotal evidence of many of the learning and motivational mechanisms addressed in the literature.

With regards to learning, most politicians indicate that—for their exemplar case of media responsiveness—they learned something from the media. Either, the media *revealed* the information upon which they reacted, or they *amplified* the information—indicating its importance. The number of instances where politicians indicate they did not learn anything from the media, is significantly smaller.

Motivationally speaking, "getting into the media" is the most important driver for media reactions. Often *media motivation* exists in function of other goals, such as *policy-making*, *representation* or *party competition*. But it is discussed as a goal on itself as well. And, for certain types of political action, politicians respond to the media in order to maximize their *political effectiveness.*

What are the implications for the role of the media in politicians' work? Most politicians (62%) would have taken their initiative—that is, the example of media responsiveness they gave—even if the underlying topic had not been covered by the media. Next, 12% of the politicians doubt whether they would have taken their initiative. Finally, for no less than 26% of the politicians to whom we asked the question, the media were decisive for their initiative, because they delivered the necessary information or because they were a crucial motivational trigger for action.

Notes

1. The interviews were conducted by the author and colleagues in the framework of the INFOPOL-project. This work was supported by the European Research Council [Advanced Grant 'INFOPOL', N° 295735] and the Research Fund of the University of Antwerp [Grant N° 26827]. Stefaan Walgrave (University of Antwerp) is principal investigator of the INFOPOL project, which has additional teams in Israel (led by Tamir Sheafer) and Canada (led by Stuart Soroka and Peter Loewen).
2. All Belgian Dutch-speaking federal and regional politicians ($N = 231$) were contacted and asked to participate. In total, 182 politicians agreed to participate (response rate: 79%).
3. An interview typically consisted of a survey of about 35 minutes—which the politician completed on a laptop brought by the interviewer—followed-up by a conversation of about 20 minutes, in which the interviewer asked in-depth questions to the politician (structured list of questions and follow-up

questions; permission to deviate from questionnaire if the interviewer saw fit to do so). The duration of the interviews varied a lot, though; some politicians spared more than half an hour for the interview; others had barely time for one question. As there was no time for all in-depth questions to be asked in each interview, we randomized the question order so that all questions would frequently be asked. For the full interview protocol, see the technical report on www.infopol-project.org.

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The Media Independency of Political Elites

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One account of media influence on the audience is the media dependency theory (Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur 1976). It holds that the media are influential simply because most people have no other means besides the media to learn about the world surrounding them. Having a kind of information monopoly, because learning from direct personal experiences is limited, the news media have a pervasive influence on people's cognition and beliefs about society. Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur's path-breaking 1970s article triggered a host of media dependency research (Baran and Davis 2012). Media dependency theorists' basic claim is that media dependency is higher in, what they call, "complex societies" and in societies with developed media systems. Most media

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dependency work focuses on the societal level and not on individuals and almost all individual-level work on media dependency focuses on ordinary citizens. The question this chapter sets out to answer is to what extent political elites, just like ordinary citizens, are dependent on the media for their information about what goes on in the world around them. *How dependent are politicians on the media to stay abreast of current affairs?*

As they are expected to solve, or at least deal with, real world problems and supposed to do so in a way congruent with citizens' preferences, being informed about the world is crucially important for politicians. Politicians look for recent information about current affairs. In a constant state of information overload (Walgrave and Dejaeghere 2016), the problems they deal with are endless and their time and resources limited (Simon 1985). Deciding on what to deal with—and how—is crucial for a politician's individual survival (re-election) and for the adequacy of representation at the aggregate level (policy responsiveness). Most work on political representation is implicitly based on the underlying premise that representatives draw on information about what the problems in society are, what the possible solutions might be, and what the public thinks about those problems and solutions (see for example the foundational work by Miller and Stokes 1963 and later studies, such as that by Stimson et al. 1995).

Individual political elites display two features that, according to media dependency theory, make them likely to look for current affairs information nearly constantly: politicians have a high need to understand the world around them (media dependency theory scholars call this the *need for understanding*) and they also need to act effectively in that world as they are supposed to represent their society (a high *need for orientation*) (Ball-Rokeach 1985). More specifically, political elites have to make sense of a social (and political) environment that is ambiguous and unpredictable and in which the problem and solution signals from society are opaque. Additionally, politicians are located in a threatening environment in which their position is constantly challenged and potentially fickle. This strong uncertainty and inherent instability increases their need to know and to act. Acting inadequately, for example based on wrong information, may threaten their political survival. Media dependency theorists expect that people in positions such as these would

be frantically looking for information to help them meet these needs (Ball-Rokeach 1985).

The fact that getting information about current affairs is crucially important for politicians' tasks does not automatically imply that politicians get this information *from the media*. The claim that politicians depend on the mass media for their current affairs information has not been substantiated by direct evidence except maybe indirectly by the finding that politicians sometimes follow-up on media stories in their actions (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). But this strand of research mostly refers to what Van Aelst and Walgrave call the active use of media information and not just to the passive informative function of the mass media. Since we know hardly anything about the latter, this paper departs from the assumption that the media is *not* very important for what politicians know about current affairs.

In fact, politicians are very different from ordinary citizens. First, they are policy experts who are interested in getting thorough and detailed information about society (see for example: Dulleck and Wigger 2015). Second, and as a consequence, they have plenty of alternative means of information at their disposal—staffers, experts, civil servants, government agencies, statistical offices, etc.—potentially lowering their reliance on the mass media. While the information encapsulated in media stories is often episodic, personalized, succinct and tentative, these alternative sources provide them with more specialized and detailed signals from society than the media can provide. Third, in order to be able to act in a sensible way, politicians need information about current affairs that is more thorough and less selective than what the main stream news media have to offer. They are thus motivated to look for "better" information than they get from the mass media. There is a dearth of research that examines the informational role of the mass media for elites. We have to go back more than 40 years ago to Kingdon's (1973) classic for an exception. Looking at US Congressional voting behavior, Kingdon found that the media are by no means a crucial information supplier. The news media play a role, Kingdon found, but more specialized sources prevail in a typical US Congressman's information menu. In sum, because of elites' policy expertise, their alternative information resources, and their strong motivation to look for thorough information, we expect to find relatively high levels of media *in*dependence for current affairs knowledge. Therefore, we take media *in*dependence as the dependent variable

of this study, leading to our research question: *Which elites are more independent from news media information compared to others and why?*

Our main aim is to *explain* media independence of elites. Our theory of media independence is based on the idea that the above mentioned three factors—expertise, alternative information sources and motivation for comprehensive information—determine the degree of media independence of individual politicians.

We test these ideas by investigating the media independence of individual politicians in three countries—Belgium, Canada and Israel. Several hundred national and regional politicians were surveyed and confronted with media stories published in the weeks preceding the interview. Elites were asked (1) whether they had seen or heard about the story, (2) whether they knew about the underlying news fact before it appeared in the news media and (3) what share of all they knew about the underlying facts originated from the news media.

We find that some politicians rely less on the media to keep taps on current affairs than others. Politicians' expertise, alternative information sources and motivation are indeed driving their media independence. Especially high-ranking government and specialized politicians are less reliant on the mass media for their current affairs information. The type of current affairs matters as well. For political events, news about political controversies and news about events that matter for the public, politicians seem to have alternative sources of information at their disposal and they seem to be more motivated to go beyond what the media have to offer.

Elites' Media Independence for Current Affairs

Our central argument is that individual politicians' media independence is determined by their expertise, their alternative information sources, and their motivation to go beyond news media information. Note that the above three variables are probably strongly associated—politicians with expertise regarding certain issues also have alternative sources of information regarding those issues and they are probably also motivated to go beyond media information when it comes to informing themselves about "their" issues. So, disentangling the effect of expertise, alternative sources and motivation is tricky and maybe even a little artificial. Still, we attempt to attribute a number of explanatory variables to each of the

three theoretical factors. We now formulate some speculative hypotheses that are mainly meant to structure our narrative.

Regarding expertise we see two potential indicators. Expertise comes with *experience*. The longer a politician has been in politics, the higher the chance that she has developed expertise on issues. Naturally, more experienced politicians also may have built a larger network of specialized sources of information to feed them with societal information and experience may not only be an indicator of expertise but also of information alternatives. A second and more direct indicator of expertise is *specialization*. Politicians tend to specialize themselves in specific issues and sit in specific parliamentary committees that deal with a narrowly defined set of policy issues. Again, their specialization in specific issues not only affects their own, direct expertise regarding some issues, it also leads to forging an alternative information network that feeds the politician with specialized information. This leads to two hypotheses:

H1 More experienced politicians are more media independent for information about current affairs than less experienced politicians.

H2 Regarding issues they are specialized in, specialized politicians are more media independent for information about current affairs than not-specialized politicians.

Politicians with a variety of information sources providing them with societal information are less dependent on the news media. As indicators of having alternative sources, we hypothesize three things to affect media independence. First, *high-ranking* politicians are better surrounded and have more staffers than low-ranking politicians. Ministers or party leaders have more people working for them than "ordinary" MPs. This apparatus is partly set up to collect information (Walgrave and Dejaeghere 2016) and should foster media independence. Second, being a politician of a *government party*, even when not being a cabinet member yourself, leads to an increase of potential information sources. Indeed, MPs from government parties often get some of their information directly from their party's ministers. Therefore, we expect them to rely less on media signals. Third, aside from who a politician is and what position she holds, the type of information may affect to what extent we observe media

independence. For some kinds of current affairs information, politicians have other sources of information. This especially applies for *political news*. As politicians are personally involved in politics, often experiencing news phenomena first-hand, we expect them to be more independent from the media when it comes to political news.

H3 High-ranked politicians are more media independent for information about current affairs than ordinary politicians.

H4 Politicians from government parties are more media independent for information about current affairs than politicians from opposition parties.

H5 Politicians are more media independent for information about political affairs than about non-political affairs.

A final cluster of hypotheses draws on the idea that, regarding some kinds of information more than for others, politicians are motivated to get information that goes beyond media information. Some information is too important to just rely on what the media have to say about it and, consequently, for that type of information politicians are more independent from the media. First, it makes sense to expect that politicians care more about those current affairs regarding which they think the *public cares* about. In other words, if politicians perceive information to relate to something voters particularly care about, we expect them to be more motivated to go beyond what is available through the news media. Second, *conflict* is a driving force in politics: policy-making and electoral competition are essentially conflictual. For example, conflictual news or signals from society offer an opportunity for the opposition to challenge the government and for individual politicians to attack their adversaries. So, we speculate that politicians in general care more about signals that contain conflict. Consequently, we expect politicians to look for information beyond the media when it comes to information that points towards conflict and disagreement.

H6 Politicians are more media independent for information about current affairs when they think the covered fact is important in the eyes of the public compared to when they think it is not.

Table 7.1 Number of respondents and response rate in three countries

	Belgium	*Canada*	*Israel*
Competence level of interviewed politicians	National level and regional level (Flanders and Wallonia)	National level and regional level (Ontario)	National level
Position of politicians interviewed	MPs, ministers and party leaders	MPs, ministers and party leaders	MPs, ministers and party leaders
Number of politicians contacted for interview	413 (out of population of 413 politicians)	286 (out of population of 425 politicians)	159[a] (out of population of 159 politicians)
Number of politicians that participated	269	76	65
Response rate	65%	27%	41%

[a] In the Israeli case, 18 of the 65 interviewed Members of the Knesset (MK) were ex-MKs. The reported response rate is calculated for the actual MPs only. Israeli national elections were held on the 17th of March 2015, right before the start of the interview period. We decided to start interviewing some ex-MK right after the elections; these people were not re-elected just a few weeks before. We supposed they would still be able to respond to our questions as if they were still in the Knesset. The other 47 Israeli interviews were with actual MKs, some of them were brand new to the job.

H7 Politicians are more media independent for information about current affairs when there is more disagreement between political parties compared to when there is no disagreement.

DATA & METHODS

Our data are collected in the framework of a series of interviews with politicians conducted by the authors and colleagues in three countries (Belgium, Canada and Israel) in 2015.[1] All respondents were regional or national members of parliament, ministers, and/or party leaders. Information about the respondents and the response rate per country is provided in Table 7.1.

The closed questions used to construct our dependent variable—a measure of media independence—were completed by the politicians on a laptop brought by the interviewer. Each respondent was presented with seven media stories. These stories were real, prominent media stories that had appeared on the front page of an elite newspaper in each of the three countries up to five weeks before the interview. Just a short summarizing

title of the story was shown. Since the interviews took place over a period of several months, the design had a "rolling" structure: for every interview a new random sample of seven stories was drawn from the (rolling) population of all stories published within the five weeks before. Stories all dealt with domestic issues; foreign news and editorials were excluded. In Belgium, the newspapers were *De Standaard* and *Le Soir*, in Canada they were *The Globe and Mail*, *Toronto Star* and *La Presse*, and in Israel *Ha'aretz*. Several questions were asked to elites about each story, three of which are relevant to the present study. Questions 2 and 3 below—which were only asked if the politician recalled the news story— form our measure of media dependency.

1. *Did you see or hear about this news fact during the last month* (no = 0, yes = 1)? (*Recall*)
   If yes:
2. *Were you informed about this news fact before it appeared in the mass media* (no = 0, yes = 1)? (*Before Media*)
3. *Thinking about everything you know about this news fact since it appeared in the news, how large is the share of information that came from the media compared to the share of information from other sources* (scale reversed so that 0 = all from media; 100 = all from other sources)? (*Share Other Sources*)

Our two indicators of media independence tap into different dimensions. The question regarding whether they knew about a news fact before it was in the news taps into the *speed* of the mass media in spreading information. Elites are not like ordinary people, they are motivated experts often making the news themselves, and therefore, we expect many of them to know the news before it actually is picked up by the media. The more elites declare they knew about the story before it was in the news, the more we consider them to be media independent.

The question gauging elites' assessment of the extent to which their knowledge about the underlying fact comes from the media or not, deals with *encompassingness* of the information available in the media. Again, we expect the share of knowledge not coming from the media to be generally large since politicians are highly motivated experts looking for thorough information. We expect, however, observable differences across politicians.

Both measures assess a distinct element of media independence. Even if elites got initially informed about a story via the media, they may have deepened their knowledge about the news fact afterwards using other sources, or they may have known the background of the story before it appeared. Yet, we do expect that the same factors captured by the hypotheses above are predictive of both dimensions.

We are aware of the fact that our two indicators of media independence are proxies that grasp the phenomenon of media independence only partially and, maybe, indirectly. We do not have measures of elites' perceptions of the usefulness or the reliability of the media information, or of whether they think the news media provide enough detail and so forth. But incomplete and indirect as our measures may be, they form a relevant first step to start thinking about the media independence of elites.

Note that both questions may suffer from a social desirability bias. It could be the case that politicians take pride in knowing the news before it breaks. In fact, a high-ranking politician declared that it was 'his duty' to know the news before it breaks and that he would be "a bad politician" if he did not. Especially our second measure may be even more prone to overestimating politicians' media independence; admitting that most of what one knows comes from the media may come across as exhibiting shallowness or lack of research skills. Our design does not allow control for this. Yet, we are not really interested in the general level of media independency but rather in the *differences* across politicians. Naturally, it may be the case that some politicians' answers are more correct and truthful than others' and that this accuracy is associated with the causal factors of interest. For example, it may be the case that especially elite politicians, ministers or party leaders, are expected to have and therefore exaggerate their knowledge that goes beyond media information.

We asked the respondents a number of additional questions about the news stories presented to them. These serve as independent variables. To measure a politician's perception of the importance of a news story in the eyes of the public, we asked: *On a scale from 0 to 10, to what extent do you think citizens want politicians to take action about this topic* (0 = No action wanted by citizens; 10 = Action wanted by citizens)? (*Public Importance*). We further asked about whether, in their opinion, political parties disagreed about the policy measures that should be taken in response to a news story: *On a scale from 0 to 10, how much*

disagreement is there between political parties about the content of the policy that is needed to address this topic? ($0 =$ No disagreement between political parties; $10 =$ Disagreement between political parties)? (*Party Disagreement*).

We collected additional biographical data about the political elites in the sample. From their websites, we retrieved how long ago they were elected into Parliament for the first time (*Experience*), their party affiliation (*Government*), personal position, and committee membership. With regards to position, we consider ministers, state secretaries (junior ministers) and party leaders to be *High-Ranking*. Committee membership was used to construct a measure of *Specialization*; if a story deals with an issue that falls within the competence of a parliamentary committee of which the politicians is a member, we consider that politician to be specialized in that issue.

A third source of data is a content analysis of the media stories. First, in addition to coding the main front page story of the main newspaper of each country every day (which was used to create the summarizing title about the story), we coded all other news articles dealing with the same news story as well. Two news articles belong to the same news story when (1) they deal with exactly the same topic and when (2) the event they cover is set on the same geographical location. We did this additional coding using the same newspapers from which we gathered front page stories (*De Standaard, Le Soir, the Globe and Mail, La Presse, Toronto Star, Ha'aretz*). We did more coding of additional popular newspapers in the same countries (*Het Laatste Nieuws, La Libre Belgique* in Belgium, *National Post, Montreal Gazette, Ottawa Citizen* in Canada, *and Yediot Aharonot* in Israel) starting from the newspaper edition before until the newspaper edition after the publication of the main article. For each article coded, we recorded whether or not at least one political actor was mentioned in the article. We then aggregated this variable to the story level. The variable *Political Story* represents the proportion of articles regarding a given news story that contains at least one political actor.

Finally, our analyses include control variables that were drawn from the survey, from the real-world databases (*Gender*) and from the content analysis. To measure whether a politician considers herself as a specialist or a generalist, we asked the following question: *Some politicians specialize in one or two policy areas, while others prefer to speak and act*

Table 7.2 Descriptive statistics

	Mean	*S.D.*	*Min.*	*Max.*	*N*
Recall (yes)	0.75	0.43	0	1	2761
Before media (yes)	0.40	0.49	0	1	2023
Share other sources (%)	40.26	32.46	0	100	2019
Female (vs. male)	0.35	0.48	0	1	407
Experience (years)	7.53	7.44	0	47	407
High-ranked (vs. MP)	0.06	0.24	0	1	407
Government (vs. opposition)	0.53	0.50	0	1	407
Generalist (0–10)	5.18	2.55	0	10	398
Prominent	4.23	5.68	1	54	429
Political story	0.60	0.42	0	1	429
Specialization	0.22	0.42	0	1	2761
Public importance (0–10)	6.04	2.66	0	10	2005
Party disagreement (0–10)	5.81	2.92	0	10	1958

upon a wide range of issues from different policy areas. Where would you place yourself on the following scale (0 = Small number of policy issues; 10 = Large number of policy issues)? (*Generalist*) The content analysis also provides a final control variable, being the number of newspaper articles on the story. We call this variable *Prominence*. Descriptive statistics of all variables used are provided in Table 7.2.

A large majority of the news stories have been heard or seen by elites (75%) but more than half of the stories were *not* known before they were published in the news (only 40% were known beforehand) and less than half of what elites know about a news fact comes from other sources than the news media (average 40%). In contrast to our expectations, these figures generally point towards low levels of mass media independence, and thus rather high *dependency*, of elites. This is especially remarkable, given that these stories were all high-profile, front-page stories on domestic topics published by one of the main newspapers.

Results

Our data have a multilevel structure, with observations embedded in stories and politicians, and therefore we estimate multilevel models. We ran two multi-level regression models with the two media-dependency indicators as the dependent variables, a logistic model predicting knowing the story before it appeared (*Before Media*) and a continuous model

Table 7.3 Predicting media independence (logistic and continuous crossed-effects regression results)

	Before media (yes)		Share other sources	
	Coef.	S.E.	Coef.	S.E.
Politician features				
Experience (H1)	−0.00	0.01	0.00	0.12
Specialization (H2)	0.21	0.15	6.80***	1.78
High-ranked (H3)	0.68**	0.24	10.20**	3.59
Government (H4)	0.33*	0.13	5.92**	1.96
Story features				
Political story (H5)	0.96***	0.23	10.48***	2.41
Public importance (H6)	0.09**	0.03	1.93***	0.29
Party disagreement (H7)	0.03	0.02	0.56*	0.27
Controls				
Female	−0.18	0.13	−0.00	1.93
Country (ref. Belgium)				
Canada	−0.13	0.22	−1.61	2.83
Israel	−0.33	0.27	−8.07*	3.29
Generalist	0.04	0.02	1.04**	0.35
Prominent	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.20
Constant	−2.26***	0.33	8.51*	3.95
N	1837		1843	
Number of stories	383		384	
Variance (politician)	0.32		11.95	
Variance (story)	1.09		11.10	
Variance (residual)			26.16	
AIC (and AIC of empty model between brackets)	2275 (2311)		17,750 (17,854)	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

predicting the self-declared share of information not coming from the news (*Share Other Sources*). Observations being simultaneously nested in politicians and stories, we use crossed random effects models which contain a random factor on both the story and the politician level. Results are in Table 7.3.

Note that both dependent variables—*Before Media* and *Share Other Sources*—are correlated with $r = 0.53$ ($p < 0.001$). This suggests that both measures tap the same underlying factor of media independence. This does not mean, though, that the exact same variable explains the two dimensions of media independence.

We hypothesized that experienced politicians would have higher levels of expertise and would, as a consequence, be less dependent on the media. But the results do not support H1. Our second expertise indicator, *Specialization*, does better. In the first model it is not significant. Specialized politicians do not know more about a news fact before it actually breaks. Yet, in the second model its effect is strong and positive. Specialized politicians—politicians sitting in the relevant parliamentary committee—get more information elsewhere regarding the issues their parliamentary committee deals with. This pattern makes sense. Even for specialized politicians the speed of the media makes them initially outperform possible alternative primary messengers. But the signals from the media are, at least for specialized politicians, not encompassing enough and specialists get a lot of their information from other sources. We can, cautiously, confirm H2.

H3, our first hypothesis about alternative information sources, gets strong support from the data. In both models the effect of *High-Ranked* is significant. High-ranking politicians do seem to have more alternative sources of information at their disposal; this leads to a greater independence from the mass media. High-level politicians have experts and staffers that give them a substantial informational advantage. Additionally, top elites often make the news themselves or they sit in bodies where news is made. The same applies to the *Government* indicator. We speculated that government party politicians can draw on the government apparatus to collect information. This makes them less reliant on the mass media for their knowledge of current affairs, and we can thus confirm H4. The effect of *Political Story* is positive and strong. This seems to suggest that politicians learn directly, without mediation by the mass media, about what goes on in politics. As a consequence, they know about political news before it appears in the media and a larger share of what they know about these events comes from non-media sources. H5 gets straightforward confirmation.

We argued that for some stories politicians are more motivated to acquire knowledge that goes beyond the information encapsulated in media coverage. Some stories are more interesting for politicians, they are more consequential for their task, and, hence, for these signals politicians tend to look for additional non-media information. By and large, the evidence seems to support our contention, yet not unequivocally so. Regarding *Public Importance* the results are strong and confirm H6. Politicians knew more of a story before it broke in the news when they

consider the story to be important for the public; they declare that a smaller share of what they know about the event or issues comes from the mass media if they think the story is salient for citizens. But the evidence for H7 is considerably weaker. *Party Disagreement*—politicians' perceptions that parties disagree about how to deal with a news fact or event—does not lead to knowing the news before, but it does exert an effect on the self-reported non-media share of knowledge. So, there is weaker support for the expectation that when parties disagree on issue elites are more motivated to know more about it. Still, the found pattern makes sense. Politicians are not getting informed more quickly by the media when the topic is conflictual but they do get more information about such topics via non-media sources. Again, we see that the media's speed in spreading information towards politicians applies across the board, across most stories and across most politicians (specialization did not play a role here). But in the second phase, when it comes to gathering more information, there is a stronger distinction between politicians and stories.

Regarding the controls, we can be brief. They hardly exert any influence. Only generalist politicians, those who define themselves as speaking and acting on wide range of issues, declare that they have more non-media information about current affairs. Israeli politicians, furthermore, are a little more dependent on media than their Belgian and Canadian counterparts.

Looking at the Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), we see a decrease for both models compared to the empty models (which are not reported in the table), indicating that the model fit improves when adding the independent variables.

By and large, the evidence supports the idea that expertise, alternatives and motivation drive media independence. Politicians with more expertise, with more information sources at their disposal, and who are more motivated to learn about an issue are less dependent on the mass media for information about current affairs. When comparing the effect of the three clusters of indicators, the data suggest that the effect of the alternative sources—*High-Ranked*, *Government* and *Political Story*—seem to have the strongest and most consistent impact on media independence. Politicians with a large information network do manage to be more independent from the media, even when it comes to informing themselves about current affairs. The proof for the effect of expertise—operationalized by *Experience* and *Specialization*—appears to be weakest,

although this may of course be caused by the fact that our indicators of expertise only partially grasp the underlying expertise dimension. The motivation indicators—*Public Importance* and *Party Disagreement*—score in between with a stronger effect than the expertise but a weaker effect than the alternative indicators. We repeat that it is hard to cleanly distinguish the three underlying factors; our indicators do not only map onto one but may map onto two or three of the underlying factors. Still we can draw the tentative conclusion that having alternative sources to learn about current affairs, as well as sources that come with holding higher office, help to foster media independence.

To get an idea of the size of the effects, we look at the predictive values of our models regarding some *real* observations in our dataset. With regards to our first model (*Before Media*), for one observation our model predicted a probability of 0.92 that this politician knew the particular news story beforehand. This politician was a high-ranked politician (state secretary) from a government party with quite some experience (12 years). Several articles on the story to be rated by him were political in nature (60%) and the politician indicated that there was high partisan disagreement on the story (10 on a scale from 0 to 10). The public importance of the story was not so high (4 on a scale from 0 to 10) and the politician was not specialized in the issue at hand, though. In reality, the politician indeed knew about the story beforehand. The lowest observed prediction in our data is 0.03. It concerns a backbencher MP from an opposition party with little experience (one year). She had to rate a non-political story in which she was not specialized and which she estimated not to be of public importance (2 on a scale from 0 to 10). She did think however, that political parties disagreed on the issue (8 on a scale from 0 to 10). In reality, this politician did not know about the story beforehand as predicted by the model. With regards to the second model (*Share Other Sources*) predictions run from 8% (politician learned almost everything from the media) to 66% (politician learned two-thirds from other sources). In other words, different constellations of the independent variables (that occur in reality) lead to substantive differences in media independence.

Finally, as a robustness check, we ran our models for all three countries separately. Most effects apply across countries and can therefore, cautiously, be generalized to many other, Western countries as well. Only the effect of *Specialization* on *Share Not Media* is negative instead of positive in Canada—yet the effect is not at all significant

($b = -1.14$; *S.E.* $= 5.05$; $p = 0.822$). All other effects go in the same direction as they do in the model with the three countries included, although they are sometimes no longer significant (due to the reduced N).

CONCLUSION

As far as we know, our study is the first to directly tackle the extent to which elites depend on the mass media for their information. The evidence shows that Belgian, Canadian and Israeli politicians get a good deal of their information about current affairs from the mass media. We had expected their media dependency to be lower, but it appears that, much like ordinary citizens, politicians read or hear most stories first via the news media. And, when asked to evaluate what they know about the underlying facts and to estimate how much of that knowledge comes from the news media, they respond that more than half of their knowledge is from the media. We do not have the necessary data to compare these figures with the media dependency of ordinary citizens, but doubtlessly citizens are *much* more media dependent than politicians. Still, it is definitely *not* the case that politicians are operating independently from the media and that they totally rely on other sources of information to know about what is going on in the world. Rather, the opposite seems to be the case.

Nuancing this broader picture, politicians' media independence varies quite a bit across politicians and issues. The more media-independent politicians are those with specialized expertise and elite politicians with executive positions or belonging to a government party. Regarding the story features, for stories that deal with politics, that report about party disagreement, or that are perceived by politicians as important to the public, politicians depend less on the media. Our theoretical framework holding that expertise, alternative sources of information, and motivation to learn more are driving politicians' media independence gets support from the data. Although we should be cautious as our measures do not allow to sharply distinguish the three drivers of media independence, especially having alternative information sources seems to matter, and these sources come with reaching a higher position or with a politician's party being in government.

An important limitation of the study is that we cannot really tell whether the role of the mass media for elites goes beyond the discovery of current events. Indeed, one could expect that elites may learn

first about an event via the mass media but then, subsequently, rely on other sources to potentially *deepen* their knowledge about the underlying facts. After being triggered by a news story, elites simply need time to inform themselves further. We would need direct evidence of elites' acquisition of additional information about a societal fact that has come to their attention first via the mass media to further examine elites' degree of media independence in later phases of information acquisition. We expect media coverage to play a role in this follow-up phase as well, albeit a smaller one compared to the discovery phase.

More generally, the question is how important the mass media are in elites' total information menu. That they partially learn about current affairs via the mass media may seem trivial. After all, this is the news media's primary function in modern society: scanning society and signaling newsworthy facts and events to an audience that naturally includes political elites. Ideally, one would study the mass media as just one source of information among many others politicians consult. But such a study supposes access to all information reaching elites—the discussions they have with their staff, the reports they receive from interest groups, their contacts with lobbyists, the caucus meetings they attend, their interactions with constituents, their phone conversations with experts etc.—which is a formidable task. We think our innovative input-output design focused on the media partly grasps the information elites get in; it forms a good start in trying to establish how elites are informed.

Another limitation of the study is the fact that we rely on elites' self-declared media independence. Our measures are subjective. We mentioned earlier that elites may, deliberately or inadvertently, give incorrect answers. Their recollection may simply be wrong; they may over- or underestimate their media independence because of social desirability or (lack of) self-confidence. That is why we focused mainly on the differences across elites and less on the absolute level of media independence. In a previous similar study presenting Belgian politicians with media stories, Sevenans et al. (2016) presented politicians with real news stories as well as with fake news stories that never appeared in the media; they found that the number of politicians claiming that they had seen a fake story was close to zero. This suggests that the social desirability bias pushing politicians to make faulty claims is probably rather small, at least as regards recall of news stories. Additionally, we do not think it is at all possible to objectively measure politicians' real dependency on the mass media in ways that could be acceptable for the politicians themselves.

Can we generalize our findings beyond the three countries under study? The three countries were chosen because of their widely diverging political system, in particular their electoral system. Still, the predictors of media independence are highly similar in all three countries. Hence, we do believe that our findings may travel across systems. We did not put forward comparative hypotheses as it is tricky to simply compare media dependency of politicians regarding different news media. Although our selection of outlets from which the stories were taken is aimed to be comparable across the three countries, we are not sure that, for instance, *De Standaard*, is an equally frequently read newspapers by Flemish elites compared to *La Presse* in Quebec (Canada). So, the absolute levels of knowing a news story before and of the share of non-media knowledge do not tell us much about the differences between countries.

Finally, normatively speaking, our results seem to underpin the idea that there is an important information asymmetry between elite politicians and backbenchers. Even when it comes to current affairs, top elites have more information and are better informed. In other words, government and opposition politicians do not fight with the same informational weapons. The opposition cannot but rely more on the mass media to search for ammunition to challenge the government while the government and top elites more generally do have other sources of information at their disposal. This finding confirms the contention by Van Aelst and Walgrave (2016) that for the opposition the media are a more useful—but also, as we have shown, a more necessary—asset than for the government. Despite this dependency, specialization and specific expertise, as we have demonstrated, can generate alternative sources of information. The opposition, while lacking the government's resources, can concentrate their efforts on specific issue areas in order to make up ground in this asymetric information battle.

Note

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When Politicians React to the Media: How the Attitudes and Goals of Political Elites Moderate the Effect of the Media on the Political Agenda

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While the media are understood to play an important role in politics nowadays, little attention has been paid to the ways in which individual politicians use it to realize their goals—whether as an information source (information function) or as a tool for self- or issue-promotion (arena function; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). Specifically, studies of the political agenda-setting effect usually focus on the *institutional-level*, examining the agenda of collective entities such as political parties and parliaments (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Van Noije et al. 2008). Since institutional-level analysis treats all political actors that operate under a collective political entity (e.g. all of the opposition members) as homogenous, it necessarily omits to address *individual-level* explanations for political agenda-setting: what drives an individual Member of Parliament (MP) to

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be more or less responsive to the media agenda? One can expect politicians to behave, think and make decisions according to different considerations and thus to use the media for different purposes. While institutions may define the constraints, individual politicians ultimately make the final decisions.

While several studies have indeed focused on the relationship between individual politicians and the media agenda (e.g. Davis 2007; Helfer 2016; Kingdon 1984; Sevenans et al. 2015; Walgrave 2008), none has taken into account how politicians' "soft" features—their *attitudes and political goals*—moderate their *objective* behavior, meaning their observed level of responsiveness to the media agenda. We suggest that in order to understand their media responsiveness, a connection should be made between what politicians think and how they behave in real-life. This chapter sheds light on how the two media functions—information and arena—vary in importance according to different types of individual politicians.

Based on two bodies of literature—representation and bounded rationality—we suggest two individual-level explanations that influence the extent to which politicians are responsive to the media: whether the politician views herself as a representative of her party or of public, and the degree to which she feels overwhelmed by information. As a result of the information abundance in the modern political environment (Baumgartner and Jones 1993), politicians must allocate their limited attention and prioritize issues and information sources according to their predispositions and goals. Specifically, we expect individual politicians to decide whether media information is useful to them according to whom they represent. This stresses the active component of the information function, as the information coming from the media creates an opportunity for political elites to respond according to their own needs. Second, we suggest that the more overwhelmed a politician feels, the more important to her the media's information function. She will be stricter in selecting sources of information and will prioritize the information coming from the media, since journalists already perform an initial information selection and deliver it concisely. The media's attention to certain issues can provide politicians overwhelmed with information with cues as to what they should be focusing their attention on.

Results show that the more politicians represent their party over public demands, the more responsive they will be to the media. This, we argue,

emphasizes the *arena* function of the media over the information function, as the party representatives wish to promote their party in the media, and the latter become a main arena for partisan conflicts. We do not find a relationship between the degree to which politicians feel overwhelmed by information and their level of media responsiveness.

Individual Politicians and the Media Agenda

The political agenda-setting literature which focuses on individual politicians can be divided into two groups: The first group examines individual-level political agenda-setting without addressing its contingency, that is, the factors that moderate the agenda-setting effect. For instance, while some studies observe real-life responsiveness (e.g. speeches) to the media agenda by individual politicians, mostly the US president (Edwards and Wood 1999; Wanta and Foote 1994; Wood and Peake 1998), others are based on interviews with political elites (Davis 2007; Kingdon 1984). However, these studies do not provide us with a systematic understanding of the contingency of political agenda-setting.

The second group of studies does indeed examine the contingency of political agenda-setting at the individual level, but through surveys and field experiments with MPs, rather than by observing their real-life agenda (e.g. their speeches or bill proposals). The moderators used for testing the contingency are politicians' "hard" features (seniority, gender) or their "soft" features (political goals), as shown in the far right column in Table 8.1. Surveys found that politicians' "hard" characteristics (especially seniority; see Helfer 2016; Midtbø et al. 2014) could moderate their responsiveness to the media. Others focused on politicians' "soft" features and found that those who emphasized political competition ("party warriors") and those who attempted to win over a wider public were more media responsive (Midtbø et al. 2014; Sevenans et al. 2015). However,

Table 8.1 Different measures of the contingency of political agenda-setting

Moderators	Measurement of political agenda-setting	
	Objective (speeches, laws)	*Subjective (experiments, surveys)*
"Hard" features (government/opposition, seniority)	Institutional-level studies	Individual-level studies
"Soft" features (attitudes and goals)	None	Individual-level studies

the dependent variable in this group of studies is the *self-reported* behavior of political elites, which can be influenced by self-rationalization, inaccurate recall and social desirability.

Adding to these studies, our study is the first to examine the contingency of political agenda-setting through a connection between a politician's individual attitudes and goals and their translation into the actor's real-life media responsiveness.

The Moderating Effect of Politicians' Attitudes and Goals on Media Responsiveness

Individual politicians are characterized by several features that can influence their level of responsiveness to the media agenda. We argue that the *attitudes and goals* of political elites shape their use of the media, and therefore moderate politicians' real-life responsiveness to the media agenda. Our main premise is that modern politics is characterized by an information abundance, and that politicians constantly apply their resources to the most important issues to them.

We lean on two main bodies of literature which provide suggestions as to how politicians act on this information abundance: First, the *representation* literature analyzes how politicians view their duty as political representatives. For instance, politicians may act upon their party ideology, the public as a whole, their local constituency et cetera (see for example, Soroka et al. 2009). We argue that these roles are important for political agenda-setting since the media can provide politicians with information related to whom they represent.

Second, the *bounded rationality* literature suggests that politicians have trouble dealing with complex issues on account of a lack of resources—mainly time and natural cognitive limitations (Lindblom 1959; Simon 1985). Thus, politicians rely on heuristic cues to manage their information and are selective in choosing information. The media can be a useful tool for providing cues regarding the relevance and importance of public issues.

Representing Citizens or Party Platform

One of the ways of dealing with information abundance is to filter in only those information sources that are relevant to whom the politician is representing. The political representation literature often distinguishes between politicians who concentrate more on fulfilling public demands

and those who promote their party platform. Some politicians feel more responsible to the citizens' preferences and serve as a conduit of the public (delegate model). Others feel more responsible to their party and direct their efforts towards gaining support for their party among the public (responsible party model; Converse and Pierce 1986; see also Andeweg and Thomassen 2005; Miller and Stokes 1963).

We suggest that these representation roles affect politicians' level of responsiveness to the media agenda. Politicians who view themselves as a mirror of the public demands are expected to be more responsive to the media agenda. The media are generally considered by politicians to be representatives of public demands, or at least as having a great impact on public opinion (Davis 2007; Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Van Aelst et al. 2008; Van Aelst 2014; Walgrave 2008). Since these politicians constantly need to gauge public opinion and address issues on the public agenda, they see the media as a useful shortcut to these issues and therefore act upon the media agenda. In contrast, party representatives are expected to be attentive mostly to issues that are close to their party agenda and goals—issues that do not necessarily correspond to the current media agenda. Since party platforms are more static than issues in the media, these politicians are expected to be less dependent on journalistic coverage which is more dynamic and deals with a large number of issues (Boydstun et al. 2014).

H1 The more politicians emphasize citizen representation over party representation, the *more* responsive they will be to the media agenda.

Feeling Overwhelmed

Information abundance is one of the main characteristics of modern politics, and politicians try to deal with this oversupply of information (Simon 1985). Naturally, some MPs may feel more overwhelmed by information than others, either because of external (institutional obligations) or internal (cognitive ability) factors. Either way, this feeling requires politicians to look for heuristic cues and cognitive shortcuts regarding which problems are most urgent and what alternatives should be considered (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Lindblom 1959; Simon 1985).

Politicians who feel overwhelmed by information are expected to strictly prioritize the sources of information they rely on and to direct their attention only to the most important. They prefer to use heuristic shortcuts that reduce the cost of obtaining and analyzing information.

We thus expect the media to be important for these politicians. The media provide information on urgent public problems and serve as a proxy for public opinion on different issues, including changes that citizens want to see implemented (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Davis 2007; Walgrave 2008). Thus, the media are important for providing cognitive shortcuts (Popkin 1994), especially to overwhelmed politicians who want to cut information costs. The media assist political elites by performing an initial selection of important public issues and by highlighting the most salient points in a concise way. This contrasts with the detailed information put out by scientific institutions and specialists which place a heavy burden of time on politicians who are already overwhelmed. It follows that issues in the news are more likely to shape the behavior of overwhelmed MPs than their less overwhelmed counterparts (Sheafer and Weimann 2005). More attention to the media naturally leads to more responsiveness to the media agenda.

It should be noted that this expected political agenda-setting effect with regard to overwhelmed politicians may also be due to reverse causality: since politicians lean more on the media, they are also more overwhelmed. Thus, we offer a conjoint explanation for the second hypothesis without decisively determining the causal direction:

H2 The more politicians feel overwhelmed by information, the *more* responsive they will be to the media agenda.

METHOD

We combined three different data types in order to test the hypotheses: The first is a content analysis of Israeli news articles. The second is a content analysis of speeches by members of the Israeli Knesset (MKs). The third is an elite survey with Israeli MKs ($N = 32$), which was conducted between June 2013 and February 2014.[1] These three data types were later combined into one unified dataset, as explained in the following sections.

THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE: POLITICAL AGENDA

Our dependent variable is a dummy variable, which indicates whether each of the 32 MKs addressed a certain issue out of seven (discussed below) in the parliament during each week.[2] The political agenda of MKs was examined through an automated content analysis of speeches

in the plenum. In addition to legislative procedure, oral activity is considered an important tool by which politicians promote their interests, monitor government activity and set the agenda in parliament (Akirav 2010; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011a). Moreover, the media mainly have a symbolic short-term influence on the political agenda (on speeches and rhetoric) rather than a substantive long-term influence (on legislation, budget allocation; see Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). Studying the early stages of the legislative agenda—MKs' speeches—thus provides more assurance that the MKs' characteristics are those shaping their decision to give speeches on certain issues.

We analyzed speeches whose initiative was largely dependent on individual politicians rather than on their party or other institutional constraints: Oral questions and interpellations, supplementary questions, one minute speeches and personal motions for the agenda.[3] In order to ensure stability of MKs' goals and attitudes, speeches were only collected during the period in which the surveys were conducted, namely the last year and a half of the 19th Knesset. In total, 820 speeches were collected from July 2013 to January 2015. This resulted in a total of 32 (MKs) X 7 (issues) X 51 (weeks[4]) = 11,424 observations.

The Independent Variable: Media Agenda

Our main independent variable is the weekly number of articles that referred to any of seven policy issues. Here we used a lagged variable in a search for causality. We collected articles from a quality national newspaper (*Ha'aretz*). All the articles in each daily issue were collected and coded for the period from July 2013 to December 2014[5] ($N = 14{,}457$).

Automated Content Analysis Procedure

In order to code the addressed issues in both the media and the political agenda, we used an automated content analysis, opting for the Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) method for topic modeling. First, the LDA model inductively identified 50 topics from the entire text corpus (without any human intervention), which were composed of a set of common keywords. Afterwards, the LDA model assigned the above topics to each text, along with the topics' probability ranking: topics with high probability of being related to the text were assigned a high ranking. The highest ranking topic for a single text was coded as the main (and only) topic

of this text. In the final stage, we collapsed these 50 topics into seven aggregated policy issue categories.[6] We conducted several validity tests which produced acceptable results (additional details on the automated content analysis procedure are available upon request).

MODERATORS

This study was based on surveys with 32 out of 120 MKs (response rate of 26.6%). The sample included party leaders and ministers, but mostly rank-and-file MKs from both government and opposition. In terms of demographic variables, the politicians who participated in these surveys adequately represent the MK population, although there are more opposition than government members in the sample (details are available upon request).[7] Each MK answered a series of closed-end questions on a wide range of subjects. The MKs noted their answers on a tablet computer in the presence of the researchers. Each moderator was constructed as follows:

Representation. MKs were asked to indicate their perceived balance between two poles on a scale: "Represent the views of citizens and transform them into policy as accurately as possible" (0) or "Represent party platform and gain the public's support for it" (100; $M = 46.09$, $SD = 27.52$).

The degree to which MKs feel overwhelmed by information. The measure was based on the question: "To what extent do you feel overwhelmed by the information that you receive on a daily basis?" MKs were asked to answer in a range between 0 (not overwhelmed) and 10 (overwhelmed; $M = 7.28$, $SD = 2.69$).

CONTROL VARIABLES

We controlled for a set of variables that may explain variations in political agenda-setting. These controls included seniority, age (in years), gender, being a member of the coalition (binary coded), party size, ideology, political power, whether there were forthcoming elections and a dummy variable for each issue. We measured political power with two dummy variables—being a minister or a party leader. The measurement of ideology was done by a binary "conservatism" variable, based on Shenhav et al. (2014). Members of right-wing parties (*HaLikud, Jewish Home, Israel Beitenu, Shas, Yehadut HaTorah*) were coded 1, while all other

politicians were coded 0. Finally, since election periods may have an effect on politicians' parliamentary activity (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011b), a dummy variable was created for the three-month period before the Israeli elections in March 2015. The value 0 was allocated to routine times and 1 to the election period.

STATISTICAL ANALYSES

Our final dataset included three levels: weeks are nested in issues that are nested in MKs. In order to assess the different effects of the media on political agenda, we estimated a multilevel logistic regression model (remember that our dependent variable is a dummy variable), which accounted for the hierarchical dependency of observations. The model included two levels: MKs and weeks. Because of the scant number of issues, we created dummy variables to control for each.[8] The main claim is that the political agenda in a single week is affected by the media agenda in the previous weeks, and thus we created lagged variables over a weekly timespan. Since political agenda-setting is a short term effect, we tested for the influence of media agenda over a weekly timespan ($t-1$). A shorter timespan was considered inappropriate due to institutional constraints in parliaments (e.g. question time mostly occurs on a weekly basis). We also included a lagged dependent variable as independent variable since the political agenda is also affected by inertia and incrementalism (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011a, b).

RESULTS

Table 8.2 shows the results of the hierarchical logistic models in terms of odds ratio: values higher than 1 indicate a positive effect, while values lower than 1 indicate a negative effect. We first present the empty model with random intercept (Model 1), and then add to it the main effects (Model 2) and the interaction effects (Models 3 and 4). As for the main effects, Model 2 indicates that, surprisingly, there is no significant effect of the lagged media agenda on the political agenda. This is a first indication that at the individual-level, the media agenda does not affect all politicians the same, but depends on certain moderators. The effect of party representation is positive (coefficient is higher than 1) and significant, meaning that party representatives give more speeches in the plenum on any of the seven issues. In contrast, the effect of the degree to

Table 8.2 Two-level hierarchical logistic model predicting politicians' responsiveness to media agenda

	Model 1 (Empty model)	Model 2 (Main effects)	Model 3 (Interaction effects)	Model 4 (Interaction effects)
Fixed				
Lagged political agenda		1.339* (0.164)	1.333* (0.164)	1.339* (0.165)
Media agenda		0.999 (0.003)	0.992† (0.004)	0.998 (0.005)
Seniority		1.046† (0.025)	1.046† (0.025)	1.046† (0.025)
Age		0.977 (0.023)	0.977 (0.023)	0.977 (0.023)
Female		0.997 (0.522)	0.994 (0.520)	0.997 (0.522)
Coalition		1.058 (0.402)	1.057 (0.401)	1.058 (0.402)
Party size		1.004 (0.036)	1.004 (0.036)	1.004 (0.036)
Conservatism		0.589 (0.268)	0.589 (0.267)	0.589 (0.268)
Minister		0.082† (0.108)	0.082† (0.108)	0.082† (0.108)
Party leader		0.588 (0.318)	0.589 (0.318)	0.588 (0.318)
Election period		0.194*** (0.046)	0.193*** (0.046)	0.194*** (0.046)
Party representation		1.017* (0.007)	1.013† (0.007)	1.017* (0.007)
Overwhelmed		0.964 (0.086)	0.964 (0.085)	0.961 (0.087)
Party representation* Media agenda			1.0001* (0.00005)	
Overwhelmed* Media agenda				1.0001 (0.0006)
Economy		0.814 (0.146)	0.813 (0.146)	0.814 (0.146)
Political system		0.203*** (0.046)	0.203*** (0.046)	0.203*** (0.046)
Law and order		1.099 (0.138)	1.099 (0.138)	1.099 (0.138)
Education and health		0.448*** (0.087)	0.447*** (0.086)	0.448*** (0.087)
Environment and energy		0.265*** (0.059)	0.265*** (0.059)	0.265*** (0.059)
Culture		0.579** (0.107)	0.579** (0.107)	0.579** (0.107)
Constant	0.044*** (0.008)	0.138 (0.237)	0.170 (0.291)	0.142 (0.243)
Random				
Variance: MPs	1.034 (0.323)	0.601 (0.193)	0.599 (0.192)	0.601 (0.193)
Level 2 N (MPs)	32	32	32	32
Level 1 N (Weeks)	11,424	11,424	11,424	11,424

Notes (1) Estimates are odds ratio coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. (2) The reference category for the last six issue dummies (Economy, Political system etc.) is the Defense and Foreign Affairs issue
†$p < 0.1$; *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$

which MKs feel overwhelmed on the odds that they will speak in the plenum is not statistically significant. Model 2 also indicates that the lagged political agenda in $t-1$ has a positive significant effect on the political agenda in week t, as found in previous studies. Moreover, during an election period the MKs speak less in the plenum than in routine times.

Our first hypothesis held that the more politicians emphasize citizen representation over party representation, the *more* responsive they will be to the media agenda. According to Model 3, the interaction term is higher than 1 and statistically significant. To facilitate the interpretation, Fig. 8.1 shows the interactive effects, indicating how the effect of being a party representative changes within different values of the media agenda (while controlling for the other covariates). Since we use a nonlinear logistic model, it is necessary to examine whether the interaction effect is significant for the different values of the media agenda variable (x-axis).
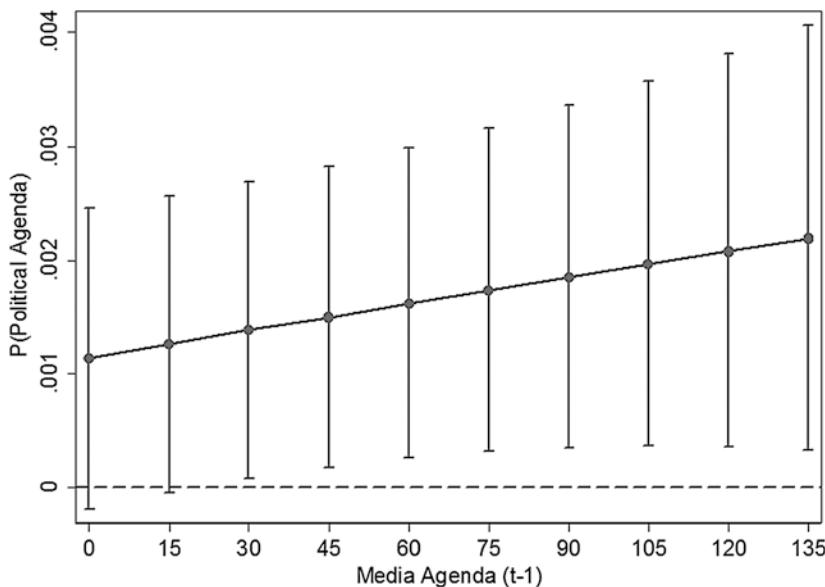

Fig. 8.1 The interactive effect of media agenda and being a party representative on a politician's agenda. *Notes* (1) *X* axis presents the weekly number of articles that referred to an issue. *Y* axis presents the predicted probability of an issue appearing on a politician's agenda. (2) Results are derived from Model 3 in Table 8.2. Brackets indicate 95% confidence intervals

Figure 8.1 indicates that the interaction effect is significant at the higher values of the media agenda variable (the confidence intervals are above 0 for each of the separate media values). However, the direction is opposite to our expectations: when an issue is more prominent in the news (higher values on the X axis), a one-unit increase of being a party representative has a positive and significant effect on the politician's responsiveness to the media. In other words, MKs who emphasize representing their party platform over public demands are surprisingly *more* responsive to the media agenda. Thus, we cannot confirm H1.

Model 4 presents the interaction effect for the second hypothesis. According to H2, the more politicians feel overwhelmed by information, the *more* responsive they will be to the media agenda. The main effects of the control variables are similar to before, but the interaction term is statistically insignificant. Therefore, we reject H2. However, it is possible that the low *N* on the MPs level, along with the complexity of the multilevel model, decreases the statistical power of the model and makes it difficult to confirm the hypothesis.

Discussion

This study examined the contingency of political agenda-setting by using an individual-level approach. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first to test the moderating effect of politicians' *attitudes and goals* on their *objective* behavior, that is, their observed level of responsiveness to the media agenda. We find that MPs are responsive to the media agenda according to their individual needs and goals—specifically their representation role—and not just the goals of collective political entities (e.g. being a member of the opposition). We therefore connect the political agenda-setting literature to actor-centered approaches that consider politicians as strategic rational actors who know how the media work and adapt their behavior accordingly for their own goals (Sheafer 2001; Sheafer et al. 2014; Wolfsfeld and Sheafer 2006).

Our two hypotheses were rejected. We find that political representation significantly moderates the political agenda-setting effect, but opposite to our expectations; politicians who represent their party platform (rather than the public demands) are those more influenced by the media agenda. This finding suggests that the *arena* function of the media is important, as party representatives use the media arena to reach the public with their party messages and to promote their interpretation of reality. Politicians

constantly try to "saturate" the public debate with partisan messages and to prime the public "to focus on their claims and ignore criticisms and alternative arguments" (Jacobs and Shapiro 2000, p. 310). In our case, party representatives are not just passive actors who respond only when the media agenda corresponds with their party-lines. Instead, they try to "ride" the wave of news coverage in order to promote their party views or to attack their opponents. The media are thus considered here as an arena for party battles that can encourage partisan conflicts among MPs (see also Shenhav and Sheafer 2008). This corresponds with previous studies which showed that the media are indeed an important source for "party warriors", that is, politicians who consider party competition and political confrontation their primary goal (Sevenans et al. 2015).

Since our representation measure was based on two poles on the same scale—party and citizen representation—our results indicate that surprisingly, there is a negative association between the media agenda and the agenda of MKs who emphasize citizen demands. In other words, the more the media cover an issue, the less these politicians refer to it. Since we examined the agenda of one left-wing quality newspaper (*Ha'aretz*), it is possible that Israeli politicians assume that the opinions of the wider public are not well reflected in that news outlet. Since our MK sample was relatively small, we encourage future studies to explore this issue using larger samples, longer time periods and different contexts.

Finally, we did not find any difference in the level of media responsiveness between politicians who feel overwhelmed by information and those who feel less overwhelmed. This indicates that the overwhelmed MKs do not lean more on the media as an information source, and perhaps use other sources of information to cut information costs. This finding may also be a result of the news outlet we used in our study (*Ha'aretz*). Overwhelmed MKs might select to consume news outlets that "wrap" the information in a simpler and less detailed package—outlets such as popular newspapers or TV news.

Notes

2. We created a dummy variable instead of a count variable since most politicians do not refer to an issue more than one time per week (MKs addressed an issue more than once in a week only in 0.08% cases in our sample). Thus, we are more interested in whether an MK addressed an issue or not in a certain week.

3. All of these oral activities can be conducted by either opposition or government members.

4. Since the Israeli Knesset does not sit throughout the entire year, there were only 51 weeks of plenum activity.

5. The speech collection period was two weeks longer than the media's and continued through mid-January 2015. This was in order to test the effect of the preceding media agenda on the political agenda.

6. Defense and Foreign Affairs; Economy, Labor, Housing and Social Policy; Political System and Government Administration; Law, Order and Civil Rights; Education, Health, Science and Technology; Environment, Energy, Agriculture and Mobility; Culture, Arts, Entertainment and Sports. This aggregation was based on the typology of issues suggested by Soroka (2002a, b), in a similar way to the one used by Walgrave et al. (2008).

7. Opposition members were overrepresented for two reasons: First, many government members refused to participate because of their role as ministers or vice-ministers. Second, our original sample included 36 MKs (response rate of 30%). However, four ministers did not give any speeches that answered our criteria of an "independent speech", and therefore were excluded from the final sample.

8. When the number of groups is relatively small, the multilevel structure adds little to the estimation (Gelman and Hill 2007).

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The Media as a Political Arena

Moving Beyond the Single Mediated Arena Model: Media Uses and Influences Across Three Arena's

Aeron Davis

Introduction

This chapter draws on multiple interview-based studies of UK political actors at Westminster (see Davis 2002, 2007, 2010, 2015). These have been conducted over nearly two decades, involving 180 interviews with political actors (politicians, civil servants, officials and political journalists), usually in sets of semi-structured interviews. The theoretical frameworks applied come more from media sociology and cultural theory than political communication and some adaption is necessary here. The studies applied an actor-centred interpretive framework to investigate the "mediation" (Thompson 1995; Livingstone 1999) or "mediatisation" of the UK political arena. Such work simply asked: how do such political actors and institutions use media and communications and, conversely, how do media and communications then shape those same actors and institutions? More specifically, it inquired as to how media engagement altered the way

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political actors co-create agendas, debate frames, policy choices, promote individuals and ideas, pick leaders, develop political alliances and so on?

While this piece supports much outlined in Van Aelst and Walgrave's information and arenas model (see Chap. 1), it also seeks to complicate their account by arguing for a move away from the single arena concept. Traditionally, the common analytical framework used by political communication scholars (myself included) has a tendency towards thinking in terms of one, singular shared, mediated public arena or public sphere (Habermas 1989). But, this has become increasingly problematic. Instead, I set out a model of media influence and use that operates across three communicative spaces: the *policy arena*, the *political arena* and the larger *public arena*. The ways political actors use and are influenced by media and journalists varies across these three arenas. Thus, for politicians, the traditional *public arena* (or public sphere) is more about the presentation of individuals, parties and policy ideas in a populist way, akin to general product branding. At the opposite scale, the *policy arena* is technical and mostly operates outside of public/media view (although individual journalists may gain some personal access). In between lies the increasingly mediatized *political arena* in which journalists, politicians and other "political actors" work at close quarters. Each arena operates with a certain autonomy from the others. But, at the same time, there are clear overlaps, with successful media use and influence in one arena having an impact on other arenas. The *political arena*, located between the others, has two functions: first as an arena in which elite policy and individuals are promoted across sectors and elite factions, and consensus is achieved; and second, as a means to mediate and translate between the three arenas.

After setting out the arenas and findings the model will be further illustrated with two short case studies: the election of David Cameron as head of the Conservative Party, and the issue of European Union membership and the recent Brexit vote. Both of these cases reveal the gaps and shifts between the UK *policy arena*, *political arena* and general *public arena*.

Moving Beyond the Single Mediated Public Arena/Sphere Model

In much research on political communication and media sociology, political and other elites sit on one side, citizens and interest groups on the other, and an expansive media space is located between them. Such a framework made sense in earlier centuries, with far more limited states,

civil societies and media. But, in large, complex, fragmented and mediatized democracies, or "actually existing democracies" as Nancy Fraser (1997) calls them, the framework is full of holes. That is not to say it is entirely redundant. Rather, parts of the framework need to be adapted to the greater variation, fragmentation and mediatization of Twenty-first Century polities and communication ecologies.

To quickly summarize, much political writing on the establishment of democracy, old and new, (see Held 2006) holds very securely to an "ideal type" of democracy that links elite decision-making to the mass of consumer citizenry via mass public communications and "public opinion". Drawing on historical treaties and declarations on "the press", a set of "ideal" public communication functions in democracies have emerged (see Keane 1991; Curran 2002, for discussions). Habermas's account of the "public sphere" (1989 [1962]) is most commonly deployed. Here, the public sphere is conceived of as the public, deliberative space between the state and private citizens. It has been applied in the assessment of public communication spaces at the national, transnational and virtual levels. It seems equally appropriate when thinking about the mediatized political arena of a modern-day parliamentary space (see Davis 2010).

However, arguably, such a model of democracy and communication does not fit modern Twenty-first Century, large, complex and fragmented polities. This issue has been highlighted by several of Habermas's critics (see, for example, Behabib 1992; Fraser 1997) and was, indeed, acknowledged in his more recent work (1996). Since then, media too has become far more diverse and fragmented, operating on multiple planes, and often within specialized networks or separated, digital echo chambers (Chadwick 2013; Viner 2016).

In addition, there is a sense that politicians perform and behave differently when moving between public, mediated and more private political arenas (Corner and Pels 2003). The appeal of a senior politician to their party, based on policy proposals, may be distinct from their appeal to ordinary party members or the larger electorate. As Corner explains (2003: 72–74), politicians can be seen to "perform" in two different arenas (or spheres): "the sphere of political institutions and processes" and "that of the public and popular". Indeed, studies of German and US politics have revealed that individual election victories may be as much based on "character traits" as on policy differences (Lees 2005; Kenski et al. 2010). Watching the rise of Geert Wilders, Boris Johnson, Marine Le

Pen and Donald Trump, it is clear that the projection of big personalities rather than policies can both appeal to electorates while also disrupting established parties and policy networks.

These issues suggest that any notion of a single, media arena for politicians is likely to offer a partial picture. If politicians and journalists now operate across different networks and spaces, each with varied audiences and forms of communicative exchange, there may be considerable differences in the way political actors use and are influenced by media.

Through multiple research projects (Davis 2002, 2007, 2010) that looked at UK politics at Westminster, it became clear that political actors and their communications do shift considerably as they move from private to public and back again. News media uses and influences change accordingly, shifting between the autonomous, insider pole of the policy space to the more general mediated public sphere. At one end is a more private policy arena, where there is minimal journalist access or media coverage of political deliberation. At the other extreme, politicians and debates are widely covered by multiple media with large public audiences. In between lies the political arena in which journalists, politicians and other political actors circulate, and media coverage is aimed at more elite audiences.

To conceptualize this, the chapter now sketches out some media-oriented features that distinguish the three arenas of political interaction. These are termed: the *policy arena*, the *political arena* and the larger *public arena* (the original public sphere as Habermas envisioned it). This sense of three overlapping arenas (or spheres or networks) came out as interviewees discussed various aspects of their everyday mediatized activities. The differences between the three are now outlined here through a focus on four factors, which help to separate and define the boundaries of these mediatized arenas: (1) news consumption and use as an information source, (2) journalist access within the political arena, (3) shifting policy and personality priorities across the arenas and (4) the alternative ways and means of developing media profiles across the arenas (Fig. 9.1).

News Consumption and Use Across the Arenas

To start, there are clear differences in news consumption patterns when comparing the wider *public arena with the mediated political* and *private policy arenas*. The main papers read by the public are the *Sun*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Mirror*. When asked (see Davis 2007) about their

Policy Arena
(private parliamentary space)

Political Arena
(public parliamentary space)

Public Arena
(public mediated sphere)
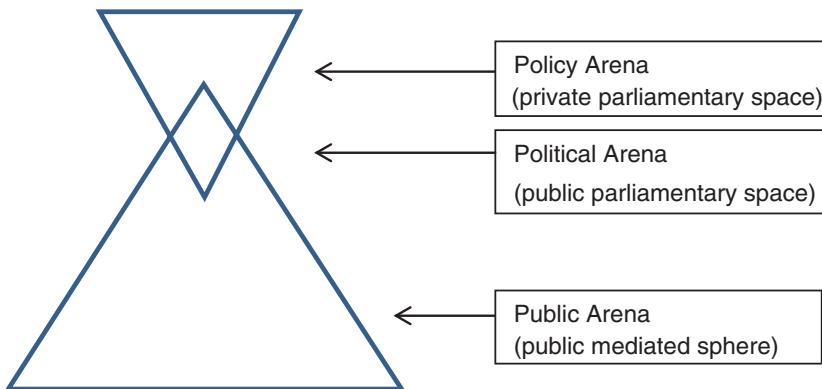
Fig. 9.1   The three arenas

news consumption, not a single MP mentioned the *Sun* or *Daily Mirror* and only three listed the *Daily Mail*. In a separate survey (Duffy and Rowden 2005), most Labour (67%) and Liberal Democrat (77%) MPs read the *Guardian*. Most Conservatives MPs read the *Daily Telegraph* (82%). The *Times* is the second most read paper by MPs in all three parties. When consuming broadcast news, politicians choose longer, more depth news programmes, such as the *Today Programme*, BBC 2's *Newsnight* or *Channel 4 News*. The general public is more inclined towards prime-time television news bulletins (Ofcom 2007). Several politicians noted that a majority of their constituents were less inclined to consume the sort of elite media outputs that they did, something all too easily forgotten in daily work:

> You can listen to *Radio 4* in the morning and think that that's everything. But when I go home at weekends and talk [people] haven't got a clue what the *Today Programme* is, never even listen to it … we read the papers avidly every day, but most people don't read … most of them haven't read the *Guardian* in their life. (Kevan Jones, Labour MP)

Talking to politicians, it was also clear that the ways news media is regarded and consumed shifts as one moves between the more elite *policy arena* and *political arena*. For MPs generally, those operating in the political arena, news media scored highly as an information source.

Ordinary back-bench MPs regarded it as a priority input (the second most mentioned source), particularly in terms of either reflecting or potentially influencing voter concerns. However, as one begins asking about news and information in the more private policy arena of committees, private offices and government departments, news became less relevant. Although half the 16 government ministers asked, listed it as an information source, none regarded it as a priority input at all. In fact, the large bulk of policy discussions did not include journalists or media at all, as MPs looked to "experts", officials, lobbyists and organizational representatives.

In effect, as one moves from public to private, the news media consumed and its use as an information source shifts. In general, it becomes less and less influential in terms of offering useful information.

Journalist Access Within the Arenas

The three arenas are also defined by levels of Journalist access. On the one hand, news reporters write predominantly for the larger public. They have wide access to many parts of the political arena, with its myriad of sources and institutions. They move between the political and public arenas, translating from one to the other. However, while "lobby journalists" (those given exclusive passes and access to Parliament) write for the wider public arena, much of their working life is spent within the rather more exclusive and exclusionary political arena.

For many who have closely witnessed Parliament in different capacities, Westminster is a small, insular "network", "club" or "village", to which select "lobby journalists" are admitted, but only if they adhere to strict rules and regulations. In most respects, reporters, in their everyday working lives, are more part of this inner political world than they are a part of the public or even their own media organization. In Westminster, journalists have on-site offices, share social facilities with politicians, and have organized political access and regular information supply. Many tend to remain in post for long periods, often longer than the average legislator (see Tunstall 1996; Barnett and Gaber 2001). As one critical journalist explained:

> Most of my colleagues are embedded journalists ... I think that the way in which lobby journalists become manifestations of the political system is quite disturbing (Peter Oborne, journalist, commentator).

At the same time, correspondents are also restricted in their physical access to many of the spaces and meeting forums of the policy arena. At any one point, a small number of correspondents may gain additional briefings as individual ministers talk to and leak information to trusted allies. But, most, most of the time, have limited and fleeting access to policy-making forums. Speaking to political public relations advisors and journalists in earlier research (Davis 2002), there was a substantial amount of secrecy and control maintained on media information flows:

> Number 10 has a strong grip on the information coming out of departments. From their point of view, it's very sensible but, from another point of view, they go to great lengths to limit debate and discussion and to stop journalists from finding out what's going on. (Andrew Grice, political journalist)

In effect, journalist access and media presence gets more restricted as reporters move between the three arenas.

News Moves from Policy to Personality and Brand Across the Arenas

Interviews also reveal distinct differences in how insiders (politicians and journalists) regard audiences inside and outside the political arena. This then determines what is considered relevant news content for political, policy and public arena audiences. For politicians and civil servants, there was a common view that larger publics are either uninterested or unable to follow the policy process itself:

> I don't think there's a terribly strong interest in the media for policy debates you know. Newspapers are about news and policy isn't really news. It's events that are news. (Greg Clark, Conservative MP)

The news media side clearly has a parallel view. Since the 1980s news organisations have been less inclined to cover Parliament in mainstream news fearing lack of consumer interest (Negrine 1998, see also Barnett and Gaber 2001). Half the 20 political journalists asked about this stated that their editors pushed for personality rather than policy-oriented stories. In fact, they saw their role as being about reporting party politics and conflicts rather than policy. Policy was both dull and took more resources to investigate:

> one of the reasons that ministers have such contempt for the press, quite rightly really, is that what they're doing day after day is hard policy work … We report nothing of what really happens, what the stuff of government really is, and what they're really doing and thinking about all the time. (Polly Toynbee, political journalist)

Instead, both politicians and journalists present personalities, personal conflicts, and the symbolic. For several observers of politics (Crouch 2004; Hay 2007), parties now compete for increasingly de-aligned and volatile electorates. They forsake ideological and detailed policy positions to increasingly adopt the promotional qualities of brands (Hall Jamieson 1996; Franklin 2004). The media, simultaneously, seeks celebrities and personal stories with which to engage their publics. They are therefore willing collaborators in the manufacture of political brands and celebrity politics (Corner and Pels 2003). During election times, it is "horse-race coverage", personalities, sound bites and negative attacks, which dominate over policy discussions (see Hall-Jamieson 1996; Franklin 2004; Esser 2008).

Lees (2005) demonstrated that Gerhardt Schroder's SPD election victory over Edmund Stoiber's CDU-CSU, in the 2002 German election, was secured, according to polls, on the strength of his stronger "character traits", rather than greater public support for his policies. Something similar was observed in relation to Obama's victory over McCain in 2008 (Kenski et al. 2010). This growing emphasis on leader personalities in the political arena as well as the public arena was already evident to many interviewees during the Blair and Bush years:

> Look at Bush, he's very similar to Blair … politicians who can handle the media come to the fore. So, you get Ronald Reagan, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Blair, maybe it explains Bush … you get the charmer to be the leader, the presenter becomes the decision maker. (Clare Short, former Labour cabinet minister)

Within the private policy sphere and the political arena how an individual or party will be portrayed to the wider public arena is clearly a consideration (see below). At the same time, there was also an awareness among reporters that personalities and conflict information, also had an impact on the rise and fall of policy proposals, temporary policy alliances and legislation. When politicians were asked about all the reasons why

they consume media, one common response was to look for such details in news content. It is the same when they meet and exchange information with journalists in personal interactions:

> The media can reveal what's going on in a policy debate, either before the Government would like it to be revealed or in a way that the Government prefers it not to be revealed… and that can be important when you're coming up to a knife edge vote, and the Government is frantically trying to mollify its rebellious back benchers. (Danny Alexander, Liberal Democrat MP)

Mediated Public Profiles Across Arenas

A related study, based on Bourdieu's work on fields and forms of (media) capital, explored how politicians built up their media profiles and judged others via media (see Davis 2010; Davis and Seymour 2010). Here, it became apparent that there were several strategies involved and that these varied across the arenas. First, politicians may build up knowledge of how media operates, either through prior journalist or public relations experience (media cultural capital). It also comes from specialist media training and ongoing experience as a politician dealing with media. Second, they can build up reporter contacts and networks through regular exchanges (media social capital). They can also increase media contacts and access by acting as a regular information source without actually appearing in news reports. Third, they can develop a public media profile through appearance in media texts (print, online, broadcast) (mediated symbolic capital). But, such mediated public profiles, depend very much on the media and audiences involved. Thus, how mediated political actors are presented across the three arenas can be quite different.

The importance of accumulating forms of journalist-based social capital and media cultural capital within the political arena came across in many interviews. Nine-tenths of those interviewed either had professional media experience or media training. Two-thirds of the politicians, when asked about the qualities needed for advancement, mentioned the need for good media skills and/or relations with journalists. Two-thirds of the journalists made similar comments.

In terms of developing a public media profile, MPs were very aware that they had to perform in a variety of more or less mediated

environments. They both see, and are seen by, their peers through the media lens as well as in person. The media-oriented performances, and media-filtered consumption and evaluation of those performances, takes place in a number of settings. These can be classified according to their position vis-à-vis the more private (policy arena) or more public (public arena) poles.

Starting with the more private, the first form of mediated judgment comes in personal exchanges between politicians and journalists, or performances observed by journalists on the edges of the policy arena (exclusive meetings, briefings, lunches). The second, which relates to the *political arena*, is during performances in public forums (debating chambers, public meeting spaces). Both politicians and journalists explained how important it was to be noticed in the House of Commons debating chamber:

> performance in the House is what we see… Prime Minister's Question Time, Chancellor's Question Time … getting in with a good question in response to a prime ministerial statement, for example. That gets them noticed. (Philip Webster, political editor)

Such appearances are recorded and analyzed primarily in more elite-oriented newspapers, websites and broadcasts. In the UK, these include appearances in the broadsheet press, on the *Today Programme* on Radio Four, depth television news programmes such as *Newsnight* (BBC One) and *Channel Four News*, and debate forums such as *Question Time* (BBC One and Radio Four). For much of the time, journalists and politicians do not physically attend such media events but, instead, observe, or later review them if present, through these other media:

> I'm looking to do that kind of *Today Programme* evaluation thing that the political class does, where they form judgements about which colleagues and opponents are doing well, doing badly, who's making sense. (Sion Simon MP)

Finally, moving further towards the general *public arena* comes political performance in non-political elite media programmes such as daily news bulletins and documentaries, down to popular comedy programmes and chat shows. In such media, performance, audience and the basis of evaluation change once again. Politicians must be generally appealing rather than being able to explain and defend detailed policies and decisions.

Media Uses and Influences Across the Arenas: Two Cases

The Rise of David Cameron

The conceptual discussion is now further illustrated by two case studies. The first details David Cameron's sudden rise from relative obscurity to leader of the Conservative Party in 2005. The question is how did a young, barely known MP, with little public profile, come from obscurity to lead his party? For many observers, Cameron was simply an instant media creation who won on the basis of one well-publicized party conference speech. However, as argued here, Cameron's success was based on his long-term accumulation of forms of media cultural and social capital within the *political arena* itself. Cameron's conference speech then confirmed what many insiders already suspected: that he was the candidate most capable of gaining support in the public arena and thus winning a future election (the full case is documented in Davis and Seymour 2010).

Following the May 2005 general election loss, the Conservatives called a leadership election. Unofficial campaigning took place through the summer. At the end of September five candidates remained and gave their big speeches at the Conservative Party Conference: David Davis, the favorite, Ken Clarke, Liam Fox, Malcolm Rifkind and David Cameron. To win the contest candidates had to first gain the support of MPs, whose two ballots would decide the two final candidates. Party members would then cast the final vote. Accordingly, gaining internal support, within the political arena, and external media profile with voters in the public arena, would have been essential. Table 9.1 shows the large differences in support (or mediated symbolic capital) that the three main candidates had or lost across the three key audiences. The extremes were the general voters (GV) of the public arena and Members of Parliament (MPs), representing the political arena.

The table shows that the main audiences differed considerably in their levels of support for the candidates. For most of the period, only David Davis had clear MP support although he never gained strong general voter support and his party member support dramatically fell away after the conference. In contrast, Ken Clarke became a clear leader with those general voters and party members outside the political field, but he lacked strong support from fellow MPs inside and went out at the first ballot.

Table 9.1 Polls of candidate support 29th May to 21st October 2005, from General Voters (GV), Party Members (PM), and Conservative Members of Parliament (MP)

Date and poll	D Cameron %			D Davis %			Ken Clarke %		
	GV	PM	MPs	GV	PM	MPs	GV	PM	MPs
29.5 Telg/ YouGov			15			35			10
27.7 Times/ Populus	4			12			29		
4.9 S Times/ YouGov			9			28			8
6.9 Times/ Populus	2			10			41		
6.9 Times/ Populus		3			16			55	
7.9 MORI	2			6			32		
9.9 Newsnight/ ICM	4			10			40		
10.9 Telg/ YouGov		17			27			33	
11.9 S Time/ YouGov	6			16			42		
30.9 YouGov		16			30			30	
7–9.10 S Times	18			16			25		
9.10 YouGov		39			14			26	
10.10 Decl MPs			17			35			11
11.10 Times/ Populus		45			15			22	
13.10 Decl MPs			16			33			12
17.10 D Mail/ Const Chairs		51			21			22	
17.10 D Mail/ Decl MPs			17			34			12
18.10 1st Ballot MPs (198)			(56) 28			(62) 31			(38) 19
19.10 YouGov		59			15			–		
20.10 2nd Ballot MPs (198)			(90) 45			(57) 29			–
21.10 MORI	33			13			–		
6.12 Members Ballot		68			32			–		

David Cameron struggled to make an impact on any of the audiences until the week of the conference, but then leaped ahead of his rivals.

This dramatic transition makes little sense when looking at the public profiles and histories of the candidates. Cameron was relatively little known to MPs having only been elected in 2001. David Davis had held a number of senior party positions since 1994 and was widely known inside Westminster and to the voting public. In the three years before the election period, Davis had appeared in 1798 pieces and Cameron 191. Many journalists, politicians and other insiders at the time concluded that he was the most likely winner. However, everything changed dramatically during the few days of the September conference speeches. Following these, broadcast and print journalists all marked out Cameron as the new favorite. By the time of the second Ballot, on the 20th October, Cameron had gained a strong lead among Conservative MPs and was clearly ahead in polls of public and party member opinion. For the next six weeks little changed and, on the 6th December, Cameron won with more than twothirds of the final vote.

The interview material and news content analysis revealed that Cameron's success was not as instant as portrayed. While he lacked a media profile in public arena, he had spent many years building up alternative, internal forms of media capital within the political arena. Although only elected to Parliament in 2001, Cameron had spent six years in Parliament previously working as a senior political advisor, building up journalist contacts. He also had spent seven years as Head of Communications at Carlton Communications (1994–2001), one of the dominant television companies of the 1990s. His core campaign team was full of politicians with journalist or public relations backgrounds (including his future nemeses, Boris Johnson and Michael Gove).

Through the summer period, Cameron and his team proved to be more active than any other campaign. They were the most prominent news sources, Cameron wrote more articles and/or was the subject of an interview piece, more than anyone else, and his allies appeared more than any other candidate's. In effect, Cameron's media capital was building up significantly within the policy arena and political arena in advance of the party conference speeches, which would then move the competition into the realm of the mediated public arena.

Three particular events crystallized this trend and encouraged the relatively small lobby journalist community towards a Cameron endorsement. The first of these was Cameron's official campaign launch to

journalists on the September 29, which took place in the private policy arena of Parliament, but was not widely reported. The launches were clearly remembered by several journalist interviewees, especially when compared to Davis's. As one explained it, behind closed doors (Gary Gibbon, political broadcast editor): "everybody felt that difference … the lobby slightly talked within itself a bit, you could see that happening".

The second, significant event took place in the realm of the *political arena*. It was a late-night BBC *Newsnight* piece, of the kind watched regularly by insiders but less so the general public. In the piece, broadcast the night before the speeches, a focus group study revealed Cameron to be the most appealing candidate. A DVD of this was then widely circulated to all Conservative MPs and political journalists, many of which noted Cameron's potential:

> we all go to many, many, many events that don't end up on the telly … But, of course, it informs our opinion … so a lot of journalists had been following his [Cameron's] progress for quite a while, but hadn't really talked about it much. (Daisy McAndrew, political broadcast journalist)

The third event was the conference speeches where, once again, the mediated performance skills of the five candidates were going to be directly compared. By almost all accounts, Cameron's speech made a strong impact but was not considered the best of the five. But by then journalists were already primed to come out in support of Cameron and against Davis. A clear tipping point within the journalist interpretive community had been reached. The media shift was stark, leading to a clear majority of insiders and ordinary party members to unite in support of Cameron.

UK Membership of the European Union and the Brexit Vote

At the time of writing, the UK has just triggered Article 50, some nine months after voting to leave the European Union. What is clear is that the country was and is polarized in many ways that cut across political parties, classes, occupations, ages and regions (see BBC, 2016b, YouGov 2016). However, a further look at polling data, past and recent, as well as earlier interviews with UK political actors on Europe (Davis 2007, 2010), reveals the general disparity between Parliamentarians and the wider

public. Within the policy arena of Westminster and Whitehall, support for staying in was high, much higher than among voters in the national public arena. In between came the mediated political arena, where public political actor opinion was clearly blurred and unstable as it became influenced by much of the news media promoting leave over remain.

The differences between the three arenas, in terms of views and attitudes towards the EU, were already observable in earlier decades. For political actors in the policy arena, there was a much greater knowledge of EU affairs as well as greater support. For senior bureaucrats and ministers, dealing with European legislation, budgets, trade negotiations etc., European institutions had become a part of their daily activities. European affairs also figure frequently in discussions in the political arena of ordinary MPs and more junior officials. European legislation passes through Parliament on a regular basis, often supporting or hindering domestic policy agendas. Many interviewees had quite a bit of professional knowledge about the institutions of the EU and, generally, were positive about it, although Conservative MPs were more ambivalent as Europe has been a long-term divisive issue for the party. So, for example, in 2005 (Smith 2006) 80% of civil servants, and 88% of Labour MPs, agreed that 'For Britain the benefits of European integration outweigh the costs'. 74% of Conservative MPs disagreed. However, when it came to actually voting in June 2016, 75% of MPs who had declared their position, voted to remain. This included 57% of Conservatives (BBC 2016a) and three-quarters of the 24 Conservative Government's Cabinet ministers.

In contrast, in the public arena, dominated by the national press, European affairs has a long history of either being under-reported or reported negatively. In fact, when asked about gaps in political news coverage, the single issue most politician interviewees listed (Davis 2007), was European affairs. One survey of MPs (Baker et al. 1999) found that they thought there was a "paucity of debate" on Europe in the media (80% Labour, 76% Conservative, 84% Liberal Democrat). Journalists too admitted that it was a difficult topic to cover, requiring expertise and research time, but having little public appeal:

> the press gives far too little attention to European directives that pass quietly through this place in distant committees. They are open to the press. But the press never attend because they're very boring meetings which, nine times out of ten, wouldn't produce a story. (Philip Webster, political editor)

Not only was the media seen as ignoring EU institutions, it was also perceived by politicians as being hostile to the Union. A majority of the UK print media, including the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, the *Sun*, the *Times*, the *Telegraph*, and their Sunday equivalents, had been overtly critical for many years (see Norris 2000; Semetko et al. 2000; Baisnee 2007). As one interviewee stated:

> Very few journalists understand European affairs, and that pool of jour-
> nalists is ever reducing … Why, when 60% to 70% of legislation emanates
> from Brussels, do we read next to nothing about anything beyond straight
> bananas, Peter Mandelson and an annual bust up in the EU fisheries
> negotiations?(Angus Robertson, SNP MP, former journalist)

Understandably, for some time, the attitude toward Europe of many British voters in the public arena, has been either disinterest or negativity. In 2004, when a survey asked "How much do you think you know about the powers and responsibilities of the European Parliament?", 71% answered "not much" or "nothing at all" (YouGov 2004). For the ten years prior to the 2016 referendum, most of the time, EU member-ship was not considered a top eight voting issue, and only registered as such as the referendum approached. At this point, a majority of UK vot-ers were unaware they even had MEP representatives. When asked, the public guessed that 15% of the UK's population was from Continental Europe (5% is the real figure), and that 27% of the EU budget was spent on administration (6% is the real figure) (Ipsos MORI 2016).

In between the opposed policy and public arenas, the mediated politi-cal arena became an uncertain and clouded battle ground for politi-cal actors as they sought a way between these different positions and audience knowledge (see accounts in Oliver 2016; Shipman 2016). Conservatives had been used to avoiding public discussion of the topic as the question of EU membership had threatened to split the party in both the 1980s and 1990s, almost bringing down the Major government (1992–1997). David Cameron only called the referendum to maintain broad party support for his government in the face of its very vocal, anti-EU minority of Conservative MPs. As the referendum approached, it was clear that a large majority of ordinary Conservative members and vot-ers would vote leave. It was also clear that they, as well as Conservative-supporting tabloid media, were ready to back any Conservatives who were prepared to break from Cameron's line, both during the campaign and in any possible future leadership election that might follow. Thus,

Boris Johnson, who had previously been more pro- than anti-Europe, switched sides at the last moment to become the de facto leader of the leave campaign. Meanwhile, many formerly loyal Conservative Ministers, such as Theresa May, Philip Hammond, Michael Fallon and Jeremy Hunt, hedged their political bets and kept low profiles during the referendum. None of them registered on Loughborough University's (2016) detailed content analysis of campaign coverage. For similar reasons, senior figures in the Labour Party were unsure of their campaign strategy. Although a clear majority of Labour MPs, members and voters wanted to stay, Labour had been losing a lot of its traditional support to UKIP in many regions outside London and the South East. There was a very real fear of further losses, if the party sounded too pro-EU, of their tabloid-reading, poorer and less educated voters, swayed by the nationalist and anti-EU line of the media.

The ambivalences of the UK political classes, combined with a largely anti-EU media, meant that news coverage was far more in favor of leaving than staying. Leave politicians were rather more reported than remain ones. Most coverage contained biased reporting and the large majority of biased reporting supported Leave. If adjusted for circulation, 82% of that biased coverage came down in favor of Brexit (Loughborough University 2016). Thus, despite a clear majority of political actors in the policy sphere being in favor of remain, mainly for economic and technical reasons, the public arena was more swayed by arguments about immigration and national sovereignty (Ipsos MORI 2016).

Conclusions

These two cases show the very real differences in the way media and journalists both inform and are used by politicians in relation to the three arenas. They also show how changes in one arena can then be relayed to and infect the other arenas, via the mediated political arena. In the first case, Cameron used his media knowledge and contacts in the policy and political arenas to overcome his lack of media profile in the public arena. In the second case, a vague, populist, media-led campaign in the public arena, paralysed political actors in the political and policy arenas, eventually bringing a leave vote and dragging Cameron down.

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The Charm of Salient Issues? Parties' Strategic Behavior in Press Releases

Caroline Dalmus, Regula Hänggli and Laurent Bernhard

Introduction

Election times mark a time period during which political actors carefully have to adopt their communication strategies. In order to get elected they need to gain visibility, bring forward their issues and gather public support. Yet, attention is not an unlimited good and the more a party focuses on one issue the less it can focus on another. Issue attention is finite (Boydstun et al. 2014). Following the literature, different aspects influence the choices taken. On the one hand, parties primarily want to highlight issues on which they have a high reputation (Budge

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and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Robertson 1976) and at the same time ignore the opponents' strong issues. On the other hand, they also have to consider those issues that are perceived as being important by the public and that are salient in the media (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Sides 2006; Wagner and Meyer 2014). Especially, during election times gaining access to the media is of major importance to parties and politicians, since media function as their primary connection to the electorate and it is of great importance to be visible in the news. Parties therefore need to follow the media closely to analyze the issues of major concern and gather information on ongoing debates and their opponents' behavior. Besides being informed about the election campaign, following the media discourse offers the opportunity to find ways to get access to the arena. Political actors are not forced to react to media coverage. Yet, in some situations this may be a smart move, since it can offer the chance to push owned issues and make them more salient or simply show the electorate that they care about pressing problems. In short: Political actors can react to news coverage when it fits their purposes. But when exactly does news coverage fit parties' purposes? Or asked differently: *Under which circumstances do political actors focus on the issues they own and when do they choose to engage with issues being salient in the media*? This question is of interest, since it can help to understand how political actors (try to) get access to the media arena, one major focus of the book.

To find answers to this question we analyze party statements on issues in press releases as dependent variable. Press releases are chosen, since they do not occur at a single time point like party manifestos, but are released constantly during an election campaign. Therefore, they are able to capture behavior during campaign times and concerning ongoing debates quite well. We test in how far issue ownership and media coverage on issues influence the issue focus in press releases. Additionally, we control how far the content of press releases is influenced by the parties' agendas in their party manifestos, which reflect the ideal party strategy according to Norris et al. (1999, p. 61). In line with the existing literature, we expect issue ownership to have an influence on parties issue choices. Additionally, we expect that events such as scandals, crisis or catastrophes offer a good opportunity for parties to follow up on media coverage. Such events raise the salience of certain issues and offer the chance to ride the wave or point out the weakness of an opponent. Besides that, the media's need for more

information to produce news in order to satisfy readers raises as well. This makes access to the media arena easier for multiple actors, especially those not belonging to the political elite (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2016, p. 509).

In our comparative analysis, we focused on four countries: Switzerland, Germany, France and the UK. We analyzed election campaigns that took place between 2010 and 2013. For this purpose a full sample of press releases, newspaper articles and party manifestos eight weeks prior to Election Day was drawn and content analyzed.

Parties' Motivation for Emphasizing an Issue in Their Press Releases

During election campaigns a lot of strategic decisions have to be taken. Besides defining which issues should be emphasized and which ones should be ignored, political actors also have to choose the fitting communication channel for their purposes. Different characteristics of a channel, like the control an actor exerts over it (Elmelund-Præstekær 2011), formal characteristics such as length (Tresch et al. 2017) or if it is mediated or unmediated (Dalmus et al. 2016) need to be considered by the political actors. When trying to get access to the media arena, press releases play a crucial role and will therefore be analyzed in more detail. They are oriented towards journalists and, if their content meets the needs of the reporters, desired information get into the media and reach a broad public. However, if journalists decide that a press release is not newsworthy it will not be considered in the news coverage and its content becomes meaningless. Therefore, the information put forward via press releases should be considered carefully. Does it heighten the own party's chances of success on Election Day when they focus on their strong issues throughout the campaign? Or are they better off if they react to issues that are subject to news coverage? Are there any patterns under which conditions parties prefer to focus on owned issues, and when they decide to concentrate on issues that are salient in the news?

Issue ownership. Issue ownership has been argued and shown to be of major relevance (e.g. Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Robertson 1976). Following the idea of issue ownership (Petrocik 1996), political actors predominantly focus on issues they own and ignore those on which their opponents enjoy a reputational advantage. Instead of taking a position on every given issue parties rather focus selectively on them.

Based on theses ideas a party is said to own an issue when it "has a long-term reputation of attention to the corresponding problem and is considered to be particularly able at handling that issue." (Lachat 2014, p. 729). Similarly, Petorcik (1996, p. 826), who first introduced the term issue ownership, defines it as a "reputation for policy and program interest, produced by a history of attention, initiative, and innovation toward problems, which leads voters to believe that one of the parties is more sincere and committed to do something". Two dimensions, namely a competence and an associative one, seem to be crucial when defining issue ownership. While the former dimension refers to the perceived competence of a party to solve a certain issue, the latter describes the spontaneous link between an issue and a party in a voter's mind (Walgrave et al. 2015, p. 780). Such associations of issues with parties appear to be similar across countries and stable over time for most issues. Therefore, rather than being a short-term matter, issue ownership is a permanent factor (Seeberg 2016). During election campaigns, this makes issue ownership a strong asset parties can rely on, given the respective issue is salient. Issue ownership may give parties only an advantage, if voters perceive the issue to be important (Bélanger and Meguid 2008). If this is the case, voters predominantly support the party they deem most competent at handling the issue (e.g. Abbe et al. 2003; Petrocik 1996). Parties do focus on owned issues, not only in party manifestos (e.g. Budge and Farlie 1983; Dolezal et al. 2014), but also in press releases, since this channel forces parties to focus on one or two issues due to limitations of space (Tresch et al. 2017). By focusing on owned issues, political actors have the chance to raise salience for them and can also "reinforce the reputation as associative issue owners" (Tresch et al. 2015, p. 205). Additionally, emphasizing a party's strong issue in press releases can be fruitful, since media coverage supports the association between a party and an issue in the minds of voters (Walgrave and De Swert 2007). It is therefore likely that parties focus on those issues where they have a reputation on, and we expect the following:

H1 Issue ownership has an influence on the issue focus in press releases across countries.

Media coverage. We expect issue ownership to influence the content of press releases. Yet, we expect other factors to have an influence as well. Even studies supporting the issue ownership theory showed that the dominance of issue ownership varies depending on the character

of an election campaign. It became apparent that in campaigns where the race was quite close and the outcome unforeseeable, issue ownership was less influential on the issue choices than in campaigns with a clearly leading candidate (Budge and Farlie 1983; Robertson 1976; Petrocik et al. 2003). Later studies putting media saliency of issues to the center of attention (e.g. Sigelman and Buell 2004; Sides 2006), provide further evidence that besides solely focusing on owned issues, parties pay attention to the issues prioritized by voters and which are salient in the media. Therefore, parties are not just simply guided by issue ownership but also by media coverage.

One research branch that strongly focuses on this aspect is the agenda setting literature. Scholars both from the field of political science and communication science have analyzed how the political agenda and the media agenda influence each other and who is following whom. The results are contradictory as Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) show in an overview of a diverse number of media and political agenda setting studies. While some studies conclude that the media have hardly any influence on the political agenda, others reveal moderate to strong effects. Regardless of the strength of media's impact, one has to respect that media is not a channel parties can use whenever and however they like. If political actors want to occur in the news, they have to convince a journalist that picking up their information is worth it. Otherwise, making an owned issue salient is not possible, at least through this channel. One problem that might arise when focusing on owned issues is reduced newsworthiness. Parties' positions on their core issues are usually well known among the electorate and the incentive for journalists to report on them might be rather low (Helfer and Van Aelst 2016, p. 61). Additionally, other issues might be of higher relevance and much more newsworthy. For example so called focusing events, which are defined by their "sudden" and "relatively uncommon" character and their ability to be "harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms" (Birkland 1998, p. 54). Such "key events" have been shown to focus the attention of the audience and journalists and heighten the amount of information put forward by the news (Kepplinger and Habermeier 1995). Therefore, exogenous shocks like a crisis or catastrophe make certain issues salient in the media (Helbling and Tresch 2011, p. 175). They appear to be of national or even international relevance and are therefore intensively brought up by the media. In this case, an issue is so crucial and the salience for it is so high that actors

may feel obliged to address it in public even if they are owned by an opponent (Tresch et al. 2015, p. 200). Since it is likely that journalists report on issues of high importance which have already been covered in the news and created discourse (Haselmayer et al. 2017, p. 2), focusing on these issues is an opportunity for political actors. While usually political elites are more likely to be reported on, access to the media arena becomes easier for all kinds of actors when a certain issue gains sudden and strong salience in the news (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2016, p. 509) Therefore, even if it has been shown that especially during election time political actors hardly follow up on issues brought up by the media (e.g. Brandenburg 2002, 2004; Dalton et al. 1998; Just et al. 1996; Norris et al. 1999), real-world events have the ability to provoke reactions to news coverage and we expect the following:

H2a If an important event takes place in the context of electoral campaigns that is strongly covered by the media, the issue-related emphasis on this event will raise.

Reacting to increased news coverage on an issue is appealing especially for those parties owning the respective issue. The chances of making it into the news are high for the parties and therefore there is the possibility to strengthen their issue ownership, substantiate their competence and increase their credibility. According to Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010, p. 667) political actors will predominantly "react to mass attention if it is about an issue that is preferable to them" and which "politicians want to politicize". In an analysis of the Swiss elections in 2011, it became apparent that among the salient issues immigration, ecology and enlargement of the army, parties further to the right chose the prior issue and more or less ignored the two latter, while those parties further to the left behaved conversely (Dalmus et al. 2016). In the literature such behavior is referred to as agenda surfing (e.g. Brettschneider 2004; Geiss 2011) or "riding the wave" (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). Since political actors cannot influence the salience of an issue they try to use it to their own advantage. An example is the German election in 2002. The former chancellor, Gerhard Schröder, used the great flood to strengthen the Social Democrats' (SPD) core issue "solidarity", proofing his problem-solving skills and showing closeness to the people. At the same time, the SPD's coalition partner, the Greens, and their core issue, ecology, got a sudden boost and media attention (Brettschneider 2004, pp. 23–24). We therefore further expect:

H2b If an issue gains strong news coverage and is owned by a given party, the attention paid to the issue by that party will increase.

DATA AND METHOD

We analyzed press releases, newspaper coverage and party manifestos to detect how parties distribute their attention among issues. The material was collected and content analyzed by the National Center of Competence in Research on "Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century" (NCCR Democracy), funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and located at the University of Zurich. The data consisted of a full sample of press releases and articles published during election times by the parties, the Swiss quality newspaper *NZZ* and the tabloid *Blick*, the German quality newspaper *FAZ* and the tabloid *Bild*, the French quality newspaper *Le Monde* and the tabloid *Le Parisien*, and the British quality newspaper *The Times* and the tabloid *The Sun*. This represented 726 documents (newspaper articles: 542, press releases: 184) in Switzerland, 1612 documents (newspaper articles: 950, press releases: 662) in Germany, 1146 documents (newspaper articles: 619, press releases: 527) in France and 707 documents (press releases: 515, newspaper articles: 192) in Great Britain. Actor statements on issues in the analyzed documents were the unit of analysis. In order to be coded, statements had to fulfill two requirements. First, the statement had to be on an issue concerning national politics. Second, the statement had to contain either an explicitly mentioned position or interpretation/elaboration on the issue. The sole mention of an issue by an actor without further elaboration was not coded. Statements on issues were coded concerning their content and style, and regarding the following main issue categories: Economy, Welfare, Budget, Freedom and Rights, Europe/ Globalization, Education, Immigration, Army, Security, Ecology, Institutional Reforms, Infrastructure, Elections and Events. Each of these top-issue categories is made up of several more detailed sub-issues leading to a total of 127 issue options that could be coded.

Concerning reliability, the coding of the sub-issues reached a Cohen's Kappa of 0.5 in Switzerland, 0.5 in Germany, 0.5 in Great Britain and 0.3 in France. According to Landis and Koch (1977, p. 165) these values can be defined as fair to moderate. Yet, the coefficients are rather low. This can be explained by the large amount of sub-issues that exist for each issue category (127 sub-issues belonging to 14 top-issue

categories). However, if we take a look at the reliability at the level of the top issues, it becomes apparent that the agreement between the coders is higher, being 0.7 for Switzerland and Germany, 0.6 for Great Britain and 0.5 for France. Therefore, the coders were able to capture the main issue of a statement quite well. In general, one difficulty for the coders was the occurrence of combinations of issues, which exist quite often and made the coding complex especially on the sub-issue level.

Measures. In the present study, issue emphasis in press releases is the dependent variable. Following Wagner and Mayer (2014) each case is a party-issue combination. Having twelve issue categories, there are twelve cases for each party. Issue emphasis is measured by the percentage of statements each party devotes to a certain issue. Since "elections" and "events" do not represent substantive issue categories, they were excluded from this analysis.

Our first independent variable is issue ownership. To associate certain parties with an issue and subscribe issue ownership is a rather demanding task. There are no set rules or methods, which provide clear guidance how to operationalize issue ownership (Wagner and Meyer 2014, p. 1025; Walgrave and De Swert 2007, pp. 42–47). We take two steps in order to ascribe issue ownership to each party. In a first step, we refer to the empirical analysis presented by Seeberg (2016). In a cross-national, cross-time analysis the author examined issue ownership from 136 national elections in 17 countries based on election surveys and could show that most of the analyzed issues constantly belong to parties either from the right or the left. For this purpose, he calculated an issue ownership score based on the aggregated perception of respondents, which party they hold most capable of solving certain problems. The score ranges between −100 and +100, the maximum reached when either a party on the left or the right receives all voter endorsements. Based on the results across countries in the 2000s, we first distinguish if an issue belongs to the political right or left. If an issue belongs to the left/right, parties to the center-left/center-right receive the value 0.5. If an issue is unowned, for example infrastructure or rights and liberties, it receives the value 0. Since the issue "economy" does not consistently belong to the left or right, and is often described as a performance issue, parties on the left and the right receive the value 0.5. In a second step we analyzed if an issue could be clearly assigned to just one party on the left or right. For this purpose, we referred to the country specific data offered by Seeberg (2016). If the issue ownership score exceeded 40 for one party

and at least 10 points higher than the second party's score, we assigned the value 1. Since not for all countries and each issue scores are given, we also refer to election surveys of the respective election, if necessary. Here, we follow Tresch et al. (2017) and assigned a score of 1 if a party was endorsed by at least 20% of the voters with a lead of 10% on the second party.

To measure in how far the media agenda influences issue emphasis in press releases the percentage of statements on each issue in the media coverage was chosen. Political actors but also experts, journalists or representatives of interest groups could make statements in the news. Thus we can capture the total amount of attention each issue receives in the media in general. Since events like crisis, catastrophes or scandals play an important role in our analysis, we also a dummy code if such an event had taken place prior to or during the election campaigns or not. Events had to be "sudden" and of "relatively uncommon" character, with the ability to be "harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms" (Birkland 1998, p. 54). According to Kepplinger and Habermeier (1995, p. 373), a key event is also marked by "an unusual number of reports concerning an exactly defined occurrence". Following this definition, three occurrences qualified as "events"—the nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima, the National Security Agency (NSA) scandal in Germany and the terrorist attacks in France. The nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima took place a couple of months prior to the elections in Switzerland and seems to have strongly influenced the discourse during the Swiss election campaign. If the media coverage is compared on the top-issue level, the issue category "economy" gains most attention. However, this is due to the fact that this top-issue category is made up of more sub-issues than others (the same logic applies for Germany and France). When compared on the sub-issue level, the issue "nuclear and atomic energy" (top-issue category "ecology") received most news coverage compared to all other 126 sub-issues. Eight percent of the entire media coverage was on this single issue. As in Switzerland, the NSA scandal in Germany emerged a couple of months prior to the election campaign. In June 2013, Edward Snowden revealed the mass surveillance of the internet and other communication channels by the US and British secret service. While in the beginning the German government denied that German citizens and agencies had been targeted, it quickly turned out that this was false and that the German secret service even had helped to spy in Germany. As a consequence, the issue "data privacy"

(top-issue category "freedom & rights") was, at 6% coverage, the most covered sub-issue in the media compared to all other sub-issues. Finally, in France a terrorist committed a series of gun attacks in March 2012 just prior to the election campaign. As a revenge for the French participation in the Afghanistan war, the man shot several people in Toulouse and Montauban before being killed by the police. During the election campaign, the issue "terrorism and terrorist attacks" (top-issue category "security") was the second most-covered sub-issue in the French media during the election campaign (8%).

Additionally, we control for parties issue emphasis in party manifestos by measuring the amount of statements each party devoted to the respective issues in this channel. Party manifestos are usually published prior to the elections and are said to represent the ideal agenda of a party containing the core issues it wants to focus on during the campaign (Norris et al. 1999). Finally, we test for an interaction effect between issue ownership and events, in order to analyze if parties owning an issue intensify their focus when the issue becomes salient and if parties not owning a salient issue reduce their focus on owned issues in order to pay more attention to the salient issue.

Case selection. As stated above, our study focuses on Germany, Switzerland, France and the UK. The countries were chosen because of their differences in a number of aspects. The countries have different political systems. Switzerland is a direct-democratic system in which the difference between opposition and government only plays a minor important role. Germany is a parliamentary democracy. Great Britain is a two-party-based parliamentary democracy. France is a presidential system. We chose the most-different system design in order to analyze if factors like issue ownership and media coverage (especially when certain events have taken place) influence the issue choices of political actors, regardless of the political or media system.

RESULTS

Table 10.1 shows the central top-issues in the media and the parties' press releases. In each country, some issues attract more attention than others. In almost all countries, the issues 'economy', 'welfare' and 'budget' score high in at least one of the channels. This is quite normal in an election. There are, however, differences between the countries. In the German media, "freedom and rights" and "Europe" ranked second

Table 10.1 Top-Five issue categories in press releases and newspaper coverage across countries

Country	Top-Five Issue Categories			
	Press Releases	%	Media	%
Germany	Freedom & Rights	21.2	Economy	15.3
	Welfare	15.5	Freedom & Rights	13.1
	Economy	13.1	Europe	12.8
	Europe	11.0	Welfare	10.3
	Education	6.6	Infrastructure	10.3
	Other	32.6	Other	38.2
Switzerland	Economy	20.7	Economy	15.6
	Ecology	17.7	Ecology	13.5
	Immigration	10.5	Freedom &Rights	10.4
	Welfare	10.2	Immigration	10.0
	Europe	9.7	Budget	9.0
	Other	31.2	Other	41.5
France	Economy	17.3	Economy	14.4
	Budget	14.0	Budget	12.9
	Welfare	12.1	Immigration	12.9
	Security	10.9	Education	9.3
	Freedom &Rights and Ecology	10.5	Ecology	8.8
	Other	24.7	Other	41.7
Great Britain	Economy	17.7	Economy	16.2
	Welfare	16.2	Immigration	16.2
	Budget	15.9	Welfare	12.9
	Freedom &Rights	9.4	Budget	12.4
	Immigration	8.0	Institutional Reforms	11.9
	Other	32.8	Other	30.4

Note. Switzerland, media: N = 1'304, press releases: N = 352; Germany, media: N = 1'798, press releases: N = 986; United Kingdom, media: N = 210, press releases: N = 736; France, media: N = 591, press releases: N = 571

and third in media coverage. The prominence of "freedom and rights" reflects the NSA scandal, which led to many statements on the "data privacy" sub-issue. The focus on "Europe", with statements predominantly addressing the "monetary union" sub-issue, results from the government's actions concerning the difficulties of the monetary union. Both issues gained strong importance during the government of the Christian Democrats and the Liberals.

Examination of the German parties' press releases reveals that the issues 'freedom and rights' and 'Europe' do gain strong attention here as well. 32 percentages of the statements in press releases fall into those two top-issue categories, most of them on 'data privacy'.

The situation is similar in Switzerland. In the media, the attention on "nuclear energy" (top-issue category "ecology") reflects the catastrophe in Fukushima, Japan, which occurred several month prior to the Swiss election. Party press releases most often (39%) address "nuclear energy" (top-issue category "ecology") and "deregulation of the market, capital controls and the banking system" (top-issue category "economy").

In France, "economy" and "budget" are the top issues, but also "immigration" ranks high as a consequence of the terrorist attacks prior to the election. For the parties, domestic policies ("economy", "welfare", "budget") are central, especially questions of taxation and employment.

In Great Britain, questions concerning the economy, the budget and the welfare state receive most attention both in the media and in press releases, with strong coverage of immigration, especially in the news.

Results of the OLS regression are presented in Table 10.2. Across all countries, issue ownership ($\beta = 0.30$, $p \leq 0.00$), the media agenda ($\beta = 0.17$, $p \leq 0.00$) and party manifestos ($\beta = 0.34$, $p \leq 0.00$) explain the issue emphasis in press releases quite well. In general, the model explains 38% of the variance in the dependent variable (Model 5) with party manifestos explaining 24% of the variance (Model 1), followed by issue ownership explaining an additional 9% (Model 2) and the media agenda explaining an additional 3% (Model 3). Hypothesis 1 can thus be confirmed.

Furthermore, events (Models 4 and 5) have an effect on the content of the parties' press releases ($\beta = 0.14$, $p \leq 0.02$). There is no significant interaction effect concerning the variables event and issue ownership ($\beta = -0.04$, $p \leq 0.56$). Yet, the negative coefficient implies that, in general, the existence of an event seems to reduce parties' focus on owned issues. Parties focus on their strong issues, but may give up some of their attention on these issues in order to concentrate on an issue relating to an event. However, if a party owns a salient issue, it can intensify the focus on both the salient and the owned issue. This is the case in Switzerland. The event itself (nuclear catastrophe in Fukushima) does not have a significant effect on the issue emphasis in press releases ($\beta = -0.11$, $p \leq 0.36$, Model 4 for the Swiss case). In general, the Swiss parties do not significantly intensify their focus on the issue nuclear energy due to the event. The interaction effect in Model 5 (Swiss case) between the variables issue ownership and event ($\beta = 0.30$, $p \leq 0.01$)

Table 10.2 Explaining issue emphasis in press releases

		Issue Emphasis Press Releases				
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
All countries N = 300	Party manifesto	0.49***	0.38***	0.34***	0.34***	0.34***
	SE	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05
	R^2	0.24				
	IO		0.33***	0.29***	0.29***	0.30***
	SE		0.02	0.02	0.01	0.02
	Gain in R^2		0.09			
	Media			0.20***	0.18***	0.17***
	SE			0.10	0.10	0.11
	Gain in R^2			0.03		
	Event				0.12**	0.14*
	SE				0.02	0.02
	Gain in R^2				0.01	
	IO x Event					−0.04
	SE					0.04
	Total R^2					0.38
Germany N = 84	Party manifesto	0.51***	0.43***	0.34**	0.33***	
	SE	0.12	0.13	0.13	0.12	
	R^2	0.26				
	IO		0.24*	0.21*	0.35***	
	SE		0.03	0.03	0.03	
	Gain in R^2		0.05			
	Media			0.22*	0.05	
	SE			0.24	0.24	
	Gain in R^2			0.04		
	Event				0.40***	
	SE				0.03	
	Gain in R^2				0.12	
	IO x Event					
	Total R^2				0.47	
Switzerland N = 72	Party manifesto	0.52***	0.35***	0.26**	0.24*	0.23*
	SE	0.11	0.11	0.10	0.10	0.10
	R^2	0.27				
	IO		0.43***	0.41***	0.41***	0.34***
	SE		0.03	0.03	0.03	0.03
	Gain in R^2		0.15			
	Media			0.33***	0.29**	0.31***
	SE			0.23	0.26	0.24
	Gain in R^2			0.10		
	Event				0.09	−0.11
	SE				0.03	0.04
	Gain in R^2				0.01	

Table 10.2   (continued)

		Issue Emphasis Press Releases				
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
	IO x Event					0.30**
	SE					0.08
	Total R^2					0.57
France	Party manifesto	0.62***	0.46***	0.47***	0.45***	0.44***
N = 60	SE	0.13	0.14	0.13	0.14	0.14
	R^2	0.39				
	IO		0.37***	0.26*	0.29*	0.29*
	SE		0.02	0.03	0.03	0.03
	Gain in R^2		0.11			
	Media			0.23*	0.24*	0.24*
	SE			0.22	0.22	0.23
	Gain in R^2			0.04		
	Event				−0.10	−0.10
	SE				0.02	0.03
	Gain in R^2				0.01	
	IO x Event					−0.01
	SE					0.05
	Total R^2					0.55
Great Britain	Party manifesto	0.44***	0.38***	0.36***		
N = 84	SE	0.08	0.08	0.08		
	R^2	0.19				
	IO		0.25*	0.21*		
	SE		0.03	0.03		
	Gain in R^2		0.07			
	Media			0.15		
	SE			0.16		
	Gain in R^2			0.01		
	Event					
	Gain in R^2					
	IO x Event					
	Total R^2			0.27		

Note. Linear regression, blockwise; Method: Enter; Values are standardized β-coefficients. *$p \leq 0.05$, **$p \leq 0.01$, ***$p \leq 0.001$

reveals though, that an event influences the emphasis on an issue if a party owns the issue. In the case of Switzerland, the Green Party focuses 43% of their attention in press releases to questions concerning nuclear energy. The attention to the issue is quite strong among center and left

parties, and fades the further right we move on the ideological scale. Therefore we can conclude that parties do surf on issues if they have the chance to do so.

However, surfing on a salient issue may not always be an option for issue owners. In the case of the nuclear catastrophe, the Green Party had the chance to point out the dangers of nuclear energy and push their alternatives. The catastrophe confirmed their criticism and thereby offered the chance to appear as important change maker. However, the saliency of an issue may also uncover that an issue owner has failed in the past. In our dataset France can be taken as a good example. The Conservative Party (UMP, today LR) owns the issue of law and order. The terrorist attacks prior to the elections may have created the impression that the party is not capable of keeping the country and its people safe. In this case, the salience of the issue could be uncomfortable for the UMP, and they rather prefer to highlight other issues. The data confirms this. Neither the event ($\beta = -0.10$, $p \leq 0.47$) nor the interaction between issue ownership and the event ($\beta = -0.01$, $p \leq 0.98$) have an effect on the issue focus (Model 4 and 5 for the French case). Rather, it seems as if the event is avoided. Predominantly, the party manifestos ($\beta = 0.44$, $p \leq 0.00$) explain the issue focus in the case of France. Even though security questions as a consequence of the attacks were central in the media (among the sub-issues terrorism gained second most attention in the media), the parties predominantly focus on budgetary and economic questions. The UMP, for example, focuses in 22% of its press releases on the budget and only in 7% on the cases on security measures regarding terrorism.

Sticking to the ideal agenda also seems to be central when no events have taken place. In Great Britain the parties' press releases are mainly dominated by their party manifestos ($\beta = 0.36$, $p \leq 0.00$) and issue ownership ($\beta = 0.21$, $p \leq 0.05$). The media agenda does not have a significant influence on the content of the press releases ($\beta = 0.15$, $p \leq 0.14$). This is in line with the literature stating that especially during election campaigns political actors hardly follow the media (e.g. Brandenburg 2002, 2004; Dalton et al. 1998; Just et al. 1996; Norris et al. 1999).

Like in the other countries, in Germany the ideal agenda set before the elections in the party manifesto ($\beta = 0.33$, $p \leq 0.00$) as well as issue ownership ($\beta = 0.35$, $p \leq 0.00$) influence the content of press releases. The media agenda seems to be important as well. However, when we introduce the variable event to the model, the effect of media becomes insignificant ($\beta = 0.05$, $p \leq 0.60$). Therefore, it is mainly news coverage

on the NSA scandal that explains why parties focus on salient issues in their press releases. The event has a significant effect ($\beta = 0.40$, $p \leq 0.00$) and it is predominantly opposition parties from the left and the right who focus on the issue as well as the liberal coalition partner. Since nobody owns the issue we cannot detect issue surfing.

Discussion

This empirical analysis finds that issue ownership matters across countries and explains quite well the parties' issue selection strategies. In addition, we have been able to show that campaign events have the power to generate attention by political actors. In Germany, the NSA scandal was central in motivating the parties to follow up on the news coverage and focus on the issue in press releases. In Great Britain, on the contrary, an event had been absent and the influence of the media agenda was not significant at the same time. Across all four countries, the data show that events do matter during an election campaign and that they apparently influence the choices taken by political actors. The expectation that an event, which has been intensively covered by the media, has an influence on the issue emphasis in press releases has been met. Therefore, parties seem to use events as key to the media arena. If an issue is salient and they can use it to their own advantage they become active and aim to enter the arena by focusing on the issue. However, an event does not necessarily seem to increase the focus on the issue as we expected. In the case of France we saw that an opposite reaction, namely ignorance, can be provoked as well, if the salient issue appears to be inconvenient for one actor.

Besides showing that issue ownership and events matter, we could provide empirical evidence that parties holding issue ownership ride on their salient issue, but only if it is to their advantage. In Switzerland, the nuclear catastrophe in Japan moderates the influence of issue ownership on issue emphasis in press releases. Therefore, the focus on an owned issue is intensified if an event concerning this issue takes places. However, in France this was not the case. Here, the owned issue that became salient was security. Security matters after the terrorist attacks had been strongly discussed by the media, yet the UMP, which owns the issue law and order, ignored it. We can therefore conclude that parties only ride on owned issues, when they play to their advantage. If the salience of the issue discloses weakness and wrongdoings, parties tend to ignore it.

In the model including all four countries we could see that, even if the interaction between issue ownership and events was not significant, the effect was negative. This indicates that the variable events may moderate the influence of issue ownership on the issue emphasis in press releases negatively. In other words, when parties focus on events they do this at the cost of issues they own, given they do not own the issue. If they own the issue, events intensify the effect. We can therefore conclude that political actors are strategists who use the media selectively whenever it meets their purposes.

In general, it could be shown that certain events have the power to generate attention in the media and that this leads to higher attention for the issue in parties' press releases. Yet, it seems as if certain mediated issues are picked up by the parties for different reasons. For future research it would be of interest to explore further how different events motivate different actors to engage with a certain issue. It would also be of interest to focus on the question of whether parties follow an event or the coverage on it. Additionally, a dynamic perspective would be worth analyzing. Who sets issues, who follows and who keeps which issues salient and why are worth studying.

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News Tone and the Government in the News: When and Why Do Government Actors Appear in the News?

Christoffer Green-Pedersen, Peter B. Mortensen and Gunnar Thesen

The introduction to this volume raises important questions about why and how political actors use the media as both a source of information and an arena in which they promote themselves and their issues. In this chapter, we explore the pros and cons of arena access from the perspective of government actors. We focus on incumbents due to their central and dominant role in democratic politics and mass media coverage (e.g. Hopman et al. 2011; Van Aelst and de Swert 2009). So far, most studies have concentrated on the so-called incumbency bonus, i.e. that government actors have an advantage in terms of news access. While the government indeed

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does appear more often than the opposition in the media, our approach to strategic favorability emphasizes the tone of news coverage. If we want to understand when and why government actors are present in the news—and the possible consequences of this news presence—we have to study how issues are framed in the news. More specifically, we focus on whether the news is positive, negative or neutral from the incumbent's perspective.

In line with the theoretical perspective discussed in Chap. 1, we assume that government actors must be present in the news arena in order to communicate with the public. Obviously, incumbents prefer positive news that could draw attention to policy success and good performance (Thesen 2013). A strong presence in the news is of little use if the coverage is largely negative. This poses a challenge for the government, as news coverage is largely dominated by negativity (c.f. Soroka 2014). However, being present in the news gives political actors an opportunity to affect the favorability of the content. To investigate these mechanisms and the relationship between news tone and government actors in the news, we concentrate on three broad empirical questions. The first is: Is the news coverage positive or negative from the point of view of government and how does this vary across issues? The second is: Does government presence in the news affect the tone and how does this vary across issues? Finally, to shed light on the causal and temporal patterns between news tone and government news presence, we ask: Do incumbents figure in the news following positive or negative coverage, and does increased news presence by incumbents affect the tone of subsequent coverage?

These are all important questions if we want to know more about how and why government actors use the arena function of the media. They are difficult to investigate, and we do not deliver definitive answers about the complex relationship between the content of coverage and the news appearances of political actors. However, utilizing a new large-N time series dataset on the tone of news coverage and the appearance of political actors, we begin to disentangle the relationship and offer some new insights into why and when political actors appear in the news. The dataset was collected in Denmark in the period 1984–2003 and covers 60,000 radio news features coded according to issue content, actor presence, and tone.

We cannot systematically observe the causes of news presence, and this is a major challenge in investigating appearance/non-appearance of political actors in the news. Are they not invited or do they decline invitations to participate? This challenge is hard to overcome even with detailed and qualitative process studies. Our large-N dataset does offer some advantages, however, mainly due to the large number of news stories across many different policy issues and the possibility to separate observations in time. In other words, although some of the analyses in this chapter are hard to interpret in causal terms, the time series aspects of the news data still allow us to examine causal relationships between actor appearances and the tone of the news coverage.

In the descriptive analyses, we find that government actors appear more often in the news when the tone of the coverage is positive from the government's point of view. However, based on the time series information, we find that government presence is more likely the more negative the preceding news coverage is. This could imply that government presence in the news is a reaction to negative news in the first place, and that government actors appear in the news in an attempt to balance this negativity. Although they generally seem to succeed, the effect does not last in the subsequent weeks of media debate. In other words, incumbent actors' appearances in the news cause an immediate but temporary improvement in how favorable the news is for the government.

Government Actors in the News

As stated in the introduction to this volume, understanding when certain political actors appear in the news has been a central question in studies of the interaction between media and politics. Theoretically, this debate has focused on how the operating procedures of news production generate certain structural biases in the media presence of various political actors. In other words, the media as an arena is not equally open to all political actors.

Empirically, a central theme in the discussion of actor presence in the news has been the "incumbency bonus", i.e. the repeated finding that government actors or incumbents appear more in the news than the opposition or challengers (e.g. Hopman et al. 2011; Van Aelst and de Swert 2009; Green-Pedersen et al. 2017). Theoretically, the incumbency bonus fits nicely with the standard understanding of news coverage as driven

by news criteria such as relevance, elite status and power. In any country, the power that comes with holding office makes an actor highly relevant for news coverage. However, in a recent investigation of the incumbency bonus, Green-Pedersen et al. (2017) argue that the incumbency bonus is also a result of the media's watch dog role. This journalistic norm requires news media to hold governments accountable for all sorts of problems in society simply because of its formal policy responsibility.

Like other studies of the incumbency bonus, Green-Pedersen et al.'s analysis was primarily based on political actors' appearance in the news but did not explore the specific content of the news, such as framing or tone, in detail. However, a better understanding of the causes and consequences of actor presence in the news requires a better understanding of the link between news content and actor presence. For instance, with respect to the revised incumbency bonus argument, if the watch dog norm is a driving force behind government news dominance then this implies that the appearance of government actors in the news is linked to critical and negative news coverage of societal problems for which incumbents are typically held accountable. Some political agenda-setting studies draw on a more detailed investigation of news content, for instance in that of Thesen (2011) of how tone and blame attributions affect government and opposition *responses* to news. However, in terms of actor *presence* in the news, the role of news tone remains underexplored.

The Political Tone of the News

The large body of research that looks at news content from a political perspective has repeatedly highlighted the existence of a pattern of "negativism" or a negativity bias (e.g. Miller et al. 1979; Benoit et al. 2005; Farnsworth and Lichter 2007; Soroka 2006, 2012). In terms of explanations of news negativity, the literature on the "gatekeeping function" of the media (see overview in Shoemaker and Vos 2009) offers a perspective where a number of combined organizational-, story-, and professional-level factors result in a preference for news negativity. Other accounts simply emphasize the human tendency to pay more attention to negative information (Soroka 2014) or claim that the "Fourth Estate" function of the media induces a bias towards problems and negative stories (Soroka 2014: 21). The way the media portrays reality thus contains a negativity bias that originates in the institutional structures around

news making, the political function of the media, and the negativity bias in the human psyche.

Common to many of these approaches to news negativity is the effort to evaluate media content in light of a theoretically, or empirically, informed conception of what "reality" looks like. This gatekeeping perspective raises important questions about the functioning of modern mass media. However, if focus is mainly on the interaction between media and politics and less on the media as a separate institution, a gatekeeping perspective is of more limited value. For political actors, the most relevant question is not how reality is depicted, but rather whether the news is positive or negative from *their* perspective. Or to put it differently, how (un-)favorable the news is for them. Thus, to the extent that we want to address the political implications of information from the media, we suggest applying a *political yardstick* of media tone. Furthermore, from a more practical angle, the question of how "reality" is depicted is clearly easier to answer when we focus on media stories about valence issues that could be satisfactorily captured through widely agreed upon quantitative measures—such as the economy (e.g. Soroka 2012). In other words, most people would agree on what should be defined as good/bad, and most people would accept the tools used to measure the objective development of economic problems (e.g. GDP, unemployment, inflation). In a broader perspective, looking at the entire media agenda, the exact nature of the reality that the media should depict is often much less clear. What is balanced media coverage that would match the "reality" of health care, education policy, science, environmental issues, immigration, and so on?

For these reasons, we focus on the "political tone" of the media. Inspired by Baumgartner and Jones (1993: 50–51), we focus on whether the tone is *negative*, *neutral* or *positive* from the incumbents' perspective (c.f. Thesen 2013). We measure tone by asking a simple question: If you were a government minister, would you see this particular news story as negative, neutral or positive? In other words, our approach to news content is explicitly political. By asking whether a news story is positive or negative from the perspective of the government, we study media content with direct focus on its potential political implications.

The choice to focus on the news from a government perspective is driven by the central role of government actors in democracy and media coverage of democratic politics (see above). In practice, the incumbent perspective also encapsulates the perspective of the opposition or the

challenger; what is bad news for the government is usually positive for the opposition and vice versa.

With a measure of the news tone from a government perspective, we can investigate the thorny question of when and why—and with what effects—government actors appear in the news. Yet, it is worth remembering that government presence in the media arena is likely to be a reflection of both strategies of government actors; that is, they actively seek to get into the news, and media requests for government reactions to certain news stories. In the latter case, government actors might find it necessary to respond, but perhaps prefer not to. However, not responding may not be a realistic option, at least not for very long, because government power also implies responsibility in the eyes of the public (Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010, 2015). Hence, challenging the "incumbency bonus" perspective, we expect increased appearance by government actors in the news following periods of much negative issue coverage. This raises the question of whether news appearances or arena access offer government actors a chance to counter negative coverage. This could play out in two ways. First, incumbents arguably succeed in the media arena to the extent that their presence makes news stories less negative than news stories without their presence. Second, incumbents succeed in the media arena to the extent their presence has a lasting impact on the tone of the news coverage. In the next section, we explain how we examine these relationships empirically.

CODING OF NEWS

To investigate the relationship between news tone and presence of government actors, we draw on a database of Danish radio news from 1984–2003 (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2007). The news was produced by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), which enjoyed a de facto monopoly on broadcasting radio news nationally in this period. Studies of the Danish media system indicate that many stories originated in the major national newspapers, but that the hourly radio news was the most important filter for newspaper stories to make it into the TV news in the evening. Radio news thereby constitutes an ideal source for measuring the agenda of the mass media in general in Denmark (Lund 2002: 147–148).

Each feature from the daily radio news broadcast at noon was coded with regard to issue content, the presence of political actors and tone. The noon broadcast had the largest audience and was considered the

most important due to its impact on TV news later in the day. The final sample included a total of 58,211 news items.[1] The issue content coding was conducted using a modified version of the Danish policy agendas coding scheme (see www.agendasetting.dk), which was reduced to 14 policy domains in order to facilitate cross-issue analysis.[2]

With respect to political actors in the media, we have coded what Ferree et al. (2002) label actor standing, rather than just visibility. Thus, political actors were only coded when they actually gave a statement or when their statements were presented. This means that when an actor is just mentioned, for instance, criticized, the actor is not coded. Furthermore, the data measures *prominence*, that is, number of appearances, not just whether an actor is present in the news (see Tresch 2009: 74–75). The coding allowed inclusion of multiple actors, such as groups of parties jointly presenting a statement.[3]

To operationalize the idea of the news tone from a political perspective, the tone of each news feature was coded into four categories: neutral, negative, positive or un-codeable. The coding was based on short resumes of the news features, which were also used in the coding of issues and actors. Some resumes were simply too short for a coding of the tone and were coded "un-codeable". As mentioned, the main coding rule reflects our distinct political perspective on media tone where the news is evaluated on the basis of how it relates to government responsibility and the opposition-government competition. News tone in this perspective basically answers the question about how favorable news coverage is for the government.

Our point of departure is the viewpoint of government ministers, and typical negative stories include news about increasing inflation, industry closures, crime, accidents, spread of new diseases and so on. Also, stories where the government might be satisfied with a specific policy but meets criticism qualify as bad news. The assumption is that the minister in charge would have preferred different news content or no story at all. With regard to the opposition versus government perspective, we have coded internal disagreement within the government as negative and internal disagreement within the opposition as positive. A news feature where opposition parties can present their preferred policy on an issue is coded negative because it is unfavorable for the government even when the opposition does not directly criticize the government. Criticism of the opposition is coded positive. Thus, news tone was not coded simply based on actor presence, but we expect that it correlates to some extent

with actor presence because actors are coded as present in news when they express their views, which is typically favorable for them.

Neutral stories for the most part give a reasonably balanced portrayal of an issue, for instance highlighting both negative and positive aspects. However, news that does not communicate clear evaluations or lack relevance to politics has also been coded as neutral.[4] The central point is that the judgment of tone is based on a political perspective on media-politics relations: Is this news feature good, bad or neutral for the incumbent government (Thesen et al. 2016)?[5]

All analyses were based on a dataset in which the 58,211 news features were aggregated into the 14 issues mentioned above as well as the 1040 weeks in the 20-year period. Due to gaps in the aggregated data set (i.e. weeks without news coverage of an issue), the total number of units in the analysis is 13,045. Finally, we use two different measures of tone or government favorability: a straightforward calculation of mean news tone for every unit (week × issue) on a scale from –1 to 1, where –1 equals fully negative, 0 equals neutral and 1 equals fully positive; and the mean percentage share of negative, neutral and positive news features for every unit, for instance the share of positive, negative and neutral news items on health in the second week of 1988. The second measure is more complex to report, but provides more information. In the extreme, a mean tone of 0 may be the result of all news being neutral or news being 50% positive or 50% negative.

A Descriptive Analysis of News Tone and Government Presence

As a first step in the analysis, we look at some simple descriptive measures of the news tone in general and the presence of government actors. The mean news tone in the complete material is –0.197, in other words more negative than positive. The percentages of negative, positive and neutral news are 38, 19 and 43, respectively, and show a similar pattern. If we look across policy issues (Fig. 11.1), all have a news tone that is more negative than positive. However, there is considerable variation across issues and over time within issues. For instance, there seems to be more negative stories about health than about defense and foreign affairs. The variation in mean news tone is first of all related to variation in neutral and negative news, while the share of positive news is more stable across issues (data not shown).
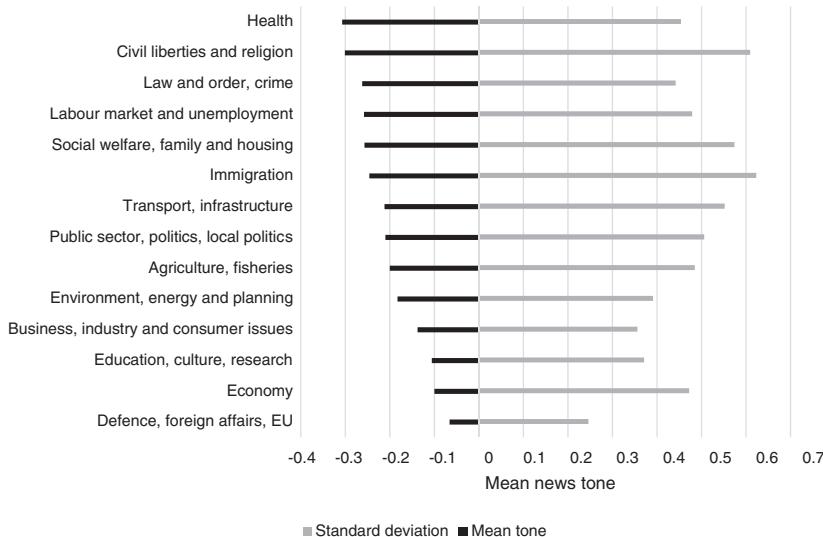
Fig. 11.1   News tone across issues. Data are expressed as mean tone and standard deviation

Next we compare the tone of news coverage in stories with and without presence of government actors. Note that government actors in a Danish context refer to the ministers of the government, the government itself, or in some cases parliamentarians from government parties. The latter group (21% of the cases) is included because Denmark does not have a strict separation of the executive and legislative branch. This implies that MPs from government parties normally toe the government line and rarely act independently (Mortensen 2016). Opposition actors are MPs from the opposition parties or simply the parties as such.

Figure 11.2 shows that the share of positive news stories is higher and the share of negative news is lower when government actors are present compared to when they are not. When opposition actors appear in the news the share of negative stories increases. The share of neutral news does not differ significantly between government and opposition, regardless of when they are present or not.

This tendency becomes even more pronounced when only one group of political actors is present: When the government figures in the news and no opposition actors are present, the mean news tone approaches
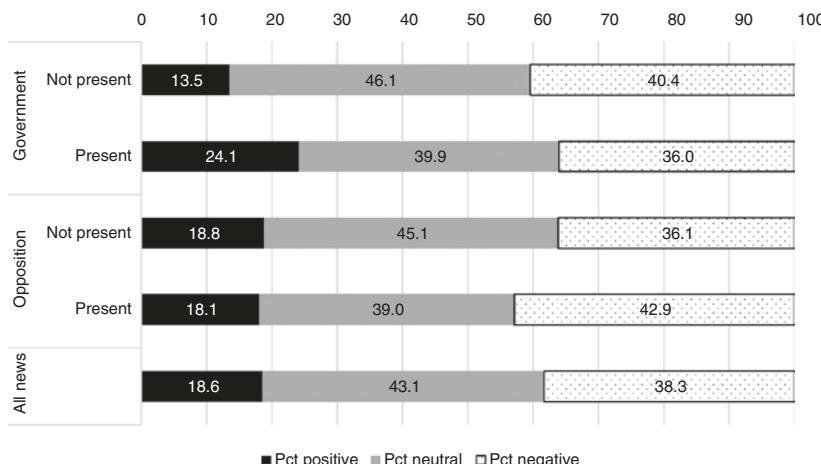
Fig. 11.2 Mean percentage positive, neutral and negative news in total (all news) and by presence of government or opposition actors* (*All differences between not present and present are statistically significant at the 1% level, except for the difference between mean percentage positive news for opposition (when present and not present), which is significant at the 10% level. The differences between government and opposition are statistically significant for mean positive and negative percentages but not for mean neutral percentages)

the neutral value of 0 (−0.067) and is thus clearly more positive than the average (−0.197). When only opposition actors are present, the news is substantially more negative (−0.368).[6]

Due to the coding method, we expected this correlation between actor presence and news tone (see above). Actors are included in news features to present their views or criticize others. However, it is important to stress that news tone is not a simple function of actor presence. This is illustrated by the variation in news tone across issues, and the fact that the news is still more negative than positive even when only government actors are present.

These descriptive differences apply across all issues. As indicated by Fig. 11.1, the news tone varies across issues but is overall more negative than positive. Table 11.1 looks exclusively at government actors and shows that the difference between news tone is statistically significant across all issues. The size of the difference varies considerably, indicating that government presence in the news is more strategically favorable for

Table 11.1 Mean news tone by issue and government presence

Issue	Gov. not present	Gov. present	Difference
Labor market and unemployment	−0.371	−0.128	0.242***
Civil liberties and religion	−0.381	−0.141	0.240***
Immigration	−0.352	−0.134	0.218***
Social welfare, family and housing	−0.359	−0.153	0.206***
Transport, infrastructure	−0.270	−0.110	0.160***
Environment, energy and planning	−0.263	−0.107	0.156***
Public sector, politics, local politics	−0.276	−0.152	0.123***
Agriculture, fisheries	−0.247	−0.127	0.120***
Health	−0.357	−0.240	0.117***
Law and order, crime	−0.299	−0.188	0.111***
Education, culture, research	−0.164	−0.059	0.105***
Business, industry and consumer issues	−0.157	−0.100	0.057**
Defense, foreign affairs, EU	−0.101	−0.054	0.047**
Economy	−0.128	−0.083	0.045*

***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$

some issues than for others. Interestingly, the ability to "lift" the news tone simply by being in the news is typically higher for issues that are characterized by a more negative news tone. These issue differences call for further theorizing and investigation in future analyses. Here we focus on disentangling the relationship between news tone and government actor appearance.

Disentangling the Relationship Between News Coverage and Actor Appearance

The main analyses above present the tone of the news when government actors are present/not present. However, news coverage is dynamic, which means than an issue is covered before (and will be covered after) government actors appeared. Our perspective on the presence of government actors in the news is based on the combination of the news value of relevance (power) and the watch dog norm. Government responsibility, we argued, leads to critical news attention and induces the government to respond to and appear in the news when negative news attention increases. Thus, the expectation is that the pattern of a correlation between government presence and a positive news tone is often situated in a context where the preceding news coverage of the issue has

increasingly emphasized developments that are negative from the government's point of view.

To investigate this further, we ran a number of VAR models to analyze whether news tone causes government appearances or the other way around over the 20 years of coverage and across the 14 policy issues. Specifically, we performed a set of Granger causality tests of the relationship between news tone and government presence. The logic is, in Granger's words, that: '[…] Y_t is causing X_t if we are better able to predict X_t using all available information than if the information apart from Y_t had been used' (Granger 1969: 428). The core idea in this analysis is a set of regressions with special focus on the statistical significance of lagged values of X in models including lagged values of Y. Described in these terms, there are three possible relations between news tone and government actor presence: a one-sided relation where lagged values of tone improve the prediction of actor presence or lagged values of government actor appearance improve the prediction of news tone; a two-sided relationship (a feedback relationship) where lagged values of both tone and actor appearances improve the prediction of the other variable; (lagged values of) the two variables can be uncorrelated, in which case including lagged values of one of the variables does not improve the prediction of the other variable. In the cases of a statistical relationship between (lagged values) of the two variables, we also look at the direction of the effect (see Table 11.2).

Table 11.2 shows that on 7 of the 14 issues, news tone Granger causes government presence, and in 6 of these 7 cases, the effect is clearly negative. In this case a negative effect means that increased news negativity is followed by an increased presence of government actors. We find little evidence of the reverse effect, i.e. that government presence Granger causes news tone. Substantially, this means that government appearance in one week is not found to have a systematic effect on the tone of coverage the following week.

As discussed above, it is very difficult to establish whether the presence of government actors in the news reflects their strategic use of the media or whether it is a "forced" presence. The VAR analyses shown in Table 11.2 do not provide a final answer to this question, but they do suggest that government actors are often *reactive* and, arguably, forced to respond to a negative news context in order to try to push the tone of the news in a more favorable direction. The descriptive analyses in this chapter indicate that these efforts may pay off in the short run, as the news tone is relatively more positive when the government is in the news.

Table 11.2 Results of VAR and VARGRANGER for news tone and government presence (14 models, one for each issue)

Issue	No. of lags	Tone Granger causes gov presence	Direction of effect	Gov presence Granger causes tone	Direction of effect
Economy	4	Yes**	Negative	No	
Civil liberties and religion	4	Yes***	Mixed	Yes**	Mixed
Immigration	3	Yes**	Negative	No	
Health	3	Yes*	Negative	No	
Agriculture, fisheries	2	Yes*	Negative	No	
Education, culture, research	6	No		No	
Labor market and unemployment	3	No		No	
Environment, energy and planning	5	No		No	
Transport, infra-structure	2	Yes**	Negative	Yes**	Negative
Law and order, crime	5	No		No	
Social welfare, family and housing	2	No		No	
Business, industry and consumer issues	6	No		No	
Defense, foreign affairs, EU	5	Yes*	Negative	No	
Public sector, politics, local politics	2	No		Yes**	Positive

Note The number of lags are based on a varsoc test in Stata
***$p < 0.01$, **$p < 0.05$, *$p < 0.1$

However, according to the results of the VAR analyses, this effect is not sustained over time. Government actors are in other words not very effective in shaping the tone of the subsequent news coverage of an issue.

A Difficult but Important Question

Pinpointing when certain political actors appear in the news is central for our understanding of the interaction between media and politics but requires additional knowledge about the content of the news. This chapter used a new coding of news tone to shed light on the presence of government actors in the news. The findings indicate that the presence

of a government actor in a specific news feature is related to a more positive news tone, but that government actors often appear in a context of a negative news tone. This would indicate that government actors appear in the news to attempt to counterbalance a negative tone. However, our findings indicate that they are not able to influence the news tone after appearing in the news. This indicates that the tone of the news is structural and not something government actors can influence very much.

The results point to the relationship between journalists and their political sources, a theme that has received broad attention in political communication (c.f. Gans 2004). Still, more empirical research is needed in order to understand the strategic motives for government presence in the news. Are government actors mainly approached by journalists and unable to avoid news presence, or do they actively seek media attention even when news is negative? The two scenarios do not exclude each other, but their relative importance is crucial when we examine how government actors use the arena function of the news. However, to answer this question, we have to look beyond actor appearances *in* the news and examine how news stories originate and the roles different actors play.

The findings in this chapter clearly demonstrate the importance of studying the variation in how actor presence interacts with news tone across issues. The extent to which the tone is favorable to the government and the extent to which the presence of government actors changes the tone vary across issues. One possible explanation has to do with the type of information they generate. The least negative tone was found for defense and foreign policy, which might reflect that developments within these issue areas can to a lesser extent be blamed on the government. This may also explain why the presence of government actors made a limited difference in such issue areas.

Notes

1. A large number of news features reporting political news from abroad with no direct relation to Danish politics were excluded from the sample.
2. The media coding scheme contains 59 topic codes and is a simplified version of the Danish policy agenda-setting coding scheme, which has more than 230 policy categories, and again is a modified version of the American policy agenda-setting coding scheme originally developed by Baumgartner and Jones (see www.policyagendas.org). The issue coding was done by 11

student coders who completed one week of intensive training. During coding, an intercoder reliability test was performed by a master coder (project leader), who recoded randomly selected news features. For each of the 11 coders, percentage agreement scores were calculated, and 90% agreement was set as the minimum target. Recoding continued until it was established with 95% certainty that the percentage agreement was minimum 90%. See Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2007) for further details about the coding.

3. The actor coding was done simultaneously with the issue coding. Due to challenges of identifying actors "standing" in the news, the target for percentage agreement between the master coder and the 11 coders were set at 85% rather than 90% as for the issue coding (see above; for more information, see Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2007).

4. Most likely there are quite a few "neutral" stories in our dataset that would have been coded as good/bad in alternative approaches. For instance, isolated events in the private sector that most people would consider negative/positive in themselves should only be coded as negative/positive if they have (or are framed as having) general implications. Think of the difference between a story about one business struggling with web security (neutral) and a story about a general threat to web security in the banking sector (negative).

5. News tone was coded by three student coders who went to intensive training before coding. Test of intercoder reliability was performed before and after the coding. The average values of the Krippendorf Alpha values calculated were around 0.73, which is satisfactory given the complexity involved in the coding (see Thesen et al. 2016 for more details).

6. All these differences are statistically significant at the 1% level.

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Combining Information and Arena

Why Do Politicians Use the Media When Making Laws? A Study On the Functional Use of Mass Media During Legislative Processes

Lotte Melenhorst and Peter Van Aelst

Introduction

Why do politicians use the media in their legislative work? This question got surprisingly little attention in previous work on media and politics. The reason might be that the answer is considered too self-evident: the mass media are by far the most effective way to reach out to the public and build a reputation. Citizens almost entirely depend on the media to get to know politicians and to learn about their ideas and accomplishments (Shehata and Strömbäck 2014). Therefore, gaining media attention is a primary goal for politicians that have, or want to obtain, an electoral mandate, and there is no reason to expect this to be different

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when it comes to their legislative work. Studies namely indicate that the role of the media in modern politics goes beyond publicity: politicians use the media not merely for electoral reasons, but also to reach their policy goals (Davis 2007; Elmelund-Præstekær and Wien 2008; Kunelius and Reunanen 2012).

This chapter deals with the functions the media have for parliamentarians during legislative processes that turn bills into laws. The focus is on the parliamentary legislative process, instead of the agenda-setting phase that proceed this process. We look at the mass media from a functional perspective, asking for what purpose individual politicians use the media in their legislative work (Kunelius and Reunanen 2012). The main question is whether the ideas about the dual function of the news media for political elites, as presented by Van Aelst & Walgrave in Chap. 1, are applicable in the context of legislation. According to them, the mass media have two essential functions for political elites (see also Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). On the one hand, they are a source of information for political elites. Politicians can use the media passively, to learn about the issue at hand or the opinions of other actors, or actively, as a window of opportunity to reach their goals. On the other hand, media are an arena for political communication. Politicians can enter this arena for self-promotion purposes, or for issue-promotion purposes.

So far, empirical work that investigates these two functions of the media for politicians in the context of lawmaking is largely missing. The few existing studies focus on the US (Sellers 2010; Wolfe 2012) instead of on proportional multi-party systems. Furthermore, it is unclear whether legislators' motivations for entering the media arena go beyond attracting public attention. We opt for an in-depth approach that allows us to understand what functions media can have for politicians in their work as legislators. We study the dual function of the media for Members of Parliament (MPs) in the context of lawmaking, a fundamental element of politics. The first research question is whether the media are a source of information for MPs when they are considering bills, and if so, whether they actively use this information during legislative processes. The second research question is whether the media are an arena for political communication during legislative processes, and if so, whether MPs employ it for self-promotion and/or issue-promotion purposes.

When dealing with these questions, we focus explicitly on two types of differences between MPs: members of opposition versus coalition

parties, and Upper House versus Lower House members. With regard to the former, the literature suggests that the media have different functions for MPs of coalition parties versus MPs that are in opposition (Thesen 2012; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011). With regard to the latter, the distinction has to do with the position of MPs towards the electorate. The 150 members of the Lower House in the Netherlands are full-time and directly elected politicians; the 75 members of the Upper House (Senate) are part-time politicians for only one day a week, and are elected indirectly via the members of the twelve States-Provincial. Whereas the Lower House is expected to deal with day-to-day politics, the Upper House is perceived as a so-called *chambre de réflexion* that usually operates in the background. Therefore we expect MPs in the Lower House to use and get more media-attention than their colleagues in the Senate.

Research Design

Since we are mainly interested in the motives of politicians, we conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews with politicians in the Netherlands. This allows us to understand why politicians think the media are (not) relevant for lawmaking. It means we are not so much interested in media coverage on legislative processes, but more in the underlying strategies and motives of MPs (for research about the media's influence on lawmaking, see for example Melenhorst 2015). The interviews are conducted in three waves, in the context of case studies about specific legislative processes: a bill regulating top salaries in the (semi)public sector (*Wet normering bezoldiging functionarissen publieke en semi-publieke sector*), a bill regulating flexible work and unemployment, and governing dismissal (*Wet werk en zekerheid*) and a bill introducing a new student finance system (*Wet studievoorschot hoger onderwijs*). The topics of the bills received ample media coverage, and as a consequence media coverage could potentially be of importance for politicians during the process (for more information see Melenhorst 2017).

All interviewees are members of the Lower and Upper Houses of Parliament, who were the spokespeople on behalf of their parliamentary party during the legislative process about one of the bills ($N = 52$). They represent a diverse range of political parties and have varying parliamentary experience. Because the starting point for the

interviews was a specific legislative process, the interviewees had an incentive not to talk about "the media" in general; they were asked specific questions about the rationale behind their own usage of media coverage and actual interactions with journalists. To avoid gathering only context-specific data, follow-up questions were asked to check for additional motivations during other legislative processes. We have not enforced a specific definition of "the media" to the interviewees, because we are interested in all types of mass media they interact with during legislative processes.

All semi-structured interviews are conducted by the first author, and took on average between 50 and 70 minutes. The interview data are analyzed via a qualitative content analysis in MAXQDA, using a codebook based on the dual function of the media. We consider all statements about the content of media coverage and about reasons why a political actor uses media coverage relevant with regard to the media as a source of information. All statements concerning reasons why a political actor tries to get media coverage for him- or herself, or issues they are dealing with, are regarded as relevant with regards to the media as an arena for political communication.

This study is conducted in the Netherlands: a multiparty, bicameral political system that is considered a consensus democracy (Lijphart 2012). Bills are typically introduced by members of government (Bovend'Eert and Kummeling 2010) although the legislative power is constitutionally shared by government and parliament (Andeweg and Irwin 2014). The dominant role of the government in drafting legislation is not unique, as the legislatures of most parliamentary democracies rarely introduce bills (Bergman et al. 2003). During the legislative process members of the Lower House can amend bills, and members of both Houses can propose motions. Legislative processes start when a bill is introduced to the Lower House, and are completed when, after both Houses of Parliament have passed it, the law is published in the Government Gazette. In this chapter we focus on the role media coverage plays during these processes in Parliament. Given the exploratory nature of the study, we focus on *whether* MPs mention media as a source of information or as an arena (as opposed to *the extent* to which they serve these functions) in the context of lawmaking.

RESULTS: "INFORMATION & ARENA" DURING LEGISLATIVE PROCESSES

Media Coverage as a Source of Information

The first part of the first research question, to be answered in this section, is whether the media are a source of information for MPs when they are considering bills. Politicians argue that the mass media are a source of information in lawmaking, mainly about public opinion and about other politicians. However, they also indicate that the media are not their most important source on the topics of bills. We will first explain why politicians perceive the importance of the media as a source of information to be limited.

MPs have multiple other sources of information that often contain information more tailored to the legislative process. Because MPs are often specialized, media attention hardly ever contains new information for them. Once they see or hear something in the media, they usually have already read about it in parliamentary documents, in research reports, or heard about it via interest groups or experts. In exceptional cases, such as via investigative journalism, media can present new information to politicians. An MP explains: "There are journalists who do research themselves. If that is quite thorough and there's more to it, than you can really use it as a Member of Parliament, just like any other source of information." It is however rare for investigative journalists to publish during legislative processes. Instead, their publications often have a more agenda setting effect prior to legislative processes. In the exceptional cases when media items do contain new information, MPs usually check the correctness of the information, for example by contacting somebody mentioned in it, or by looking up the original source of the news. According to some politicians, the expertise of journalists— for example, those writing for quality newspapers—can be useful. One MP argues: "Because I think that the people that write for these newspapers (…) know exactly what they are talking about, they have good networks themselves. (…) They follow a topic seriously, and by following closely what these people write, you get a reasonable idea of the breadth of the debate, of the various views in the debate."

Media attention is generally speaking considered as being rather superficial, or at least it does not go into the details of bills. Such coverage can

nevertheless still be informative, for example because it provides an overview of the topics under consideration, or reminds politicians of the fundamental ideas behind the bill. MPs also argue that media coverage can direct their attention to potentially problematic elements of the bill they had not thought about previously. Although mass media coverage is not their most important source of information, politicians do monitor more or less closely what is in the media about the topic of the bill. As expected, members of the Lower House monitor more closely and intensely what is in the mass media than members of the Upper House.

In the perception of legislators, journalists are often prone to report on incidents. Some argue that such incident coverage is not relevant information, because legislation is not suitable for solving such specific cases. However, if media pay attention to a particular case in which the bill has presumably unforeseen consequences, other MPs do believe they should take note of that. The MPs agree that in any case, it is their task to analyze the meaning of the coverage. An MP explains: "There are very often items about incidents, they have a good signal function. Then you need to weigh: do I have to do something with this? Is this a sign of something structural or not?" They seem not to trust media reports blindly, which is in line with previous research that shows political actors anticipate biases in the news (Herbst 1998); they try to check whether the information is correct, and what the broader story is.

An important reason to monitor the media is that it provides clues about public opinion. MPs mention that it is part of their job to follow the media, because they are expected to know what is going on in society—in particular when it concerns a bill that is being considered in Parliament and that they are the spokesperson of their party on. "You have to know how the matter stands, and what people think about it. You are a representative of the people, you are not there for yourself", one of them argues. "You have to translate notes from society to your appearance in the House." MPs want to be aware of the information that is communicated to the wider public via the media, and want to check whether there is media coverage they feel they have to do something with. Since public opinion polls about topics of bills during legislative processes are rare, MPs look for alternative indications of what the public thinks. Some MPs mention pieces written by columnists, editors or opinion makers, while others believe that the readers' opinions published on the correspondence pages of newspapers express what the public thinks. "In newspapers the readers' letters are most important, and nowadays

also the responses on websites. I think that is much more interesting than the opinion of the editor", an MP explains. MPs also indicate that rely on specific newspapers one to know what the public thinks: "If you want to keep an eye on opinion in the Netherlands, than you always have to follow *De Telegraaf*, that is the type of newspaper that expresses the sentiments in the Netherlands." Some devote special attention to particular media because they reflect the priorities and opinions of their voters or supporters. Although the media landscape in the Netherlands is not very polarized and not as partisan as it was in the first half of the twentieth century, some newspapers and public broadcasting organizations have a more right-wing or left-wing leaning, or for example a religious character. About the latter, an MP from a Christian party says: "If these media write a lot about an issue, than you automatically look at it more critically."

Via the media, MPs also get information about political developments and the position or agenda of other politicians in the legislative process. Political actors explain that although most of the time they know what the position of others is, they still want to be aware of what other MPs say in the media. In particular when there is political tension, attention for the political process is relevant to MPs, and can inform them about the position of their colleagues. This may then be a reason to contact that colleague, to check their position in person, or to adjust one's own positioning. Regarding the latter, an MP explains: "The media are an important source of information about how other parties position themselves." This is relevant because, if you aren't committed to a particular position yet, "…you choose your position in relation to how others position themselves." For members of the Upper House, media attention can be informative about the decision-making process in the Lower House. This is relevant because after a bill is passed by the Lower House, it is sent to the Upper House. Therefore several Upper House MPs indicated they already monitor the media prior to that moment, because they know that it is likely that at some point they will participate in the legislative process themselves.

Providing information is a first potential asset that the media offer to politicians. In a follow-up step this information can be used in their daily work. The second part of the first research question is whether MPs actively use information they acquired via the media during legislative processes. In general, Dutch parliamentarians emphasize that because they have multiple sources of information at their disposal, they do

not use explicit media references very often. If they want to refer to a source when asking a question or making a claim, they prefer to mention sources like research reports, official documents or online publications, even when media coverage was the source via which a political actor first learnt about the issue. However, in addition to those sources, MPs do use media coverage in legislative processes. MPs argue they do refer to specific media items or to what is in the media more generally, for example when asking written questions to the minister, or during legislative debates. This concurs with what we know is quite common with regard to parliamentary questions in the Dutch Lower House (Van Aelst and Vliegenthart 2013). Media references seem to be more common in the Lower House than in the Upper House, which is in line with the expectations about the Senate as a *chambre de réflexion* that is less focused on topical issues.

Political actors mention a number of motivations for actively using media coverage during legislative processes. A first and rather self-evident reason is that political actors want to credit the source that initially brought the issue to their attention. One MP even makes a direct comparison with the way in which scientists refer to the sources they use. Mostly, however, the motivation to refer to media coverage is more strategic. Several politicians indicate that a media reference helps to underline the urgency or topicality of an issue. This is for example something MPs do to begin their contribution to legislative debates with: "Topical matters are always a good start of a debate, because people are watching it at home and should know what it is about", an MP explains. According to him media references demonstrate that the issue the bill is about is "… topical, and relevant, and why people read about it in the newspapers on a daily basis." Another explains that this is in particular helpful if you are dissatisfied with the bill: "The art of the debate is of course also to keep it topical, to make it lively—at least if your aim is to change something."

Media coverage can also be employed to substantiate a party's point of view. In particular, media coverage is useful for opposition MPs because it is often negative, or at least critical towards those in power. For instance, an opposition MP remembers a legislative process in which "…journalists have (…) cooperated very well". In contrast, a coalition party MP says in the context of a particular bill: "The newspapers didn't really write things that helped me, so there was not much to quote, really." And an MP that was part of a temporary coalition to support a bill explains that "…once I have signed an agreement, I cannot

go into the media anymore with all kinds of things that are completely different [to what is in the agreement]. So that limits the room I have."

Another motivation for MPs to refer to examples from the media is to make the topic of legislative debates clearer to the larger public: "The interesting thing about such examples is that they are recognizable for people", a Lower House MP explains regarding a reference he made to an issue that received ample media attention. Also when legislation is complex, it can be useful to refer to media coverage, an MP explains. "It can be very technical (…), and then it is sometimes very useful to refer to an expert article (…), also during the plenary debate about a bill." Referring to a media source can also be a way for MPs to justify questions they ask. One of them explains that "…you can derive examples from it, and occasionally you think, this what I read, we can convert that into questions." Media coverage can also be used by MPs to confront or challenge their political opponents. For example, if a political actor said something in the media he or she has not said within parliament before, in particular if it goes contrary to prior statements, an MP can refer to this to force the other to respond to it and clarify their position.

In sum, media coverage can be informative in the sense that it contains opinions of other political actors, representatives of interest groups, experts or individual citizens. In the context of legislation, the media can thus function as a platform for people that have ideas about the content or consequences of bills. It is however not only a passive source of information: media coverage can also be used actively by MPs during legislative processes. Their motivations to use media references are diverse, including crediting the source, underlining the urgency of issues, substantiating their party's position, and clarifying the bill under deliberation to the larger public.

The Media as an Arena for Political Communication

The second research question, to be answered in this section, is whether the media are an arena for political communication during legislative processes, and if so, whether MPs employ it for self-promotion and/or issue-promotion purposes. The information and arena model namely suggests that there are mainly two reasons why politicians want to enter the media arena. First, because it is still the best way to develop name recognition and make themselves visible, and second, because it allows them to promote their issue agenda (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016).

During the interviews none of the interviewees mentioned that they aim at getting media attention for themselves personally in the context of lawmaking. Some do mention that they want to create visibility for the position and behavior of their parliamentary party during the legislative process. The "self" they want to promote should be interpreted as the parliamentary party group the MP is representing as a spokesperson. In addition, in the context of legislative processes, political actors tend not to be concerned about the mere visibility of their party as such: they want attention for the *position* of their party. This is probably due to the substantial nature of legislative processes; if MPs are in contact with journalists, they are motivated by the debate about the bill and want to make apparent what their position is.

In the context of lawmaking the sub-function of "self-promotion", in the sense of promoting oneself personally, is thus hardly applicable. Issue-promotion via the media seems to be a more common strategy, at least among Lower House MPs. Their main goal is to create visibility for the position of their parliamentary party group. By showing the issues their party cares about and demands attention for, they want to communicate what they are doing to the larger public. By doing so they want to give account to their voters, for example show that they are executing their election program, or show to interest groups that they take their concerns seriously. At the same time, with an eye to the future, they also want to show their legislative behavior to potential future voters. A member of the Lower House explains that it is about "…the communication between the representatives of the people and their supporters, whether that is a voter, or a member of the party, or people that have not voted for you but that do follow politics. That is an inextricable element [of your job]. So in that sense you are always a missionary that is trying to bring things into the limelight, and you need the media for that," also in order to "…increase the support for your ideas, and thus for your party".

MPs may also try to get media coverage for particular issues to influence the direction of parliamentary debates. They may for example try to enter the media arena directly prior to legislative debates or votes. "The news cycle 24 hours before the debate starts is very useful to direct the debate towards your position. That isn't any different with legislation." a Lower House MP explains. "If you say [in a newspaper]: we are going to introduce an amendment (…), all your colleagues read it. And they will start to develop an opinion on it (…). And thereby you achieve that at least part of the debate is about your ideas." Another MP explains that

"…you want to make clear what the position of your party is, and show that you are serious about it (…). And if you really disagree with something, it is important to become issue owner, by approaching the media a lot. And at the same time, you always have the hope that you can find a hole in the coalition".

Generally speaking, coalition MPs do not have a strong incentive to get into the media while the legislative process is still in progress. For them, the main priority is to make sure that the bill under consideration passes both Houses of Parliament. They tend to perceive being in the media as a risk, in the sense that if they say something one of their coalition partners is unhappy with, that may put pressure on the often delicate balance between the parties. Nevertheless, complying with a journalistic request is sometimes perceived as beneficial, particularly if they think the media coverage will allow them to defend their support for the bill. A Lower House MP explains that he for example participated in a radio interview because "…it was a good opportunity to tell our own story". Members of the Upper House, whether they represent coalition or opposition parties, are usually not in favor of entering the media arena prior to legislative debates. One of the senators states rather clearly: "We debate with the government, and not with the newspaper."

Lower House MPs enter the media arena more than Upper House MPs, but they also stress that it is not something they do frequently in the context of lawmaking. Because legislative processes are often lengthy, rather technical and complex, MPs have ample room to bring up issues within the parliamentary arena and deliberate about them with their colleagues and with members of the cabinet. It is according to the politicians not very common for them to try and get media coverage for topics they are concerned about with regard to legislation, because most of what happens in parliament remains out of the media's spotlights. This perception concurs with research that shows most legislative processes receive no, or only little, media coverage (Melenhorst 2013; Van Aelst et al. 2015). Some legislators even mention 'not using the media' as a strategy. This means that political actors sometimes deliberately *not* inform journalists about their position on a bill, because media coverage for their position might obstruct what is considered by them to be the desirable legislative outcome. If a party for example received precarious support for a proposal, they might wait until the actual vote took place before telling the media about it. An MP explains: "In some situations you (…) do not want to involve the media. For example (…), if you say

out loud in the media that you are going to manage something, then it may become very difficult for another spokesperson to get his parliamentary party to go along."

In sum, many of the actions and behaviors of MPs during legislative processes are not particularly aimed at receiving media attention. In this regard various MPs contrast legislative processes with the parliamentary question hour, to indicate that whereas one of the goals of asking oral parliamentary questions is to try and gain media attention (Van Aelst et al. 2016; Van Santen et al. 2015), this is not the case when MPs ask questions or do proposals during lawmaking processes. The reason seems to be that, in the eyes of the politicians, journalists are not always equally interested in the actual, legislative, deliberative and decision-making processes in parliament—even when the topic the bill is about is often covered by the media. In the words of an MP: "Legislation is a bit of a backwater, a desert, a legitimation, that is the least interesting for journalists. They want to be at the front of the news, not when it is being finished off."

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Previous studies show that politicians consume a lot of news and also react to media coverage. This literature has however only seldom looked into the motives of politicians to use the media during legislative processes. Van Aelst and Walgrave (2016; see also Chap. 1 of this book) argue that the media have a dual function in politics: that they are both a source of information and an arena for political communication. Does this conceptualization apply to the legislative context in a parliamentary system such as the Netherlands?

The results of the empirical test of the dual function of the media in legislative processes is summarized in Table 12.1. On the one hand, the media can be a source of information for politicians. They use it primarily to learn about public opinion, the position of interest groups and expert, and to stay informed about the position of competitors and allies. In some cases MPs actively use coverage in parliament, to illustrate their position or confront political opponents. Using media references gives an intervention in the parliamentary debate a more topical and up-to-date character. For MPs from opposition parties, the often critical nature of media coverage is useful to underline their position or confront the legislative initiatives of the government.

Table 12.1 Applicability of the media's dual role in the context of lawmaking

	Source of information	*Arena for political communication*
Sub-function	• *Passive*: seldom new information about the topic of bills, but monitor the media to learn about opinions of political actors, interest groups, experts or individual citizens • *Active*: illustrate and justify one's position or confront political opponents; shows topicality and underlines urgency of issues	• *Self-promotion*: hardly applicable to the context of lawmaking, focus on parliamentary party position instead of mere visibility of individual political actors • *Issue-promotion*: create visibility for the position of one's parliamentary party group and use media coverage to support position in parliament

On the other hand, and to a lesser extent, the media can serve as an arena for political communication. Whereas in the context of lawmaking political actors do not aim at self-promotion via the media, some do try to get media attention to make visible what their party is doing, and draw attention to their position with regard to a bill. In sum, the news media do serve both functions, but overall our interviewees conceive their importance as relatively limited. The media can be a source of information for politicians, mostly in addition to the broad range of other sources of information they dispose of. To a much lesser extent the media also serve as an arena for political communication.

These findings suggest that the conceptualization of the "dual function of the media" should be nuanced in the context of legislation. Could this be explained by a form of social desirability of the politicians we interviewed? For instance, they might not like to admit that gaining personal media attention during legislative processes is one of their goals. It is unlikely that this is the case, because this finding is in line with previous research. Studies have shown that many ordinary politicians receive little attention media attention, as political journalists mainly follow the trail of power (Vos 2014). For this reason, Hess (1984) even suggested that for the bulk of US Senators it is irrational to pursue media coverage, as most journalists are simply not interested. Our previous work shows that indeed, legislative processes in the Netherlands are not very newsworthy (Van Aelst et al. 2015). As a consequence, it is rather logical that Dutch MPs seldom try to enter the media arena in the context of legislative processes in parliament.

However, various other reasons might also partly explain the limited media use of MPs when making laws. Firstly, whereas journalists are sometimes eager to bring issues up, they mostly do so long before a legislative process is started, or only when the law is being implemented. During the actual legislative process they mainly report on decisions that have been made. This concurs with studies that suggest the media's influence is stronger in the agenda setting phase of the policy cycle, due to its ability to focus attention on certain issues (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Esser and Pfetsch 2004, p. 388).

Secondly, MPs monitor media coverage for relevant information, but it only rarely contains information that is new to them. If it does, they may use it during the legislative process, but MPs are often already well-informed and have a strong network to consult regarding a bill. For this study the parliamentarians that were spokespeople for their party on a bill were deliberately interviewed; the media may play a more important role for MPs that are not experts on an issue. MPs that are most occupied with a bill, however, have more and better sources to rely on.

Thirdly, the modest functional role of the media might be related to the low journalistic interest in the actual lawmaking process. In a previous study we already showed that most bills in the Netherlands do not get very much media attention (Van Aelst et al. 2015). But even if the topic of the law is mediatized, this does not necessarily mean that journalists devote attention to the fine tuning of a bill. For instance, MPs know that it is definitely not self-evident for their motions and amendments to be covered in the news. That confirms earlier findings about the limited journalistic interest into the 'details' of legislative processes (Melenhorst 2015, 2017).

Fourthly, because lawmaking is complex and has substantial policy consequences, using the media as an arena to influence parliament is generally speaking not perceived as a very effective or appropriate way to get things done. In a fragmented multiparty system such as the Netherlands, parties always have to form coalitions to pass legislation. Such coalitions are either established in coalition agreements or in temporary agreements. Coalition parties in particular do not have much to gain by being in the media in terms of affecting legislative outcomes. Being in the media is primarily a way for them to publicly defend the decisions made. Politicians that do deliberately enter the media arena are often critical opposition MPs that hope to influence public opinion, or even legislative debates. This is in line with Sellers' (2000) findings that

in the United States, it is the minority party that has most to benefit by entering the media arena. However, if the agreement between the ruling parties on the particular bill is solid, entering the media arena will not change much. For legislators that are part of the coalition it can even be a reason to stay out of the news, as this can only hurt the often delicate compromise the parties have chosen. Put differently: with regard to legislation, the partitocracy trumps the mediacracy.

In a sense, it might be reassuring that media mainly play a passive role during legislative processes. In terms of the quality of lawmaking, one might hope that political actors' main aim is to try and make laws that are in accordance with their political viewpoints as much as possible. That they are thereby not very often responding to the media, or acting in the media themselves, might be more a good than a bad thing. At least during legislative processes MPs do not seem to be swayed by the controversies of the day. In that respect we are inclined to follow an MP that states media-attention is "…definitely not leading".

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Information Source and Political Arena: How Actors from Inside and Outside Politics Use the Media

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INTRODUCTION

Only recently, functional explanations of political actors' media-related behavior have aroused political communication scholars' interest (Fawzi 2014; Kepplinger 2008; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). Previous research on the media-politics relation has mainly focused on how the media affect politics, for instance the media's agenda-setting power. However, a functional perspective may help to understand the media's role in politics in a more comprehensive way. This is because the media's power not only results from the influence of their political coverage on politics, but also from the way political actors use the media to pursue their political goals and the way they use the media as a political platform (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). Thus, based on the key question of the uses and gratification approach this perspective asks "what do political actors do with the media?" (Fawzi 2014). Do political actors use media coverage as indicator of public opinion? Do different actors from

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the political arena communicate to each other via media? Do political actors try to influence the political agenda or legislation through media coverage? And do politicians use the media in a different way than non-governmental actors?

To structure previous research addressing such questions, Van Aelst and Walgrave (2016, also see introduction to this book) presented a typology of the media's functions which distinguishes media as a source of information and as political arena. This paper aims at analyzing the importance of both functions empirically from political actors' point of view. It will take a wide range of political actors that are involved in policy-making from inside and outside the political-administrative system into account and is hereby based on a very broad understanding of political actors. It will first present a theoretical framework on the media's functions, followed by the results of a quantitative survey of German Members of the Bundestag, civil servants and non-governmental actors like associations, NGOs, and researchers all involved in the case of Energy policy.

Theoretical Framework

This paper will focus on the two basic media functions for political actors proposed by Van Aelst and Walgrave (2016): The media (1) as an information source and (2) as a political arena to communicate with citizens and other actors. Most research focuses on the media's role for politicians, little is known about other political actors involved in the policy-making process like members of the administration, lobbyists or scientists although they play a crucial role in policy-making. Civil servants prepare and implement laws, processes that are often disregarded by the media. Lobbyists, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and researchers provide information and expertise during this process on the one hand, on the other hand at least the first two groups want to influence the legislation process in their desired direction (Leif and Speth 2003). As a large part of these processes take place behind closed doors, not only politicians but also administrations and associations are being criticized of lacking adequate democratic legitimation (e.g. Koch-Baumgarten 2010).

That is where the media come in. They provide political actors a platform to communicate to the public and to other political actors but also to receive political news themselves. However, to make use of these functions, political actors have to fulfill necessary conditions. It may sound

trivial, but to use the media as an information source and monitoring tool, political actors actually need to follow media coverage. In fact, most organizations receive or produce press reviews to observe media coverage about them and to generally learn what is going on in the political world; especially politicians are often called "news junkies" (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016, p. 11), but empirical data on the actual media use of the political elite is scarce.

Moreover, to make use of the media as a strategic policy instrument, political organizations try to influence media coverage, for instance, by publishing press releases, holding press conferences, giving interviews to journalists, or holding background talks and other forms of informal communication (Baugut and Reinemann 2013). Thus, this study will first analyze how intensively political actors use the media and to what extent their organizations are concerned with media-related work.

Media as Information Source

Due to the complexity of policies, it is almost impossible to stay up to date on all political events, positions and strategies of the relevant political actors, political negotiations or citizens' opinions towards the respective policies. However, information is a central political resource; thus, political actors—just like citizens—use the media to get an overview on what is going on in the political world (Deutsch 1963). This means that the media can substitute direct, personal political observations for political actors and provide a summary of current political problems (Cobb and Elder 1981). Requiring information from inside and outside the political system (Davis 2007; Voltmer and Koch-Baumgarten 2010), political actors may search for various information in the media: information about societal problems, about what is going on in their policy field or to learn about public opinion. In the following, this study will focus on information about citizens and other political actors.

Citizens. Media are regarded as an important intermediary that connects citizens, parties, organizations and institutions with each other. From the elites' perspective media coverage is an easily accessible source in contrast to other indicators of public opinion like polls that are often not available. Several studies have indeed shown that politicians consult the media agenda as a proxy of public opinion (Cohen 1972; Herbst 1998; Pritchard 1992; Wittkämper 1986), either because they assume that the media strongly influence public opinion (Cohen et al. 2008) or

that media coverage reflects public opinion. However, research has also yielded contradictory findings that cast doubt on the assumption that the media serve as an important indicator of public opinion for politicians (e.g. Davis 2007).

Although it seems more important for politicians who are directly voted by citizens to be informed about their acceptance among voters, ministries, lobbying companies and associations might also be interested in how citizens' perceive and assess their organization or work. Thus, the following research question asks, how important media coverage is for politicians and other political actors to obtain information on citizens' opinion.

Political Actors. It is the media's task to cover current political events to inform citizens. This information, however, is also useful for political actors. It can be used to monitor the political arena and to receive information about the strategies of other political actors or the results of negotiations that often take place behind closed doors (Sellers 2009). Thus, media are said to be "active agents in stimulating, filtering and structuring the inputs of the policy process" (Cobb and Elder 1981, p. 392) and to fulfill a "map-making function" for the political elite (Cohen 1963, p. 12). Luhmann (1992, pp. 84–85) has described this function by the mirror metaphor. Political actors use the same media to observe other political actors and themselves. And more importantly they are aware that they are being watched by the media and consider this during their actions (see also Weiss 1988, p. 13).

In a quantitative survey of US policymakers, a large proportion said that they use media coverage for information on the government and for information on their own policy (Linsky 1986). This information function of the media was analyzed in more detail with regard to foreign policy. For instance, a diplomat interviewed for the study pointed out the media's general importance: "So many negotiations are going on at the same time that you can't be involved in all of them. The press helps you keep informed about other negotiations that may affect what you are doing." (Davison 1974, p. 181) Other studies have shown that during international negotiations media sometimes where the first source for information or even the only available source (Gilboa 2002; O'Heffernan 1994). Moreover, it has been argued that especially political actors who are not involved in the legislation process like NGOs might use the media to monitor what is going on within the political arena (Cobb and Elder 1981; Cohen 1986; Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010). Thus, the next research question is interested in how

important media coverage is for politicians and other political actors to obtain political information on other actors in the political process.

Media as Political Arena

Of course, all organizations involved in the political process have an interest to work on media relations to receive favorable media coverage. For instance, in surveys with MPs from Sweden and the Netherlands a large part of politicians stated that they would "do anything to get media coverage" or that it is more important to receive media coverage than to work hard (Brants et al. 2009; Strömbäck 2011, pp. 433–434). But what exactly do politicians want to reach when the media report about them?

Addressing Citizens. There is no doubt that the media are the most important channel for political actors to reach citizens. Thus, political actors, especially politicians who have to be successful in personalized elections need to appear in the media to make citizens aware of their positions and achievement and to be able to legitimate their actions. A positive media reputation is an important resource for both governmental and non-governmental actors. For instance, the most important goals of German members of state parliaments' media relations are "explaining their political views", "making their political work public" and "increasing public awareness for themselves" (Marx 2009, p. 191). Several studies have shown that organizations make huge efforts to influence public opinion via mass media and how successful they are in spinning information in the desired way (McCright and Dunlap 2003; Oreskes and Conway 2010). However, we still do not know much about how important politicians and other political actors assess the media coverage for addressing citizens.

Addressing other political actors during the political process. Mass media can serve as a political arena comparable to other political arenas like the parliament. However, not much attention has been paid to this role of the media explicitly (see Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016); just a few qualitative case studies indicate that policymakers use the media strategically during the policy process (e.g. Bennett 1988; Cohen 1986; Cook 1989; Kingdon 1984). Taking a closer look at the individual stages of the policy cycle, we can see that the media are said to play different roles. The media are assessed as an important tool to influence the political agenda by agenda-building techniques, thus, to be of particular importance in the beginning of the political process (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999;

van Noije et al. 2008). The next research question will address this assumption: Do politicians and other political actors use the media to put their issues on the political agenda?

During the next step of policy-making—policy formulation—the media's role seems to change. Kingdon (1984) showed that while political actors go public when they want to influence the political agenda, they avoid publicity when aiming at influencing legislation. The reason for that is that they favor personal, non-public discussions with public administration, politicians and lobbyists (p. 94). In contrast, other studies indeed demonstrated that politicians use the mass media strategically during policy formulation. Davis (2003, p. 683) for instance, showed that politicians purposely fight "leadership battles" in the media to support their own political goals. In further qualitative studies, the interviewed politicians observed that participants of negotiations, especially in foreign policy, communicate via media with each other by, for instance, sending signals of their willingness to cooperate (Cobb and Elder 1981, p. 392; Davison 1974, p. 184; O'Heffernan 1994, pp. 236–237). Due to this supporting role, Gurevitch (1991) even described journalists as "international political brokers". The media can serve as a tool to influence other political arenas (Sellers 2009). Policymakers do admit that they leak secret information to journalists, for example to receive attention for an issue, to force the processing of an issue or to mobilize public support for it (Brants et al. 2009; Davis 2003; Linsky 1986; Sellers 2009; Spörer-Wagner and Marcinkowski 2010). Moreover, Wittkämper et al. (1986) showed in a quantitative survey in Germany that policymakers tried to involve journalists especially during policy-making to receive supporting media coverage to better legitimate their decisions.

Using the media as a policy instrument might be especially important for those actors with no direct political power. In Linsky's (1986) survey, policymakers agreed that political actors outside the government are able to increase their influence via media coverage. Accordingly, surveys with members of trade associations showed that the most important goal of their media relations—besides building up a positive image—is influencing the legislation process (Schütte 2010). With regard to NGOs, going public to influence policy-making is one of their key strategy, e.g. Greenpeace is well-known for their public campaigns to arrest attention to issues but also to influence policy-making (Lucht 2001). The next research question therefore asks whether politicians and other political actors try to influence policy-making via media coverage.

Methods

Method and Design

The literature review showed that there is no study yet that systematically analyzed both media functions for the diverse groups of political actors that are involved in policy-making. Thus, this paper aims at providing first insights in this matter. To analyze those actors that actually interact with each other and to be able to compare their perceptions, one policy area was selected. Being a very relevant policy area, where crucial long-term decisions are taken and a wide spectrum of policymakers is involved, energy policy served as a case.

The relevant actors were selected by a press database (European Energy Exchange AG 2009) and Brand and Corbach's (2005) analysis of the stakeholders in Energy policy. For each group of actors beside the Members of the Bundestag, public relations (PR)employees were also included to get a complete picture of media's functions for those organizations.

A quantitative survey of the following political actors was conducted in spring 2011. The executive and legislative actors included all members from the German Bundestag of the six committees that are concerned with energy issues ($n = 212$) as well as all six ministries that work in energy policy. Here, all directors of departments that were specialized in energy policy were chosen. This procedure was also applied to the government agencies. For both, ministries and agencies, one PR employee has also been considered ($n = 161$). The group of non-governmental actors comprised trade associations and NGOs dealing with energy and environmental issues. To identify them the list of the press database and the lobby list of the German Bundestag (associations and NGOs can register there voluntarily) were consulted. Per association one executive director and one PR employee was chosen randomly ($n = 249$; some associations didn't have a PR employee). Furthermore, all research institutes' directors listed in the press database were selected as well as one PR employee if present ($n = 110$).

Measures

Media Use. Political actors' intensity of media use was analyzed by asking respondents how often they use newspapers, radio, TV, online media and social media for professional purpose (5-point scale from "never" to "daily").

Media Work. In an open question, respondents were asked how much time they spend with media-related work such as "reading press reviews, write press releases, plan media strategies, giving interviews etc".

Media as Information Source. Respondents had to assess on a 5-point scale (1 = does not apply, 5 = fully applies) for which purposes they observe media coverage: one item with regard to citizens ("*to inform ourselves about the acceptance of our issues and projects among citizens*") and three items for the political process (e.g. "*to inform ourselves about the strategies and interests of other energy policy actors*").

Media as Political Arena. Respondents were asked to assess on a 5-point scale the goals of their media relations: two items with citizens as target group (e.g. "*to convince citizens of our activities*") and three items with regard to other political actors (e.g. "*to set our issues on the political agenda", "to influence the legislation*").

Response

The written questionnaire was sent out to 742 policymakers in April 2011; of those 262 responded (response rate 35.3%). This may appear a rather low rate but is similar or even better than other elite surveys in Germany (Kepplinger 2007; Pontzen 2006). Response rates were different for the five groups of actors: politicians (26%) and ministries (27%) answered less often than representatives of associations and NGO leaders (37%), civil servants (42%) and scientists in research institutes (43%).

Across the research questions, PR employees' and policymakers' perceptions did not differ significantly from each other ($p > 0.05$). Therefore, the following analysis will compare the main political group of actors: politicians and civil servants (ministries and departments) represent the political-administrative system. Trade associations, NGOs and scientists represent the non-governmental actors.

Results

This chapter starts from the assumption that the various actors in the political arena regularly use the mass media and work on their media relations which can be confirmed by the data. For professional purposes, most actors use newspapers (84%) and online media (63%) on a

daily basis, followed by radio (50%) and TV (47%). All respondents use at least one medium per day; every fourth (26%) follows daily news an all four outlet types. Politicians use the media most often, which especially holds for newspapers (95%). In 2011, when this survey was conducted, social media only played a minor role in political actors' media repertoire. Although the large part of parties or associations already had Facebook and Twitter accounts, the elite themselves did not follow them regularly. It was most likely politicians (33%) who used social media on a daily basis, only few association officers (14%), members of the administration (8%) and scientists (8%) did so.

Contemplating all media related work (beside media use this also includes contact to journalists, planning media strategies etc.) political actors state to spend more than one hour a day on such tasks (1.2 hours). On average, Members of the Bundestag even spend almost two hours (1.8), but civil servants (both 1.2) as well as scientists (1.0) are also concerned with media activities. In this case, PR staff differs significantly from all other actors. Not surprisingly, media relations take more time of their daily resources (4.2 hours).

Media as Information Source

Figure 13.1 depicts a first impression of the overall importance of the media's information function. It shows that the majority of respondents do perceive the media to be an important information source, especially to learn about what is going on in the political world.

Specifically, we were interested in how important the media are for receiving information on citizen's opinion for the different groups of political actors. Most of the respondents (61%) do observe media coverage to learn about citizens' acceptance of their own projects, i.e. they use media as a proxy for citizens' opinion. This holds not only true for politicians (68%), but also for the majority of civil servants (61%), associations and NGOs (60%) and research institutes (55%), which shows that the media are of similar importance for all four groups of actors ($F = 0.81$, $p = 0.492$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$).

Receiving news about political actors through media coverage is even more important for political actors. The majority of respondents (75%) monitor media coverage for information on the strategies of other political actors. This is most important for politicians (82%), researchers (82%) and associations officers (78%) but also for a large part of the
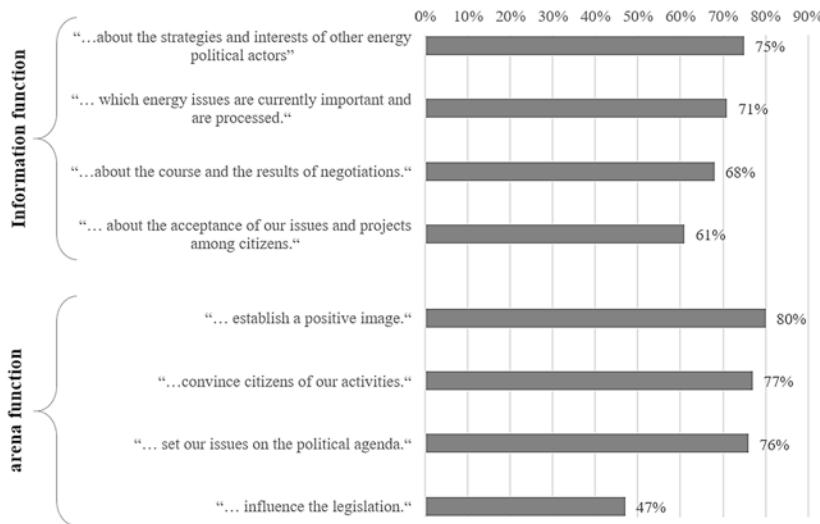
Fig. 13.1 Overall importance of the media's information and arena functions *Note* $N = 258–262$. 5-point scale: 1 = "does not apply", 5 = "fully applies"; Percentages summarize both approving scale digits (4 + 5)

administration (61%; $F = 4.08$, $p = 0.008$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$). Differences are larger when it comes to information about the current political agenda ($F = 11.64$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.12$). Media coverage is a more important source for non-governmental actors (research institutes: 90%; associations and NGOs: 80%) than politicians (52%) and civil servants (61%) to find out which issues are currently important and processed in politics. This holds also true for information on the course and results of negotiations. A clear majority of scientists (90%) and association officers (75%) use media coverage for this purpose. However, this also applies to civil servants (71%), while it is less important for politicians (36%; $F = 16.97$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.17$, see Table 13.1). Although most political actors use media coverage for some information on the political arena—48% observe it for all three reasons—in a general tendency, media seem to be a more important source for actors outside the political-administrative system.

Table 13.1 The media as information source

"[…] We observe media coverage to inform ourselves…"		Political-administrative system		Non-governmental actors		
		Politicians (n = 56)	Civil servants (n = 60–61)	Associations & NGOs officers (n = 93–96)	Researchers (n = 49)	Total (N = 258–262)
"…about the strategies and interests of other energy political actors"	(fully) applies	82%	61%	78%	82%	75%
	M (SD)[1]	4.0[a.b] (0.6)	3.6[a] (1.3)	4.1[b] (0.9)	4.0[a.b] (0.8)	3.9 (1.0)
"… which energy issues are currently important and are processed"	(fully) applies	52%	61%	80%	90%	71%
	M (SD)[2]	3.4[a] (1.1)	3.5[a] (1.3)	4.2[b] (1.0)	4.3[b] (0.8)	3.9 (1.1)
"…about the course and the results of negotiations"	(fully) applies	36%	71%	75%	90%	68%
	M (SD)[3]	3.0[a] (1.1)	3.7[b] (1.2)	4.0[b.c] (1.1)	4.3[c] (0.8)	3.8 (1.2)
"… about the acceptance of our issues and projects among citizens"	(fully) applies	68%	61%	60%	55%	61%
	M (SD)[4]	3.8[a] (0.9)	3.6[a] (1.2)	3.8[a] (1.0)	3.6[a] (1.1)	3.7 (1.0)

Note 5-point scale: 1 = "does not apply", 5 = "fully applies"; Percentages summarize both approving scale digits. Means with the same letter are not significantly different;[1] $F_{(3; 256)} = 4.08$, $p = 0.008$, $\eta^2 = 0.05$ (Games-Howell);[2] $F_{(3; 258)} = 11.64$, $p = <0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.12$ (Games-Howell);[3] $F_{(3; 258)} = 16.97$, $p = <0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.17$ (Scheffé);[4] $F_{(3; 258)} = 0.81$, $p = 0.492$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$ (Scheffé)

Media as Political Arena

For most political organizations and institutions, it is a matter of course to operate intensive PR work. The goals of this work can be regarded as the strategic use of the mass media as political arena. Figure 13.1 shows that aside from trying to influence legislation via media, the media also play an important role for the respondents as an arena.

First of all, media are indeed an important tool to reach the citizens. Most of respondents (80%) try to influence media coverage to build up a positive image; this applies to all groups of actors equally ($F = 1.42$, $p = 0.236$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$). It is similarly important for them to convince citizens of their work via media coverage (77%), however, this is slightly more central for actors from the political-administrative system (politicians: 95%; civil servants: 87%) than for non-governmental actors (research institutes: 75%; associations and NGOs: 63%; $F = 11.36$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.12$).

Which role do media play for influencing the political process? Considering agenda-building, political actors do try to get access to the media coverage to put their issues on the political agenda (76%). This holds mostly for politicians (88%), associations (78%) and research institutes (75%). But even civil servants say they do so, although to a lesser extent (62%; $F = 2.78$, $p = 0.042$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$).

Getting access to media coverage to influence legislation seems to be rather a tool of associations and NGOs (67%) but also half of the scientists (49%) and every third politicians (34%; $F = 10.09$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.11$) make use of it, while less civil servants (28%) name this as a goal of their media work (see Table 13.2).

DISCUSSION

This paper analyzed the functions that the media fulfill for politicians and other political actors involved in the political process. It thereby distinguished between two functions: the media as an information source and as a political arena. The importance that different types of actors attribute to the media for these functions was investigated both with regard to citizens and other political actors.

Based on a quantitative survey of German actors from *inside* and *outside* the political-administrative system in energy policy, the results show that the media play an important role in the every-day routine of political actors and the media thus fulfill relevant functions. First of all,

Table 13.2 The media as political arena

"If the media report on your goals and interests, what would you like to achieve? With our media work, we want to…"[#]		Political-administrative system		Non-governmental actors		
		Politicians (n = 55–56)	Civil servants (n = 60–61)	Associations & NGO officers (n = 95–96)	Researchers (n = 47–48)	Total (N = 258–261)
"… establish a positive image"[1]	(fully) applies	82%	85%	76%	79%	80%
	M	4.1[a]	4.3[a]	4.0[a]	4.2[a]	4.1
	(SD)	(0.7)	(0.8)	(1.0)	(1.0)	(0.9)
"…convince citizens of our activities"[2]	(fully) applies	95%	87%	63%	75%	77%
	M	4.6[a]	4.3[a,c]	3.7[b]	3.9[b,c]	4.1
	(SD)	(0.6)	(0.8)	(1.2)	(1.2)	(1.1)
"… set our issues on the political agenda"[3]	(fully) applies	88%	62%	78%	75%	76%
	M	4.3[b]	3.8[a]	4.1[a.b]	4.0[a.b]	4.1
	(SD)	(0.7)	(1.1)	(1.1)	(1.0)	(1.0)
"… influence the legislation"[4]	(fully) applies	34%	28%	67%	49%	47%
	M	3.1[a]	2.7[a]	3.8[b]	3.3[a.b]	3.3
	(SD)	(1.1)	(1.3)	(1.3)	(1.3)	(1.3)

Note [#] 5-point scale: 1 = "does not apply", 5 = "fully applies"; Percentages summarize both approving scale digits. Means with the same letter are not significantly different;[1] $F_{(3; 256)} = 1.42$, $p = 0.236$. $\eta^2 = 0.02$ (Scheffé);[2] $F_{(3; 257)} = 11.36$, $p = < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.12$ (Games-Howell);[3] $F_{(3; 257)} = 2.78$, $p = 0.042$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$ (Scheffé);[4] $F_{(3; 256)} = 10.09$, $p = < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.11$ (Scheffé)

despite their limited resources and their PR staff, the surveyed political actors spend, on average, one hour per day with media-related work. This already indicates how the media penetrate political every-day life. Moreover, this study confirms the important role of media as intermediary between citizens and political actors. From the respondents' perspective, the media serve as a proxy for public opinion as well as an important channel to reach citizens and inform them about the own political projects and goals. This does not only hold for politicians but also for the public administration and non-governmental actors that are not directly elected by the people but also want to get access to the media to inform

citizens about their projects and achievements. Against the background that these actors especially lobbyists usually work behind closed doors, this is a remarkable finding. Thus, not only politicians but also civil servants, lobbyists and energy scientists seem to put an intense effort in getting access to the media coverage, for instance to better legitimate their work to the citizens. This high importance of traditional media is also remarkable in times of direct communication possibilities between political actors and citizens, for instance via social media.

The results also showed that the media play a crucial role by connecting political actors to each other. Like citizens, political actors inform themselves in the media about what is going on in the political world. They follow media coverage to find out about other political actors' positions or the results of negotiations. This is significantly more important for non-governmental than for actors from inside the political-administrative system. Moreover, political actors also try to let other political actors know about their own strategies and to influence the political agenda and legislation processes via the media. This holds true even for governmental actors that are directly involved in policy-making. Thus, politicians and civil servants rely on the mass media as information source and as a policy instrument, although alternative information sources and instruments are at their disposal. They seem to purposely expand the political arena by the media arena to fight the daily political battle, to wield political power and to influence policy-making. This is not in line with previous results, both with regard to lobbyists and politicians who are said to avoid publicity during policy-making (Kingdon 1984; Reunanen et al. 2010; Sellers 2009).

When comparing both media functions, the results show that the arena function seems to be slightly more important for actors from inside the political-administrative system, while the information function plays a slightly more important role for non-governmental actors. Being directly involved in the policy-making process, politicians seem to have to rely less on the media when it comes to information on current political developments. Presumably, they have easier access to more reliable, direct sources than actors from outside politics. In contrast, they use the media similar often as a proxy for public opinion than the three other groups of political actors, which is rather astonishing as their career directly depends on citizens' votes. However, this dependence becomes more apparent within the arena function. Here, politicians are indeed keener to address citizens via media coverage than non-governmental

actors. Politicians also make use of the media more often for agenda-building strategies. This is interesting against the background that they actually are able to rely on direct means (e.g. in parliament) to put their issues on the political agenda.

All in all, these findings demonstrate that political actors cannot be regarded as "victims" of the media who intrigue the political arena as mediatization research sometimes assumes. Political actors themselves instrumentalize the media arena for genuine political reasons. They thereby exert power to the media whose media coverage, in turn, affects politics. As the media report according to their own rules and presentation criteria, the actual effects might differ from the effects intended by political actors themselves. The media arena does not stand for itself but is influenced by and impacts other political arenas (Hänggli and Kriesi 2010; Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013). This strategic use of the media is a clear reference of a self-mediatization of politics (Strömbäck and Esser 2014). It demonstrates that such a functional perspective of media-politics-relations can be a fruitful expansion to effect-oriented approaches.

The findings of this study need to be interpreted with caution for several reasons. First, this survey asked energy policy actors about the media's role in energy policy which is a very complex and conflictual policy. However, a similar importance of media as intermediary between political actors and citizens as well as the political arena itself could be assumed in other policy fields. Though, an empirical comparison of different policy domains would be interesting for future research. Moreover, this study only addressed the importance of the media's functions but did not analyze how successful political actors are in influencing media coverage. Do they manage to reach their goals and are they able to spin issues in a favorable way? It also did not ask about the importance of other information sources to put the importance of the media into perspective. Finally, the study did not analyze how political actors assess the information they retrieve from the media which can be factual information but also framed and slanted information (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). One can assume that political actors are aware of theses biases, but how do they take this into consideration when they inform themselves about political events or other political actors? Are they aware that other actors might adapt to media logic and therefore exaggerate or produce conflicts to get the media's attention? And, finally, how do political actors make use of this information in policy-making? Are policy decisions actually based on this information?

Overall, this study is an important contribution to the media-politics literature by providing empirical results on both the information and arena function of the media for a wide spectrum of political actors. Although it revealed some differences between politicians' and non-governmental actors' use of the media, it showed that the media fulfill significant functions for all groups of political actors respective their political goals and their daily struggle for political power: stay updated, set the political agenda, influence legislation or being re-elected.

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Elaborating and Specifying the Information & Arena Framework

Stefaan Walgrave and Peter Van Aelst

Much of the existing literature on media and politics focuses on the power struggle between journalists and political actors. That is understandable as their intense relationship is an essential aspect of the daily work of both political journalists and elected politicians. Furthermore, as Chap. 5 by Vliegenthart and Skovsgaard shows, politicians and journalists clearly have a different take on their mutual 'power' relationship. However, to better understand what the media actually mean for the struggle over 'who gets what, when and how', we argue that a focus on how and why political actors *use* the media is a more useful way to analyze the relationship between media and politics (see also Chap. 2 by Thesen). Relying on different methods—from interviews over surveys to content analyses—drawing on empirical evidence from a broad variety of a dozen different countries and looking at very different activities politicians undertake—from taking position in press releases over asking parliamentary questions to legislating—this book examines how political

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actors use the news media. Overall, the basic idea that the mass media have a double function for elected political actors gets ample support from the evidence. The mass media provide information to politicians, and they form an arena that politicians need to access.

Indeed, the book presents several important cases of how politicians use the media arena to further their political goals, such as the unexpected rise of David Cameron as the leader of the Conservative party in the UK (Chap. 9) and the nomination of Donald Trump as the presidential candidate of the Republican party in the US (Chap. 3). Also, the chapters of this book make clear that 'ordinary' politicians in diverse democracies such as Belgium, Canada and Israel use the media to learn what is going on in society (Chaps. 6, 7), and actively use this information in their parliamentary work (Chaps. 8, 12). Taken together, the chapters in this book make a strong case that the mass media indeed fulfill different (sub)functions for political actors and that the media perform the mixed role of provider of information and forming an arena for political struggle.

Simply establishing that these functions exist and that politicians use the media for their own goals was not the main aim of this book, though. Rather, our main goal is to elaborate the arena and information framework by doing two things. First, we set out to *theoretically* deepen and broaden the model by thinking through its scope and applicability, by specifying how we can conceptualize "political actors" and the media 'arena' more precisely. Second, the book also has an *empirical* ambition. In particular, we look for differences and variation among political actors in how they use the media. Which politicians employ the mass media to perform which function? In which political context does this happen more or less often? In a sense, we want to know whether a functional approach to mass media influence on politics tells us something about the distribution of power *among* political actors. In that respect we also aim to dig deeper in the precise information politicians use and the motives that lay behind their use of the media as a tool to reach political goals. Many chapters contribute to this goal as they find systematic differences between different politicians or provide more insight in why exactly politicians consume and interact with news media. In addressing the four questions we put forward in the introduction, we highlight some of the book's theoretical and empirical contributions to the information & arena framework.

Theoretical and Empirical Lessons

Should the Information and Arena Model Be Broadened and/or Refined?

Several chapters in this book address the fundamental or conceptual aspects of the information and arena model. In particular two central concepts of our model, 'media arena' and "political actors", have received in-depth attention.

First, related to the media arena, several chapters provide alternative, more developed conceptualizations of the *media arena*. In Chap. 4, Strömbäck and Esser discuss the functional role of the media for political parties in different political arenas. Following the classic work of Sjöblom (1968), they distinguish between an internal arena, a parliamentary arena and an electoral arena. In all these arenas, the strategic use of the news media by parties and their leaders is seen as important to reach their political goals. In particular in the electoral arena, where the main goal is to maximize votes, the media are seen as the crucial channels to build public support. However, next to this electoral (or public) arena, the authors suggest there is a partly overlapping media arena, in which parties want to "*maximize positive publicity, while the members are journalists and editors, i.e., those who have an influence over the news media coverage*". In other words, in the media arena parties try to influence the news makers, and build long term relationships with journalists, rather than directly target the public at large.

Although using a different terminology, Davis makes a similar distinction in Chap. 9. He argues that we should distinguish between the large *public arena*, where popular topics and politicians are discussed broadly and where widely read tabloids play a central role, from a much smaller *political arena*, where the main interactions are between political elites and political journalists and only a small higher-educated part of the public is watching. In addition, Davis identifies a third, *policy arena*, where policy makers operate largely outside the public eye, and journalists play a modest role as observers.

If we translate these insights to our notion of a single media arena, we acknowledge that it is probably useful to distinguish between a more "popular" and a more "elite" side of the media arena. Politicians want to

be both active in the elite side of the arena, trying to impress or convince the opinion makers and their colleagues. At the same time, they need, mainly for electoral reasons, to reach a larger audience in the popular or public side of the media arena. So, the media arena is not one, single arena but consists of a number of more or less segmented sub-arenas. We agree with Lawrence and Boydstun (Chap. 3) that the boundaries between especially the popular side of the (news) media arena and the entertainment sector have become increasingly porous; it has become harder to distinguish news from entertainment. For the US case, they argue that politically relevant information is increasingly provided in talk shows, infotainment programs and late-night comedy. Their implicit claim is that similar things are bound to happen in other media systems as well, and that in other countries as well the underlying end goal of all media—attracting public attention—and the pressure of social media will lead to similar evolutions where news and entertainment are becoming indistinguishable.

In addition, Lawrence and Boydstun suggest including celebrities and entertainers as *political actors* since they often also use the media to promote specific social issues or political views. This raises the question whether also political journalists can or should be conceived as a sort of political actors. Thesen (Chap. 2), extensively argues that the media are clearly distinct from other political actors, such as political parties, politicians or interest groups. "*Unlike for other political actors, political goals are not the primary goals of news organizations. The primary goal is professional and commercial: they make and sell news.*" Still Thesen labels journalists and news outlets as a specific sort of political actor. Not so much because they have ideological or partisan objectives (but see Brexit case; Chap. 9), but rather because they constantly intervene in the political sphere and have an impact on political processes and the behavior of other political actors.

Although we largely agree we the nuanced discussion by Thesen, we believe that for conceptual clarity it make more sense *not* to label the media as a political actor. Political actors in our view have explicit political goals, something the large majority of the news media in Western democracies have not. That being said, we acknowledge that the media is a (political) institution that works according to specific values and routines, and this institutionalized behavior has indeed a profound influence on how political actors operate. This view is supported by

the interviewed journalists in Chap. 5 by Vliegenthart & Skovsgaard. Journalists are well aware that they have a significant influence on politics, but clearly defuse the idea that this is the result of their own political agenda. The authors conclude that journalists are aware of their impact, but might underestimate their invisible, "omnipresent" influence on how politicians operate. That politicians perceive so much media influence, however, might not only be a consequence of an almighty press that forces them to react, but be as much a responsibility of pro-active, ambitious politicians that are constantly exploring the opportunities to use the media to their advantage.

What Motivates Politicians to Use the Media?

The arena and information model suggests that politicians use the media for different reasons and goes beyond the idea that politicians are only interested in news exposure for electoral reasons. What drives politicians need to use the news media? Sevenans, in Chap. 6, specifies the information function of the mass media and more in particular the active information function of the mass media. Based on a series of interviews with Belgian MPs, she shows that political actors use the media information because they want to affect policy, because they want to represent public opinion, to weaken an adversary, to elicit attention for their own person, and to increase their own policy effectiveness. Interestingly, getting into the media themselves is the reason politicians themselves mention most when asked why they reacted on media information. This shows how the information and arena functions of mass media are tightly connected. Active media information use, may lead to arena access. Sevenans also nicely disentangles the precise informative function of the mass media. The mass media can reveal new information to political actors, information they did not have before. More often, though, news media amplify existing information by making it more important and making actors act at a certain point in time. This "amplification effect" is also a core finding of Melenhorst & Van Aelst's Chap. 12 regarding legislative processes in the Netherlands. Legislators mainly *use* the information in the media to make their case stronger and to unarm adversaries. Using media information in external communication mostly signals the urgency and relevance of a problem. Both chapters also stress that politicians'

motivation to do something politically with the information from the media varies considerably. This will be further discussed when tackling question 4 below.

What Types of Information Matter Most?

The information and arena model suggests that the mass media function as an important source of information for political elites, but the current literature provides little knowledge on how pervasive the information function of the media really is, and what types of information matter most. Chap. 7 by Walgrave and colleagues clearly documents the *passive information* function of the mass media. When it comes to current affairs, politicians in three very different countries (Belgium, Canada and Israel) largely depend on the mass media to find out what is going on in society. When digging deeper in the types of information, a somewhat unexpected finding emerging from many of the chapters is that actors find the media more useful to learn about the political process itself than about societal problems and public opinion. It is remarkable to see to what extent political actors use the media to learn about themselves or, more precise, about the actions, plans or statements of competing political actors. Especially, Chap. 12 zooming in on the Dutch legislative process is rife with examples of how politicians say they use the media mainly to see what others are doing. Also Fawzi (Chap. 13) clearly illustrates that most policy-making elites she interviewed on the issue of energy policy find the mass media most useful when it comes to information about the policy process itself. Sevenans found the same in her interviews with Belgian legislators in Chap. 6. Of course, the media represents as well a measure of public opinion, but it is foremost a warning device that alerts elites about what other elites are up to. In a sense, the major role of the political information disseminated by the media leads to a kind of merger of the information and arena functions. Actor A wants to promote himself and his issue position towards the public and tries to enter the media *arena*. For actor B, the other actor's media performance represents a piece of *information*. So, in the sequential game of political actors entering and observing the media arena, the media present information to the receivers of political information while it is an arena for the senders of political information. For politicians, the most important reason to attend to and to enter the media is the political game itself.

How Do Politicians Differ in Their Use of the Information and Arena Function?

Although both the information and arena functions matter to some degree for all elected politicians, talking about *the* functions of the media for *the* politicians may not be a good idea. Based on previous studies, we suggested in Chap. 1 that the government-opposition divide might function as a crucial distinction. Several chapters confirm this. What gives a politician power more than anything else is being part of a government party and, even more, being a member of the cabinet itself. The media dependency study of Walgrave and colleagues (Chap. 7) shows that politicians belonging to government parties and occupying powerful positions are less dependent on the mass media. High-raking politicians have other sources of information besides the media, the government apparatus is working for them and is collecting information on their behalf. This is also confirmed for the UK case were Davis (Chap. 9) shows that none of the interviewed government ministers considers the media as a priority information source, and rather get their policy input from experts, officials, and all kind of lobbyists. Walgrave et al. also show that opposition actors depend more on the media than government actors which implies that the opposition uses media information more often.

The Dutch legislation study (Chap. 12) adds by establishing that, by the fact that media information is mainly negative and conflictual, it is more useful for opposition actors. But not only with regard to the information encapsulated in coverage but also with regard to the use of the media as an arena for political struggle, opposition actors seem to be more keen on gaining access to the media, the interviews with Dutch legislators suggest. The reason is that government MPs are bound by inter-party agreements. They are more powerful and have a bigger impact on the eventual law than opposition actors but they are not as free as opposition members are to use the media as they see fit by entering it and clarifying their own position and attacking that of the opponents. So, powerful actors, although more *capable* of entering the media due to their higher news value—any medium would be happy to give the floor to top politicians (see also Chap. 5)—are deliberately *restricting* their own use of the media arena. They consider media appearances as a risk that may imperil the successful passing of the law. It may jeopardize the delicate balance they have struck with other government parties and backfire.

That the power of government and opposition role of politicians is a relevant distinguisher of which politicians use the media for what, is also the main message of the Danish parliamentary question in Chap. 11. Based on a longitudinal design including several government terms, Green-Pedersen and colleagues suggest that government actors are more or less "forced" to enter the media arena to counter the negative news (planted in the media, or at least highlighted, by the opposition). The sequence they sketch goes as follows: bad news leads to the opposition reacting in the media using the media information to attack the government; as a consequence, members of the government enter the media to correct the negatively biased tone and trying, and succeeding, to temporarily reestablish a more neutral tone towards them and putting policy success and good performance in the spotlight. This finding is compatible with that in the Dutch legislation chapter in the sense that government actors, although capable of entering the media at any time, do not always wish to dominate the media arena unless they feel obliged to do so rebalance a negative news situation. Both chapters emphasize that government actors enter the media arena selectively, when they feel they have to correct a negative image.

In sum, several chapters confirm that the opposition-government divide, and the related power position of politician is a key factor explaining variation in media use. But it is not the only factor. First, multiple studies in this book refer to the notion of *specialization*, as an important mediator of media use by politicians. Chapter 7 of Walgrave and colleagues show that not only powerful politicians, but also specialized politicians, are less in need of media information. Due to their specialized network of information, media messages about their topic of specialization are less informative for them, and do not contain a lot new information. That *specialization* limits politicians' use of the media as a source of information, also strongly comes to the fore in Chap. 12 regarding legislative processes in the Netherlands. Based on an extensive and fine-grained reconstruction of the coming about of three laws in the Netherlands, this study makes it very clear that, with regard to the content of the bill and the problem it tackles, the mass media do hardly contain any new information for the specialized politicians who are working on a specific law or who are trying to prevent it from being passed. Other sources provide information that is much more tailored to the actual legislative process. There is some new information encapsulated in media coverage, though, with regard to public opinion and with regard to what other politicians are saying. That is why even specialized politicians do still monitor the media

closely. Most importantly, even if the degree of new substantive information they get from the media is very limited, these specialists do *use* the information in the media to make their case stronger and to unarm adversaries. Using media information in external communication mostly signals the urgency and relevance of a problem.

The comparative Chap. 10 by Dalmus, Hänggli & Bernhard as well further reinforces the idea that specialization may fundamentally affect a political actor's relationship with the media. In contrast to the previous two chapters that underpinned the role of specialization for *individual* actors, the study of Dalmus et al. does address the matter of specialization at the level of *collective* actors, in this case: political parties. They investigate what the topics are that are addressed by parties in their press releases. Press releases are attempts to gain access to the media agenda, they highlight the exact issues the parties want to promote their position on in the media arena. Drawing on evidence from four countries, the chapter finds that issues ownership is a significant driver of issue attention in press releases. In a sense, issue ownership is the party-level equivalent of specialization on the level of individual politicians. Parties own an issue if they consider this issue to be particularly important and are committed to it. In other words, when parties are owners of an issue they are 'specialized' in that issue. Dalmus and colleagues thus establish that the specialization of an actor in an issue, makes this actor more willing to enter the media arena with regard to that issue. The actor in question may not be learning a lot from the media, there may not be much information in the media coverage of the issue one is specialized in, but that does not prevent the political actor to be especially keen on talking about the issue in the media.

Apart from specialization and power, the functional use of the mass media appears to be influenced by *personal characteristics*. In Chap. 3 Lawrence and Boydstun argue that the media might be more important for the electoral success of celebrity politicians than of ordinary politicians. The exceptional case of Donald Trump suggests that this kind of politicians not only uses the arena function of the media more, but also the information function. Even as President Trump appears to frequently use the media as a source of information, as is shown by his many references to specific news outlets and programs. With regard to the active information function, Chap. 8 by Zoizner and colleagues must be mentioned. In an original study in Israel bringing in individual-level variables that moderate the agenda-setting effect of the media—the effect of media information on the topics Israeli politicians address

in parliament—this chapter examines whether individual factors such as personal attitudes have an impact on responsiveness to media information. The strictly individual *role definitions* politicians adopt, in this case: whether they think of themselves as representing their party or public opinion, has a significant effect on whether media information is actively used in parliament.

So, media use is not only a matter of structural factors such as specialization and power but also of subjective and personal attributes of individual politicians. Finally, we find some prove that the *real world* matters as well. The comparative press release Chap. 10 by Dalmus et al. underpins the importance of what happens in reality. If something dramatic happens—a scandal, a disaster, a terrorist attack—political actors react and want to show the public that they care, and that they have the best solution to fix the problem. They vie to enter the media arena to do so. In operational terms, the study shows that focusing events significantly trigger attempts of parties to address the issue in the media. In other words, the way political actors use the mass media does not only differ across actors' structural features and their personal features, it also varies *over time* depending on real world events.

Looking at politicians' differential use of the mass media as a source of information or as a political arena shows that the mass media do indeed perform both functions but that the contingency of the process is enormous. Yes, information and arena matter for politicians but not always or for every political actor to the same extend. Using a functional approach to dig deeper into the role of the media for political actors as most chapters in this book have done, leads to a complex picture of how political elites use the media. There is variation at different levels and there are a lot of moving parts. It seems too early to formulate generic claims about which actors use the mass media with what purpose at what time. The functional framework seems promising; the chapters in this book show that it can produce a nuanced and rich account of the relationship between politics and media.

A Research Agenda for Media & Politics

In discussing the answers to the four questions put forward in the introduction it is clear this book made a significant contribution to the literature. However, at the same time many other issues have been hardly toughed upon or the insights so far are very premature. Therefore in this

last part we suggest four additional questions that require additional scholarly attention. We believe all four can be seen as paths or challenges for further study that could contribute to the media and politics literature and improve the usefulness of the information and arena model.

How Do System Characteristics Influence the Role the Media Plays for Politicians?

In line with a more general complaint often heard with regard to the state of the discipline of political communication more broadly, studies that deal with the relationship between media and politics at the elite level are seldom truly comparative (but see Van Dalen and Van Aelst 2014; Vliegenthart and Mena Montes 2014). Also this book does not tell us a lot about how political system differences affect how politicians go about using the media to pursue their goals. Sure, there were chapters that presented comparative evidence. Vliegenthart & Skovsgaard's Chap. 5 on politicians and journalists' perceptions of media power, for instance, drew on evidence from Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. Chap. 7 on media dependency presented evidence from Belgium, Canada and Israel. And, Dalmus and colleagues' Chap. 10 presented comparative evidence about France, Germany, UK and Switzerland. But none of these chapters really examined country differences. Even on the contrary, in these three chapters the countries were just used to generate more observations and to test the robustness of the findings. In that sense, although presenting comparative evidence, the logic of these chapters was not really comparative. So, what is severely lacking is an account of how political system differences affect the way political actors use the news.

Still, some of the non-comparative chapters in the book implicitly suggest that specific country characteristics are at play. For instance, Chap. 12 about Dutch legislation emphasized how government MPs' freedom to engage with the media and to enter the media arena to promote themselves and especially their or their party's point of view with regard to a piece of legislation under scrutiny was severely hampered by interparty agreements in the coalition government. This opens the floor to opposition MPs to fill the void and to use the media as a forum to convey their anti-government stances. Obviously, such constraints on government MPs to use the media arena are much less in place in countries with majoritarian systems and one-party governments.

Chapter 3 about the shifting borders between entertainment and news in the US, draws attention to the differences across media systems. Maybe more than anywhere else, the US offer an example of blurring boundaries between news and entertainment media, for example testified by an increasing predominance of entertainment values in news programs and a decreasing and fragmented news market. Such a situation offers plenty of opportunities for entertaining politicians or for political entertainers to leverage the media arena, be it in news or in pure entertainment shows, to gain political popularity. In many European countries, the borders between entertainment and news have not become so porous (yet), and it is still harder to imagine that a person mainly known from entertainment TV would use the media to make it to being the leading politician. So, not only the political system affects how political actors use the media, also the media system is a country may deeply influence the opportunities (would be) politicians get to sell themselves and their points of view.

A similar, implicitly comparative lesson may be drawn from Chap. 12 about Danish questioning. These authors conclusion that the government enters the media arena to counteract negative news (fueled by the opposition) is conditioned by the type of media at stake. The chapter is based on data from the Danish public radio, a media outlet known for its objective and non-biased reporting and for the absence of partisan bias. The possibility of political actors to enter the media arena essentially depends on media outlets willing to let a certain actors pass the gates. In systems in which news media tend to become more biased along partisan lines, access to the news media may not only be determined by the power of the actors at stake, but also by the match between a political actor's ideological leaning and the partisan preferences of the medium in question.

In sum, we believe that there two ways forward: truly comparative studies that compare how politicians use the media in different systems, or country studies that more explicitly discuss their findings in a broader perspective.

Are Politicians Different Than Other Political Actors in Using the Media?

The chapters in this book corroborate the idea that politicians use the media for information and as an arena and there are differences between politicians and through time in how intense and for what

politicians make use of the media. The question arises whether politicians are any different from other elites in their interaction with the media. Maybe the chapters just point to how elites more *generally* use the media and there is no difference between elected politicians and other public officials. Fawzi's Chap. 13 directly contradict this idea. Based on a survey among policy elites involved in German energy policy making, she highlights that elected politicians are more intense and different users of the media. Compared to, for instance, civil servants, NGO leaders, and interest group representatives, elected politicians are more keen media users, they are more active social media users, they spent more time on media work (e.g. writing press releases), they use the media more as a source of information about public opinion, and they use the media more as a way to promote their solution to problems and to affect the political agenda. Fawzi concludes that for elected politicians, the arena function of the mass media is more important than their information function, while the opposite applies to outsider political actors, such as NGO personnel and interest group leaders; for them the information function prevails.

Clearly there seem to be something special to the relationship between elected politicians and the news media that does not apply to other actors that are involved in policy making process. We believe future studies could use the information and arena framework to study how other political actors use the media to reach their goals, and if possible, compare their behavior with elected politicians.

How Do New Media Affect the Information and Arena Function of the Mass Media?

This book focused exclusively on the role of the mass media, and the traditional news media in particular. This raises of course the question whether these insights hold in an ever more digital media environment where social media play an ever more central role in how people consume news. Although, we lack a clear answer at this point, we strongly believe that the social media boom can be studied from an information and arena perspective. Although many studies show that new media are to a large extent an echo-chamber of the classic news media (e.g. Boczkowski 2010), and that in most Western democracies a majority of the public still consumes most of its political news via the traditional media (Shehata and Strömbäck 2014), it is stimulating to think

about how the new media might fit into the information and arena model proposed in this book. Social media form a source of information for politicians, for example because experts and opinion leaders are active on Twitter. This may make the traditional news media less vital as a source of information for politicians. Problems, public opinion, and information about other actors directly reach politicians, without mediation by the traditional news media. The arena function of the traditional news media as well may be affected by the social media revolution (e.g. Jungherr 2014). Politicians may be able to bypass the traditional news and to communicate with the public, or at least with the most engaged and niche segments of it, in a more direct way without having to compete with their adversaries or negotiate with news makers. In sum, we argue that social media can be studied from the same integrated perspective and, maybe more interestingly, that the social media boom has affected political actors' dependency on the traditional media for information and arena purposes.

How Does the Information and Arena Model Relate to Existing Media and Politics Theories?

We believe there is a possibility to connect the information and arena framework of how politicians use the media more explicitly with existing theories on media and politics. Multiple chapters in this book linked their study with the literature on the mediatization of politics and political agenda-setting. Although both theories focus initially on the influence of the media on political actors, the evidence presented in this book pushes scholars to devote more attention to the opposite side of the relationship. If politicians follow the issues in the news (agenda-setting), or adapt to the rules of the media logic (mediatization), the following question should be how and why do they do so? And what are the consequences for the distribution of power among different political players? (see also Chap. 2 by Thesen). We hope that the information and arena model can serve as a source of inspiration for scholars that use medialization and political agenda-setting and provide a more complete view on the media-politics relationship. At the same time, our model on how political actors use the media might benefit from insights from literature on political public relations and strategic news management as suggested by Strömbäck and Esser (Chap. 4).

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