

Enduring Gender Bias in Reporting on Political Elite Positions: Media Coverage of Female MPs in Belgian News Broadcasts (2003–2011)

The International Journal of Press/Politics
2015, Vol. 20(4) 395–414
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1940161215596730
ijpp.sagepub.com



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Abstract

In Belgium, like in numerous other democracies, the representation of women in parliament has risen sharply in recent decades, partly because of gender quota legislation. This rapid evolution implies that traditional notions on the presence of gender bias in media reporting need to be re-assessed. Relying on data from more than six thousand full newscasts, we examine the allotted speaking time to members of parliament (MPs) from 2003 until 2011 in the two main television news broadcasts in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. Multilevel regression analyses were conducted to determine which factors influence the probability and volume of television news coverage of MPs. The results indicate that—even controlling for alternative explanations—news media persist in a biased treatment of female MPs: Female MPs are significantly less likely to be allotted speaking time, and they receive less speaking time than their male colleagues. Moreover, results show that this gap in media coverage is present especially for elite and thus newsworthy positions. Apparently, gender bias in the media persists, even when the political system evolves rapidly toward equal representation.

Keywords

descriptive representation, gender bias, news media, Belgium, television news, multilevel analysis, media bias theory

In Western liberal democracies, one can observe a trend toward a stronger descriptive representation of women in politics (Childs and Krook 2009). It has not

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been investigated systematically, however, whether this trend also erodes the pattern of gender bias that is traditionally present in the news media (De Swert and Hooghe 2010). Content analysis in the past has shown repeatedly that there is a systematic bias in the way female and male politicians are being portrayed in the media, both in terms of the volume and the substance of the media coverage (Kahn 1994; Ross et al. 2013). A theoretically relevant question is therefore whether the rise in the proportion of female seats in parliament has had an effect on the coverage female members of parliament (MPs) receive in news media. In this article, we aim to assess this question drawing upon unique longitudinal data covering more than six thousand full television news broadcasts from Belgium, permitting us to investigate patterns over time. In contrast to earlier studies, we do not rely on a sample of broadcasts, but we include all news broadcasts that have been aired during this nine-year observation period. Do female politicians still receive significantly less media coverage than male politicians, while controlling for other alternative explanations that impact newsworthiness of politicians? Is there a trend toward more equal media coverage as female participation in parliament is on the rise? The rapid rise of women in political elite positions in Belgium allows us to investigate whether media bias is reduced when women gain access to more political power.

The outline of the paper is as follows. First, we focus on gender bias research in the media, before we introduce the Belgian case and our data and methods. Finally, the implications of our findings are discussed and suggestions are made for further research.

Gender Bias and Stereotypes in the Media

Historically, women have struggled to obtain suffrage and parliaments were traditionally dominated by male representatives, but even in the current era, female politicians are often subject to processes of gender stereotyping (Fox and Oxley 2003; Lawless 2004; Ramirez et al. 1997; Ross et al. 2013). Braden (1996) has stated that female politicians often face stereotypical questions on womanhood in the media and are described according to traditional gender roles. Research has identified several causal mechanisms that may account for the lack of female representation in politics. Many studies indeed point to the persistence of traditional gender stereotypes and roles, which highlight the perceived incompatibility of traditional female gender roles with pursuing a political career (Fox and Oxley 2003; Lawless 2004).

Furthermore, gender bias in media coverage too might serve as an obstacle to female representation in politics. Media bias theory suggests that the media “play an integral role in the campaign by framing, shaping, ignoring or presenting the candidates to the public” (Falk 2008: 2). The media would treat female and male politicians differently and this would be unfavorable for female politicians (Ross et al. 2013). As previous studies on agenda setting have shown, voters rely heavily on the media for information on politics, with a result that voting behavior can be strongly influenced by media messages (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). If the media report on female politicians in a biased manner, this may lead the electorate to internalize these messages.

Lack of media coverage for female politicians may reinforce public perceptions about politics as a dominantly male profession. Moreover, the volume of media attention has an important positive effect on the future career of politicians. Less media coverage thus may inhibit female politicians' opportunities to pursue a successful political career. Another reason why equal media coverage is important lies in the fact that the visibility of positive role models is crucial to motivate women in aspiring a political career (Atkeson 2003; Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007).

The possible presence of gender bias in media reporting on politics has been the topic of numerous studies (Aday and Devitt 2001; Bystrom et al. 2001; Heldman et al. 2000; Kahn 1994; Wasburn and Wasburn 2011). Generally, two patterns can be distinguished. First, there is a difference between female and male politicians in terms of the *volume* of media coverage they receive. Second, also the *substance* of the media coverage would greatly diverge.

First, with regard to the volume of media coverage, Kahn's (1994) content analysis in *The Distorted Mirror* demonstrated how women running for office in the United States systematically received less media coverage than men. It has to be noted, however, that efforts to replicate these findings have delivered mixed results (Atkeson and Krebs 2008; Robertson et al. 2002; Smith 1997). More recent studies even found high-profile candidates to receive more media coverage than their male counterparts (Wasburn and Wasburn 2011).

Second, the *substance* of media coverage, too, is subject to persistent gender bias (Kahn 1994). A number of studies have found that the representation of female politicians focused more on physical appearance and personal life (Bystrom et al. 2001; Falk 2008; Ross et al. 2013) and less on issues and political ideas, reducing the ability of women to present themselves as viable candidates (Aday and Devitt 2001). Media often stress the novelty of women running for office as well. In addition, it has been shown that female politicians were more frequently linked with issues such as social policy, than with topics such as foreign policy or finance (Bystrom et al. 2001).

In this study, we will mainly focus on the volume of media coverage, and there are three reasons to take this step. First, agenda-setting theory and research allows us to assume that especially the volume of media attention will have an effect on the way female politicians are perceived by future voters. Second, a focus on volume allows us to fully exploit the vast data set, containing more than six thousand news broadcasts. Third, volume is highly reliable indicator, as registering the length of a news items involves fewer decisions than efforts to analyze the substance of media coverage.

The Rise of Women in Belgian Parliament

Historically, numerous studies have documented a low presence of female politicians in media reports. However, if in reality too women are underrepresented in politics, this does not imply media bias, as the low level of visibility is an adequate representation of reality. In the recent era, however, female participation in elected politics has risen sharply, and this offers a unique opportunity to assess whether there is indeed a persistent media bias. Whereas in 1997, women only made up 13.8 percent of all MPs

in Europe, this proportion steadily increased to 25.3 percent in April 2015 (Interparliamentary Union [IPU] 2015). Assuming news media reflect trends in society, we would expect that female MPs are more visible in the media as well.

Belgium offers an interesting case study because the country started as a “laggard” with regard to equal representation but now is considered to be a leader on gender equality (Meier 2012). In general, Belgium has received a ranking in the top ten of the Gender Inequality Index, which is an indicator of equal rights and opportunities for women (United Nations Development Program [UNDP] 2015). Belgium lagged behind for a long time: The percentage of women in the Belgian federal parliament remained very low until the beginning of the 1990s (Meier 2012). However, from 1994 onward, this changed rapidly. Belgium was one of the first European countries to adopt gender quota legislation, and the country became a pioneer in implementing gender quota legislation for political assemblies, an example which has been followed by other countries. These initiatives have resulted in a steady increase of female MPs in both the Chamber of Representatives and the regional assemblies. In the Flemish regional parliament, for instance, the number of women in parliament almost doubled from 23 percent in 2003 to 39 percent in 2011. Due to this historically unprecedented rise, Belgium offers an ideal setting to investigate whether a stronger representation of female politicians reduces gender bias in media reporting: Within the same political and media system, the proportion of female MP changes dramatically across the observation period.

The Current Study

In this paper, we address the possible persistence of a gender bias in the media using evidence from the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium, that is, Flanders. Our study contributes to the available knowledge on this topic in several ways. First, past evidence has often been mixed and most of the studies are based on evidence from the United States or other Anglo-Saxon contexts (Aday and Devitt 2001; Atkeson and Krebs 2008; Bystrom et al. 2001; Heldman et al. 2005; Smith 1997). Second, the focus of previous work was almost entirely upon election campaigns and more specifically on races for high prestigious and mediatized offices (Aday and Devitt 2001; Heldman et al. 2005; Wasburn and Wasburn 2011). Although investigating coverage of media campaigns is crucial, media attention for politicians in nonelectoral settings has been less frequently examined. Long-lasting media exposure of female MPs and politicians can, however, be expected to have a profound socialization impact on the electorate. Third, studies on gender bias tend to be narrowly focused on a politician’s sex as only possible explanation. Few studies systematically investigate the presence of gender bias in media coverage controlling for alternative explanations that could account for differences in media attention. Our study will therefore take into account the effect of other background characteristics. Fourth, past studies rely on data resulting from small samples of several weeks. This study, however, uses a data set that covers every occasion an MP received speaking time on the two most important television news broadcasts in the Flemish region of Belgium from 2003 to 2011. As we include data from

more than six thousand news broadcasts, we can be confident that our findings are not due to variations in small samples. Finally, our data cover a nine-year period that permits us to investigate evolutions over time. In line with the literature review, we formulate two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: There is a gender bias in the volume of media coverage for female MPs in television news broadcasts, controlling for relevant characteristics and real-life data.

Hypothesis 2: There is a trend toward a more equal balance in the amount of media coverage for female MPs in television news broadcasts over time.

Data and Method

To determine whether gender bias is persistent, we will rely on evidence from Flanders, the Dutch-speaking region in Belgium. Belgium is a federal state with a bicameral system, with the Chamber of Representatives (the Lower House) and the Senate (the Upper House). In both legislative bodies, members either belong to the Dutch or French linguistic group (Deschouwer 2009). A special feature of the Belgian federation is that the country has two completely distinct media systems. The Dutch language community in the North of the country has its own television and radio stations and its own newspapers, and the reverse goes for the French language community (Hooghe et al. 2007). For this reason, we only consider the media system of one language group, the Dutch language community. Within this media system, we analyze television news coverage for the national Chamber of Representatives and the Flemish regional parliament. As we only analyzed Flemish news media, we only included the Dutch-speaking MPs for the Chamber of Representatives.

We rely on data collected by the Electronic News Archive (ENA) (www.nieuwsarchief.be). This is one of the largest digital news archives available for scientific research: Since 2003, the major evening news broadcasts of the Flemish public broadcasting corporation, VRT, and of the main commercial corporation, VTM, are archived, coded, and analyzed (ENA 2013). A special feature of the ENA archive is that it includes all news broadcasts and does not rely on a selection. Both newscasts attract large audiences every evening (CIM TV 2011). In 2011, the average market share for the public broadcasting corporation amounted to 33.4 percent. The commercial station had a market share of 20.2 percent.

For every news item, we have information on name, language, function, sex, and speaking time of the depicted actor. Coding of the items was conducted by a team of professional coders that received extensive training by the academic staff of ENA (De Swert and Hooghe 2010). The intercoder reliability of the data was assessed on a regular basis. For the coding of actors and speaking time, the Krippendorff's alpha coefficients were respectively 0.82 and 0.98 and for the coding of the political function the Krippendorff's alpha was 0.98 (De Smedt et al. 2013). The attribution of variables such as gender, age, and specific elite positions was done by relying on official parliamentary records.

The volume of media coverage was operationalized as the seconds speaking time the MPs received in the six thousand news broadcasts. The unit of observation is an MP in a parliamentary term in a specific function. The logic behind this approach is that the amount of media attention for an MP depends on the specific characteristics that define the MP at a certain point in time. If during one term, for example, a MP first is an ordinary MP, subsequently becomes a party president, and a year later Speaker of the House, these are three different observations, because every time this person acquires a new defining characteristic that will have an impact on her/his media exposure. We opted to include political position, parliamentary term, and membership of a majority or opposition party in our definition of a "distinct observation." Hence, every time a change occurred for an MP for one of the characteristics taken into account, we constructed a new unit of observation for that person. This means that it is possible that one person appears several times in the data set. This is the case when an MP is serving or has served more than one term and within or between terms accumulated other political positions and/or went from opposition to majority, or vice versa. Politicians that were MPs during the period of analysis, but did not appear in the analyzed newscasts at all, are included in the data set as well, thus reflecting the actual composition of parliament. They were attributed a "zero" on the dependent variable "allotted speaking time." The different observations nested within MPs on different points in time make that there is dependency in our data, resulting in a multilevel structure (Hox 2010). We will therefore adopt a two-level approach, by considering the different observations nested within a person as the first level, and the person as the second level (see Appendix A).

The data set contains information about 493 individual MPs, each of whom belonged to at least one of the parliaments during the period of observation. One hundred eighty of these 493 MPs, or 36.6 percent, did not receive any speaking time at all. Together the MPs accumulated 143,404 seconds of speaking time on both newscasts, that is, almost 40 hours of speaking time. Following the approach that we already described, these 493 persons led to the creation of 1,011 units of observation, each representing an MP with unique characteristics within a single term in office. Of these 1,011 observations, 421 or 41.6 percent refer to MPs that did not receive any speaking time, whereas the remaining 590 units or 58.4 percent correspond with MPs that were granted at least one second of speaking time in the analyzed news broadcasts during that specific observation period.

In the next paragraphs, we will first present descriptive data to test whether the allotted speaking time for female MPs is in proportion with their actual representation in parliament. Subsequently, we will try to evaluate the hypotheses systematically. The descriptive data made clear that a large proportion of MPs did not receive any speaking time, and this means that almost half of all our observations take the value of "0." This skewed distribution forces us to adopt two different methods of analysis. We will first determine why some MPs receive speaking time and others do not. As the dependent variable "speaking time or not" is a binary outcome, multilevel logistic regression will be used. Subsequently, and only for the units of observation with speaking time, we explain which factors influence the volume of speaking time, using a multilevel

linear regression. The dependent variable for this second regression is the number of seconds an MP was allowed to speak. Although this approach might seem cumbersome, it allows us to differentiate two distinct forms of media bias. First, it allows us to investigate when MPs do not receive any speaking time at all, and second, we can ascertain whether the number of seconds a politician receives for a news quote is shorter than one would expect.¹

Operationalization of the Variables

Dependent Variables

For the multilevel logistic regression, the dependent variable is binary: Is an MP allotted speaking time or not? For the multilevel linear regression, the units of observation without speaking time are not included. Here the dependent variable is the number of seconds an MP is allowed to speak. The average speaking time was 243.1 seconds over the entire nine-year observation period for every MP with speaking time.

Independent Variables

As we want to determine whether a gender bias is present in the television news, an MP's sex is the main independent variable (0 = *man*, 1 = *woman*). In the entire sample ($N = 1,011$), used for the logistic regression, 32.0 percent of the units of observation that received speaking time are female, 68.0 percent are male. For the multilevel linear regression sample, in which cases with a "zero" on speaking time are excluded ($N = 590$), female MPs represent 28.5 percent of the observations and male MPs 71.5 percent. As this variable does not vary between the observations, it is measured on the second, individual level. All other variables were measured at the first level, as they vary over the different observations.

Next, we collected information about the age of the MPs, which will be used as a control variable. Previous literature suggests that age effects play differently for women than for men (Bligh et al. 2012). While for men age and assumed experience can be a positive characteristic, apparently this is less the case for women. For all politicians, however, age is an important control variable as research suggests that younger politicians receive more media coverage than older politicians (Midtbø 2011). We operationalized this variable by selecting the age of the MP at the end of his or her function. When the MP was still in parliament on December 31, 2011 (i.e., the final date in the data set), we included his or her age at this moment to guarantee comparability. The youngest member is 24 years old, the oldest 79.

The third group of independent variables concerns so-called "position variables." Every actor in the sample is an MP, but some occupy other positions as well, which may explain why those members receive more television news coverage. This is in line with previous literature that has focused upon the concentration of media coverage by holders of elite positions (Midtbø 2011). Some MPs are more newsworthy than others because of the prestige they derive from their political position (Heffernan

2006; Schaffner and Sellers 2003). The general evidence states that media attention rises along with the prestige of the political position. We opted to include the following elite positions: (former) party president (1 = *yes*), former government minister, Speaker of the House, and (former) chairperson of the parliamentary party. To arrive at a general measurement of elite positions, we constructed a grouping variable called “holder of an elite position,” encompassing every MP that held at least one of the positions mentioned. The data show that, with regard to these elite positions, the gender balance is not equal. Female politicians only occupy 13.4 percent of these elite positions in the national Chamber of Representatives and 28.7 percent in the Flemish parliament for the entire period 2003 until 2011, which is lower than the overall percentage of female MPs in both parliaments. Appendix B includes more detailed descriptive statistics.

The experience of an MP is also a characteristic that has been found to influence the amount of media attention (Elmelund-Præstekær et al. 2011; Van Aelst et al. 2010). More experienced MPs receive more media coverage, because they have access to more resources and inside information that journalists consider valuable. We operationalized this variable by counting—at the start of each position, and hence observation—the number of days the MP has been represented in the parliament he or she currently is a member of. This ranges from zero days, referring to a political novice without parliamentary experience to 14,095 days, referring to a political veteran who has been a MP for over 40 years. To enhance the interpretability of this variable, we divided the number of days by 365.

We collected information about the fact whether the MP is a majority or opposition member (0 = *opposition*, 1 = *majority*) because past literature has indicated an impact of this characteristic on the newsworthiness of MPs (Schaffner and Sellers 2003; Schoenbach et al. 2001). Opposition MPs make up 46.1 percent of the observations, 53.9 percent refer to majority party members. We also included a control variable containing information about the parliament the MP is a member of (0 = Flemish regional parliament, 1 = Chamber of Representatives). The distribution was 51.7 percent for the Flemish parliament and 48.3 percent for the Chamber.

Finally, to investigate how media coverage has evolved over time, we constructed a variable referring to the parliamentary term in which the MP is active. For the national Chamber of Representatives, the period of observation overlaps with four terms: 1999–2003, 2003–2007, 2007–2010, and 2010–2014.² For the Flemish parliament, which is renewed every five years, we have three terms: 1999–2003, 2004–2009, and 2009–2014. We took the corresponding terms for the Chamber and Flemish parliament together, resulting in four terms.³

Results

Female MPs and Media Coverage

First, we explore the bivariate relationship between the proportion of female MPs and the amount of speaking time they receive. Figure 1 demonstrates the rise of women in both the national and regional parliament. To improve the comparability of the rise in

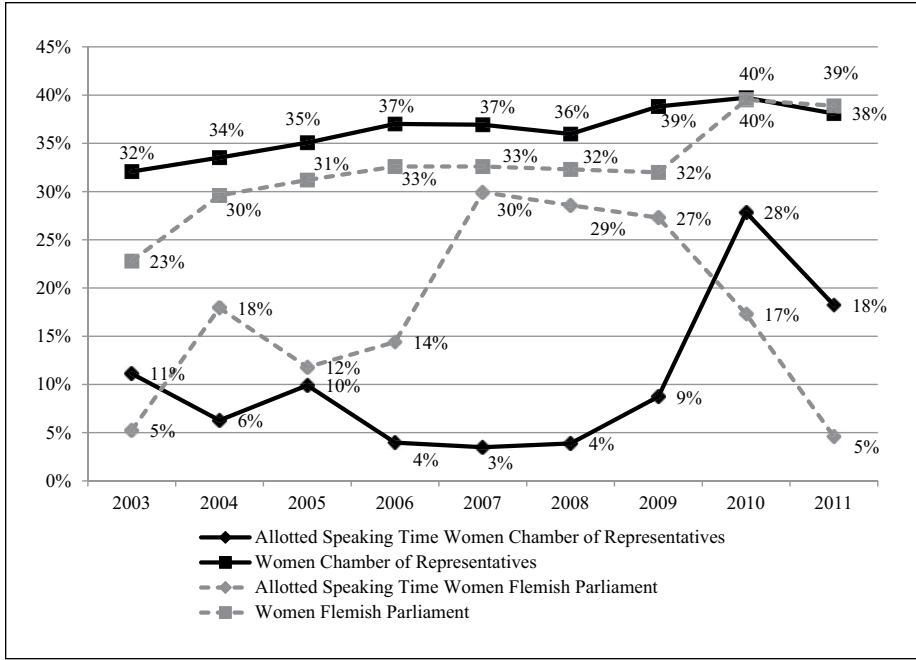


Figure 1. Trends in descriptive representation of women in parliament versus allotted speaking time.

Source: Chamber of Representatives (www.dekamer.be), Flemish parliament (www.vlaamsparlement.be), Electronic News Archive (www.dekamer.be).

female MPs with the volume of speaking time (which we analyzed for Flemish MPs), we only included Flemish MPs in the graph as well. In 2003, approximately one out of three MPs (32 percent) in the Chamber was a woman. This percentage of female MPs has grown over the years, and in 2011, women made up almost 40 percent of the MPs in the Chamber. This ranks Belgium worldwide at a sixteenth place for gender balance in parliament (IPU 2015). As for the Flemish parliament, the graph shows that women made up less than one-quarter of the MPs (23 percent) in 2003 and this almost doubled to 39 percent in 2011.

Figure 1 plots this rise in female MPs together with the allotted speaking time of female MPs during the same time period. For the Chamber, there is a large gap in the years until 2009. Even while occupying 30 percent of the seats in parliament, women did never receive more than 10 percent of the allotted speaking time. In 2010, we note a considerable rise in the percentage of speaking time for female MPs. This is mostly accounted for by the fact that the female leader of the Flemish Socialist Party joined the Chamber in that year. In October 2011, she was replaced by a male successor, which helps to explain the decrease in speaking time for women that year. It is clear that at no point in time the volume of media attention is in proportion with the number

of female MPs. Even at the highest point, women only obtained 28 percent of the speaking time, while occupying 42 percent of the parliamentary seats in the Chamber. In the Flemish parliament, media attention is slightly more in proportion with the actual women's share in seats, certainly in the years 2007 until 2009. The trend, however, is not stable: In 2011, the percentage of speaking time is even lower than in 2003, producing the largest gap since 2003. This drop in media attention is mainly due to the absence of female chairpersons in the Flemish parliament since 2008, as all female chairpersons were replaced by male counterparts.

This bivariate analysis already sheds light on the second hypothesis: There does seem to be a persistent gender bias in the Belgian television news. The graph, however, does not control for alternative explanations yet. In the next paragraph, the possible presence of a gender bias in Belgian newscasts will therefore be investigated in a more systematic manner.

Explaining the Probability and Amount of Media Coverage of MPs

Multilevel logistic regression. By conducting a multilevel logistic regression, we aim to determine which factors impact the probability that an MP will be allowed speaking time or not. For this analysis, we considered the total sample ($N = 1,011$). We can derive that 590 cases (58.4 percent) represent actors that were allowed speaking time, whereas 421 (41.6 percent) observations refer to actors without speaking time. Model 0 (Table 1) represents the intercept-only model. This model shows the variance at the second, individual level, and the model fit when no independent variables are included. Model 1 includes the independent variables at both the first and second level.

The results in Model 1 indicate that female MPs are significantly less likely to receive speaking time. Age has a small but significant impact: Younger politicians are slightly more likely to be granted speaking time. The strongest and most significant predictor, however, is being holder of an elite position. Experience does not influence the probability of speaking time and neither does the variable with regard to majority or opposition. With regard to parliamentary term, we observe that MPs were significantly more likely to receive speaking time in the second and third term than in the first term. Finally, we note that members of the national legislative body are more likely to receive speaking time than regional MPs.

As far as the probability to be allotted speaking time is concerned, we can conclude that Model 1 suggests that a gender bias is still present. Only 38.6 percent of the male MPs is not allotted any speaking time compared with 48.1 percent of the female MPs. Occupying an elite position, however, is the most powerful predictor as mainly MPs with elite positions dominate the television news.⁴

In addition, we tested cross-level interactions⁵: Most notably, it is necessary to assess whether over time there is an evolution toward a more equal media attention for female MPs. None of the cross-level interactions were significant, and they were therefore not included in Table 1. We can conclude therefore that there is no evolution toward more speaking time for female MPs over time.

Table 1. Explaining the Probability to Be Allotted Speaking Time.

	Model 0	Model 1
Intercept	0.260 (0.070)***	-0.292 (0.519)
Level 1: Observation		
Age		-0.024 (0.010)*
Holder of elite position (1 = yes)		1.600 (0.239)***
Experience		0.027 (0.018)
Majority/opposition (1 = majority)		0.251 (0.156)
Terms (ref. = Term 1)		
Term 2		0.703 (0.202)***
Term 3		0.704 (0.213)**
Term 4		0.155 (0.294)
Parliament (1 = Chamber)		0.603 (0.176)**
Level 2: individual		
Sex (1 = woman)		-0.455 (0.183)*
Variance	1.663	0.564
-2 log likelihood	-666.231	-612.246

Note. Entries are the result of a multilevel logistic regression using maximum likelihood estimation.

Dependent variable: Speaking Time—Yes or No. N (Level 1) = 1,011, N (Level 2) = 493.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Multilevel linear regression analysis. For the multilevel linear regression analysis, we included only the 590 observations of MPs that received speaking time (Table 2). The dependent variable is the number of seconds the MP was speaking in the television news, ranging from 2 to 10,421 seconds. As the variable did not have a normal distribution, we calculated the logarithm and used the transformed variable in the analysis. We can derive that female MPs received a total of 19,356 seconds (5.4 hours) of speaking time, while male MPs accumulated almost five times as much speaking time, that is, 124,048 seconds (34.6 hours). In percentages, this means that male MPs received 86.5 percent of the total speaking time. More detailed descriptive statistics can be found in Appendix B.

Model 0 represents the intercept-only model in which the variance is split into two components: the variance between observations within individuals (“within group variance”) and the variance between individuals (“between group variance”). There is substantially more variance between the individuals, than between observations within individuals. We can now calculate the intraclass correlation (ICC) of the intercept-only model, that is, the expected correlation between the observations on the dependent variable of two randomly chosen units in the same group. The ICC shows that 33.2 percent of the variation can be explained by individual-level characteristics, whereas 66.8 percent can be explained by first-level variables. In Model 1, we add the independent variables both at the first and second level, while the cross-level interactions are included in Model 2.

Table 2. Explaining the Volume of Speaking Time.

	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2
Intercept	4.177 (0.069)***	3.776 (0.367)***	3.749 (0.367)***
Level 1: Observation			
Age		-0.004 (0.007)	-0.005 (0.007)
Holder of elite position (1 = Yes)		1.282 (0.126)***	1.514 (0.142)***
Experience		-0.007 (0.011)	-0.008 (0.011)
Majority/opposition (1 = majority)		-0.159 (0.105)	-0.179 (0.104)
Term (Ref. = Term 1)			
Term 2		0.562 (0.140)***	0.576 (0.138)***
Term 3		0.140 (0.145)	0.142 (0.143)
Term 4		0.129 (0.194)	0.121 (0.192)
Parliament (1 = Chamber)		0.465 (0.117)***	0.421 (0.117)***
Level 2: Individual			
Sex (1 = woman)		-0.426 (0.129)**	-0.188 (0.144)
Cross-level interaction			
Sex × Holder of elite position			-0.986 (0.271)***
Variance (Level 1)	0.647	0.275	0.306
Variance (Level 2)	1.302	1.187	1.135
ICC	33.2%	18.8%	21.2%
-2 log likelihood	-1,101.555	-941.635	-935.199

Note. Entries are the result of a multilevel linear regression using maximum likelihood estimation. Dependent variable: allotted speaking time of members of parliament. Dependent variable was log transformed. N (Level 1) = 590, N (Level 2) = 308. ICC = intraclass correlation.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Model 1 largely confirms expectations. The results indicate that an MP's sex exerts a strong influence on the volume of speaking time: Female MPs receive significantly less time. Evidence is thus conclusive on the first hypothesis: a gender bias in television news media remains present. The assumption that mostly MPs occupying elite positions receive speaking time finds support as well.⁶ MPs in the second parliamentary term received more speaking time, but other terms were not significant. Experience and belonging to the majority or opposition are not significant, and neither is age. Finally, MPs from the federal Chamber receive more media coverage than MPs of the regional parliament.

In summary, both analyses reveal that television news does not reflect the evolution toward more descriptive representation of women in parliament. Male MPs are not only more likely to be allowed speaking time, but they also receive systematically significant more media coverage. We also test cross-level interactions in Model 2. The only cross-level interaction term that is significant is the interaction between "holder of an elite position" and "sex."⁷ Model 2 explains 52.7 percent of the first-level variance and 12.8 percent of the second, individual-level variance. Adding the cross-level

interaction term reveals that the mechanisms of gender bias that are at play are even stronger than previous research would lead us to believe. The interaction term indicates that even when women occupy elite positions, they receive less time in the news than men. The observed difference therefore will not simply disappear when female MPs acquire elite positions. While we here group all positions together, it can be observed that even when we look at identical functions (e.g., Speaker, President of a large party), this gender difference is still present. We can observe that a male holder of an elite position, on average, is allotted 485.1 seconds of speaking time, whereas a female holder of an elite position is allotted only 203.6 seconds.

We also tested other possible relevant interaction terms, but as they were not significant, we did not include them in Table 2. The interaction terms between “sex” and “term” failed to reach significance, which disconfirms Hypothesis 2: There is no evolution over time toward more speaking time for female MPs.

Discussion

This article investigated the presence of a gender bias in the media in Belgium, a country that has witnessed an impressive growth in the descriptive representation of female politicians in parliament. Relying on six thousand full news broadcasts from a nine-year period from 2003 until 2011, we systematically assessed which factors were important in determining both the probability and amount of media attention. The results were clear: News media continue to have a biased treatment of male and female MPs. The volume of media coverage for female MPs was not in proportion with their actual share in parliament, nor did the analysis show an evolution toward more proportional media attention. Female MPs are significantly less likely to be allotted speaking time than their male colleagues. Once speaking time is granted, female MPs receive less time.

The analysis thus revealed that a persistent gender bias continues to exist in the television news. This contradicts our hypothesis that gender bias would weaken when women succeed in accumulating more political power. The analysis, however, provides conclusive evidence that this is not the case. The most important finding of the article lies in the cross-level interaction effect between “sex” and “holder of an elite position.” The evidence does not support the assumption that increasing the proportion of women in elite positions will automatically result in more proportional media coverage in at least two ways. First, the analysis made clear that female MPs have a smaller probability to be granted speaking time and receive less media coverage. Second, adding the interaction term in the multilevel linear regression revealed another mechanism of gender bias: the differential treatment holds *especially* for women in more newsworthy elite positions. The interaction effect proved to be highly significant and strong. A female politician, exerting exactly the same function as her male colleague, is treated differently by the television news. It is important here to point out that this difference cannot be explained by the fact that women would never reach the most important political positions. An example can illustrate this finding. Ms. Marleen Vanderpoorten was Speaker of the Flemish parliament from July 2006 until June 2009.

She received 385 seconds of speaking time in the news broadcasts during the period she held this position. Mr. Jan Peumans, the current male Speaker of that parliament, succeeded her in July 2009. He obtained 608 seconds speaking time from July 2009 until December 2011, which is about three times as much for every year in office as his female predecessor. In summary, we can be confident that a real gender bias is present in the television news, and this bias becomes even stronger when women obtain elite positions. We think the most important contribution of the current finding lies in the establishment of gender bias for female holders of elite positions. Holding an elite position initially overrules gender bias, as in practice female party presidents cannot be ignored by journalists. But subsequently, when we investigate the *volume* of media attention, we do observe a clear gender bias. This implies that gender bias mechanisms tend to be very stubborn. Even in a country like Belgium, that scores very high on UNDP's Gender Equality Index, this bias is still clearly present, and we can therefore assume that this will also be the case in countries that are far less successful in achieving gender equality. Gender bias seems to operate in subtle ways, by, for example, allowing for longer quotes (i.e., more seconds) for men than for women. This suggests that to determine whether there is a gender bias between holders of an elite position, one should go into more detail and look at discrepancies in the amount of media coverage. Future studies may therefore want to replicate current findings, maybe in other institutional contexts, or over a longer period of time.

That female MPs are faced with a persistent gender bias in the media may have important implications, most notably for their own careers, but also in terms of the electorate. First, media attention is very important for MPs as they need to attract attention to their parliamentary work to get re-elected. Lack of media coverage can thus have a detrimental impact of female politicians' careers. Second, on the long term, a gender bias in media coverage for MPs may also hinder future recruitment and mobilization of female politicians, as visibility in the media is a crucial mechanism in stimulating young women to aspire political ambitions (Wolbrecht and Campbell 2007). Finally, mass media are highly instrumental in shaping public perceptions, and a lack of media attention for female politicians may stimulate beliefs that the democratic system is not open to everyone. Mass media operate within a democratic system, and therefore it could be expected that the media should adapt to new social realities, like increasing gender equality. In this regard, our study provides conclusive evidence showing the persistence of gender bias.

The finding that a gender bias is present in reporting on elite positions raises new questions for future in-depth-investigation. What mechanisms help us to explain the persistence of gender bias? On a speculative note, it might be that persistent stereotypical beliefs about female politicians held by newsmakers offer an explanation for the underrepresentation of female MPs. Gidengil and Everitt (2000) have focused on the impact of "gendered mediation." They argue that the political realm is still a largely masculine domain, and that the media tend to reinforce these male norms and values by framing political news from this dominant masculine perspective. Female politicians' behavior would be perceived as deviating from the prevalent norms in political behavior, such as confrontation and competition. To make things worse, confrontational and aggressive

behavior by female politicians may be negatively evaluated because it does not live up to the usually cultivated image of women. Another explanation may be that women themselves participate less actively in politics. In Belgium, however, we know from parliamentary records that male and female politicians participate equally. To address whether these mechanisms play a role, a more detailed content analysis is needed to assess how female leaders are portrayed, and whether this portrayal differs from the way male politicians are represented. Moreover, future studies should also include interviews with reports and media directors, to disentangle the underlying mechanisms. Some evidence of interviews conducted in the Belgian context suggests that some journalists perceive diversity and news as incompatible, and that the question whom one reports about is less important than the topic. Journalists suggest that they work with fixed contact lists, which may hinder contacting female politicians as network access is biased. It is quite clear, therefore, that despite official policies on diversity, in the media organization itself, journalists might lack motivation to reflect diversity in their news items. In any case, it is clear that gender bias within news media is a persistent phenomenon, and rather than alleviating the phenomenon, the rise of powerful female politicians might even lead to the introduction of new and stronger forms of gender bias.

Appendix A

Structure of the Data set for MPs.

Obs. No.	Obs. Name	Person	Term	Function	Age	Experience	On News?	Seconds
1	Marleen Vanderpoorten I	Marleen Vanderpoorten	2	MP Majority	52	4.15	yes	138
2	Marleen Vanderpoorten II	Marleen Vanderpoorten	2	Speaker Majority	55	6.23	yes	385
3	Marleen Vanderpoorten III	Marleen Vanderpoorten	3	Speaker Majority	55	9.13	no	0
4	Marleen Vanderpoorten IV	Marleen Vanderpoorten	3	MP Opposition	57	9.23	yes	45

Appendix B

Descriptives

Total Sample (N = 1,011).

	Minimum	Maximum	M
Sex (1 = woman)	0	1	0.32
Age	24	79	47.62

(continued)

Appendix B (continued)

	Minimum	Maximum	M
Experience	0	14,095	1,629.68
Speaker of the House (1 = yes)	0	1	0.01
Party president (1 = yes)	0	1	0.04
Former party president (1 = yes)	0	1	0.03
Chairperson of party (1 = yes)	0	1	0.08
Former chairperson of party (1 = yes)	0	1	0.04
Former government minister (1 = yes)	0	1	0.14
Holder of elite position (1 = yes)	0	1	0.25
Majority/opposition (1 = majority)	0	1	0.54
Parliament (1 = Chamber)	0	1	0.48
Term 1	0	1	0.23
Term 2	0	1	0.35
Term 3	0	1	0.30
Term 4	0	1	0.12

Restricted Sample (N = 590).

	Minimum	Maximum	M
Sex (1 = woman)	0	1	0.28
Age	24	74	47.43
Experience (years)	0	38.62	4.47
Speaker of the house (1 = yes)	0	1	0.02
Party president (1 = yes)	0	1	0.07
Former party president (1 = yes)	0	1	0.05
Chairperson of party (1 = yes)	0	1	0.12
Former chairperson of party (1 = yes)	0	1	0.06
Former government minister (1 = yes)	0	1	0.19
Holder of elite position (1 = yes)	0	1	0.36
Majority/opposition (1 = majority)	0	1	0.57
Parliament (1 = Chamber)	0	1	0.53
Term 1	0	1	0.18
Term 2	0	1	0.37
Term 3	0	1	0.33
Term 4	0	1	0.12

Gender Balance for Elite Positions 2003–2011.

Chamber of Representatives.

Position	Chamber		Flemish Parliament	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Speaker of the house	0.0%	100.0%	33.3%	66.7%
Party president	8.3%	91.7%	30.0%	70.0%
Former party president	12.5%	87.5%	27.3%	72.7%
Chairperson of party	18.2%	81.8%	15.4%	84.6%
Former chairperson of party	10.0%	90.0%	27.3%	72.7%
Former government minister	14.8%	85.2%	39.4%	60.6%
Holder of elite position (Total)	13.4%	86.6%	28.7%	71.3%

Speaking Time MPs—Holder of an Elite Position 2003–2011.

	Percentage
MP (No Elite Position)	24.8
Holder of Elite Position	75.2

Speaking Time MPs—Gender Balance and Holder of an Elite Position 2003–2011.

	Percentage Speaking Time— MPs (No Elite Position)	Percentage Speaking Time— Holder of an Elite Position
Man	75.9	90.0
Woman	24.1	10.0

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors gratefully acknowledge financial support from the European Research Council, ERC Advanced Grant ‘Linkage’, 295920.

Notes

1. An alternative method would be to use a zero-inflated negative binomial model. While this kind of analyses addresses the skewed distribution of the data and leads to roughly the same results, it fails to make a crucial distinction between receiving no media attention at all and receiving shorter quotes.

2. The Chamber was dissolved in 2010 and snap elections were held in June 2010, explaining the three-year 2007–2010 term.
3. As the problem does remain that the terms of the two parliaments do not entirely overlap, we also conducted the same analysis separately for the regional and the federal parliament, and this does not lead to different results.
4. We also included the different function variables separately. The results indicated that the variable “party president” was the most significant predictor of the probability to be allotted speaking time, followed by “former party president,” “chairperson of party,” and “former government minister.”
5. We tested interaction terms between “sex” and “holder of an elite position,” “sex” and “experience,” “sex” and “term,” “sex” and “age,” “age” and “experience,” “age” and “majority,” “holder of an elite position” and “age,” “holder of an elite position” and “experience.” They were not significant.
6. Including the function variables separately made clear that “party president” had the largest impact on speaking time, followed by “speaker of the house” and “chairperson of party.” “Former party president,” “former government minister,” and “former chairperson of party” proved to be not significant.
7. We tested interaction terms between “sex and experience,” “sex and term,” “sex and age,” “age” and “experience,” “age and majority,” “holder of an elite position” and “age,” “holder of an elite position” and “experience.” They were not significant.

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Shades of Mediatization: Components of Media Logic in German and Austrian Elite Newspapers (1949–2009)

The International Journal of Press/Politics
2015, Vol. 20(4) 415–437
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1940161215595944
ijpp.sagepub.com



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Abstract

This study investigates mediatization of campaign coverage of German and Austrian elite newspapers from 1949 to 2009. With a cross-national perspective on a sixty-year time span, it is well suited to examine the long-term development of mediatization. It focuses on news media logic and its components that have not been satisfyingly investigated by empirical research yet. In Step 1, the study empirically identifies three components of media logic: partisanship, personalization, and detachment from policy. In Step 2, it presents evidence that these components are largely invariant between the two countries, seven newspapers, and four time intervals investigated, pointing to the institutional nature of media logic. In Step 3, it shows that the components have developed erratically over time, which contests the idea of mediatization as an incessant, general process. Altogether, the results call for a more nuanced picture of mediatization and a systematic examination of factors interrupting, reverting, or accelerating its long-term development.

Keywords

Austria, campaign coverage, comparative research, content analysis, Germany, longitudinal analysis, media logic, mediatization

Introduction

In recent years, mediatization has become one of the most debated theoretical concepts in political communication research. In an institutionalist tradition, many scholars

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describe it as a long-term dynamic process in the course of which the mass media gain influence within the society as a whole and its subsystems (e.g., Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Strömbäck 2008). This is notably true for politics: Political actors, institutions, and organizations rely on communicating through the media and therefore adapt to the media's immanent rules for "formatting" their content—the media logic (Strömbäck and Esser 2014). Media logic, first defined by Altheide and Snow (1979: 10) as "the process through which media present and transmit information," guides whether and how events, issues, and actors are reported on (Takens 2013). Even though it has been pivotal for the relation between politics and media from the start, many scholars assume that it has become more important over the last decades, particularly in Western democracies.

Despite the large body of literature on mediatization, however, the field still lacks a widely accepted definition (Jensen 2013), which is at the root of several other shortcomings: Even though media logic is widely described as a multidimensional concept comprising several indicators (e.g., Esser 2013), its components and their interrelations broadly remain to be investigated yet (Takens et al. 2013). Moreover, there are remarkably few longitudinal studies on mediatization (Deacon and Staney 2014), several of them showing at best a partial increase of media logic (e.g., Takens et al. 2013; Zeh and Hopmann 2013). Thus, it is still unclear to what degree the assumptions of increasing mediatization apply to Western democracies under different structural conditions—also because systematic cross-national investigations of mediatization are lacking (Deacon and Staney 2014; for exceptions, see Umbricht and Esser 2014; Zeh and Hopmann 2013).

This study—one of the first cross-national comparison over six decades—addresses these research gaps. It compares the coverage of seven German and Austrian elite newspapers on all thirty-six national election campaigns from 1949 through 2009. Both countries have quite similar political and media systems diverging in only few respects (most similar systems design), which allows for testing the influence of these differing structural conditions on media logic. The article first focuses on mediatization and media logic from a theoretical perspective. Based on this, it derives research questions and hypotheses, articulates methods, and presents the results. The study reveals three components of media logic whose erratic long-term development contests the idea of mediatization as an incessant, general process. Finally, the study's limitations and its implications for future research are discussed. Altogether, it calls for a more nuanced picture of mediatization and a systematic examination of factors interrupting, conversing, or accelerating its long-term development.

Conceptualizing Mediatization of Politics and Media Logic

In his prominent conceptualization, Strömbäck (2008) analytically splits mediatization of politics into four dimensions each of which is described as a continuum: (1) The first dimension comprises the most important *sources of information* on politics, oscillating between interpersonal communication and the mass media. (2) The second dimension includes the degree of *media autonomy*, ranging from full dependence to

full independence from political institutions. (3) The third (*media practices*) and (4) fourth (*political practices*) dimensions concern the question of whether media coverage and political actors, respectively, are mainly governed by political logic or media logic. All four dimensions are highly interrelated. The degree of mediatization is a function of where between the two poles a case (e.g., a country at a point in time) is located. The more important the media are as information sources, the more independent they are of political institutions, and the more media coverage and political actors are governed by media logic, the more mediatized politics is. As mediatization is too complex to be investigated in its entirety, the current analysis focuses on media practices and thus the importance of media logic in media coverage.

Mediatization is strongly driven by media logic (Mazzoleni 2008), understood as the way of organizing, presenting, and emphasizing news (Altheide and Snow 1979). As this definition is ambiguous and neglects the complexity of media logic (Strömbäck and Esser 2014), Strömbäck (2011: 373) more narrowly defines news media logic as “the institutional, technological, and sociological characteristics of the news media, including their format characteristics, production and dissemination routines, norms, and needs, standards of newsworthiness, and to the formal and informal rules that govern news media.” When speaking of media logic, the current study subscribes to this definition.

Media logic shapes both news selection and news presentation: First, media primarily select news that fit well into their patterns of presentation and interpretation with news values as pivotal selection criteria. Second, the selected news are adapted to the media logic in form and content (Altheide and Snow 1979). Just as mediatization, media logic can be considered a multidimensional concept (Strömbäck and Esser 2014). It fundamentally differs from the immanent rules of politics that guide political activities and policy-making processes—the political logic that comprises (1) the institutional framework and structural aspects (polity), (2) political processes (politics), and (3) substantial, factual issues (policy). Esser (2013) identifies three ideal-typical aspects of media logic:

1. *Professional aspects* concern the orientation toward journalistic norms and rules. They gain in importance to the extent that media become more independent from external (particularly political) influences, are guided by the public interest rather than particular interests (e.g., those of particular political parties; see also Brants and van Praag 2006), and develop specific professional norms (e.g., news values). Professional aspects are reflected in media coverage by indicators such as more balanced and more interpretative, analytical reporting (e.g., articles composed of own words rather than politicians’ citations).
2. *Commercial aspects* refer to the economic forces promoting media logic and are in some respects contradictory to the professional aspects. As the media successfully rid themselves of direct political influences and politically motivated funding, they become more dependent on commercial imperatives and hence on the audience’s attention to sell their media products (Udris and Lucht 2014), for example, through personalization, negativity, and visualization.

3. *Technological aspects* describe the specifics of media logic in different media types, attributable to the different technological affordances—for instance, the predominant role of text in print media and the audiovisual nature of television.

The differentiation between professional and commercial aspects reflects the dual nature of media logic combining a normative and a market-driven perspective (Asp 2014). This explains why essentially professional and commercial indicators in some cases overlap and cannot always clearly be assigned (Esser 2013). However, these aspects of media logic, their interrelations, and the way they are influenced by the framework conditions have hardly been established by empirical research yet. This study, thus, addresses the following research question:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): Which components of media logic can be identified in German and Austrian campaign coverage empirically?

Several scholars, taking an institutionalist perspective, assume that media logic—that is, how political coverage would look like if the media acted independently from the political system—is similar across countries, media outlets, and points in time. In the same vein, some assume that the level of mediatization—that is, the degree to which media coverage mirrors media logic versus political logic—develops similarly across countries, media outlets, and over time (e.g., Asp 2014; Strömbäck and Esser 2014). A comparison of various outlets in the Netherlands between 1998 and 2010 supports these assumptions (Takens et al. 2013). However, media logic is not said to be “cast in stone and fully consistent across time, countries, or . . . media institutions within countries” (Strömbäck and Esser 2014: 247). Esser (2013: 167) rather speaks of “different shades of media logic.” Some other authors, however, contest the concept of media logic as a single institution in general (e.g., Jensen 2013; Schulz 2014).

The current study focuses on one media type in two countries with very similar political and media systems (Magin 2012): Germany and Austria are classified as consensus democracies (Lijphart 1999) and as countries with a democratic-corporatist media system (Hallin and Mancini 2004). These strong similarities lead to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The components of media logic do not differ between (a) Germany and Austria, (b) different newspapers, and (c) different time periods under study.

A confirmation of these hypotheses could, certainly, only be taken as a first evidence in support of an overarching (and possibly transnational) media logic and would not allow for generalizing inferences about media logic in more different countries or outlets. But to put it differently, if media logic differs significantly even between quite similar countries and outlets, the existence of an overarching media logic is called into question in general.

Mediatization and Media Logic in a Long-Term Perspective

Several scholars assume that the degree of mediatization and the importance of media logic have increased over time, particularly in Western democracies after World War II (e.g., Brants and van Praag 2006; Farrell 1996). In the course of an idealized mediatization process, the political system first adapts to and finally adopts media logic and thereby becomes more prone to media's influences (Strömbäck 2008). However, although the relationship between politics and media undoubtedly changes over time, few cases will ever conform to the ideal type of a completely mediatized political system. Media logic will hardly ever dominate political logic by all means (van Aelst et al. 2008), and it is unlikely that mediatization will progress uniformly, linearly, and independent of structural and situational circumstances (Esser 2013). Several authors suppose that structural influences can at least periodically accelerate, interrupt, or even reverse the mediatization process (e.g., Brants and van Praag 2006; Strömbäck 2008). It is, however, still unclear what these influences are and how exactly they affect mediatization as they have been insufficiently analyzed yet (Deacon and Stanyer 2014; Livingstone 2009). For example, the introduction and diffusion of technological innovations (e.g., television) are often described as key events, but it is unclear whether they raise the importance of media logic abruptly (Farrell 1996) or gradually (Jensen 2013), temporarily, or lastingly.

This ambiguity stems from the fact that mediatization theory is far from being empirically saturated: "Much mediatization research depends on a presumption rather than a demonstration of historical change, projecting backwards from contemporary case studies rather than carefully designed temporal comparisons" (Deacon and Stanyer 2014: 1037). The few existing long-term analyses arrive at mixed results that only partly support mediatization theory. For instance, Zeh and Hopmann (2013) and Takens et al. (2013) point to a deceleration and even a decline of mediatization for Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands since the 1990s, suggesting that mediatization might have reached its peak. Umbricht (2014: 25) shows a straightforward "transformation towards a more commercial logic" in British, American, and Italian newspapers, but gets ambiguous results in Switzerland and finds no upward trends in German newspapers from 1960 to 2007.

Germany and Austria have faced several substantial changes during the last decades that—starting from mediatization theory—should have increased the significance of media logic. These changes are associated with far-reaching changes of societal values (Inglehart and Welzel 2005), affecting both the political and the media systems and resulting in increased competition for recipients' as well as voters' attention. Concerning politics, voters are less and less aligned to political parties that can less and less count on traditional voters and therefore compete to persuade the increasing number of free-floating voters (Dalton and Wattenberg 2002). Consequently, if they want to reach the electorate, they depend on the media and have to adapt to their rules—the media logic. This adaptation has become even more urgent due to the media's "secularization": Over time, the media have detached from

the political actors organizationally and ideologically and are hence less prone to political influences (Udris and Lucht 2014).

The media's selection and processing of news have always been guided by the intention to attract the audience's attention. Nevertheless, the decreasing press-party parallelism has strengthened the media's economic motives and their effort to gain and retain the attention of the largest possible audience rather than maintain and address an ideologically homogeneous audience (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Udris and Lucht 2014). In turn, the media's professionalization, their orientation toward commercial maxims, and hence the significance of media logic grow (Strömbäck 2008; Takens 2013). This process can be conceptualized as a self-reinforcing spiral (Slater 2007): By orienting their coverage toward media logic, the media shape the recipients' future expectations of media coverage, that is, they adjust the audience's expectations to their current version of media logic and must thereby adapt to media logic themselves even more strongly (Altheide 2004).

However, even though Germany and Austria are structurally similar in many respects, they still differ in some others that—according to theory—would lead to different patterns of progression of mediatization in either country. Both political systems differ in one particular respect that also shapes the media systems: During the first decades after World War II, socio-cultural cleavages were more salient and more consequential in Austria. Just like other culturally fragmented countries, it evolved into a consociational democracy—a type of liberal democracy similar to consensus democracy in many respects but different in the primary mode of conflict resolution: They establish a “non-competitive pattern of conflict management” (Lehmbruch 1974: 90) to ensure the stability of democracy. The cleavages between two “Lager” (“camps”) shaped the Austrian party system (the Austrian People's Party represented the Catholic “Lager” and the Socialist respectively Social Democratic Party represented the socialist-secular “Lager”) as well as the media system very strongly. As a result, political parallelism between the political and the media system and along with it the media's dependence on political institutions was much higher in Austria after World War II (Udris and Lucht 2014). Even though consociationalism has been decreasing in the course of the “value change” (Luther and Müller 1992), it remains an influence on the campaign coverage of Austrian newspapers to date (Magin 2012) and may have led to a lower significance of media logic compared with Germany.

Mediatization might, moreover, be structurally influenced by contradictory competition pressures on the media markets: On one hand, press concentration is much stronger and has rapidly grown in Austria since the 1960s, particularly caused by the dominant tabloids, while it remained mostly constant in Germany (Magin 2012). These pressures may have led to a stronger influence of media logic in Austrian elite newspapers. On the other hand, commercial TV has been introduced earlier in Germany (1984) compared with Austria (beginning of the twenty-first century), rapidly gained in importance, and is still somewhat more influential than in Austria (Magin and Stark 2015). As commercial television is assumed to promote mediatization, this points to a

stronger influence of media logic in Germany. The second research question aims at clarifying the structural influences on mediatization:

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How has the importance of media logic in the campaign coverage of German and Austrian elite newspapers developed from 1949 to 2009?

Method

Sample

To answer the research questions and test the hypotheses, a quantitative content analysis of the campaign coverage of German and Austrian daily national newspapers is conducted. It includes coverage on all thirty-six national election campaigns (seventeen Bundestag elections in Germany, nineteen Nationalrat elections in Austria) from 1949 to 2009, drawing on data from two longitudinal studies on campaign coverage that are directly comparable with the greatest possible extent (Germany: Reinemann and Wilke 2007; Wilke and Leidecker 2010; Wilke and Reinemann 2001; Austria: Seethaler and Melischek 2014). As the Austrian sample only contained the campaigns from 1966 to 2006, the coverage of the Austrian campaigns from 1949 to 1962 was coded additionally.

To ensure cross-national comparability of data, the sampling procedures are essential. The German sample contains four quality papers, representing a balanced political spectrum (from political left to political right: *Frankfurter Rundschau* [FR], *Süddeutsche Zeitung* [SZ], *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* [FAZ; except for 1949 when FAZ had not been launched yet at the time of the election campaign and was replaced by *Der Tagesspiegel*], and *Die Welt*). Due to the low number of quality newspapers in Austria, ensuring the cross-national comparability was somewhat difficult. Only one quality paper was published throughout the whole period investigated—the right-wing paper *Die Presse*. The only left-leaning quality paper, *Der Standard*, was founded not before 1988, resulting in a smaller Austrian sample.

There were three possible ways to handle the composition of the Austrian sample, each of which, however, causes specific problems: (1) Coding only *Die Presse* before 1988 would induce political imbalance and thereby damage cross-national comparability. This is even more problematic due to the high party–press parallelism in Austria. (2) Including a left-leaning outlet of another type published during the full time period is also problematic as tabloids differ too fundamentally from quality papers, and regional newspapers lack a sufficient national focus for an analysis of coverage on national election campaigns. (3) For the campaigns before its launch, the left-leaning quality paper *Der Standard* can be replaced by the *Arbeiter Zeitung* (AZ), the former largest Austrian socialist party paper that was closed down in 1991 due to economic reasons. The use of two different newspapers for different time periods undoubtedly

limits the comparability of the results that have to be interpreted very carefully. Nevertheless, this option seems to be the best due to several reasons: Similar to the quality papers, *AZ* was strongly used by the social elites in Austria, so all seven newspapers are elite newspapers. To a certain degree, *AZ* can be regarded as the political counterpart of *Die Presse* that was—although not a party paper—very close to the Austrian People's Party in the era of consociationalism. Finally, its disappearance itself indicates mediatization as proposed by Strömbäck (2008). The abrupt sample change thereby captures a gradual societal change.

The analysis focuses on the last four weeks of each election campaign. It includes all articles on the title pages and the politics sections that mentioned the respective election campaign and/or one of the candidates for chancellor of the conservatives (Germany: CDU/CSU; Austria: ÖVP) or of the socialists/social democrats (Germany: SPD; Austria: SPÖ) in its headline or first paragraph. Articles serve as units of analysis. A random sample (50 percent) of all articles was drawn. Altogether, 8,076 articles were analyzed (Germany: $N = 5,053$; Austria: $N = 3,023$). Table 1 outlines the number of articles analyzed per election and outlet.

Measurement and Reliability

The current analysis is based on seven indicators guided by the professional and commercial aspects of media logic specified by Esser (2013; for the indicators' calculation, see Table 2). The technological aspect of media logic is neglected as the analysis only includes newspapers equipped with comparable technology at the same time, so there is no reason to expect any differences in this respect. The indicators were selected dependent on availability in the original studies. For each indicator, the continuum of media logic is normalized, taking values from "0.00" for a weak manifestation to "1.00" for a strong manifestation (wherefore some formulae include a division by the respective indicator's original maximum value).

(1) *Deauthentication* as an indicator of articles being composed of journalists' own words rather than politicians' quotations is based on the ink bites of the candidates for chancellor. It divides the length of quotations by the article's entire length and subtracts the quotient from 1, resulting in values between 0 = *whole article consists of quotations* and 1 = *exclusively journalistic content*. (2) The appearance of evaluative statements on the candidates for chancellor mirrors the representation of journalists' own opinion in coverage. *Interpretive reporting* is measured by dividing the number of evaluative statements by the article's entire length as the longer an article is, the more space it provides for evaluations. (3) *Balanced reporting* is measured based on the overall evaluations of the conservative and social democratic candidates for chancellor and ranges on a 5-point scale. It was recalculated to range from 0 = *very biased* to 1 = *very balanced*. (4) *Negativity* is conceptualized as the sum of negative evaluations of both candidates for chancellor, each measured on a 5-point scale. It was recalculated to range from 0 = *not negative at all* to 1 = *very negative*. (5) *Visualization* is measured by contrasting articles

Table 1. Sample—Number of Articles per Election and Outlet.

Germany		Austria	
Year	<i>n</i>	Year	<i>n</i>
1949	216	1949	107
1953	278	1953	86
1957	231	1956	61
1961	276	1959	53
1965	278	1962	118
1969	365	1966	145
1972	381	1970	150
1976	387	1971	153
1980	350	1975	135
1983	287	1979	149
1987	190	1983	189
1990	182	1986	131
1994	201	1990	211
1998	328	1994	166
2002	440	1995	230
2005	431	1999	204
2009	232	2002	267
		2006	275
		2008	193
Outlet	<i>n</i>	Outlet	<i>n</i>
FAZ	1,228	AZ (1949–86)	828
FR	1,136	Die Presse	1,380
SZ	1,250	Der Standard (1990–2009)	815
Die Welt	1,439		
Germany overall	5,053	Austria overall	3,023

Source. Reinemann and Wilke (2007); Wilke and Leidecker (2010); Wilke and Reinemann (2001); Seethaler and Melischek (2014; secondary analysis; additional data collection was done by the author).
 Note. FAZ = *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*; FR = *Frankfurter Rundschau*; SZ = *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.

with (= 1) and without (= 0) pictures of at least one of the two candidates for chancellor. (6) *Person focus* is measured by adding the degree of reference to each candidate. The resulting 7-point scale ranges from 0 = *not personalized at all* to 1 = *very personalized*. (7) *Depoliticization* is measured by coding articles on policy issues (= 0), for example, economic policy, defense policy, or social policy, versus other, “depoliticized” issues (= 1), for example, the election campaigns, the candidates, and their private lives. The more de-authenticitized, interpretive, balanced, negative, visualized, personalized, and depoliticized an article is, the more strongly it is assumed to be shaped by news media logic.

Table 2. Indicators of Media Logic and Their Calculation.

Indicator	Original Variable(s)	Original Variable(s) Description	Original Values	Formulae of Calculation
Deauthentication (DA)	(1) Quotation of Conservative candidate (QCC) (2) Quotation of Social Democratic candidate (QSC) Article length (AL)	Absolute number of lines with direct and indirect quotations of (1) Conservative candidate (2) Social democratic candidate Absolute number of lines of the whole article	Absolute number of lines	$DA = I - \frac{[QCC + QSC]}{AL}$
Interpretive reporting (IR)	Number of evaluative statements (NES) Article length (AL)	Absolute number of evaluative statements on the candidates for chancellor Absolute number of lines of the whole article	Absolute number of evaluative statements Absolute number of lines	$IR = NES / AL$
Balanced reporting (BAL)	(1) Evaluation of Conservative candidate (ECC) (2) Evaluation of Social Democratic candidate (ESC)	Overall evaluation of (1) Conservative candidate (2) Social democratic candidate	-2, very negative; -1, negative; 0, neutral/ambivalent; 1, positive; 2, very positive	$BAL = I - \left(\frac{ECC + ESC}{ *(-1) + 4 / 4} \right)$
<i>Exemplary calculations:</i>				
(i) $ECC = -2; ESC = -2 \rightarrow BAL = I - \left(\frac{((-2-2) *(-1)+4) / 4}{ } \right) = I$				
(ii) $ECC = -2; ESC = +2 \rightarrow BAL = I - \left(\frac{((-2+2) *(-1)+4) / 4}{ } \right) = 0$				
Negativity (NEG)	(1) Negative evaluation of Conservative candidate (NCC) (2) Negative evaluation of Social Democratic candidate (NSC)	Negative overall evaluation of (1) Conservative candidate (2) Social democratic candidate	-2, very negative; -1, negative; 0, not negative	$NEG = \frac{ (NCC + NSC) }{4}$

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Indicator	Original Variable(s)	Original Variable(s) Description	Original Values	Formulae of Calculation
<i>Exemplary calculations:</i>				
	(i) $NCC = -2$; $NSC = -2 \rightarrow NEG = (-2-2) / 4 = 1$			
	(ii) $NCC = 0$; $NSC = 0 \rightarrow NEG = (0+0) / 4 = 0$			
Visualization (VIS)	Illustrations (ILL)	Existence of at least one picture of at least one candidate	0, no picture; 1, at least one picture	$VIS = ILL$
Person focus (PER)	(1) References to Conservative candidate (RCC) (2) References to Social Democratic candidate (RSC)	Intensity of references to (1) Conservative candidate (2) Social democratic candidate	0, no reference; 1, marginal reference; 2, equilibrated with other actors; 3, candidate dominates the article	$PER = (RCC + RSC) / 6$
<i>Exemplary calculations:</i>				
	(i) $RCC = 0$; $RSC = 0 \rightarrow PER = (0+0) / 6 = 0$			
	(ii) $RCC = 0$; $RSC = 3 \rightarrow PER = (0+3) / 6 = 0,5$ (iii) $RCC = 3$; $RSC = 3 \rightarrow PER = (3+3) / 6 = 1$			
Depoliticization (DEP)	Issue (ISS)	Pivotal issue of the article	0, policy issue; 1, non-policy issue (resulting from a list of 13 political issues)	$DEP = ISS$

Inter-coder reliability in Germany was calculated using Holsti's formula of inter-coder agreement, based on thirty articles. The original study does not indicate the coefficients for all relevant data used in the current analysis. The available coefficients range from 0.69 (issues) to 1.0 (reference to candidates for chancellor; Wilke and Reinemann 2001). Inter-coder reliability in Austria was calculated using Krippendorff's alpha, based on 223 articles. In detail, the coefficients concerning the relevant variables are 0.70 for evaluation of candidates for chancellor, 0.77 for the number of evaluative statements, 0.84 for depoliticization, 0.85 for visualization, 0.98 for person focus, 0.99 for article length, and 0.99 for length of quotations. Cross-country reliability was not tested systematically, but because the author participated as coder in both studies and shared high reliability with the other coders, a sufficient comparability of the data between Germany and Austria can be assumed.

Results

The current analysis proceeds in three steps: In the first step, it examines which components of media logic can be found empirically in the German and Austrian newspapers with the help of a principal components analysis (PCA). In the second step, it investigates to what extent the components differ between countries, outlets, and time intervals by using a test for invariance in confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). In the third step, it examines how the components have developed in both countries over time.

Components of Media Logic

To answer RQ1, a PCA is conducted, based on the seven aforementioned indicators. The results show which indicators tend to co-occur in campaign coverage within the same article and can therefore be interpreted as indicators of the same component of media logic. PCA is used despite the presence of dummy variables as there is only one interval (0/1) and hence equidistance is not a problem. Simulation studies have demonstrated only moderate component identification bias even when only dummy-coded variables are used (Kolenikov and Angeles 2004). Missing values were imputed using predictions from regression models with random errors (Gelman and Hill 2007). The number of principal components is determined by three criteria: the component's eigenvalues (must be >1.0 ; Kaiser criterion), the share of explained variance (must be >50 percent; Raïche et al. 2013), and evenly distributed communalities, indicating that all measurements are adequately reproduced by the components. Both the Kaiser criterion and 50 percent explained variance were met by a two-component solution (eigenvalues 1.298), but at the cost of very unevenly distributed communalities (ranging from .190 to .733). Therefore, a three-component solution explaining 66 percent of variance with evenly distributed

Table 3. Components of Media Logic (Factor Loadings, Varimax Rotation).

	Principal Components			Extraction %
	F1: Partisanship	F2: Personalization	F3: Detachment from Policy	
Negativity	+0.874	+0.038	-0.037	77
Balanced reporting	-0.854	-.147	-0.049	75
Interpretive reporting	+0.677	+0.100	+0.135	49
Deauthentication	+0.019	-0.851	+0.156	75
Person focus	+0.453	+0.730	+0.019	74
Visualization	+0.105	+0.507	+0.590	62
Depoliticization	+0.043	-0.253	+0.819	74
Explained variance before rotation (%)	37	19	14	

Source: Reinemann and Wilke (2007); Wilke and Leidecker (2010); Wilke and Reinemann (2001); Seethaler and Melischek (2014; secondary analysis; additional data collection was done by the author). Note. Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin criterion = .692; Bartlett’s test: $\chi^2 = 12823.193$; $df = 21$; $p < .001$; eigenvalues = 0.991. Criterion for choosing the number of main components were as follows: eigenvalues near 1, evenly distributed communalities, at least 50 percent explained variance of the original variables. Bold numbers are assumed to belong to the respective principal component. $N = 8,076$ articles (Germany: $N = 5,053$; Austria: $N = 3,023$). 1949: *Der Tagesspiegel* instead of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 1949–86: *Arbeiter Zeitung*. 1990–2009: *Der Standard*.

communalities was chosen that only marginally violates the Kaiser criterion (eigenvalues 0.991; see Table 3).

(1) The first component comprises negativity, interpretive reporting, and balanced—or rather unbalanced—reporting as this indicator loads negatively on this factor. This component unifies three indicators associated with partisan media: The newspapers take sides by evaluating the candidates for chancellor. They mostly evaluate the candidate of the opposite “camp” negatively rather than positively evaluating the candidate from their own “camp” (Magin 2012). Thus, the first component is labeled *partisanship*. (2) The second component includes person focus, visualization (rather weak loading), and deauthentication—or rather authentication due to the negative loading. Hence, it combines three indicators closely linked to the candidates for chancellor who are intensely referred to, pictured, and cited. This component is labeled *personalization*. (3) Visualization also is (weakly) related to the third component—as well as depoliticization. Representing pictures of the candidates and a negligence of policy by non-policy issues, this component is labeled *detachment from policy*.

Cross-National Similarities and Differences between Media Logic(s)

To examine whether these components apply to both countries and all seven newspapers during the whole period investigated according to H1a, H1b, and H1c—that is, to

test them for invariance—a CFA is conducted. Invariance is a structural equation modeling (SEM)–based concept from psychological testing that assesses whether the configuration of variables (configural invariance, Model 1), or even the factor loadings (weak invariance, Model 2), or also intercepts (strong invariance, Model 3) and means (strict invariance, Model 4) are the same (“invariant”) across a particular set of groups (Cheung and Rensvold 2002)—that is, countries, outlets, and time intervals in the current study. Relevant for testing the hypotheses are configural and weak invariance, while strong and strict invariance are not necessary. If the components do not show weak or at least configural invariance, the variables they consist of respectively their factor loadings differ between the groups. This result would contest the assumption of media logic as a single institution.

For the CFA model, all indicators (manifest variables) and components (latent variables) were connected if factor loadings in the PCA were above .20/below $-.20$. To test the components for invariance over time, three time intervals were defined based on the long-term development of the effective number of parties (Laasko and Taagepera 1979), guided by the consideration that the more parties exist, the stronger they compete for voters, and the more important media and media logic become in political communication. In both countries, the party system first consolidated (campaigns 1949–57) and was relatively low and stable afterward (1959–83), until party competition intensified (1986–2009; Magin 2012).

Datasets as large as the current one will nearly always show that weak, strong, and strict invariance do not hold, that is, that overall model fit (χ^2) deteriorates significantly with more restricted models. Concerning other fit indices, model fit is satisfying if comparative fit index (CFI) and Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) are above .90, standardized root mean square residual is below .08 (Hu and Bentler 1999), and root mean square error of approximation is below .10 (.08–.10 = mediocre fit, below .08 = good fit; MacCallum et al. 1996). Other authors have proposed stricter thresholds (e.g., Hu and Bentler 1999). It is recommended, however, to check whether the decline in model fit is of practical significance, a criterion being a CFI decline of at least .01 (e.g., from Models 1 to 2) plus a good or at least satisfactory absolute fit of the model.

According to Table 4, Model 1 that assumes an equal configuration of indicators fits the data well when comparing across countries, outlets, and intervals. Configural invariance, in other words, means that all groups show the same components of media logic (i.e., they are tied to the same sets of indicators), but the relative importance of indicators, indicated by factor loadings, may vary between the groups. Model 2 additionally assumes equal factor loadings across the groups. As a result, model fit deteriorates moderately ($\Delta\text{CFI}_{\text{country}} = .008$; $\Delta\text{CFI}_{\text{outlet}} = .022$; $\Delta\text{CFI}_{\text{interval}} = .021$). The decline in CFI for outlets and intervals is, hence, above the threshold (.01) defined by Cheung and Rensvold (2002). However, Model 2 is still acceptable according to most fit measures. Consequently, invariance of factor loadings between countries, outlets, and time intervals can be assumed for practical purposes, despite little variations in detail. H1a, H1b, and H1c are thus accepted for configural invariance and partly supported for weak invariance but not for strong and strict invariance. Thus, the components of media logic are quite similar between the groups which approves their suitability for a comparative analysis of media logic’s long-term development in Germany and Austria.

Table 4. Variances of Media Logic between Countries, Media Outlets, and Time Intervals.

Model		$\Delta\chi^2$	df	CFI	RMSEA	TLI	SRMR
By countries (2 groups)							
1	Configural invariance	473.0***	16	.966	.084	.910	.026
2	Weak invariance	112.4***	7	.958	.078	.923	.036
3	Strong invariance	120.1***	4	.949	.079	.920	.041
4	Strict invariance	167.1***	3	.936	.083	.911	.046
By outlets (7 groups)							
1	Configural invariance	589.4***	56	.961	.091	.898	.028
2	Weak invariance	345.4***	98	.939	.086	.908	.048
3	Strong invariance	224.6***	122	.924	.086	.909	.053
4	Strict invariance	248.0***	140	.908	.089	.903	.059
By time intervals (3 groups): Campaigns (1) 1949–57, (2) 1959–83, (3) 1986–2009							
1	Configural invariance	518.9***	24	.963	.088	.903	.027
2	Weak invariance	298.9***	38	.942	.087	.903	.047
3	Strong invariance	214.0***	46	.926	.089	.899	.051
4	Strict invariance	350.2***	52	.901	.097	.880	.068

Source. Reinemann and Wilke (2007); Wilke and Leidecker (2010); Wilke and Reinemann (2001); Seethaler and Melischek (2014; secondary analysis; additional data collection was done by the author). Note. CFA model—Partisanship indicators: (1) negativity, (2) balanced reporting, (3) interpretive reporting, (4) person focus. Personalization indicators: (1) deauthentication, (2) person focus, (3) visualization, (4) depoliticization. Detachment indicators: (1) visualization, (2) depoliticization. Indicator 1 is lead indicator with B fixed to “1.00.” Basis: N = 8,076 articles (Germany: N = 5,053; Austria: N = 3,023). 1949: *Der Tagesspiegel* instead of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 1949–86: *Arbeiter Zeitung*. 1990–2009: *Der Standard*. CFI = comparative fit index; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; CFA = confirmatory factor analysis. *** $p < .001$.

To go into some more detail, depoliticization and visualization—and along with them, the detachment component—show moderate variance (e.g., with single variations of plus-or-minus signs), particularly over time and across outlets, probably because as dummy variables, they are prone to random errors. Visualization, moreover, is particularly pronounced in *Der Standard*, which can be explained by its late launch in 1988, when techniques of image processing were already highly developed. However, all other variables and components are virtually invariant across all groups with only very little variation of factor loadings that can be interpreted as shades of the same media logic in different countries, outlets, and time intervals.

Long-Term Development of Media Logic in Germany and Austria

Even though the components of media logic continuously consist of the same indicators, their importance in campaign coverage must by no means have necessarily been constant or developed simultaneously in Germany and Austria over the last decades.

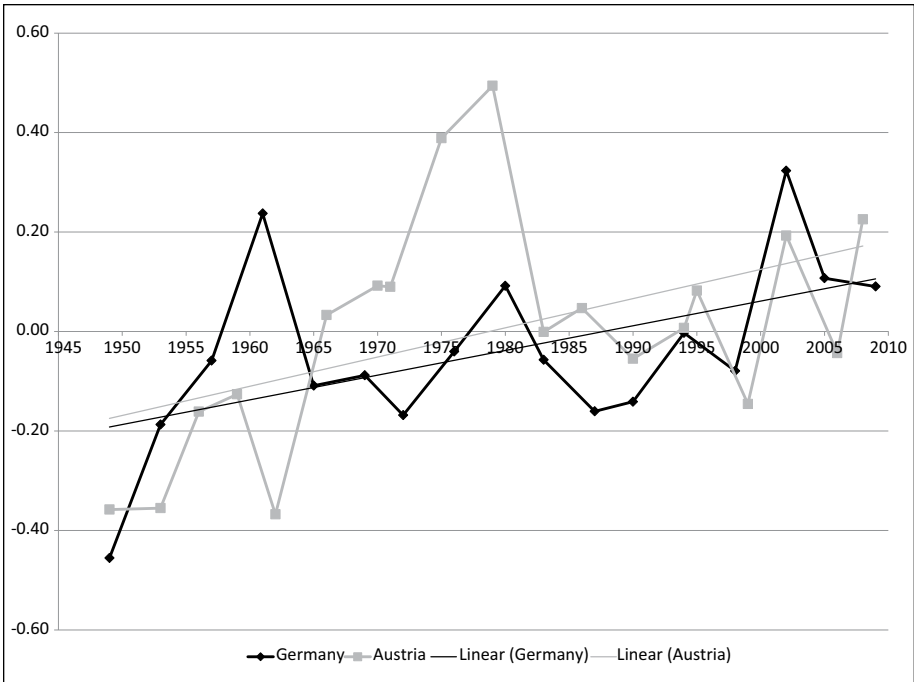


Figure 1. Long-term development of partisanship in Germany and Austria (1949–2009).

Source: Reinemann and Wilke (2007); Wilke and Leidecker (2010); Wilke and Reinemann (2001); Seethaler and Meliscek (2014; secondary analysis; additional data collection was done by the author). Note. Germany: $y = .0037x - 7.444$; $t(15) = 2.38$; $p = .03$. Austria: $y = .0049x - 9.814$; $t(17) = 2.248$; $p = .038$. Basis: $N = 8,076$ articles (Germany: $N = 5,053$; Austria: $N = 3,023$). 1949: *Der Tagesspiegel* instead of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 1949–86: *Arbeiter Zeitung*. 1990–2009: *Der Standard*.

Their long-term development is addressed by RQ2 and illustrated in Figures 1 to 3. It becomes apparent that all three components—although the trend lines in fact indicate moderate growth—fluctuate quite strongly over time in both countries, which can be seen as indication of interruptions and conversions of the mediatization process (Brants and van Praag 2006; Strömbäck 2008).

Concerning *partisanship*, a decrease could be expected because media logic theoretically is assumed to be guided by “norms that signal clear distance to a partisan-political logic” (Esser 2013: 168). However, the results indicate strong fluctuations over time and—according to the trend lines—a moderate increase rather than a decrease of partisanship over time (Figure 1). In Germany, this result is—according to a more detailed analysis—attributable to a weak increase in interpretive reporting while negativity and balanced reporting are quite constant. In Austria, partisanship increases until 1979 and fluctuates on a moderate level afterward. This indicates a widely balanced coverage since the 1980s, which might be closely linked to the decrease in consociationalism—and with it, to the change in the sample.

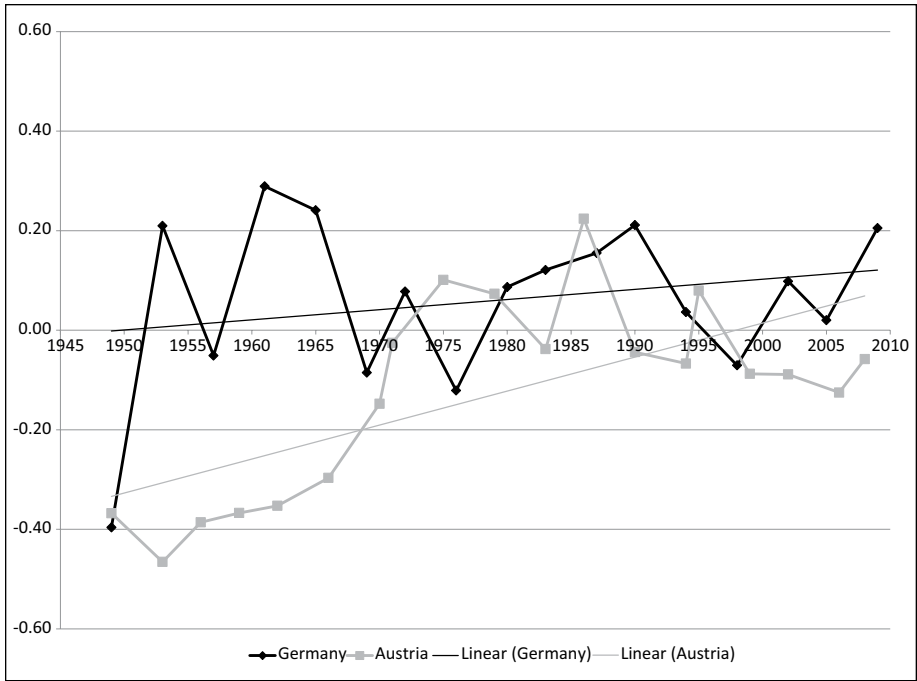


Figure 2. Long-term development of personalization in Germany and Austria (1949–2009). Source: Reinemann and Wilke (2007); Wilke and Leidecker (2010); Wilke and Reinemann (2001); Seethaler and Meliscek (2014; secondary analysis; additional data collection was done by the author). Note. Germany: $y = .0015x - 2.9369; t(15) = .92; p = .37$. Austria: $y = .0074x - 14.68; t(17) = 3.635; p = .002$. Basis: $N = 8,076$ articles (Germany: $N = 5,053$; Austria: $N = 3,023$). 1949: *Der Tagesspiegel* instead of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 1949–86: *Arbeiter Zeitung*. 1990–2009: *Der Standard*.

Personalization in Austria grows almost linearly from 1949 to 1975, which can be seen as an indication of mediatization—or, alternatively, of a normalization as in the era of consociationalism, the political parties were the dominant political actors whereas the candidates were rather insignificant (Figure 2). This changed radically with the chancellorship of Bruno Kreisky (1970–83) who recognized the importance of the media for politics and received much media attention. Afterward, however, personalization develops erratically and even seems to decrease somewhat since the 1990s. This decrease is in part caused by a shrinking volume of candidates’ quotations and thus probably related to the change from *AZ* (that acted as the socialist party’s “mouthpiece” to a certain extent) to *Der Standard*. In Germany, personalization fluctuates strongly with only a marginal upward trend, which runs counter to mediatization theory.

Detachment from policy in fact shows a long-term increase (Figure 3). However, it proceeds abruptly rather than gradually, and it actually appears not before the middle of the 1990s in both countries, which is quite late within the paradigm of mediatization theory. In Germany, this increase in depoliticization and visualization might be related to the growing importance of commercial TV in the 1990s and the improved techniques

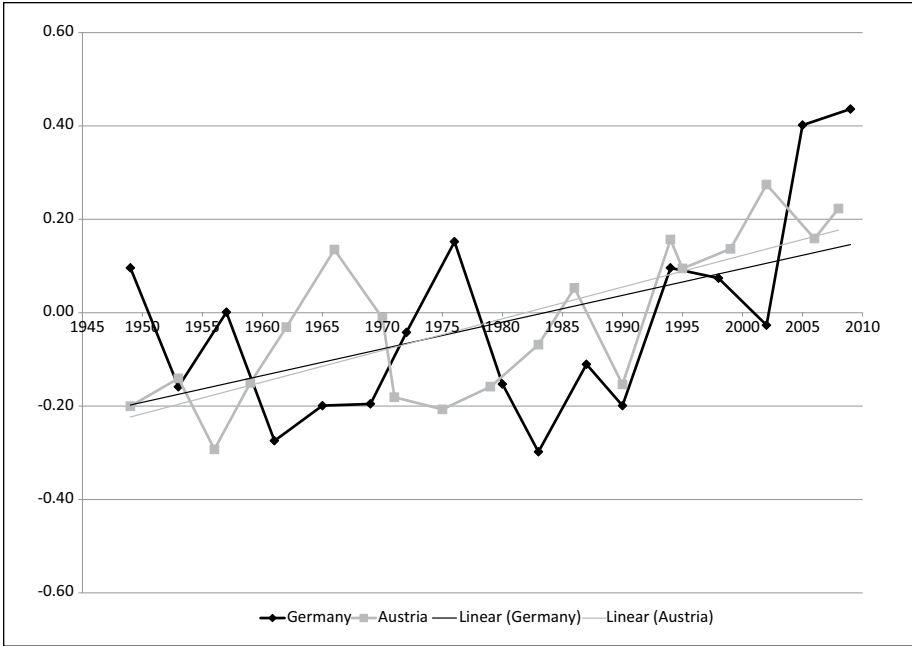


Figure 3. Long-term development of detachment from policy in Germany and Austria (1949–2009).

Source. Reinemann and Wilke (2007); Wilke and Leidecker (2010); Wilke and Reinemann (2001); Seethaler and Melischek (2014; secondary analysis; additional data collection was done by the author).

Note. Germany: $y = .0094x - 18.709$; $t(15) = 1.89$; $p = .08$. Austria: $y = .0029x - 5.8$; $t(17) = 4.628$; $p < .001$. Basis: 8,076 articles (Germany: $N = 5,053$; Austria: $N = 3,023$). 1949: *Der Tagesspiegel* instead of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 1949–86: *Arbeiter Zeitung*. 1990–2009: *Der Standard*.

of image processing. This assumption is supported by a more detailed analysis showing that particularly the underlying indicator visualization increases while depoliticization is somewhat constant. In Austria, the increase might have been caused by the change in the sample: Due to the strong dependence of the *AZ* on the socialist party, the quality paper *Der Standard* might by nature be more depoliticized and, due to its later launch, more visualized. Certainly, we have to recall that *AZ*'s disappearance refers to a fundamental structural change in Austria—the decrease of consociationalism that seems to be linked to the rise of mediatization.

Discussion

The aims of the current study were to (1) clarify the components of media logic in German and Austrian elite newspapers empirically, (2) test whether these components fundamentally differ between both countries, and (3) analyze how media logic has developed in Germany and Austria from 1949 to 2009. All things considered, the

results confirm the multidimensionality of media logic. Three components were identified (RQ1): partisanship, personalization, and detachment from policy. They can be seen as empirical manifestations of media logic that are shaped by professionalism, commercialism, and technology—the reasons of a growing importance of media logic theoretically described by Esser (2013).

The composition of the three components is widely invariant between the two countries, seven newspapers, and three time intervals, which confirms H1a, H1b, and H1c and can be seen as first evidence of an overarching media logic. Despite all similarities, however, the components in some respects apparently differ, even though the degree of differences is still compliant with mediatization theory. Nevertheless, if even an analysis of quite similar countries and media outlets comes to this conclusion, one further research question arises: At what point must the idea of different shades of the same media logic be replaced by the idea of several different media logics? Subsequent studies should address this by including a larger and more diverse set of countries and media outlets.

Concerning the long-term development of mediatization (RQ2), the results are mixed. Indeed, detachment from politics in both countries and personalization in Austria increase as predicted by mediatization theory—but, admittedly, only in particular phases and by no means linearly. Some other results rather look like random walk processes: Personalization fluctuates for long periods, particularly in Germany, and partisanship—contrary to theory—even tends to increase over time.

Certainly, the conclusion that these results challenge mediatization theory in its entirety would be too far-reaching—all the more as the current study only investigates few pieces of a large jigsaw. Nevertheless, they agree with a number of other long-term studies that also contest the idea of mediatization as an incessant, general process and call for a more nuanced picture of the process (e.g., Takens et al. 2013; Umbricht 2014; Zeh and Hopmann 2013): Over the last six decades—pretty much the whole period over which mediatization is supposed to have taken place in Western Europe—both political and media systems have faced fundamental changes described as drivers of mediatization in the literature. Then why did media coverage develop that erratically?

To find an explanation, it is necessary to consider the relationship between media coverage and its structural contexts more systematically—theoretically as well as empirically. This results in some further research questions: Which structural factors interrupt, revert, and accelerate mediatization systematically? To what extent can the situative context cause abrupt turns of long-term processes? And can situative conditions (e.g., early elections, closeness of poll results) also be systematical influence factors (Magin 2012)? For that purpose, multilevel approaches are needed, involving structural variables on different levels as well as the situative context of single election campaigns (Esser and Strömbäck 2012; McLeod and Lee 2012). This is all the more necessary due to the variety of interrelated and partly contradictory factors influencing media logic.

Admittedly, the current study has some limitations. It focuses on campaign coverage on the candidates for chancellor whereby media logic herein may overlap with a “campaign logic.” This might, on one hand, bring about an overestimation of media logic—a weakness that might be a strength at the same time—having in sight

that campaign coverage probably gives particularly obvious signs of media logic (Esser and Matthes 2013). On the other hand, the restriction to elite newspapers might entail an underestimation of media logic that is assumed to be somewhat less pronounced in this media type compared with, for example, tabloids and (particularly commercial) television. Therefore, further studies should include routine coverage and other media types to draw a more multifaceted picture of mediatization and media logic.

Moreover, the change in the sample from *AZ* (1949–86) to *Der Standard* (1990–2009) may have distorted the results, and *AZ*—the only party paper in the sample—might be not perfectly comparable with the six quality newspapers. However, due to the lack of a left-leaning quality newspaper in Austria before 1988, including *AZ* is the best option for keeping the Austrian sample politically balanced. *AZ* is, furthermore, likewise an elite paper, representing an important newspaper type in the era of consociationalism and therefore revealing for the investigation of media logic under these specific conditions. Thus, changing the sample is not only a methodological problem but rather an indicator of the decrease of consociational democracy and thereby of increasing mediatization in Austria.

Finally, the current study is a secondary analysis, which is why some indicators are not really designed for the needs of investigating mediatization. Moreover, seven indicators cannot depict media logic in its entirety. Secondary analyses, however, have become increasingly important in the social sciences meanwhile and can be very productive when carefully applied to an issue that was not originally envisaged by those who collected the data (Schutt 2015). The secondary analysis of mostly comparable data from two countries over six decades presented a great chance to investigate mediatization under different structural conditions and has generated crucial insights into the development of media logic. Its findings provide a valuable starting point for further research on mediatization and its effects on political actors, organizations, institutions, and recipients (Esser and Matthes 2013). Particularly a comparison of more different countries seems interesting as the transfer of the current results on different structural conditions would give some more indication of the shades of mediatization and media logic.

Acknowledgments

I thank the authors of the German study, Jürgen Wilke, Carsten Reinemann, and Melanie Leidecker, and those of the Austrian study, Gabriele Melischek and Josef Seethaler, for providing the data.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The data collection in Austria was supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF) under Grant P20147-G14.

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Manufacturing Conflict? How Journalists Intervene in the Conflict Frame Building Process

The International Journal of Press/Politics
2015, Vol. 20(4) 438–457
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1940161215595514
ijpp.sagepub.com



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Abstract

A considerable amount of research is devoted to the presence and effects of conflict frames in the news. However, it is unknown if journalists actively manufacture and inflate conflict in their coverage of politics, or if they merely respond to contentious politics as it happens. This study focuses on the extent to which journalists take an interventionist stance in the conflict frame building process. We conducted expert interviews ($N = 16$) among Dutch political journalists. Results show that journalists indeed take an active stance in conflict frame building. They contribute to the emergence of conflict frames by using exaggerating language, by orchestrating, and by amplifying possible consequences of political conflict. However, intervention in conflict framing is not merely a result of individual agency of journalists. Rather, some role conceptions seem to counter an interventionist stance. Media routines that are embedded in organizational practices were found to facilitate this active role in conflict framing. Finally, journalists are mainly found to be active when politicians or parties with political power are involved.

Keywords

framing, conflict, news, journalism, frame building, interventionism

Research has shown that conflict framing is one of the most important mechanisms of political news reporting (Neuman, Just, and Crigler 1992). What remains unclear is the role journalists play in this process. How actively do journalists construct conflict? Do

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they exaggerate conflicts when making the news or do they merely respond to political conflict as it happens on the political stage? This study addresses these questions by investigating if journalists reporting political news play a formative role in the conflict frame building process.

To date, analysis of media content or media effects has been central to conflict framing studies. Earlier research highlighted the prevalence of conflict frames in the news (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000). Furthermore, distinct effects of exposure to conflict frames on political behavior (e.g., Mutz and Reeves 2005; Schuck et al. 2014), as well as other political perceptions (Avery 2009; Vliegenthart et al. 2008) have been found. These findings underscore the relevance of studying conflict framing. Yet, few studies have addressed the actual journalistic practice in which these frames emerge: the conflict frame building process.

We know that journalists play a pivotal part in the process that determines which frames actually end up in the media (Hänggli 2011). However, this aspect of the framing process has long been neglected in research (De Vreese 2012). Journalists prefer news that entails an element of conflict (Mutz and Reeves 2005). What remains unclear is how much the agency and intervention of journalists determines the modification of frames to emphasize conflict.

Relevant in the context of frame building is the concept of interventionism, the extent to which journalists take an active or passive stance in reporting (Strömbäck and Esser 2009). Journalists decide if and how to report about political conflict. They may seek out political conflicts, amplify political conflicts for the attractiveness of the story, or even actively orchestrate and manufacture conflict frames. However, besides the agency of individual journalists, other aspects such as media routines and external, political, influences obviously shape how journalists frame conflict (Shoemaker and Reese 2013). The aim of this study is to assess the importance of these influences for how active journalists are in the conflict frame process.

We conducted a series of semistructured expert interviews with political journalists in the Netherlands. We chose the Netherlands as a subject of our study, because it is an example of a democratic corporatist media system with a strong history of public broadcasting (Van Aelst et al. 2008). Furthermore, politically, it is a multiparty system where coalitions between multiple parties are usually necessary to form a government (Lijphart 1999). These characteristics distinguish the Netherlands from countries with different media systems and different party systems, such as the United States. Although the findings generated in this study are particularly relevant for the Dutch context, they will likely also inform our knowledge on frame building in countries with a similar political and media systems, such as, for example, Germany and Denmark (Hallin and Mancini 2004). The sample includes both reporters and editors working for newspapers, television, and news sites. We consider the in-depth quality of interviews with journalists the ideal way to disentangle how different aspects of the journalistic practice contribute to active conflict frame building: individual role conceptions, media routines, and external political factors. This study aims to provide insight into the circumstances that affect how journalists play an active role or passive role in the conflict frame building process.

Frame Building: How Journalism Shapes Conflict Frames

In the framing process, particular aspects of reality are highlighted above others. A frame is concerned with variations in emphasis or salience of particular aspects in a media text (Druckman 2001). This study focuses on the specific application of conflict frames in political news. Conflict frames are defined as news frames that “emphasize conflict between individuals, groups, or institutions as a means of capturing audience interest” (Semetko and Valkenburg 2000: 95). A conflict can consist of disagreement, tension between different sides, incompatibility between viewpoints, and politicians attacking each other in the media (Putnam and Shoemaker 2007). Conflict is considered an integral part of the political process, as it is central to a properly functioning democracy (Sartori 1987).

Research shows that conflict frames are some of the most frequently used frames in political communication (De Vreese et al. 2001), across different media systems, countries, and news formats (Lengauer et al. 2011). Conflict frames are influential for a considerable number of aspects of political life. For instance, conflict frames can negatively affect support for policies (Vliegenthart et al. 2008), but also have a positive impact on turnout (De Vreese and Tobiasen 2007), and lead to more balanced thoughts about issues (De Vreese 2004). Indeed, exposure to conflict frames may lead citizens to realize what is at stake and why political decision making is important (Schuck et al. 2014).

What remains understudied is how conflict frames emerge in the media: the frame building stage. Frame building refers to the processes that affect how media frames are formed and how frames are created and adapted by journalists (Scheufele 1999). Journalists do not solely report about political events, but they also shape these events (Entman 1991). This agency of journalists in framing the news is a characteristic of political news coverage (Cook 1998). Under certain circumstances, journalistic frames adjust or even prevail over actor frames (Brüggemann 2014). Also, media strategies of political actors have been found to be contingent on media frames and preferences in an issue (Ihlen et al. 2014). Central in the process of conflict frame building is the concept of journalistic intervention or “the media’s discretionary power” as the degree to which the media take a formative role in shaping the agenda of election campaigns (Semetko et al. 1991: 3).

Two aspects of interventionism are of importance for frame building. First, interventionism determines the degree to which journalists are visible in a news item (Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2011). This is, for instance, accomplished by adapting a more interpretative style of reporting (Hanitzsch 2007) and “journalists reporting about political news in their own words, scenarios and assessments” (Esser 2008: 403). Second, interventionism signifies an active approach by journalists when creating or adapting frames as opposed to a passive approach (Hanitzsch 2007). This includes constructing their own frames and altering existing frames (Schnell 2001).

Hänggli and Kriesi (2010) suggest that frames put forward by political actors contain less political contestation than journalistic frames. This strongly suggests that journalists shape political discourse into conflict frames rather than just reporting conflict as it happens. Yet, the precise role of journalists in this process, as well as an examination of

their professional attitudes toward such practices, remains unstudied. So far, the content analytical research only suggests that journalists contribute to conflict, but do they do this simply by juxtaposing contrasting views or do they actually affect the severity of the conflict by the inclusion of conflict-laden language or by agitating political actors during interviews? Hence, the main research question is as follows:

Research Question 1: How interventionist are journalists in the conflict frame building process?

A Multidimensional Approach toward Studying Conflict Frame Building

Research toward the production of news frames benefits from applying a multilevel approach that takes into account different internal and external forces that influence journalistic performance (Gans 1979; Scheufele 1999). Therefore, we align our research question with the widely used “hierarchy of influences model” as proposed by Shoemaker and Reese (1996, 2013). We use this model to assess how different levels of influences affect the degree of journalistic intervention in the conflict frame building process specifically. We focus on the individual level, the routines level, and the external level of the model.

Individual Level

Role conceptions and journalistic values play an important role in the production of news content (Shoemaker and Reese 2013). In this study, they are important, because they directly relate to the starting point of our study: interventionism (Strömbäck and Esser 2009). Journalistic values may also affect intervention in the conflict frame building process. It is likely that journalists who support active conflict frame building possess role conceptions and values connected to interpretative styles of reporting. This would stand opposite to the “disseminator role,” which is all about disseminating the news as quickly, accurately, and neutrally as possible in a detached way (Weaver and Wilhoit 1996). The disseminator role presumably hinders journalists to interfere much by exaggerating or manufacturing conflict frames. Those that embrace the interpretative role, however, are more likely to include an analysis and interpretation and take an active stance in the conflict frame building process.

Routines Level

Journalistic practice consists of the routinized production of news stories. There are certain patterns, rules, procedures, and practices embedded in the way journalists work (Shoemaker and Reese 2013), which may explain journalistic intervention in conflict framing. In a survey among Swedish journalists, Strömbäck et al. (2012) found that journalists believe that conflict played a bigger role in the practice of news production than it should according to their individual views.

Based on previous research, we identified three media routines likely to play a role during in conflict frame building: (1) objectivity, (2) journalistic storytelling, and (3) reliance on other media.

First, the journalistic objectivity norm, or the “ritual of objectivity” (Tuchman 1978), is likely to contribute to the *emergence* of specific conflict frames as well as the *prevalence* of conflict framing in the news. The objectivity norm describes the idea of balanced reporting as good journalism (Skovsgaard et al. 2012). Balance in reporting often requires inclusion of an oppositional voice.

Second, journalistic storytelling as a routine often leads to the addition of an element of conflict to a story to transform events into a news commodity (Shoemaker and Reese 1996). Journalists use dramatic depictions to transform an issue into a vivid story (Cook 1998; Gitlin 1980). In a study on frame building in reporting of stem cell research in the United States, Nisbet et al. (2003) illustrate how pitting opposite sides against each other is one of the ways in which journalists provide the audience with a comprehensive and attention-grabbing story.

Third, the routine of reliance on other media should play a role. Under the influence of time pressure, journalists have been shown to habitually rely on other media as an inspiration for their own reporting (Reinemann 2004). This can eventually lead to pack journalism, where journalists reporting on the same story place an emphasis on the same angle and viewpoints (Schudson 2003). Indeed, the competition between news media for audience attention has been associated with a preference for conflict and drama both in a U.S. (Bennett 2005) and in a European context (Esser 1999).

External Level

Which frames come forward and which do not is determined in a constant negotiation process between journalists and their sources: political actors (Lewis and Reese 2009). Although politicians are known to use the media to fight out political disputes and achieve political goals (Davis 2003), politicians also use existing political conflicts as means to generate media attention and increase own media visibility (Strömbäck et al. 2012). However, not much is known about circumstances under which frames constructed by politicians have the upper hand over media frames, and for which types of sources journalists are more likely to intervene in the frame building process. Prior research suggests that powerful institutional actors such as parliamentary and government members are not only featured more in the news than less resourceful actors (Herman and Chomsky 1988) but are also more successful in getting their own frames in the media (Tuchman 1978). It is likely that journalists will make a greater effort in involving powerful actors in conflicts, taking a more active stance.

As a result of this imbalance of news exposure, less resourceful political institutions and individuals have to be creative to get news exposure and may be more likely to resort to dramatized news forms, such as conflict (Van Dalen 2012), in an effort to fill the oppositional space when official and powerful actors close ranks (Cook 1998). This strongly suggests that the dynamics of journalistic conflict frame building in relationship with political frames depend on the size and influence of a political actor.

In sum, we thus posit that three levels of the influences model affect the degree to which journalists intervene in the conflict frame building process: The study of individual role conceptions will tell us to what extent journalists believe they should bring conflict into the news; journalistic routines can explain if there are embedded structures in journalistic practice that support conflict framing, and political power might be an important external factor that determines the influence of journalists compared with political elites in bringing conflict into the news.

Method

To investigate to what extent journalists intervene in the conflict frame building process, we conducted sixteen in-depth interviews with Dutch political journalists and editors in charge of the editorial teams specialized in political news. These elite interviews lasted on average forty-five minutes. Interviews serve as a commonly used method to capture the experiences and opinions of journalists (e.g., Lecheler 2008; Lewis and Reese 2009). For this study, the depth and richness of the data provided by qualitative interviews were deemed pivotal to uncover the specific circumstances in which conflict frames emerge in political news.

Interviews

The interviews were semistructured with an interview protocol that served as the main guidance for the interview, but which still gave the possibility to deviate from the predetermined dimensions. The interview protocol was organized around the three levels of influence discussed above. On the *individual level*, questions were asked to address the stance of journalists toward political conflict and the role of an interventionist journalistic role conception for conflict frames specifically. Furthermore, questions were included about other journalistic values and role conceptions to see how these other individual characteristics affect interventionism in the frame building process. On the *routines level*, questions were structured around daily practices, organizational procedures, audience perceptions, and reliance on other media. We assessed how journalists deal with the news and how journalists practically follow up on news in general and news about political conflict specifically. The aim was to investigate whether the objectivity norm and the routine construction of narratives affect the emergence of conflict frames and the active role of journalists in this process, without steering the interview subjects toward these specific routines by asking direct questions. Finally, on the *external level*, questions were asked concerning the role of politicians in the conflict frame building process as well as the differences between less and more well-known politicians.¹

The interviews also included vignettes. Interviewees were presented with short hypothetical news selection scenarios and asked how they would deal with particular news situations and follow up on evolving stories. Vignettes provide a good way of tapping journalistic practices because they allow interviewees to imagine situations similar to the actual daily practices of news making, and thereby allow them to provide

the interviewer accurate depictions of their experiences (Jenkins et al. 2010). This approach was adapted to enhance the external validity of the interviewee responses

Sample

We used purposive sampling to identify the interviewees. We utilized two main selection criteria: (1) interviewees either had to work as journalists on political news or managed the team responsible for political news and (2) interviewees had to work for one of the leading newspapers, television news shows, or news Web sites in the Netherlands. Both seasoned journalists, who were experienced and possessed an extensive knowledge concerning the topic, and journalists early in their career with a still taintless and more detached view on the subject were sampled. Selecting respondents from various organizations ensures a variety of perspectives and reduces the effects of institutional characteristics of particular organizations (Shenton 2004). Therefore, interviewees included television journalists working for both Dutch commercial and public news. Also, journalists from the major newspapers including both “quality” and more “populist” oriented newspapers were included. The journalists in the sample are at the center of the political frame building process in the Netherlands and deal with framing of political news on a daily basis. To gauge the exact size of the sample, we followed a strategy developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), who suggest that theoretical saturation in interviewing is achieved when adding new cases becomes counterproductive, which is the case when the new data do not add any substantive new findings. For an overview of our sample composition, see Table 1.

Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed to allow full immersion and deep understanding of the material. We used thematic coding to analyze the transcribed interviews, using the step-by-step plan proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method consisted of capturing themes or patterned responses in a systematic way. The analysis was carried out using the software MAXQDA. We did not apply a strictly inductive methodology; the analysis was driven by predetermined theoretical boundaries. Specifically, we used the individual level, the routines level, and the external level of the hierarchy of influences model to limit and structure the findings. Initially, we also included the organizational level as a research dimension, but during the coding process, it became clear that findings did not reveal clear differential organizational influences.

In the first step of the analysis, initial codes are given when the data display characteristics of interest to the research question and a specific theoretical dimension (e.g., When a journalist describes how noncoalition conflicts make him yawn. This falls within the external level and is given the initial code “noncoalition conflicts deemed boring by journalist”). The second step consists of determining patterns in the list of initial codes and categorizing these codes as candidate themes (e.g., a large number of initial codes can be categorized under the broader theme of a journalistic preference to intervene when powerful actors are involved). After defining these themes, the data and

Table 1. Interview Subjects.

Interview Subject	Interview Date	Media Type	Job	Length of the Interview
Journalist1	May 20, 2014	Online	Journalist	43:23:00
Journalist2	May 30, 2014	Television	Journalist	50:00:00
Journalist3	June 03, 2014	Newspaper	Editor	44:13:00
Journalist4	June 05, 2014	Television	Editor	26:23:00
Journalist5	June 06, 2014	Newspaper	Journalist	48:11:00
Journalist6	June 10, 2014	Newspaper	Editor	48:48:00
Journalist7	June 12, 2014	Newspaper	Editor	40:36:00
Journalist8	June 12, 2014	Online	Journalist	57:47:00
Journalist9	June 18, 2014	Newspaper	Journalist	46:03:00
Journalist10	June 18, 2014	Television	Journalist	47:28:00
Journalist11	June 20, 2014	Newspaper	Editor	54:15:00
Journalist12	June 25, 2014	Newspaper	Journalist	48:13:00
Journalist13	June 26, 2014	Online	Journalist	41:33:00
Journalist14	June 27, 2014	Newspaper	Journalist	43:39:00
Journalist15	July 01, 2014	Television	Journalist	55:03:00
Journalist16	July 11, 2014	Online	Journalist	01:00:31

codes are assessed again and subcategories and subthemes are defined (e.g., coalition consequences is defined as a subtheme; codes that fall within this category consist of journalists describing how coalition conflicts are interesting because they have consequences, as opposed to conflicts involving opposition politicians). The third step was to review the themes. In this step, extracts were analyzed in more detail. This was done by going through the data again to determine whether themes should be discarded, put together, expanded, or recoded, or different subthemes should be defined. The relations between the themes and the subthemes were also taken into account in this step. In the final step, we defined the themes extensively by working them out concisely theme by theme and reporting on them in the “Findings” section.

Findings

We organize the findings by discussing them structured around the different levels of the multidimensional approach, that is, by focusing on the individual, routine, and external levels. Within these levels, we will discuss the themes and patterns that emerged during our analysis of the semistructured interviews.

Individual Level

The analysis revealed a general expression of ambivalence among interviewees when it comes to the question whether conflict in the news is a “good” or “bad” thing. This uneasiness about conflict as a substantial part of journalistic life is best illustrated by

several examples. For instance, when confronted with a political conflict, a television journalist almost cynically described the attitude of political journalists toward conflict as something “which we in The Hague . . . enjoy *thoroughly*” (Journalist10). However, at the same time, some journalists also indicated that they disliked conflict reporting:

I hate reporting that purely deals with the political conflict or consists of 80% conflict. Many journalists tend to only shortly explain in the remaining 20% what really matters. I disapprove of this practice. (Journalist13)

Interestingly, this ambivalence proved to be much more visible characterization of journalistic perceptions. For instance, it was also present in the journalist views of interventionism in political conflict reporting. When prompted, most interviewees indicated that they did not exaggerate or manufacture conflicts during reporting. Nevertheless, a number of journalists suggested that this was a common practice for *other* journalists—particularly those working for the largest Dutch tabloid newspaper—and that they disapproved of such practices. Overall, our interviewees reported that they value accuracy and trustworthiness, and indicated that these values prevented them from exaggerating or blowing up conflicts to the extent that the facts are violated.

A second theme that emerged from the analysis revolves around the subtle ways in which journalists do intervene and sometimes seek out actively and even orchestrate conflicts. Several subthemes that reveal these instances are described below. First, most interviewees stressed that there is a tendency to word conflicts as sharply as possible in the media while remaining to the facts. Language is used to report about conflict in a more attractive way, but most journalists stressed that violating the truthfulness of the message is avoided. A second method in which journalists intervene is by giving news items a title that suggests a stronger conflict than is necessarily the case. Some journalists indicated that certain words that add weight to the conflict and increase dramatization are added, especially in the title to attract attention from the audience.

I tend to gear up a little when making headlines. To justify this for myself I say: at least people will read the article. . . . This is perceivably effective. If you use boring headlines . . . they don't stimulate the reader to continue. (Journalist16)

You often nuance things in the text. In the title you use words such as “on collision course,” or “to perish,” those kind of terms. . . . This helps to make something insightful and engaging to readers. (Journalist9)

Third, when describing their practices, a number of journalists indicated that they actively look for policy topics and agenda points that can potentially function as a source of conflict between political actors. This practice is a clear indicator of an active stance by journalists; instead of waiting for news events to happen, possible conflicts are identified and politicians are approached for comments on those policy subjects:

There are upcoming points on the political agenda for which you know disagreement exists between parties. There are certain topics on which the coalition parties disagree profoundly and where conflicts arise, which you, as a journalist, investigate and pay attention too. (Journalist2)

Journalists generally indicated that the watchdog role is imperative to this theme and contributes to an active approach in looking for political conflict.

We cannot take into account the interests of politicians. We want to get to the bottom of a story. This does not mean exaggerating, but sharply uncovering the truth. And the discussion is that exaggerating or amplifying will always be there, simply because the interests are different. (Journalist7)

In the analysis, another assertive behavior that emerged as a reoccurring theme was journalists asking steering questions. By asking questions in a particular way, journalists actively engage the conflict frame building process. This is illustrated in the next example where the interviewee indicates that although conflicts are not actually caused by the journalist, they are certainly facilitated by them:

I will not go as far as to incite conflict. Just think along a little bit. . . . Sometimes I say to politicians, if you would attack [another politician], I would consider it worth reporting on that. . . . That is what I mean with “thinking along.” (Journalist16)

To expand the scope of a conflict, interviewees indicated that they sometimes made a conflict look more severe than it actually is by adding possible and potentially hypothetical consequences of a political conflict for the politicians or political parties involved, even if such consequences are unlikely: “You [as a journalist] will always try to make the story look worse by sketching possible consequences. While you actually know that 99% of all conflicts will be dismissed with a compromise” (Journalist11). In effect, this example shows how the scope of a conflict is enlarged by the enactment of the interpretative journalistic role conception. Prospective speculation regarding future events also serves as a way to uphold the value of trustworthiness while avoiding the introduction of false facts.

In sum, the findings indicate that professional values such as trustworthiness and factuality pose clear limitations on the extent and manner in which the interview subjects took an interventionist stance in the conflict frame building process. Nevertheless, the analysis yielded subtle practices in which journalists do take an active stance in the conflict frame building process. In the next section, we will address how these interventionist approaches are affected by journalistic routines.

Routines Level

Application of the objectivity norm. Journalists indicated that it is a routine to involve politicians or political actors with opposing viewpoints when producing stories about news issues. For political conflicts, stakeholders who were not already involved in a

conflict are approached and asked to respond to new quotes by other stakeholders in the conflict. The majority of interviewees indicated that they approached these actors because they expected or even hoped that they joined a particular side in an evolving political conflict in the press. This is illustrated by this quote from a reporter concerning routines in news production on a conflict within a Dutch party:

When the number two has criticism on the number one, you ask certain questions: Should you be having this position? Why is that person not doing well? And of course you want to obtain viewpoints on the issue from the number one. Then you ask: What are your reactions to these allegations? (Journalist8)

Another reporter voiced a similar reaction. When asked about his working routines when presented with a scenario where a party member criticizes the party leader, he issued the following response:

I would find it interesting to go to the party leader and ask: This party member said this and this about you, what is your opinion on this . . . and what are the consequences for the party. . . . Shouldn't the party member fear for his position? (Journalist16)

This example illustrates a more general pattern: The objectivity norm is not merely a way in which journalists juxtapose political actor frames; questions are also formulated in a certain way that enables the scope of conflicts to expand. When there is no oppositional voice found to openly back up claims about a conflict, a number of interviewees also explained that they resort to anonymous accounts to include as opposing viewpoints, despite their reluctance to do so:

When there is a media discussion about the leadership of a politician and you cannot get a member of the party to respond openly, then it can also work [to use anonymous accounts]. Maybe politicians are willing to say something anonymously. That is not ideal, but it also indicates the sensitivity of the issue. (Journalist2)

Dramatic narratives as building blocks of conflict frames. When describing the power of conflicts in the news, interviewees indicated that, in their view, the attraction of political conflict is that audiences like to pick sides in a conflict so that they can relate and identify themselves with their preferred politicians or parties. A television journalist stated, "Conflict is always really beautiful. You have a good guy. You have a bad guy. The viewer can pick sides" (Journalist4). The interviews also showed that a political conflict is interesting because there has to be an outcome. Conflict has to be consequential. When asked about what makes a political conflict interesting, this interviewee identified this as an important feature of political conflict that makes it newsworthy: "Because the ending is unknown. How is it going to end? There is more tension and that is interesting. How are they going to solve that?" (Journalist9).

The analysis also showed that certain conflicts are valued more than others. Three characteristics of conflicts emerged as themes that give a conflict journalistic value. First, a conflict has to imply a tangible outcome. For instance, a major ideological change

within a party, a change in power relations within parties and coalitions, or the future of policy measures. Also, the interviewees indicated that conflicts that have a high entertainment value are interesting for the audience, for instance, personal conflicts where politicians attack each other or news items where the bad relations between ministers are exposed:

To make a conflict interesting to readers, you need details. You need to show how these people sometimes struggle with each other. . . . People like it when politicians are not shown as profiteers, but as human beings who also suffer. That is the power of a political conflict. (Journalist14)

Third, personal accounts and detailed descriptions of political conflicts are ways in which to involve readers in a story. However, some interviewees also indicated that these details are not always readily available. In the following example, a lack of time prevented the following newspaper journalist to thoroughly find out everything about a given conflict, but nonetheless decided on reporting about it.

It is sometimes the case that you do not know everything you should know about a political conflict. You know a few things. But you still think it is important enough for the newspaper, even if it is not complete. . . . I would not call this exaggerating. (Journalist12)

This particular quote shows how constraints that are embedded in media routines prevented some of the journalists in exposing all of the facts and constructing a full and complete story with all of the facts.

Routine reliance: Following the crowd. The interviewees indicated that they sometimes had to report on political conflicts because a news event is already a big issue in other media outlets and they have to follow the “pack.” The following television journalist voices this opinion: “One media outlet does not want to be second behind another one” (Journalist15). This reasoning occurs even when journalists do not think a conflict is that relevant: “You do not want to be the only medium that does not bring news about which the whole country is speaking. Even if you think: Is this really interesting?” (Journalist8). In the last quote, the journalist mentioning news “about which the whole country is speaking” also illustrates that perceptions of the audience plays a pivotal role in this process. Even though having reservations about an issue’s newsworthiness, journalists will feel obliged to report about a conflict because of the wish of the audience.

When a conflict is already in the media, a common practice that came forward in the interviews was that journalists tried to find an angle that is unique to their own media outlet. They often seek to add novel facts to introduce some sort of development to the narrative of the news story. This could be done by phrasing questions to politicians involved in the conflict in a particular way, for instance, by emphasizing possible consequences of a conflict for a power structure or by raising stakes of a particular conflict. When introduced to a vignette describing a conflict already present in the media, a journalist responded,

When we meet them [the politicians] in the parliament, we ask: "What caused this fight and which side are you on?" . . . And then they all have to speak out about the issue and because of the phrasing of the questions you already pick your angle, kind off. (Journalist12)

External Level

Power is an important part of the conflict frame building process. Three main themes emerged that describe which types of conflict and for which types of political actors journalists are more likely to intervene: coalition consequences, consequences for policy, and consequences for internal party relations.

First, journalists are more likely to intervene when the conflict affects the coalition. The Netherlands is a multiparty system where coalitions are needed to form the government. Constant negotiation between the government partners is needed to ascertain continuity of the incumbent coalition. Conflicts can thus potentially affect these relationships. As a result, interviewees unanimously exhibited a preference for conflicts that can affect coalition relations:

Small parties that are part of the opposition and differ in opinion are often not considered newsworthy. But when coalition members differ in opinion about an important subject among themselves, it is. If they do not agree, this can potentially cause a crisis in the government. (Journalist8)

Coalition members who oppose government plans are considered as nonimportant and only newsworthy in special occasions. Paradoxically, while it is of importance to members of the political opposition to get into the news and voice their opposition toward the ruling parties, for the coalition it is important to showcase unity. The coalition preferably avoids getting into the news with a conflict angle. Subsequently, to find conflicts within the coalition, a more active, interventionist approach is required. In these specific ways, political power affected the extent to which the interviewees intervene and attempt to pursue conflicts. However, interviewees did indicate that less influential politicians who are not part of the coalition intervened in the conflict frame building process by informing journalists about conflicts within the coalition.

Opposition parties tell us: "The situation within the coalition is complicated, they fight each other for every inch of ground." And then they hope we investigate that and pay attention to the fact that [it does not go well] between the coalition parties. (Journalist10)

This is a practice in which political actors not well-known, and therefore less valuable for the press, do manage to get media attention and influence the political process through the media.

A second pattern emerging from the analysis on the external level was the preference for conflicts that implied consequences for policy. This theme highlights a journalistic preference for political conflicts that have the potential to actually result in an outcome in the form of new or amended policy. Hence, conflicts need to have a promise of

consequences and change the existing policies and laws. This is also related to the audience of the media text, consequences in the form of policies imply changes for citizens.

Recently there was a small-time politician with a deciding vote who threatened to vote against a certain policy. In such instances the media is very receptive. . . . Because it would have become a big conflict if he [The politician] would have voted no. (Journalist7)

This has consequences for lesser known politicians and their chance for exposure. When a politician from the opposition attacks the coalition, but has no chance of affecting the coalition policy because there is no majority, the journalists we interviewed did not identify this as newsworthy. In contrast, the interviewees deemed politicians who are needed for a majority or are in a position to change policy or exert power are more likely to get press coverage when involved in a conflict.

Finally, the interviewed journalists indicated that conflicts that could effectively change the course of the party were most interesting for their reporting. These include internal conflicts that represent an ideological power struggle or potential change to the course of the party. These instances motivate journalists to dig deeper into a conflict and thus intervene in the frame building process:

Is there a conflict between two people or does it split up the party? Are there more people who think differently? For example party leaders or party departments. Does the conflict between two people represent something bigger? I would try to find that out. (Journalist15)

The findings with regard to external factors and political power in conflict frame building indicate that formal power is indeed an important determinant when it comes to interventionism in the conflict frame building process. The consequential nature of a conflict between powerful actors enhances the attractiveness for journalists. Simply pitting political actors from the opposition against government actors is not deemed interesting enough by most of the interviewees. Our results also show that journalists and political actors in a position of power have a conflict of interests. Actors in a position of power are often the ones who try to prevent news from being framed in terms of conflict. For coalition relations, it is beneficial to maintain an image of harmonious relations. Hence, it is necessary for journalists to expose conflict within the coalition without much overt cooperation from political sources within the coalition.

Discussion

This study examines the circumstances under which conflict frames emerge in the Netherlands. Our findings highlight the active role journalists play in the emergence and prevalence of conflict frames in the news media. Journalists do not merely disseminate conflict frames put forward by political actors, but actively shape when and how conflict appears in the news. Subtle methods of journalistic news production are applied to facilitate, emphasize, and sometimes even exaggerate conflict. This is partly

explained by journalistic role conceptions that value exposing facts, controlling the government and informing citizens about conflicts within the coalition. However, it is limited by other journalistic professional norms that value accuracy and trustworthiness. This is seemingly a paradox, but it is known that journalistic ideology consists of a set of news values that often contradict each other (Deuze 2005). The findings indicate that journalistic intervention in conflict framing is encapsulated in journalistic routines. These include the practices of transforming political events into a vivid story and juxtaposing political actors. Furthermore, pack journalism and news hypes function as self-reinforcing processes in which the initial framing of a subject structures and fuels follow-up reporting (Vasterman 2005). Journalists prefer to intervene in conflicts between powerful actors or conflicts with consequences for the coalition, policy, and power relations within political parties. This corresponds with earlier findings such as those by Bennett (1996), who suggests that power can be defined as the ability to affect the outcome of a particular news event. Bennett's arguments can also be connected with the findings on the routines level, conflict narratives require developments to remain interesting for the audience, and the types of conflict identified on the external level resemble conflicts with prospective outcomes that can keep the narrative going. However, the findings seemingly contradict earlier findings that suggested that the use of conflict frames contributed to the visibility of less powerful political actors (van Dalen 2012). Lesser known politicians have a greater need to become a part of the news and will provide the journalists with conflict frames, resulting in a reduced need to intervene. Although this is relevant for the Dutch context particularly, our findings also resonate with earlier findings from a U.S. study by Esser (2008). In this study, it was shown that political campaigns that are more scripted and characterized by more news management led to an increase in media interventionism in the United States.

Different levels of influence affect how conflict frames emerge and the extent to which journalists are active in this process. These levels are interlinked and are not always clearly distinguished in the journalistic practice (Shoemaker and Reese 2013). For instance, journalistic values are respected as much as possible when producing news, but sometimes suffer, given the limitations imposed on newsroom organizations by routines that are caused by a shortage of time and resources. Similarly, the preference for powerful political actors may be explained by the heightened stakes in such a conflict, which results in a narrative which is more consequential to the readers, who are the main consumers of news stories.

The validity of the sample ensures that the findings likely give a good indication of how conflict frames emerge in Dutch political news. These findings resonate with earlier studies conducted in the United Kingdom (Cook 1998) and Sweden (Strömbäck 2008), which highlight the agency of political journalists in the frame building process. The findings of the current study are likely relevant for countries with media and political systems similar to the Netherlands. The Dutch political system is characterized by a multiparty system in the parliament. This system makes coalition forming with multiple parties a requirement for a government and alters the political power dynamics relevant for conflict frames. These dynamics are presumably different in, for example, two-party systems where it is more relevant to include members from the

oppositional party in a conflict story, because they represent the main opposing political actor. Furthermore, the distance between the pragmatic Dutch press and politicians is relatively large, as opposed to more partisan media cultures, where less intervention in frames put forward by political actors is likely. Indeed, different news cultures have differing levels of conflict frames in the news (Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2011) and journalistic values also differ between countries (Hanitzsch et al. 2011). Cross-national studies could reveal the extent to which the presence of conflict frames is explained by differing degrees of journalistic intervention and type of political system.

Even though the journalists interviewed in our study were open about their work practices, the self-reported nature of studies such as ours must be taken into account. Naturally, our findings show how journalists *perceive* their routines and practices. Via use of vignettes and a varied sample, we aimed to make sure that these perceptions are as varied, specific, and insightful as possible (Maykut and Morehouse 1994). Future studies will have to compare our results with content-analysis data of conflict reporting in the Netherlands and beyond.

Our focus on individual journalistic perceptions also alludes to another limitation of this study, namely, that factors on the organizational level and market pressures are not taken systematically into account. We did ask journalists about differences between news organizations with differing commercial aims and reporting styles, but we found no structural differences. Noticeably, journalists from all types of media outlets emphasized the importance of the audience, even those working for public broadcasters. Cross-national comparative studies or studies with a more macro-level or quantitative approach could assess differences between various types of organizations more proficiently. Organizational processes may fuel journalistic intervention in the form of exaggerating headlines when journalists do not write their own headlines. Furthermore, news media can differ in their modes of news presentation. This can potentially contribute to both the emergence of conflict and the way in which conflicts emerge (Cottle and Rai 2006). For instance, a television roundtable discussion in which different political actors participate may increase the chance of disputes. Content studies seem most adequate to reveal the consequences of these architectural characteristics for conflict framing.

Conflict frames emerge not exclusively because of the agency and intervention of journalists. News framed in terms of conflict often resonates with political reality and reflects disagreement fought out on the political stage. Journalists do not just send frames without adding meaning, nor do they solely provide the public with their own frames (Brüggemann 2014). This study shows that journalists can influence the construction and adaptation of conflict frames, and sheds light on contextual features that affect the amount of journalistic framing when it comes to political conflict. This adds to the literature because the role of journalists in the frame building process is still a relatively neglected area (Hänggli 2011).

In conclusion, the current study contributes to the frame building theory by showing the active role that journalists play when framing news in terms of conflict. This study reveals some of these interventionist practices. Furthermore, it sheds light on the role of media routines and politicians in when and how journalists intervene in the

conflict frame building process. Future studies could further disentangle the motivations of journalists. What drives them to intervene in the conflict frame building process? Regarding these motives, our results emphasized the important role of the audience. Future studies must assess to what extent commercial, organizational, and other higher order factors play a part and drive these motivations. These factors are harder to disentangle in a qualitative study. Also, the dynamics of political power deserve more attention. Our results point to the flexible nature of political power. Contextual factors affect how less powerful actors can become more newsworthy, for instance, by diverting from party policy. Future research must disentangle these ever-shifting power balances, both in political media systems that are similar to and different from the Dutch case. Finally, research towards different types of conflict frames seems needed. Most research is focused on conflict as a generic concept, but our results imply that different types of conflicts are present; future studies must uncover how visible these different types of conflicts are in actual press coverage.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note

1. The full interview protocol will be made available upon request.

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Who's Hot and Who's Not? Factors Influencing Public Perceptions of Current Party Popularity and Electoral Expectations

The International Journal of Press/Politics
2015, Vol. 20(4) 458–477
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1940161215596986
ijpp.sagepub.com



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Abstract

This study analyzes how perceptions of the popularity of political parties (i.e., the current opinion climate) and expectations about parties' future electoral performance (i.e., the future opinion climate) are formed. Theoretically, the paper integrates research on the sources of public opinion perception and empirically draws on a representative survey carried out before the 2013 German federal election. We show that the perceived media slant and opinions perceived in one's personal surroundings are closely related to perceptions of party popularity, whereas individual recall of poll results and personal opinions about the parties are not. However, poll results are shown to be the single most important predictor of expectations about the parties' future electoral success.

Keywords

opinion climate perception, electoral expectations, polls, poll effects, social projection, wishful thinking, media slant

Individual judgments about the opinions, attitudes, and potential voting decisions of other voters have attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent election studies. These studies focus primarily on electoral expectations, like, for example, individual assumptions about which party, candidate, or coalition might win an upcoming

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election. This growing interest in voters' expectations is driven mainly by the potential impact on voting decisions and electoral turnout—two effects that are especially important in multiparty systems where governments are usually formed by coalitions and smaller parties have to pass an electoral threshold.

Integrating various strands of research, we develop a path model that considers a wide range of factors potentially influencing perceptions of current party popularity and electoral expectations. Using survey data gathered before the 2013 German national election,¹ we show that—all else equal—electoral expectations are mainly driven by individual poll recall, whereas assessments of current party popularity are affected by perceptions of media slant and of opinions in personal social environments. Although our results underline the importance of media coverage as a source of expectations, effects of social projection were almost absent.

To date, research on electoral expectations has concentrated mostly on three aspects: First, scholars have examined the origins of expectations by investigating the information sources upon which voters rely when predicting election outcomes (Blais and Bodet 2006; Irwin and van Holsteyn 2002; Krizan et al. 2010). Second, the quality and/or accuracy of expectations has been addressed (Lewis-Beck and Skalaban 1989; Lewis-Beck and Tien 1999), and third, the effects of electoral expectations on political preferences and behaviors have been studied—most prominently in relation to voting intentions (Morwitz and Pluzinski 1996), election participation (Hoffmann and Klein 2013), and actual voting behavior (Bargsted and Kedar 2009). This paper belongs to the first category, examining the origins of party-related expectations and extending existing approaches in three ways:

First, research has focused largely on single sources of electoral expectations and, among those, particularly on published polls. In contrast to this rather narrow focus, and in accordance with more recent studies (e.g., Blais and Bodet 2006), we assume that published polls constitute just one of several factors that contribute to the formation of electoral expectations. Aside from the well-examined tendency for “wishful thinking,” which means that people tend to project their personal political opinions onto other citizens and their voting decisions (Krizan et al. 2010; Marks and Miller 1987), both perceptions of opinions in one's personal network (O'Gorman 1979) and media coverage (Gunther 1998) play important roles as sources that inform electoral expectations. Although there is evidence that nearly all of the factors mentioned above have an impact, an integrative investigation that allows their relative effects to be determined is still pending. Second—and in line with research on perceptions of public opinion (Shamir and Shamir 2000)—we examine voters' perceptions of other citizens from a temporal perspective, by considering perceptions of *current* party popularity and judgments about their *future* performance in an upcoming election (i.e., electoral expectations). Third, we investigate the sources of electoral expectations about a wide range of parties that vary in size and current political standing. Considering smaller parties in the context of electoral expectations is particularly important because they have the potential to influence election outcomes, as they often serve as coalition partners. According to Hobolt and Karp (2010), who analyzed 479 Western European governments from 1949 to 2010, more than half of these were formed through coalitions.

Similar proportions can be observed in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) states outside Europe as well (Armstrong and Duch 2010). As voters are aware of the potential power of the smaller parties (Blais et al. 2006; Meffert and Gschwend 2011), perceptions of their current standing and future success can also influence voting decisions.

Perceptions of Current and Future Public Opinion

When reviewing the literature on perceptions of public opinion, two perspectives can be identified: On one hand, researchers have examined how people judge the *current* state of public opinion—for example, present public support for a party or candidate. On the other hand, perceptions of *future* public opinion have been investigated by asking citizens to assess opinion trends or predict the state of public opinion in the future. Voters' expectations of electoral performance are the most prominent example of such subjective predictions (Shamir and Shamir 2000). To assess electoral expectations, researchers usually ask citizens to estimate the likelihood of a certain election outcome (Blais et al. 2008), for example, to predict the winning candidate (Delavande and Manski 2012), coalitions between parties, vote shares, or the chances of small parties entering the parliament (Meffert et al. 2011).

The differentiation between current and future perceptions of public opinion was first introduced by Noelle-Neumann (1974) in her “spiral of silence” theory. She justifies the distinction by claiming that

if there is a divergence in the assessment of the present and future strengths of a particular view, it is the expectation of the future position which will determine the extent to which the individual is willing to expose himself. (p. 45)

In other words, it is assumed that expectations about the future state of public opinion will have stronger behavioral consequences than perceptions of the status quo. Noelle-Neumann (1974) also suggests that the differences between both judgments reflect ongoing changes in public opinion and serve, therefore, as indicators of its dynamic nature, whereas congruent judgments point to a rather stable situation.

From an empirical point of view, assessments of current and future opinion climates are, in fact, often correlated (Marsh 1985; Petric and Pinter 2002). However, to date, it is unclear how the two relate to each other. Existing theoretical approaches consider assessments of current public opinion to be a source of future expectations (Petric and Pinter 2002; Taylor 1982), whereas most empirical studies do not link them in a causal way (e.g., Marsh 1985; Moy et al. 2001). In the current study, we follow the former view, assuming that people who perceive a party to be popular currently will also expect that party to be successful in an upcoming election.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The higher a person rates a political party's current popularity, the more favorable expectations that person will hold regarding the party's future electoral success.

Sources of Public Opinion Perceptions

Social psychologists, as well as political and communication scientists, have identified various sources of public opinion perceptions and electoral expectations. Before we begin to examine these factors empirically, we will discuss existing theoretical approaches and empirical research.

Social projection

One of the most stable phenomena in social psychology is the human tendency to assume that other people hold opinions, attitudes, or show behaviors that are mostly similar to one's own (Marks and Miller 1987). This effect is also known as "social projection," although where opinions are concerned, the terms "looking-glass effect" (Fields and Schuman 1976) and "false-consensus effect" (Ross et al. 1977) are more common. Numerous studies have reported (moderate) correlations between personal opinion and perceptions of public opinion (Mullen et al. 1985) though the exact reasons behind this relationship remain unclear (Marks and Miller 1987).

Empirical studies have demonstrated that the projection of opinions occurs in relation to a wide range of issues (Wojcieszak and Price 2009) and can also reduce the accuracy of public opinion perceptions (O'Gorman 1979). Furthermore, social projection is attenuated by heterogeneous social networks, in which individuals have higher chances encountering disagreement, which serves as a corrective factor (Wojcieszak and Price 2009).

The effects of social projection are especially prevalent when people assess future public opinion (Shamir 1995). In this regard, most studies have concentrated on how electoral expectations are influenced by personal political attitudes or preferences. It has been shown repeatedly that, compared with supporters of other political camps, voters tend to expect their preferred candidate or party to have greater success in a forthcoming election (Krizan et al. 2010; Meffert et al. 2011; Miller et al. 2012). This effect is also known as "wishful thinking" and it persists even when people receive more objective information about others (e.g., the results of election polls; Delavande and Manski 2012).

All in all, existing research suggests that personal opinions about parties are positively correlated with (1) perceptions of their current public popularity and (2) expectations about their future electoral performance. This leads us to put forward the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): The more positive a person's personal opinion is about a party, the more positively that person will assess the party's current popularity within the general population.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): The more positive a person's personal opinion is about a party, the more favorable expectations that person will hold regarding the party's future electoral success.

Media coverage: Polls and general media slant

The assumption that the media can influence perceptions of public opinion is not new (Katz 1982; Noelle-Neumann 1974). In fact, it is a view that frequently has been empirically supported (Gunther 1998; Mutz and Soss 1997; Tsfati et al. 2013). Some authors have even concluded that the media is far more successful in telling people what others think than in exerting a direct persuasive influence on their own attitudes and behaviors (Mutz 1998). Previous research indicates that there are two types of media cues that affect people's perceptions of public opinion: explicit cues and implicit cues (Zerback et al. 2015).

Explicit cues describe public opinion in a direct and aggregated way. Most important in this context are public opinion polls, which have become an integral part of political media coverage across western democracies (Brettschneider 2008; de Vreese and Semetko 2002; Lavrakas and Traugott 2000). As well as polls, subjective statements can also refer explicitly to public opinion; for example, a politician might declare that "Most European citizens support a more restrictive position on immigration." Such statements represent a considerable proportion of political coverage (Donsbach and Weisbach 2005; Reinemann et al. 2013). However, because of the importance of published polls in election coverage, we assume that they still constitute the main cues to public opinion. Moreover, research suggests that published polls play a key role when voters assess the current climate of opinion and future election outcomes. The effect seems to be especially prevalent among those who are highly involved and/or closely following a campaign (Blais and Bodet 2006; Irwin and van Holsteyn 2002; Meffert et al. 2011) and increases as the election approaches (Krizan and Sweeny 2013). Furthermore, polls have been shown to affect expectations about the success of certain party coalitions, whether small parties will enter a parliament (Meffert et al. 2011), and expected vote shares (Irwin and van Holsteyn 2002). These effects are especially relevant to multiparty systems that often have coalition governments involving two or more (smaller) parties—and even more so in electoral systems that impose electoral thresholds. Based on these findings, we consider published polls to be an important media cue that influences perceptions of current party popularity and electoral expectations, leading us to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): The higher the poll result is that a person can recall for a political party, the more positively that person will assess the party's current popularity within the general population.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): The higher a poll result is that a person can recall for a political party, the more favorable expectations that person will hold regarding the party's future electoral success.

Implicit cues are elements of media coverage that do not refer directly to public opinion and therefore require further cognitive elaboration by recipients. Among these, the general slant of news coverage (Gunther 1998; Gunther et al. 2001) is probably the most important. Regarding general media slant, the "persuasive press

inference” (PPI) suggests that people tend to think that the slant of coverage will have persuasive effects on other citizens (Gunther 1998; Gunther and Storey 2003). Therefore, they will assume that today’s coverage is tomorrow’s public opinion. The PPI has been supported by several studies and on a wide range of issues (e.g., Gunther and Christen 2002). These studies have also shown that perceptions of public opinion follow *perceptions* of media slant rather than actual media slant (Christen et al. 2002). This is important to note because perceived media slant can vary considerably, depending on a recipient’s personal opinion (*hostile media perception*; Vallone et al. 1985). We therefore propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 4a (H4a): The more positively a person perceives the slant of media coverage about a party, the more positively that person will assess that party’s current popularity within the general population.

Hypothesis 4b (H4b): The more positively a person perceives the slant of media coverage about a party, the more favorable expectations that person will hold regarding the party’s future electoral success.

Personal social networks

People’s personal social surroundings can be considered to play a decisive role in the formation of public opinion perceptions. Davison (1958) describes how people (accidentally or voluntarily) gather opinions from others to form impressions about the distribution of views in their immediate environment or in society in general. What he calls “person sampling” closely resembles the role of personal social networks in the “spiral of silence” (Noelle-Neumann 1974) and in more recent works (Wojcieszak and Price 2009: 29). According to Noelle-Neumann, individuals receive various signals from their personal surroundings and interpret them as indicators of the climate of opinion. Among these signals are publicly shown behaviors (e.g., wearing buttons, taking part in demonstrations, applauding a speaker) and statements made in public (Noelle-Neumann 1974; Shamir 1995).

Unfortunately, there are only a few studies that have examined the impact of personal networks on public opinion perception directly (e.g., O’Gorman 1979; Wojcieszak and Price 2009). Such research suggests that personal opinions tend to be rather similar to the opinions held in close social surroundings (e.g., those held by family and friends); a finding that has been explained by the distinct social homogeneity of interpersonal networks (Boomgaarden 2014; Mutz 1995). Accordingly, the probability of being confronted with different views increases when personal networks become more heterogeneous—for example, in surroundings that are socially more distant, like the workplace (Mutz 2006). Being confronted with opposing views also affects perceptions of public opinion by reducing bias caused by social projection (Wojcieszak and Price 2009) thus making public opinion perceptions more accurate (O’Gorman 1979).

People’s personal social environment may also influence their expectations regarding the outcome of elections. This notion is supported by studies investigating the effect of geographical locations (e.g., regions, towns, or electoral districts) on outcome

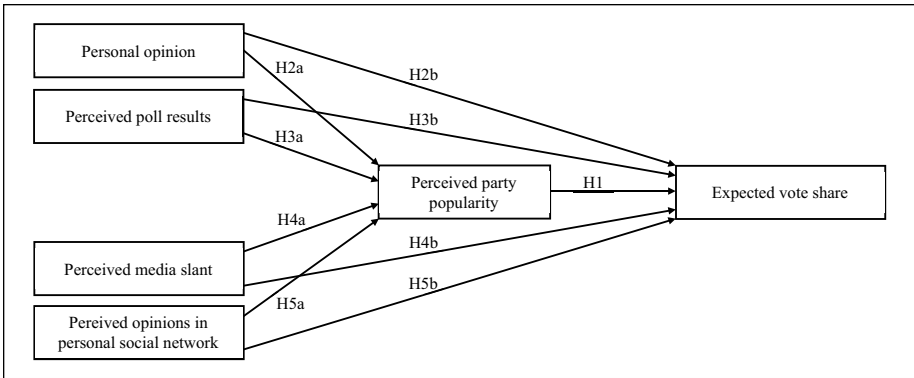


Figure 1. Factors influencing perceived party popularity and electoral expectations.

expectations (Babad et al. 1992; Meffert et al. 2011). Babad et al. (1992) call this the “neighborhood effect.” However, existing studies tend to compare large geographical regions with each other, thus overlooking the effect of the closer social environment. With this in mind, we propose our last two hypotheses:

Hypothesis 5a (H5a): The more positively a person perceives the opinions about a party in the closer personal social environment, the more positively that person will assess the party’s current popularity within the general population.

Hypothesis 5b (H5b): The more positively a person perceives the opinions about a party in the closer personal social environment, the more favorable expectations that person will hold regarding the party’s future electoral success.

Analytical model

Based on these considerations, we propose a path model that integrates perceptions of current party popularity and electoral expectations with the different sources informing those perceptions (Figure 1). The model enables us (1) to estimate the relative impact of the various sources, while controlling for other factors; (2) to compare effect patterns for perceptions of current and future climate-of-opinion perceptions; and (3) to analyze the indirect effects of information sources on expectations, as mediated by their perceived current popularity.

Method

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a regionally representative telephone survey with 1,012 Berlin citizens in the run-up to the 2013 German federal election. The survey was carried out by the Social Science Survey Center of a German University two weeks before the election, on September 22.² The respondents answered a series of questions about the key variables included in our model.

Personal Opinions about Parties

Personal opinions about the seven most important parties (Christian Democratic Union / Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD), Green Party, Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Left, Pirate Party, and the Alternative for Germany (AfD)) competing in the election were measured by the following question: “Now we are interested in what you personally think about the political parties. Please tell us, in general, whether you hold a positive or a negative opinion about the different parties. What about the [party]?” The respondents answered the question using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“very negative opinion”) to 5 (“very positive opinion”).

Perceived Opinion in Personal Networks

The respondents were also asked to assess how those in their immediate social environment feel about the parties: “Now we are interested in your closer personal surrounding, for example your family and friends. What opinions do they hold about the different parties?” Again, the respondents used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (“very negative opinion”) to 5 (“very positive opinion”) to answer the question.

Perceived Slant of Media Coverage

The participants indicated their evaluation of the general media slant regarding every party. Once more, a 5-point Likert-type scale was used (from 1 “very negative” to 5 “very positive”) to answer the question: “And how do you think the media has covered the various parties over the last week? I will read the names of the parties to you again; you tell me whether you think the media has portrayed that party positively or negatively in general.”

Recall of Poll Results

To measure individual recall of current poll results, we asked how often the respondents had engaged with polls within the last week. Those who indicated that they had seen polls were asked whether they could recall the poll share for each party (“Can you remember what share the parties had in the last poll that you saw? What about the [party]?”).

Perception of Current Party Popularity (Currently Perceived Public Opinion)

The respondents were asked to assess the current popularity of each party:

Now think about the political parties again. This time, we would like to know how the Germans in general feel about the parties. I will read the names of each party to you; you tell me whether you think the Germans hold a negative or positive opinion about that

party. Please use values from 1 to 5. "1" means that the Germans hold a very negative opinion about the party, "5" means that they hold a very positive opinion. You can use the values in between to rate your judgment. What opinion do the Germans hold about the [party]?

Electoral Expectations (Perceived Future Public Opinion)

Perceptions of the future climate of opinion were measured via expected vote shares for each party in the upcoming election ("Irrespective of the current situation, what vote shares do you think the different parties will achieve on September 22? What vote share will the [party] achieve?").

Results

The assumed relationships between perceptions of party popularity, electoral expectations, and their potential sources were analyzed using path models estimated with the Mplus 7.0 software package. Path models allow estimating the effects of several independent on several dependent variables; furthermore, they offer the possibility of including mediating variables. In our analysis, for example, we can determine the indirect effects of the four key sources on the expectations mediated by the perception of current party popularity. All the models presented here are saturated, meaning that the information in the data (variances, covariances) is just sufficient to estimate the model parameters (standardized path coefficients and R^2) but not to calculate model-fit-indices. Consequently, the quality of each model is assessed on the basis of the variance it explains (R^2).

Current Party Popularity

The parties included in the analysis differ with respect to how well perceptions of their current popularity can be explained by the four sources (Table 1). The amount of variance explained seems to be related to the size of the party and by the time it already is an established part of the party system. Popularity judgments regarding the two larger, well-established parties, the CDU/CSU ($R^2 = .09$) and SPD ($R^2 = .13$), can hardly be traced back to the independent variables in the model, whereas in the case of the smaller parties (the Green Party, the FDP, The Left, and the Pirate Party), considerable parts of popularity judgments can be explained (R^2 between .19 and .33). For the AfD, which was founded just a few months before the election, R^2 is even higher ($R^2 = .49$). This may be due to the fact that voters did not have any prior, long-term experiences with this party, its image, or its former electoral success. In assessing the AfD's popularity, therefore, they had to be dependent mostly on the information sources included in the model.

Looking at the relative impact of the predictors across all the parties, one dominant pattern can be observed: Perceptions of media slant and personal networks were the two most important sources of perceived current party popularity. Perceived media

Table 1. Explaining Perceptions of Current Party Popularity* (Standardized Path Coefficients and Standard Errors).

	Perceptions of the Current Popularity of Parties (Current Climate-of-Opinion)						
	CDU/CSU (n = 568)	SPD (n = 566)	Green Party (n = 513)	FDP (n = 488)	The Left (n = 442)	Pirate Party (n = 309)	AfD (n = 259)
Direct effects							
Personal opinion	.04 (.05)	.03 (.05)	.05 (.05)	.22*** (.04)	.02 (.06)	.20*** (.06)	.12 (.07)
Perceived opinion in personal network	.13** (.05)	.21*** (.05)	.28*** (.05)	.27*** (.04)	.23*** (.06)	.20*** (.06)	.40*** (.07)
Perceived slant of media coverage	.22*** (.04)	.20*** (.04)	.25*** (.04)	.26*** (.04)	.30*** (.04)	.31*** (.05)	.33*** (.05)
Recalled survey results	.04 (.04)	.09* (.04)	.07 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	.15*** (.04)	.05 (.05)	.08 (.05)
Controls							
Gender	.01 (.04)	.07 (.04)	-.05 (.04)	.08 (.04)	.08* (.04)	.07 (.05)	.05 (.05)
Age	-.08 (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.01 (.04)	.04 (.04)	-.08 (.05)	-.06 (.05)
Interest in the election	.08* (.04)	.02 (.04)	.01 (.04)	.00 (.04)	-.05 (.04)	-.11* (.05)	-.04 (.05)
R ²	.09***	.13***	.19***	.23***	.24***	.33***	.49***

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. Parties included: Christian Democratic Union / Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD), Green Party, Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Left, Pirate Party, and the Alternative for Germany (AfD)

slant was found to be the single best predictor for the CDU/CSU, The Left, and the Pirates. In the case of the AfD, personal networks were most influential, whereas for the SPD, the Green Party, and the FDP, the effects of perceived media slant and personal network opinions were about the same size. So the more positive the respondents perceived party-specific media coverage and the opinions in their personal networks to be, the better they rated the party's popularity within the general population. Surprisingly, projection effects did not occur consistently—only for the FDP and the Pirate Party. In these cases, people with positive opinions about the parties tended to perceive them as being more popular. It is also noteworthy that recalled poll results are the weakest of all the predictors, although, compared with the others, they constitute a more objective source of information through which to judge current party popularity. The results show that poll recall only slightly affected the popularity ratings of the SPD and The Left (Table 1).

Electoral Expectations

We will now turn to the expected vote shares as our central dependent variable. As depicted in Figure 1, perceptions of current party popularity now serve as an additional potential predictor of electoral expectations. When compared with perceptions of party popularity, the results show that electoral expectations can be explained better by the independent variables (R^2 between .20 and .47; Table 2). However, the pattern of influences is different: Perceived media slant remained a significant predictor in just two cases (CDU/CSU and SPD), and similarly, the perception of opinions in one's personal network retained significance in relation to just three parties (CDU/CSU, SPD, and Pirate Party). All the other effects were small. Social projection was also evident; however, its effect was relatively weak (CDU/CSU, Green Party, and FDP). The single most important variable explaining electoral expectations was poll recall, which exerted a moderate (and, in some cases, a strong) influence. Thus, it can be concluded that the higher the poll results people recalled for a party, the higher they rated its expected vote share on Election Day. Furthermore, expected vote shares were influenced by perceptions of a party's current popularity. Although this was the case for two parties only (FDP and AfD), current popularity can still be considered a strong predictor—especially in the case of the newly founded AfD. Moreover, the effects of poll recall were smallest for these two parties. This means that expectations about vote shares were rather independent from poll results and more affected by the other predictors. This is especially interesting because the question of whether they would pass the election threshold or not was discussed very intensively in the media.³

Path analyses also revealed some indirect effects on expectations in the case of the FDP and the AfD, which were mediated by the perceptions of their current popularity. For the FDP, we found that indirect effects of personal opinion, perceived opinions in personal networks, and the perceived tone of media coverage were significant.

Table 2. Explaining Electoral Expectations (Vote Share; Standardized Path Coefficients and Standard Errors).

	Expectations of Election Outcome						
	CDU/CSU (n = 568)	SPD (n = 566)	Green Party (n = 513)	FDP (n = 488)	The Left (n = 442)	Pirate Party (n = 309)	AfD (n = 259)
Direct effects							
Personal opinion	.13*** (.04)	.05 (.03)	.15** (.05)	.14** (.05)	-.01 (.06)	.04 (.05)	.10 (.08)
Perceived opinion in personal network	.08* (.04)	.08* (.03)	-.02 (.05)	.05 (.05)	.02 (.06)	.12* (.06)	.08 (.09)
Perceived slant of media coverage	-.08* (.03)	.08** (.03)	-.02 (.04)	-.03 (.04)	.03 (.05)	.07 (.05)	-.06 (.06)
Recalled survey results	.60*** (.03)	.63*** (.03)	.46*** (.04)	.34*** (.04)	.44*** (.04)	.57*** (.04)	.27*** (.07)
Perceived current popularity	.03 (.03)	-.01 (.03)	.04 (.04)	.13** (.05)	.01 (.04)	.08 (.05)	.26*** (.07)
Indirect effects							
Personal opinion	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.01 (.01)	.03** (.01)	.00 (.00)	.02 (.01)	.03 (.03)
Perceived opinion in personal network	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.01 (.01)	.04** (.01)	.00 (.01)	.02 (.01)	.10*** (.02)
Perceived slant of media coverage	.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.04** (.01)	.00 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.09*** (.03)
Recalled survey results	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.00)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.02 (.01)
Controls							
Gender (female)	.10*** (.03)	.08** (.03)	.05 (.04)	.10** (.04)	-.04 (.04)	.04 (.04)	.11* (.05)
Age	.09** (.03)	.07* (.03)	.09* (.04)	-.07 (.04)	.01 (.04)	-.04 (.05)	.01 (.06)
Interest in election	.02 (.03)	-.02 (.03)	.02 (.04)	.06 (.04)	.01 (.04)	.04 (.04)	.02 (.06)
R ²	.47***	.47***	.26***	.22***	.20***	.42***	.26***

Note. Indirect effects are calculated as products of coefficients along the respective model paths. Because products of coefficients are not normally distributed, significance testing is based on a corrected test (Bias corrected bootstrap; MacKinnon et al. 2004). Parties included: Christian Democratic Union / Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD), Green Party, Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Left, Pirate Party, and the Alternative for Germany (AfD).

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Discussion

Voters' perceptions of the climate of opinion in election campaigns can have far-reaching consequences because they might impact individual voting decisions. This is especially the case in multiparty systems, where governments are usually formed from coalitions, and in electoral systems with electoral thresholds. Investigating such perceptions and their sources is not only relevant with respect to large political parties but also for smaller ones, due to their role as potential kingmakers. Voters' expectations about whether such small parties have a chance of entering parliament or not may influence voting decisions and therefore affect the outcome of an election. This study constitutes an extension to prior research on electoral expectations in three ways: First, and in line with existing theoretical approaches to research in public opinion perception, it has considered current and future political opinion climates. Second, this is the first study to compare the impact of several sources of public opinion perceptions at once. Third, this paper has taken into account both larger and smaller parties. Our results therefore offer new insights into the origins of electoral expectations in western democracies with multiparty systems, coalition governments, and/or electoral thresholds. The results can be summarized as follows:

1. Perceptions of current party popularity are influenced by perceived media slant and the opinions that respondents perceive within their personal networks (H4a and H5a are confirmed for all parties). In contrast to our assumption, poll results and personal opinions only play a minor role (H2a and H3a confirmed for two parties). This result also supports Noelle-Neumann's (1974) assertion that judgments about the climate of opinion can be derived from the immediate *and* the mediated social environment. The limited effect of poll results may be explained by their complexity; percentage shares often need to be interpreted and put into context for further inferences to be made. Most people probably have difficulty deducing the popularity of a party solely from numbers, except when very low or very high poll results are obtained.

Another interesting finding is that projection effects were almost completely absent in this study. The respondents rarely aligned their judgments about the opinions of others with their personal opinions. The reason might be that, in contrast to most previous studies, we controlled for factors that are partly confounded with personal views—most importantly the perception of opinions in personal networks. This suggests that studies not controlling for this aspect might overestimate the impact of personal opinions (see also Table 3). In some cases, projection effects may be a result of mere social selection because personal networks are often characterized by attitudinal homogeneity, which makes opinions that are similar to one's own more salient and accessible (Marks and Miller 1987).

2. The importance of the information sources is entirely different when it comes to electoral expectations: Poll results as recalled by the respondents are the most dominant factor (H3b is confirmed for all parties). Other sources are only

Table 3. Zero-Order Correlations (Minimum–Maximum across All Seven Parties).

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Personal opinion	—					
2. Perceived poll results	.02*–.18**	—				
3. Perceived media slant	.07**–.30**	–.01–.13*	—			
4. Perceived opinions in personal social network	.37**–.51**	.01–.10*	.06–.32**	—		
5. Perceived party popularity	.20**–.48**	.04–.21*	.26**–.52**	.13**–.43**	—	
6. Expected vote share	.10**–.29**	.38**–.67**	.03–.11**	.10**–.22**	.11**–.36**	—

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

influential in some cases, and their effects are much weaker (H2b, H4b, and H5b are confirmed only for two/three parties). A possible reason for the dominance of poll results might be that people perceive them as the most applicable source of information when predicting election outcomes, whereas other sources may be judged less valid. Supporting this assumption, polls covered by the media are often presented as forecasts rather than snapshots of the parties’ current standing, which might also foster their interpretation as valid predictors of future election outcomes (Weimann 1990). And although perceptions of the social environment and general media slant hardly influence electoral expectations directly, at least in some cases (FDP, AfD), they exert indirect effects mediated through perceptions of current party popularity.

3. Perceptions of current party popularity affect outcome expectations, at least in some cases (H1 is confirmed for two parties).
4. Besides the similarities in effect patterns across parties, we also found some differences between them. First, the amount of variance explained by the predictors in our models differs considerably. Second, not all predictors are equally important for all parties suggesting that popularity perceptions and expectations may, in some cases, depend on the specific characteristics of individual parties or the situational context of the election. During the 2013 German federal election, the sizes of the parties and the question of whether they were well-established parts of the party system seem to have had an important impact in this respect. For example, the perceived popularity and chances of success of the newly founded AfD can be explained particularly well by the sources we considered in our model. We assume that for a new party no prior experiences (e.g., election results and long-term developments of polls) exist that could have informed respondents’ estimates of public opinion. In contrast, expectations for the FDP, which has been in the federal parliament since 1949, were completely independent from the poll results that respondents remembered.
5. Although most respondents were able to recall poll results, others were not and therefore represent interesting cases for further analysis. Referring to this group, our data provide preliminary support for the conclusion that those people do not

entirely differ regarding the importance they ascribe to other sources of electoral expectations. Nevertheless, the case of lacking poll knowledge raises the question if long-term sources like the ones mentioned above may gain importance as substitutes in this case.

In addition to drawing a clearer picture of the relative influence of various information sources, our results also point to the responsibility of pollsters and the media. The information they provide, when conducting and reporting election polls, plays a crucial role in informing citizens' perceptions of political reality and therefore can also influence political behavior—especially in multiparty systems.

The present study has certain limitations. First of all, we have investigated a single election in a specific situational context, which means that some results may be election-specific. Future analyses should examine whether the findings can be generalized to other elections or even to nonelection times (e.g., Shamir and Shamir 2000). The limited setting of Berlin, however, does not impede the validity of our results because we were interested in conducting a theory-driven investigation of relationships between perceptions of public opinion and their sources that should be independent of whether the analyses are based on a regionally or nationally representative sample. What has to be stressed, though, is the fact that we focused on perceptions. Although we would argue that it is exactly those perceptions that potentially bring about behavioral consequences, our analyses, in a strict sense, cannot prove the actual effects of media slant or published polls. To do that, content analytical data on media slant and poll results would have to be included in the study. It should also be stated that, due to the cross-sectional design, the paths within our model should not be interpreted in a strict, causal manner. However, all the relationships assumed here are derived from careful theoretical considerations.

Another point worthy of discussion is the measures that we used. Relying on a 5-point scale to measure perceived party popularity might have affected the correlations with the percentage scales that we utilized to assess expectations because, in both cases, the respondents could differentiate their answers to varying degrees. Compared with the wider scale (0–100 percent), the narrow 5-point scale could have resulted in an underestimation of the relationship with the percentage scale.

Also the measurement of perceptions of current and future opinion climates has to be reflected upon critically. Probably, a part of the strong correlation between remembered poll results and electoral expectations is due to the formal similarity of the percentage scales used in these cases. Although we cannot rule out the possibility that this correlation is related to measurement, additional analysis suggests that it is probably not: Using a 5-point Likert-type scale, we also asked respondents whether they expected the smaller parties to exceed the election threshold of 5 percent and make it into parliament (5-point Likert-type scale: 1 = “clearly pass,” 2 = “narrowly pass,” 3 = “exactly get 5 percent,” 4 = “narrowly miss,” and 5 = “clearly miss” the threshold). The effect of recalled poll results still remains strong and significant when expectations are measured employing the 5-point-scale ($\beta = .24-.40$). Hence, it can be suggested that the strong impact on expectations is not related merely to measurement.

Furthermore, substantial differences between the two constructs examined might have contributed to the findings obtained here. For instance, it can be argued that the

Table 4. Sample Descriptives* (*n* = 1.012; Means and Standard Deviations).

	CDU	SPD	Green Party	FDP	The Left	Pirate Party	AfD
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Personal opinion (5-point scale)	2.78 (1.06) <i>n</i> = 994	2.96 (0.94) <i>n</i> = 998	2.75 (1.13) <i>n</i> = 985	1.79 (1.06) <i>n</i> = 985	2.36 (1.22) <i>n</i> = 981	1.84 (1.04) <i>n</i> = 917	1.63 (1.02) <i>n</i> = 748
Perceived opinions in personal social network (5-point scale)	2.77 (1.14) <i>n</i> = 903	3.15 (0.88) <i>n</i> = 901	2.92 (1.08) <i>n</i> = 897	1.81 (0.95) <i>n</i> = 903	2.35 (1.16) <i>n</i> = 897	1.82 (1.02) <i>n</i> = 876	1.60 (0.98) <i>n</i> = 773
Perceived slant of media coverage (5-point scale)	3.56 (0.82) <i>n</i> = 922	3.19 (0.80) <i>n</i> = 928	2.86 (0.77) <i>n</i> = 887	2.61 (0.88) <i>n</i> = 879	2.47 (0.89) <i>n</i> = 879	1.94 (0.92) <i>n</i> = 744	2.00 (0.99) <i>n</i> = 647
Recalled survey results (%)	39.3 (5.3) <i>n</i> = 680	27.7 (5.4) <i>n</i> = 671	11.5 (3.6) <i>n</i> = 614	5.8 (2.8) <i>n</i> = 589	8.5 (3.6) <i>n</i> = 536	3.6 (2.1) <i>n</i> = 419	3.1 (1.8) <i>n</i> = 376
Perceived party popularity (5-point scale)	3.61 (0.77) <i>n</i> = 974	3.18 (0.70) <i>n</i> = 976	2.85 (0.75) <i>n</i> = 972	2.09 (0.80) <i>n</i> = 973	2.15 (0.86) <i>n</i> = 966	1.77 (0.90) <i>n</i> = 926	1.76 (0.92) <i>n</i> = 764
Expected vote share	38.6 (6.8) <i>n</i> = 932	30.4 (7.1) <i>n</i> = 934	12.7 (6.1) <i>n</i> = 924	6.7 (5.3) <i>n</i> = 924	8.9 (6.5) <i>n</i> = 918	4.2 (4.1) <i>n</i> = 891	3.5 (4.4) <i>n</i> = 822

*Parties included: Christian Democratic Union / Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU), Social Democratic Party (SPD), Green Party, Free Democratic Party (FDP), The Left, Pirate Party, and the Alternative for Germany (AfD)

formation of outcome expectations is also influenced by long-term factors and considerations such as previous election results and perception of long-term party affiliations. This would also help to explain why our models were especially effective in explaining expectations about the performance of the relatively new Pirate Party and the AfD.

Despite the limitations mentioned above, the present study has shown that the formation of public opinion perceptions in election campaigns is more complex than prior research has assumed. The processes involved and—most importantly—the behavioral consequences of voting decisions should be investigated further in light of these results. Future studies should replicate our analysis to investigate whether the patterns of influence we found can be generalized to other elections, other national contexts, or even nonelection periods. Finally, the considerable number of voters without any poll knowledge deserves further attention to determine which information they use instead to assess public opinion and to form electoral expectations.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. The paper is not based on research that was funded entirely or partially by an outside source.

2. Participants lived in households with a private telephone connection and were eligible to vote. A random sample of households was drawn (random-digit dialing [RDD]). Respondents were selected via the last-birthday method; the maximum number of contacts was ten—52 percent of respondents were male, with an average age of 55 years ($SD = 17.6$); 50 percent were qualified to enter higher education; 84 percent said that the result of the election was “important,” or “very important” to them; and 63 percent held a long-term party identification. This means that like in other surveys on similar topics, respondents were rather male, older, better educated, and politically more involved compared with the general population. The structure of respondents thus is more similar to those actually participating in the election.
3. Not all respondents were able to recall poll results, especially for the smaller parties (see Table 4). A reanalysis of the data including only persons without poll recall indicated that their perceptions of current party popularity were still mainly determined by the opinions they perceived in their social environment and by perceived media slant. However, the models predicting electoral expectations performed considerably less well, which underlines the important role of poll perception as a predictor.

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When Threats Come from Within: National Identity, Cascading Frames, and the U.S. War in Afghanistan

The International Journal of Press/Politics
2015, Vol. 20(4) 478–497
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sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav
DOI: 10.1177/1940161215599384
ijpp.sagepub.com


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Abstract

Scholars have widely demonstrated that the process by which officials frame their communications significantly impacts how citizens understand, evaluate, and respond to policy issues or events. This study attempts to build on existing framing research in two important ways. First, we seek to illuminate the importance of “cultural resonance” in determining whether an individual frame is likely to gain acceptance among its intended audience. Second, we assess the impact of “frame contestation” on the adoption of such frames. We explore these dynamics in the context of the U.S. war in Afghanistan. Specifically, we conducted an experiment in which U.S. adults were exposed to a news story about U.S. military transgressions in Afghanistan. Our results indicate that frames, designed to appeal to and protect the national identity, broadly resonated among respondents, impacting their perceptions of the character, causes and consequences of the transgressions, as well as their broader attitudes about the nation, the U.S. military, and the war in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, when these frames were presented, and then explicitly contested within the same news story, it diminished—but not entirely—these framing effects. We reflect on the theoretical and practical implications of these findings for journalists, officials, and the broader public.

Keywords

cascading activation, cultural resonance, frame contestation, national identity, War in Afghanistan

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Throughout the U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan, a number of incidents involving American military personnel killing innocent Afghan civilians have come to light.¹ Perhaps the most egregious of these occurred on March 11, 2012, when a U.S. soldier opened fire on a number of unsuspecting villagers in Kandahar, killing a total of sixteen civilians, including nine children (T. Shah and Bowley 2011). Any single incident like this—let alone several—could have, in theory, led to a broader public outcry and a demand for accountability up the chain-of-command. However, none of these incidents seemed to elicit sustained public debate within the United States about the circumstances under which these incidents occurred, what lessons should be derived from them, or whether they could be linked to military training or the policies put in place by the administration. The relative lack of critical discourse that surrounded these incidents, we suspect, was due in large part to how these incidents were framed by the White House and Pentagon, and reported in the news. President Obama's statement in the aftermath of the Kandahar killings, for example, in which he emphasized that this is "not who we are as a country and it does not represent our military," effectively became the dominant narrative that surrounded this and other similar incidents in U.S. political and news discourse (Obama 2012).

As research has shown, such explicit appeals to national identity in U.S. political discourse are not uncommon in these types of moments—moments in which the image of the nation is threatened by the actions of its soldiers (e.g., Bennett et al. 2008; Grey and Martin 2008; Rowling et al. 2011; Rowling et al. 2015). Such strategies can be particularly powerful—and beneficial for those seeking to sustain public support for an ongoing war—in shaping how these incidents come to be portrayed in the news and understood among the broader public. As scholars have shown (see Holsti 2004; Jentleson 2010), public opinion can create powerful constraints on the decisions of policymakers, even during war. Thus, it becomes imperative for those policymakers who might be implicated in such scandals to frame these incidents in ways that might align with and, therefore, resonate with the broader culture and identity of the nation. This was precisely what occurred, for example, in the aftermath of the 1968 My Lai Massacre (see Grey and Martin 2008; Rowling et al. 2015) and the 2004 Abu Ghraib prison torture scandal (see Bennett et al. 2008; Rowling et al. 2011). In each case, White House and military officials aggressively framed these transgressions as "un-American," "isolated" acts carried out by a "few bad apples," and these frames, in turn, were largely amplified within the U.S. press, despite strong opposition among congressional officials. Thus, the public was largely sequestered from these alternative, critical viewpoints in response to the incidents and, as a result, public support for each war remained relatively stable throughout these controversies. This is particularly troubling, given that it is in these moments, one could argue, that the nation, its leaders, and their policies deserve the most scrutiny, not less.

Although these patterns in news are well documented, more work is needed to better understand the effects of these dynamics on public opinion. Beyond inferences we might make from public opinion polls and the lack of public debate, we do not yet know what impact these types of frames might actually have on public attitudes in these moments. Furthermore, while scholarship has shown that contestation can undercut

framing effects (Brewer and Gross 2005; Sniderman and Theriault 2004), it is unclear whether the same applies when the initial frames in question are culturally resonant. With this in mind, we conducted an experiment in which we exposed a sample of U.S. adults to a news article about a recent incident involving a group of U.S. soldiers accused of having killed several innocent civilians during combat operations in Afghanistan. Our results indicate that frames designed to bolster the national identity strongly resonated among respondents, significantly impacting their perceptions of the nature, severity and broader consequences of this incident, as well as their broader attitudes about the nation, the military, and the war in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, when these frames were presented, then explicitly contested within the same news story, it diminished—but did not entirely eradicate—these framing effects. These findings, we argue, have significant theoretical and practical implications for journalists, officials, and the broader public.

Framing, Cultural Resonance, and National Identity

There is broad consensus among scholars that political actors and journalists, through their communications, seek to frame certain events in ways that might benefit them politically or professionally. To frame, as Entman (1993: 52) defined it, “is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient within a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” Put simply, a frame is designed to make sense of a broad array of complex information and suggest a suitable course of action, and its “effect” can be measured by whether it leads to changes in attitude or behavior about a given topic among frame recipients (Nelson et al. 1997). In the words of Chong and Druckman (2007b: 104), framing effects “occur when (often small) changes in the presentation of an issue or an event produce (sometimes large) changes in opinion.” Indeed, numerous studies have demonstrated such effects on issues ranging from welfare, affirmative action, and AIDS (Nelson and Kinder 1996) to attitudes about American exceptionalism (Gilmore 2015), foreign nations (Brewer et al. 2003), and the use of military force (Edy and Meirick 2007). This study seeks to build on this existing framing research in two important ways. First, we illuminate the importance of “cultural resonance” in determining whether an individual frame is likely to be embraced by its intended audience within the framing process. Second, we assess the impact of “frame contestation” on the adoption of such frames. Thus, we “pit” the strength of culturally resonant frames against the power of frame contestation and, in doing so, bring together two disparate aspects of framing research.

Framing involves a complex interplay between the content of a frame and the values, beliefs, and perceptions of those receiving the frame. As scholars have noted (Gamson 1992; Snow and Benford 1988), the extent to which a frame can move public opinion about a policy or event is heavily dependent upon its “cultural resonance.” Culturally resonant frames offer interpretations that are consistent with enduring cognitive schemas. Such schemas, or mental frameworks, help to structure how citizens understand the world (Goffman 1974). Because culturally resonant frames activate

and support relevant values and beliefs among the citizenry, they tend to elicit common responses. As Entman (2004: 14, emphasis in original) notes, “The most inherently powerful frames are those fully congruent with schemas *habitually* used by most members of society. Such frames have the greatest intrinsic capacity to arouse similar responses among most Americans.” For example, Chong (2000) and Pan and Kosicki (2001) have shown that the strength of a frame increases significantly when it appeals to broader consensus values and does not conflict with strongly held beliefs (see also Brewer 2001). Moreover, frames that effectively tap into and resonate with citizens’ preexisting schemas and broader cultural values stand the best chance to be adopted by the public, even when opposition from political rivals or the press might arise.

The specifics, however, about what factors make a particular frame culturally resonant remain vague; indeed, much of the research on framing recognizes its significance, but only accounts for it in the abstract and does not empirically test its importance within the framing process. This is not surprising, given that culture is difficult to define, and the manner and extent to which it might matter within the framing process will depend upon the context. We, therefore, seek to address these issues by focusing on what prevailing cultural values might be at stake in moments of national dissonance and assessing what specific frames might be particularly resonant to citizens in these situations. In such moments, we argue, the psychology associated with national identity should be key to understanding which frames are likely to resonate among Americans. Studies in social psychology indicate that an individual’s self-identity is profoundly shaped by the social groups to which he or she belongs and the value attached to those groups (Tajfel 1982). Simply put, through largely unconscious processes, individuals tend to derive comfort, self-esteem, and security from the groups with which they identify (Rivenburgh 2000). And these predispositions toward group identity tend to be particularly pronounced among citizens within a nation because, in the words of Anderson (2006: 4), the nation commands “profound emotional legitimacy” for its citizens. As a result, citizens often seek to protect or enhance the nation whenever it is perceived to be threatened physically (see Hutcheson et al. 2004) or, in cases involving national dissonance, psychologically (see Branscombe and Miron 2004; Entman 1991; Gilmore et al. 2013).

In moments when the image of the nation has been threatened by U.S. military transgressions—acts that profoundly deviate from what are perceived to be the collective values and identity of the nation—the types of frames that would be culturally resonant become less abstract. In such situations, uncertainty and collective angst are likely to set in among Americans regarding the scope and severity of these transgressions, the circumstances that may have led to them, who should be punished, and whether this behavior is reflective of how the U.S. military conducts itself in combat. These dynamics, we argue, are likely to prompt Americans to seek out explanations that serve to *protect and restore* the national identity. We, therefore, focus on the effects of four identity-protective frames that have been shown to be regularly employed by officials in moments of national dissonance: *minimization* and *contextualization* of the transgressions, *disassociation* of the transgressors, and *reaffirmation* of the national identity (Rowling et al. 2011; Rowling et al. 2015). We expect these

frames, designed to reorient how citizens come to understand, evaluate, and respond to these situations, to resonate because citizens possess deep psychological motivation to rationalize behavior that reflects negatively upon themselves and their nation (Branscombe and Miron 2004). Each frame merits elaboration.

First, *minimization* involves downplaying the seriousness and extent of the deviant behavior by characterizing it as isolated or by blaming the behavior on lower level group members (Bandura 1999; Blatz et al. 2009). In essence, minimization seeks to limit the damage caused by the transgressions by suggesting that the behavior is neither serious nor widespread. Second, *contextualization* involves characterizing the behavior as situational and, therefore, not indicative of the character and values of the group members who committed the acts or the group itself (Entman 1993; Hogg and Terry 2000). This consists of blaming the deviance on environmental circumstances such as confusion, stress, or peer influence (Zimbardo 2007) or highlighting the existence and severity of some external threat. Thus, contextualization is about blaming aberrant behavior on the situation rather than the disposition of the perpetrators or the in-group itself.

Third, *disassociation* is to take measures to remove the deviant actors from the group, by characterizing the deviants as unworthy of group membership—for example, as “un-American” (Marques and Paez 1994)—or taking material measures to punish them (Eidelman et al. 2006). In essence, a purging from the group of the deviant members enables the collectivity to suggest that the behavior is not characteristic of the group and will not be tolerated, thereby allowing for the preservation of positive group identity. Finally, *reaffirmation* redirects attention away from the deviant behavior toward more positive aspects of the group (Tajfel 1982). This involves highlighting cherished group values and attributes, exemplary behavior, invoking resonant historical myths and cultural symbols (Billig 1995; Hutcheson et al. 2004), or highlighting aspects of selected out-groups that reflect poorly upon those groups (Bandura 1990). Thus, when nationally dissonant moments arise, an important strategy for officials seeking to limit the political damage is to shift citizens’ attention toward ideals and attributes that make them feel good about the nation.

Our first set of hypotheses, then, focus on the impact of the minimization, contextualization, disassociation, and reaffirmation frames in news coverage of an incident involving U.S. military transgressions. Our primary motivation here is to test the effects of these frames by measuring not just their impact on respondents’ perception of the incident but their broader attitudes toward the nation, the military, and its policies as well. First, we expect that respondents exposed to news coverage in which one of the four frames was echoed—that is, offered by White House and military officials, then essentially repeated by congressional officials—would be more likely to perceive the incident less negatively than those exposed to news coverage in which these frames were entirely absent (Hypothesis 1 [H1]). Specifically, we expect that respondents exposed to the echoed minimization frame would be more likely to downplay the severity of these transgressions (Hypothesis 1a [H1a]); respondents exposed to the echoed contextualization frame would be more likely to attribute the causes of these transgressions to situational stress (Hypothesis 1b [H1b]); respondents exposed to the

echoed disassociation frame would be more likely to believe that those involved will be appropriately punished (Hypothesis 1c [H1c]); and respondents exposed to the echoed reaffirmation frame would be more likely to perceive America as a moral leader in the world (Hypothesis 1d [H1d]). This hypothesis is based on the assertion that such frames are likely to resonate because these lines of argument allow citizens to limit the collective shame and humiliation potentially triggered by such an incident and, in turn, restore their beliefs in the virtues of the nation.

Second, we expect that respondents exposed to news coverage in which the frames were echoed would identify more strongly with the nation than those exposed to news coverage in which these frames were entirely absent (Hypothesis 2 [H2]). This is due to the fact that citizens tend to engage in nation-protective behavior when the nation is perceived to be threatened. Because these frames are explicitly designed to bolster the image of the nation, we expected them to facilitate among respondents a greater sense of national pride and, therefore, a stronger connection with the nation. Thus, we expect that exposure to these nation-protective frames will move citizens to become more attached to the nation in response to the incident.

Finally, we expect that respondents exposed to news coverage in which the frames were echoed would be more supportive of the U.S. war in Afghanistan (Hypothesis 3a [H3a]) and express greater confidence in the U.S. military (Hypothesis 3b [H3b]) than those exposed to news coverage in which these frames were entirely absent. Because these frames are designed to lead respondents to downplay the severity of the transgressions, attribute the causes of the transgressions to situational stress, believe that those involved will be appropriately punished, and perceive America as a moral leader in the world, it stands to reason that these frames would also elicit among respondents broader effects on their attitudes toward the nation, the military, and its policies.

Frame Contestation and Framing Effects

Despite their potential power, culturally resonant frames—indeed, any frames—rarely manifest in political discourse without at least some opposition. As several framing-effects studies have noted, political issues are routinely debated and framed in contrasting terms, and citizens are usually presented with two or more competing arguments *together* within the same discourse (see Druckman 2004; Edy and Meirick 2007; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). Nonetheless, many framing-effects studies employ a one-sided design in which respondents receive just one of two or more alternative representations of a given issue to determine the public's preference for one frame over another (Borah 2011). As Sniderman and Theriault (2004: 141–142) have noted, framing-effects studies have largely “restricted attention to situations in which citizens are artificially sequestered, restricted to hearing only one way of thinking about a political issue” (see also Entman 1993). But to accurately assess framing effects within a broader political context, it is imperative to account for frame contestation.

Recent studies by Sniderman and Theriault (2004), Chong and Druckman (2007b), Druckman (2004), and Brewer and Gross (2005), for example, have begun to explore these dynamics. Notably, their findings have suggested that respondents are more

likely to consciously evaluate the initial frame when opposing considerations are introduced (Chong and Druckman 2007a). That is, frame contestation is likely to prompt uncertainty and skepticism within the minds of individuals about the quality and persuasiveness of the initial frame, thereby encouraging more critical assessment of why one interpretation or frame might be better than another. In particular, Sniderman and Theriault (2004) and Brewer and Gross (2005) have suggested that framing effects are essentially canceled out when opposing frames are presented together. It remains unclear, however, whether contestation of *culturally resonant* frames might function in the same manner. Indeed, it is reasonable to assume that the cultural resonance of the frames in this study—versus just any frames—might make them more resistant to the effects of contestation. As Chong and Druckman (2007b) have suggested, respondents are likely to still prefer whichever frame is more consistent with their preexisting values, *even* when competitive frames are introduced. In effect, the power and cultural appeal of a particular frame can make it too difficult to completely disrupt or dislodge from the collective consciousness. This would suggest, then, that contestation of culturally resonant frames might simply attenuate their effects, but not fully counteract them.

We, therefore, seek to engage this scholarly tension between the effects of cultural resonance and the impact of contestation within the framing process. With this in mind, we offer our second set of hypotheses. First, we expect that when respondents are exposed to news coverage in which the White House and military frames of minimization, contextualization, disassociation, and reaffirmation are actively *contested* by congressional officials, they will be more likely to perceive the incident more negatively—but not as negatively as those receiving no frames at all—than those exposed to news coverage in which these frames were *echoed* by members of Congress (Hypothesis 4 [H4]). Thus, contestation should diminish the effects of these frames, but not entirely eradicate them. Specifically, we expect that respondents exposed to news coverage in which the minimization frame was challenged would be less likely to downplay the severity of the transgressions (Hypothesis 4a [H4a]); respondents exposed to news coverage in which the contextualization frame was challenged would be less likely to attribute the causes of the transgressions to situational stress (Hypothesis 4b [H4b]); respondents exposed to news coverage in which the disassociation frame was challenged would be less likely to believe that those involved will be appropriately punished (Hypothesis 4c [H4c]); and respondents exposed to news coverage in which the reaffirmation frame was challenged would be less likely to perceive America as a moral leader in the world (Hypothesis 4d [H4d]). Because counterframes compel respondents to critically evaluate—or at least subconsciously rationalize—why one frame is more credible than another, frame contestation is likely to limit respondents' receptivity to the initial frames.

Second, we expect that respondents exposed to news coverage in which the frames were *contested* by congressional officials would identify less strongly with the nation—but stronger than those receiving no frames at all—than those exposed to news coverage in which these frames were *echoed* by members of Congress (Hypothesis 5 [H5]). Thus, we expect that the simple presence of the frames would

impact national attachment, but that this impact would be attenuated when those frames are contested in news coverage.

Finally, we expect that respondents exposed to news coverage in which the frames were *contested* by congressional officials would be less supportive of the U.S. war in Afghanistan (Hypothesis 6a [H6a]) and express less confidence in the U.S. military (Hypothesis 6b [H6b])—but more supportive of the war and more confident in the military than those receiving no frames at all—than those exposed to news coverage in which these frames were *echoed* by members of Congress. Again, the assumption here is that exposure to the frames would impact these broader policy attitudes, but that this impact would be attenuated when those frames are contested in news coverage.

Method

To test these expectations, we conducted an experiment among a sample of U.S. adults through the online survey company SurveyMonkey. The sample comprised 1,698 adults who were part of a regular survey panel through SurveyMonkey and the data were collected during spring 2012. Because these respondents chose to be part of a panel of survey takers for SurveyMonkey and self-selected into our study, they are not representative of the U.S. adult population. That said, the sample of participants includes a diverse range of individuals. Specifically, males constituted 53.6 percent; 63.2 percent of respondents were above the age of forty-five years; 61 percent had a two-year college degree or more while 10.6 percent had no more than a high school education; 83.6 percent of respondents were white; 41.5 percent of the respondents were Democrat, 24.6 percent were Neutral, and 33.9 percent were Republican; and 55.8 percent of respondents made less than \$75K/year (see Table 1 for full distribution).

Participants were presented with a simulated news article about an incident in which U.S. soldiers were accused of having deliberately killed several innocent civilians during combat operations in Afghanistan. This story was derived from an incident reported in the *New York Times* in September 2010, which received considerable attention in the press (Yardley and Schmitt 2010). Respondents were randomly assigned to one of nine versions of the story.² Specifically, there was an echoed and a contested condition for each of the four frames, as well as a control condition in which none of the four frames—or any substantive interpretation of the incident—were offered. In the article, the frames were initially invoked by White House and military officials, then either echoed (essentially repeated) or contested (directly challenged) by Republican congressional officials.³

Incident-Related Measures

After reading the news story, respondents were asked to answer a questionnaire. It began with incident-related questions. To limit the potential for consistency bias in the survey responses, we mixed up these questions—Questions about the scope and severity of the incident, for example, were interspersed with questions about situational stress, punishment, and America's moral standing. We also included reverse-coded

Table 1. Distribution of Demographic Variables.

	M	Median	Minimum Value	Maximum Value	25% Quartile	75% Quartile
Gender	1.46	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00
Age	4.42	4.00	1.00	7.00	3.00	6.00
Income	3.73	4.00	2.00	5.00	3.00	5.00
Party	4.20	4.00	1.00	7.00	3.00	6.00
Race	1.28	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.00	2.00
Education	3.77	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.00	5.00

measures. Overall, these measures were designed to assess the power of the frames and to see whether frame contestation impacted perceptions of the incident.

The incident-related questions were measured via a 4-point scale, ranging from 1 (“not at all”) to 4 (“completely”). *Limited severity* contained six items, which included, for example, “To what extent do you think that the soldiers involved in this incident were just following orders?” (reverse-coded, $M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.81$). These items combined received a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .80$. The *situational stress* measure contained five items, which included, for example, “To what extent do you think that the stresses of combat in Afghanistan led these soldiers to do this?” ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.80$). These items combined received a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .83$. The *punishment* measure was examined via four items, which included, for example, “How likely do you think that those responsible for this incident will be appropriately punished?” ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 0.86$). These items combined received a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .78$. Finally, the *America as moral leader* measure was comprised of four items, which included, for example, “To what extent do you think that this incident is consistent with the way in which America conducts itself in war?” (reverse-coded, $M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.79$). These items combined received a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .78$.

For each of these incident-related measures, we averaged them to create single-item standardized indices, which were then scored in the direction of *frame acceptance*—in which higher scores meant respondents were more likely to regard the severity of the incident as limited, attribute the causes to situational stress, believe that those involved would be appropriately punished, and perceive America as a moral leader in the world.

National Attachment Measures

Next, there was a battery of questions to assess respondents’ level of national attachment. Five items developed by Huddy and Khatib (2007) were examined via 4-point scales, ranging from 1 (“never/not at all”) to 4 (“all the time/completely”). This included, for example, “To what extent do you identify with other Americans?” ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 0.78$). These items had a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .84$; we averaged them to create a single-item index in which higher scores meant stronger identification with the nation.

Policy-Related Measures

Finally, respondents were asked questions about their level of support for the war in Afghanistan and their confidence in the U.S. military. Attitude toward the war was assessed via three items. This included, for example, “To what extent do you think U.S. involvement in the war in Afghanistan has improved the long-term security of the United States” ($M = 1.90$, $SD = 0.80$). These items had a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$, so we averaged them to create a single, standardized measure. Confidence in the military was examined via one item: “In general, how much confidence do you have in the U.S. military” ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 0.74$).

Results

To test our first hypotheses, we ran one-tailed t -tests comparing mean scores on these incident-related measures between those who received any of the echoed frames and those who received no frames—thus collapsing across all frame conditions. These results are shown in Table 2. These data indicate that respondents who were exposed to an echoed frame condition were significantly more likely to downplay the severity of the incident, attribute the causes of the incident to situational stress, believe that punishment would be appropriately served, and perceive America as a moral leader. This supports the overarching H1.

Next, we compared mean scores for these incident-related attitudes within conditions. Because each incident-related measure is conceptually linked with one of the frames—limited severity (minimization), situational stress (contextualization), punishment (disassociation), and America as a moral leader (reaffirmation)—we wanted to assess the effects of the echoed frames versus the absence of any of these that frames on these related attitude measures.

Overall, the data offer strong support for H1a, H1b, H1c, and H1d. Those who received the minimization frame were significantly more likely to downplay the severity of the incident, $M = 2.93$ versus $M = 2.67$; $t(492) = 5.173$, $p = .000$, $d = .453$; those who received the contextualization frame were significantly more likely to say the behavior of those involved in this incident was caused by situational stress, $M = 2.97$ versus $M = 2.58$; $t(470) = 6.932$, $p = .000$, $d = .652$; those who received the disassociation frame were significantly more likely to believe that those involved would be appropriately punished, $M = 2.50$ versus $M = 2.36$; $t(487) = 2.345$, $p = .010$, $d = .213$; and those who received the reaffirmation frame were significantly more likely to perceive America as a moral leader, $M = 2.96$ versus $M = 2.64$; $t(494) = 5.569$, $p = .000$, $d = .503$. Together, these results suggest that each of the frames, when echoed by Congressional officials, resonated among respondents. In contrast, when respondents received none of the frames, they perceived the incident much more critically. These results are presented visually in Figure 1.

Next, we explored our second and third hypotheses—that respondents exposed to news coverage in which the frames were *echoed* would identify more strongly with the nation (H2), would be more supportive of the U.S. war in Afghanistan (H3a), and would express greater confidence in the U.S. military (H3b) than those exposed to

Table 2. Mean Scores on Incident-Related Attitudes, Comparing Presence versus Absence of Any of the Frames Across All Conditions.

	Echoed	Control
Limited severity	2.75 (n = 968) <i>t</i> = 1.87, <i>df</i> = 1,215, <i>p</i> = .030, <i>d</i> = .135	2.67 (n = 249)
Situational stress	2.67 (n = 964) <i>t</i> = 1.88, <i>df</i> = 1,208, <i>p</i> = .030, <i>d</i> = .140	2.58 (n = 246)
Punishment	2.45 (n = 964) <i>t</i> = 1.98, <i>df</i> = 1,208, <i>p</i> = .024, <i>d</i> = .142	2.36 (n = 246)
America as moral leader	2.82 (n = 964) <i>t</i> = 3.67, <i>df</i> = 1,208, <i>p</i> = .000, <i>d</i> = .261	2.64 (n = 246)

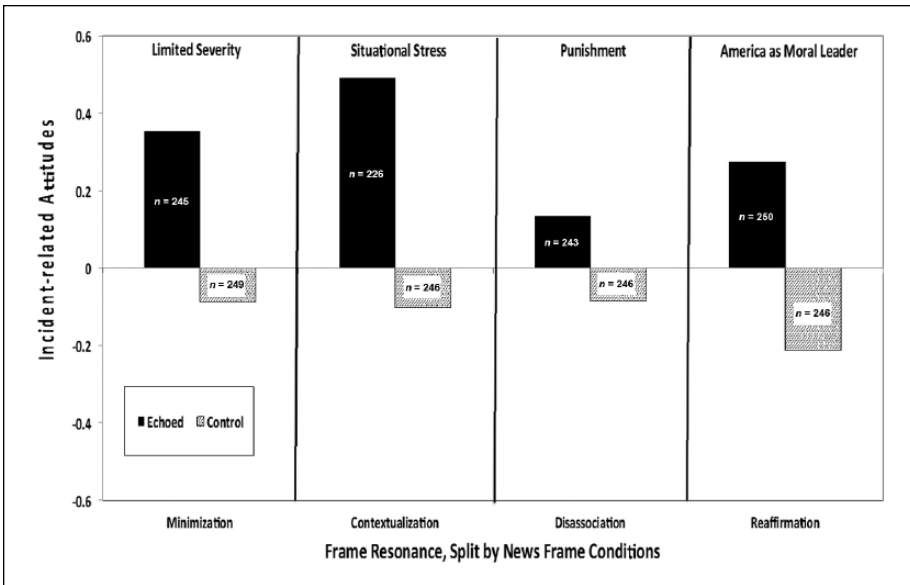


Figure 1. Means on incident-related attitudes, within frame conditions, when frame was echoed versus absent.

Note. To provide a visual representation of these findings, we standardized the scores to distribute around a zero point. This allowed us to provide a visual of the distribution of scores for the echoed and control conditions.

news coverage in which no frames were present. We again collapsed across framing conditions here because the conceptual focus is on attitudes that should be affected by any of the frames, not one in particular. These results are in Table 3.

The results indicate that exposure to the frames in the aggregate spurred among respondents a significantly higher level of national attachment, increased support for the U.S. war in Afghanistan, and greater confidence in the U.S. military. These results

Table 3. Mean Scores on National Attachment, Support for the Afghanistan War, and Confidence in the U.S. Military, Comparing Presence versus Absence on the Frames Across All Conditions.

	Echoed	Control
National attachment	3.20 ($n = 928$) $t = 3.15, df = 1,160, p = .001, d = .227$	3.06 ($n = 234$)
Confidence in U.S. military	3.32 ($n = 933$) $t = 2.76, df = 1,168, p = .003, d = .199$	3.17 ($n = 237$)
Support for Afghanistan war	1.85 ($n = 942$) $t = 3.44, df = 1,179, p = .000, d = .253$	1.68 ($n = 239$)

support H2, H3a, and H3b. That these frames would have such effects on what tend to be entrenched beliefs among respondents further demonstrates the cultural resonance of these frames and underscores the considerable benefits that officials might gain from emphasizing them in such moments.

For our fourth set of hypotheses, we expected that respondents exposed to contestation in the news stories would be less likely to downplay the severity of the transgressions (H4a), attribute the causes of the transgressions to situational stress (H4b), believe that those involved will be appropriately punished (H4c), and perceive America as a moral leader (H4d)—but more likely than those receiving no frames at all—than those exposed to news coverage in which these frames were *echoed* by members of Congress (H4). To examine these potential differences, we conducted one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests, which allowed us to compare the means for these incident-related attitudes between those respondents who received the echoed frame, the contested frame, or the control condition. These results are presented in Table 4.

These data suggest that, overall, contestation diminished the effects of the frames on incident-related attitudes among respondents, but not entirely. In the minimization and contextualization conditions, and marginally in the reaffirmation condition, for example, contestation led to significantly more critical attitudes. As expected, however, we see that in both the contextualization and reaffirmation conditions, frame contestation could not entirely undermine the power of the frames to impact attitudes; instead, respondents in the contested conditions were still less critical of the incident than those in the control condition. Only in the minimization condition did contestation seem to bring respondents' attitudes down to the level of those who received no frame at all. This was the only instance, then, that contestation seemed to fully "undo" the effects of these culturally resonant frames. Indeed, disassociation showed no effects from contestation at all—Specifically, the contested version differed significantly from neither the echoed nor the control, according to post hoc tests ($p = .434$ and $p = .471$). Furthermore, the small effect sizes for these analyses suggest that contestation effects are not immense. Nonetheless, the bulk of the evidence indicates that contestation does indeed diminish the power of these frames in relation to incident-related attitudes, providing support for H4a, H4b, and H4d.

Table 4. ANOVA Mean Scores on Incident-Related Attitudes, within Experimental Conditions.

	Echoed	Contested	Control
Limited severity within minimization frame	2.93 ^a (<i>n</i> = 245)	2.73 ^b (<i>n</i> = 236)	2.67 ^b (<i>n</i> = 249)
	$F(2, 727) = 13.93, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .037$		
Situational stress within contextualization frame	2.97 ^a (<i>n</i> = 226)	2.73 ^b (<i>n</i> = 251)	2.58 ^c (<i>n</i> = 246)
	$F(2, 720) = 23.36, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .061$		
Punishment within disassociation frame	2.50 ^a (<i>n</i> = 243)	2.43 ^{ab} (<i>n</i> = 237)	2.36 ^b (<i>n</i> = 246)
	$F(2, 723) = 2.94, p = .054, \eta_p^2 = .008$		
America as moral leader within reaffirmation frame	2.96 ^a (<i>n</i> = 250)	2.83 ^b (<i>n</i> = 243)	2.64 ^c (<i>n</i> = 246)
	$F(2, 736) = 15.47, p = .000, \eta_p^2 = .040$		

Note. Means with different superscripts significantly differed from one another in Tukey's post hoc tests, at a minimum of $p < .05$. In the "America as Moral Leader" comparisons, the difference between challenged and echoed frames was marginally significant at $p = .059$. ANOVA = analysis of variance.

Finally, we turned our attention to whether challenges to these frames diminished respondents' attachment to the nation (H5) or shifted their attitudes toward the U.S. war in Afghanistan (H6a) and the U.S. military (H6b). These results are reported in Table 5.

These data do not support H5 or H6. Although there were clear and significant distinctions between the echoed and control conditions among respondents across these measures—as we reported in the results for H3, H4a, and H4b—contestation seems to have no significant effect on respondent attitudes about the nation, the war, or the military. Specifically, frame contestation did not significantly reduce respondents' attachment to the nation ($p = .254$) or shift their attitudes about the U.S. war in Afghanistan ($p = .426$) or their confidence in the U.S. military ($p = .393$). We do, however, see a clear distinction on these measures between those respondents who received the frame—either echoed or contested—and those who received no frame at all (control condition): Across the board, respondents who received the frames were significantly more positive about the nation, the war, and the military than those in the control condition. This provides further evidence of the cultural resonance of these frames, that is, while contestation can diminish the effects of these frames on incident-related attitudes, it cannot undermine the reverberating effects that these frames can have on respondents' attitudes about the nation, the military, and the war effort in such moments.⁴

Discussion

In this study, we sought to examine the potential impact that political and news discourse can have on public opinion in moments of national dissonance. Specifically, we were interested in examining (1) the impact of culturally resonant frames tied to national identity in response to U.S. military transgressions and (2) the extent to which

Table 5. ANOVA Mean Scores on National Attachment, Support for the Afghanistan War, and confidence in the U.S. Military, across Experimental Conditions.

	Echoed	Contested	Control
National attachment	3.20 ^a (n = 910)	3.15 ^a (n = 922)	3.06 ^b (n = 234)
	$F(2, 2081) = 5.21, p = .006, \eta_p^2 = .005$		
Confidence in U.S. military	3.32 ^a (n = 933)	3.29 ^a (n = 935)	3.17 ^b (n = 237)
	$F(2, 2102) = 3.80, p = .023, \eta_p^2 = .004$		
Support for Afghanistan war	1.85 ^a (n = 942)	1.81 ^a (n = 936)	1.68 ^b (n = 239)
	$F(2, 2114) = 6.08, p = .002, \eta_p^2 = .006$		

Note. Means with different superscripts significantly differed from one another in Tukey's post hoc tests, at a minimum of $p < .05$. In the "National attachment" and "Confidence in U.S. military" comparisons, the difference between challenged and control frames was marginally significant at $p = .078$ and $p = .058$, respectively. ANOVA = analysis of variance.

contestation of these frames might mitigate their effects. Our findings contribute to two central lines of inquiry in framing research.

First, our findings support the assertion that the national identity-protective frames offered by White House and military officials in times of national dissonance have powerful effects on how U.S. citizens interpret such incidents. Specifically, exposure to the minimization, contextualization, disassociation, and reaffirmation frames, when echoed by congressional officials in the news article, served to significantly contain the extent to which respondents negatively reacted to the incident. Furthermore, these effects extended beyond the specific context at hand to broader attitudes toward the nation, the military, and the war in Afghanistan. Thus, we see that culturally resonant frames—those that align with the prevailing values and cultural schemas of the audience—have power to not only affect interpretation of such incidents but also influence broader attitudes among the public in these critical moments. Thus, our study provides a specific explication of cultural resonance in these moments and, in doing so, demonstrates the profound effects that these frames can have on citizens, especially when journalists choose to only give voice to those who seek to amplify these frames.

Second, our findings contribute directly to the broader debate over the potential impact of frame contestation on public opinion, particularly with regard to culturally resonant frames. Notably, our findings support two competing ideas: (1) that contestation can play an important role in encouraging citizens to engage in critical analysis of contentious national incidents and (2) that even in the face of contestation, these frames still exert powerful effects on audiences. Notably, we found that congressional challenges significantly diminished the impact of these frames on public opinion: Respondents were more critical about the scope, causes, and moral implications of the incident when confronted with this contested discourse. As scholarship suggests, this may be due to the tendency among citizens to more carefully consider and critically assess the merits of an original frame when it is contested (Chong and Druckman 2007a). This is an important finding for those interested in journalistic performance and democratic accountability. It suggests that despite the structural and cultural

pressures to “rally around the flag” and defer to authoritative sources in times of crisis (Bloom 1990; Mueller 1970), journalists can still play a pivotal role in facilitating a critical public response to U.S. military transgressions by simply publishing frame contestation when it occurs in official debate. Put simply, the mere presence of disagreement in news discourse encourages increased public scrutiny of the nation’s policies and greater accountability of its policymakers. This is all the more important given that the press rarely gives voice to such contestation in news stories when U.S. military transgressions occur—for example, My Lai and Abu Ghraib (Rowling et al. 2011; Rowling et al. 2015)—even when these views are present in political discourse. Thus, should the press to reliably “index” (see Bennett et al. 2008) the contestation offered among officials in such moments, the public would be more likely to critically assess the underlying circumstances that led to the incident and substantively examine its broader implications.

At the same time, we saw that in several instances, the presence of a contested frame was *still* much more powerful than the absence of any resonant frames altogether. Indeed, when it came to broader attitudes about the nation, the military, and the war in Afghanistan, respondents who received either the contested or echoed frame were significantly more positive on these measures than those who received no resonant frames. These results lend further support to previous research on the importance of cultural resonance within the framing process (Chong 2000; Entman 2004; Gamson 1992; Pan and Kosicki 2001). Given the power of these frames in such moments, it is unlikely that White House and military officials will refrain from employing them in these situations. Nonetheless, what these results suggest is that political opponents should not be reluctant to challenge these frames when they emerge: Beyond the aforementioned effects that such challenges can elicit among respondents regarding their incident-related attitudes, there is minimal risk that these challenges might undermine Americans’ support for the nation, the military, or the war effort. Thus, the perceived risk of a patriotic backlash should one utter a word against the military during wartime might be exaggerated. Our findings, then, suggest that journalists and political leaders alike should—indeed must—voice criticism and demand accountability when such incidents arise.

Given its experimental setup, our study raises questions about its generalizability and external validity. First, while scholars acknowledge that contemporary audiences often scan headlines and quickly move through news environments (e.g., see Zaller 2003), there are still readers who focus on in-depth content related to issues that concern them. Those readers who actively seek out information about these issues are also more likely to be opinion leaders (see, for example, D. V. Shah and Scheufele 2006) and, therefore, might subsequently influence the attitudes of those around them. Furthermore, the troubling and dramatic nature of the story involved suggests that even a casual reader should, according to news values (Harcup and O’Neill 2001), be more drawn to this story than a more typical, dull foreign policy story. Future studies, however, should certainly try to replicate these effects with shorter news items, possibly presented via or alongside audio/visuals, to more accurately represent what average news consumers see today. Second, the duration of framing effects is disputed in

the literature, with longitudinal studies finding conflicting results (Lecheler and de Vreese 2015) and relatively few studies offering theoretical models for understanding when effects should last. Because our frames present novel information, but tap directly into enduring cultural schemas, we expect that they should last longer than frames which either present no new information or new information that is irrelevant to the audience's existing knowledge on a topic. Finally, it should be noted that the effect sizes—especially in the contestation conditions—are relatively small. Because we do not have data that can address this question, future studies should account for this and examine the effects studied here at multiple, lagged moments.

Beyond addressing these concerns, future research should expand upon this work in several important ways. First, scholars should extend this research beyond the U.S. context to discover whether these dynamics are, as we expect, relevant to other countries in which nationally dissonant incidents arise. At the moment, we can only extrapolate from our findings to the U.S. case—It was a U.S. incident, and the manipulation was based on news influenced by the structural norms and routines of the U.S. political system and press. Nonetheless, given that the fundamental mechanism underlying cultural resonance—in this case, the protection of national identity when it is threatened—is psychological, there is no reason to suspect that these phenomena are isolated to the United States. Second, it would be interesting to see whether the impact of frame contestation on public opinion differs when such disagreement occurs from within the same party or from sources other than congressional officials, such as interest groups, local officials, or foreign officials. This would be an important next step toward better understanding the precise manner and extent to which frame contestation matters in shaping public attitudes. Third, future research should build on these findings by exploring whether similar dynamics emerge in the context of other issues and events. This might include testing the cultural resonance of these frames in response to situations in which national identity does not seem to be at stake or exploring the impact of an alternative set of frames when other types of threats to the nation emerge. It would be interesting, for example, to explore what frames might be culturally resonant when external—rather than internal—threats to the nation arise.

In sum, this research demonstrates the importance of cultural resonance within the communicative relationship among officials, the press, and the public. Frames that effectively tap into the broader cultural values of the citizenry by bolstering the national identity, particularly in moments of national dissonance, tend to gain wide acceptance among the public. In such moments, citizens often seek out frames that will allow them to reconcile their beliefs in the virtues of the nation with the potential shame and humiliation caused by these transgressions. The frames of minimization, contextualization, disassociation, and reaffirmation, therefore, broadly resonate because they allow citizens to rationalize the transgressions in nation-protective ways. Such frames are not only powerful in terms of how they affect audiences, as demonstrated here, but they also serve to limit whether, to what extent and what kind of contestation is likely to emerge. Specifically, the sources of these counterframes must walk a fine line between implicating the administration and its policies for the transgressions and directly challenging the values and identity of the nation. Still, as the

data in this study indicate, such challenges do gain some traction among the public, moderating—at least in part—whether the public will be receptive to the initial frames. In this sense, at a minimum, it is incumbent upon the press to give legitimate representation of frames and counterframes in news stories, especially in response to national transgression. Doing so has important implications for how the broader citizenry comes to understand and respond to such incidents.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. In 2010, for example, U.S. soldiers were accused of killing at least three unarmed civilians in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, then collecting their body parts as trophies (see Yardley and Schmitt 2010). Allegations also surfaced in fall 2012 that a team of U.S. Special Forces was involved in the torturing and murdering of at least ten civilians in Wardak Province, Afghanistan, whose bodies were later found buried outside the U.S. military base (see Aikens 2013).
2. Comparisons between conditions indicated that random assignment across all demographic variables was successful. These results along with the entirety of the conditions used in the experiment, the full wording of the survey questions, and a list of all items used for composite variables are included in the appendix, which is available at <http://uva.nl/profiel/p.h.sheets>.
3. We used an online tool to calculate the Gunning Fog Index—a measure of the estimated years of formal education needed to understand the text on the first read—for each condition. Our stimuli scored on a range of 11.65 (minimization-contested condition) to 13.54 (contextualization-echoed condition). Furthermore, respondents were able to spend as much time as they liked reading the text and were encouraged to read it thoroughly.
4. We also explored whether partisanship significantly impacted respondents' incident-related and broader policy attitudes when exposed to the varying experimental conditions. As Zaller (1992) suggests, citizens might be inclined to look to partisan cues when confronted with contested discourse. Nonetheless, across the dependent measures, we found that partisanship had no such moderating effect on respondent attitudes.

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Book Reviews

The International Journal of Press/Politics
2015, Vol. 20(4) 498–507
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W. L. Bennett and A. Segerberg

The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. 240 pp. ISBN: 9781107642720

Reviewed by: John Postill, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia

DOI: 10.1177/1940161215599940

The Logic of Connective Action asks a timely question, namely, “how digitally networked action works in an era of increasingly personalised political participation” (p. 211). The book’s premise is that the long-term decline in membership of civic and political organizations observed across the West, along with a “personalisation” of lifestyles and media practices, suggests people’s engagement (or not) with politics may have changed.

To explore this shift, Bennett and Segerberg coin the concept of “connective action,” a form of contentious action based on sharing personalized contents through social media. This they contrast with an earlier logic of collective action that relies on the formation of collective identities. The challenge for “connective” action networks is not how to get individuals to contribute to a cause. After all, people are already routinely contributing their free labor, or “sharing,” through social media. Instead, the challenge is how to turn that sharing into “public engagement, policy focus, or mass media impact” (p. 58). More often than not, argue the authors, part of the answer is not to subsume individuals under a collective identity but rather to get them to share “personal frames” derived from inclusive ideas, for example, variations on the “I am the 99%” meme.

Chapter 1, “The Logic of Connective Action,” develops a three-part typology of collective versus connective action (see the helpful diagram on p. 47). In contrast to the collective action of “organisation-brokered networks,” two different types of connective action are introduced: crowd-enabled versus organization-enabled action. Whilst the Occupy movement is a crowd-enabled action network, the London-based coalition Put People First (PPF) typifies an organization-enabled network.

Chapter 2, “Personalised Communication in Protest Networks,” compares two coalitions linked to the G20 London summit of 2009—the organization-enabled PPF and a classic collective action network named Meltdown. Despite its more personalized approach, PPF attained a high degree of organizational coherence (p. 78) and remained “managed and focused” (p. 86).

Chapter 3, “Digital Media and the Organisation of Connective Action,” compares once again two 2009 networks. Here, however, both are connective action networks: the crowd-enabled #cop15 protests in Copenhagen versus the organization-enabled #thewave in London. By examining in detail two key Twitter practices (hashtagging and hyperlinking), the analysis reveals that the “crowdsourced” gatekeeping of the Copenhagen Twitter stream was no less coherent than that of the organization-managed London stream.

Chapter 4, “How Organisation-Enabled Networks Engage Publics,” compares another pair of action networks: fair trade networks in Germany and the United Kingdom. It argues that public engagement as a desirable goal for all action networks is not a given. To establish which conditions favor or inhibit organization-enabled connective action, we must identify the “opportunities and trade-offs in the political environment” (p. 145).

Chapter 5, “Networks, Power, and Political Outcomes,” compares the United Kingdom’s organization-enabled Robin Hood Tax (RHT) network with the crowd-enabled Occupy movement in the United States. The aim is to examine “[h]ow power operates in different kinds of connective action networks” (p. 149). Bennett and Segerberg introduce the notion of “power signatures” to gauge “the degree to which recognition (prestige and influence) is concentrated or dispersed among actors in a network” (p. 152) who can “set conditions on how power is organised” (p. 155). Despite their different power signatures, both networks managed to “change the conversation” on inequality in their respective nations (p. 165).

Finally, “Conclusion: When Logics Collide” is more than a recapitulation, as it takes up a new issue: the conditions under which internal strife can arise within action networks. Thus, within Occupy “fundamentally different ideals and ideologies of organisation and action” arose over online deliberation technologies during the post-encampment phase (p. 200).

This is a remarkable book that doubtless accomplishes its mission of understanding “how digitally networked action works in an era of increasingly personalised political participation.” The book straddles the conventional pre- and post-Tahrir divide running through much of the current protest movements scholarship. It also develops an original conceptual vocabulary around the notion of “connective action.” In addition, it makes fruitful, systematic use of the comparative method, as well as developing methodological innovations on web crawling and other digital techniques. As if that were not enough, *The Logic of Connective Action* even wrestles with one of the more vexing problems of social network analysis: its customary inattention to questions of power (see Chapter 5). In doing so, it opens collaborative avenues with social movements scholars currently attacking power from other angles, including field theory. As the authors point out, there are limitations to the network analysis approached adopted in the book and therefore much scope for future collaboration with ethnographers and other qualitative scholars.

The book suffers from two main weaknesses. First, the authors succeed in making the more “boring,” technical sections accessible to non-specialists, yet most chapters are rather too lengthy, and there is a fair degree of repetition and redundancy. The more

fundamental problem, though, is the idea that different action networks possess their own “logics”—and indeed that there is such a thing as a “logic” of connective action. Although this idea drives the book, it is left unexplained. In fact, there appears to be a manner of causal linearity in the argument. So long as the analyst can identify the unique logic (or mix of logics) “at work” in a given action network, the rest (digital media, internal frictions, political outcomes, etc.) will follow *logically*, as it were. In avoiding the technological determinism of cruder accounts, Bennett and Segerberg may have veered too close to morphological determinism by presuming that network form begets contentious action type.

This brings us nicely to the perpetual question of agency. Does the power and agency of network participants end at the very point at which they have co-created a given “logic” of action? This is unlikely, suggesting the need for a revised theory of action that can handle the messy, multi-directional causality of contentious politics.

Donatella Campus

Women Political Leaders and the Media. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. vii + 147pp. £55.00. ISBN 978-0-230-028528-6

Reviewed by: Anne Stevens, *Aston University, Birmingham, UK*

DOI: 10.1177/1940161215598138

The principal merit of this essay on women political leaders is the author’s willingness to confront directly some of the key questions. To what extent is gender a key variable in leadership style? How widespread and influential are gender stereotypes? Are such stereotypes perpetuated and social perceptions and attitudes reinforced by the media, whether printed, broadcast, or digital?

The first of the book’s seven chapters notes that, however constrained by the structures within which they must operate, leaders will only be recognized as such if they are perceived to be effective actors. So the character, personality, and traits of individual leaders matter. If the prevailing model for the appropriate traits is male, then women will struggle to overcome the sex stereotyping that denies them legitimacy and effectiveness as leaders. However, for those who can achieve that, the nature of selection for leadership roles and the demands of the tasks involved ensure that, at the very top, differences in leadership are not evident. Whether, as suggested at the end of the chapter, a more widespread adoption of models of transformational, as opposed to charismatic, leadership will eventually result in a “degendering” of notions of leadership seems more debatable, especially because the author fails to suggest how this might occur.

The second chapter turns to the media, to note how, especially for the broadcast media, the story is nowadays principally about the person. Campus suggests that if the

perceived as outsiders but suffer from the premium attached to performance if they are called into office in intrinsically difficult circumstances. Campus argues that new styles of leadership, which may produce a “degendering” of the concept, both are, and should be, developing, and the increasing role of the Internet will further them. The argument is thought-provoking and optimistic, perhaps unduly so, as the author fails to acknowledge the “dark side” of the developing Internet.

Campus’s work has the merit of clarity and of bringing together a very wide and interdisciplinary range of reading to produce stimulating insights. At risk of mixing metaphors, it might be said that the juxtaposition of insights from many fields—including political science, international relations, psychology, management studies, and media studies—provides a highly useful map of the way through the minefields that surround women achieving leading positions. One section of the terrain that her map does not cover is the linguistic one. Professor Judith Baxter, among others, has published very illuminating work on gendered language and the oral communication of women leaders in business, which is very relevant to Campus’s conclusions. Whether these conclusions are more hopeful than realistic may perhaps be debated, but it is to be hoped that researchers in both gender studies and political communication will take up that debate. Certainly both students and researchers alike, and not just those involved in women’s or gender studies, but across a wide area of management, communication, and leadership studies, will benefit greatly from this book.

Erik Albæk, Arjen van Dalen, Nael Jebri, and Claes H. de Vreese

Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014. xvi + 264 pp. \$28.99 ISBN 9781107674608

Reviewed by: Rodney Benson, *New York University, NY, USA*

DOI: 10.1177/1940161215598287

In this impressive study of news production, content, and reception in Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Spain, four distinguished scholars forge new paths for comparative political communication research and present a number of surprising, if sometimes provocative, findings about how political journalism can best serve democracy.

The research design alone provides ample cause for celebration. Albæk, van Dalen, Jebri, and de Vreese succeed as few others have before them in bridging the gap between media sociology (production and content) and political communication (effects) research. In highly original and systematic fashion, they combine cross-sectional surveys of journalists, framing analysis of popular/tabloid and elite press and commercial and public service broadcasting, and panel surveys of audiences (linking public attitudes to exposure to specific media outlets and their particular patterns of framing).

The book is divided into three parts. The first part presents journalistic practices, operationalized as journalistic perceptions of political and commercial constraints and role perceptions. The second part examines news content, focusing on three fundamental oppositions characterizing political journalistic style (pragmatic vs. sacerdotal, impartial vs. partisan, and information vs. entertainment) and linking these content styles to journalistic practices. The third part analyzes how different mixes of practices and content produce different types of aggregate national and individual level audience effects (public knowledge, cynicism, and overall satisfaction with the media).

Albæk and colleagues are engaged in a project both relativist (mostly at the descriptive level) and universalist (at the causal and normative level). The relativist project is consistent with Hallin and Mancini's tripartite typology of media systems, and the book extends this institutional analysis by testing and ultimately demonstrating consistent, if not always expected, differences in news content and audience effects between the liberal (United Kingdom), democratic corporatist (Germany, Denmark), and polarized pluralist (Spain) models. Their evidence strongly refutes claims of uniform levels and types of mediatization in perceived production environment and actual content and audience effects. In general, they find more consistent and substantial cross-national than cross-outlet differences, demonstrating the ultimately decisive shaping power of national journalistic fields.

Spanish journalists are the most likely to complain of all types of pressures, especially political, but also commercial (budget, advertising, audiences, and competition), and Danish the least. Spanish journalists are also most sacerdotal (operationalized as inclination to fully report on national politics even if the public is not interested) and partisan; U.K. journalists are most likely to see their role as providing entertainment over information. Surveys also examined journalists' attitudes toward politicians and spin doctors and found that Spanish journalists were the most cynical.

These perceptions are then linked to news content. Although the cross-national differences vary somewhat depending on medium, the authors find that a sacerdotal role conception (especially in Spain) increases the overall focus on political news and decreases the use of the conflict, game, and human-interest frames. Spain's partisan role conceptions are linked to the most partisan biased tone (high political parallelism) while the United Kingdom's dominant entertainment role conceptions correlate with the greatest focus on scandals and politicians' private lives.

The book stumbles when it presents surveyed journalists' perceptions of pressures as firm evidence of actual pressures, which may be quite different. Cross-national differences in both journalist and audience perceptions could be accounted for in part by national economic or culture influenced propensities for optimism, satisfaction, or reflexivity (e.g., as noted below, is the Spanish public really less satisfied with its journalism than is the Danish public, or are Spanish citizens in general more restrained in their expressions of satisfaction?). In general, the reliance on conscious self-perceptions is problematic in that it provides a limited account of human action, ignoring its often taken-for-granted habitual character.

Be that as it may, this oversight may not matter that much if the authors can show a link between journalists' "perceived" pressures, their level of cynicism toward

politics, news content, and ultimately audience cynicism and other attitudes. In this complex, fine-tuned analysis with universalist aspirations, the authors largely succeed at the causal level but draw some debatable normative conclusions.

Comparing knowledge about U.S. politics before and after exposure to U.S. election news coverage in Denmark, Britain, and Spain, the authors show that exposure to conflict and human-interest framing increases political knowledge, especially for those with low political interest.

In their analysis of the effects of infotainment on public cynicism, the authors usefully distinguish two types of infotainment: “privatization” (focus on scandals or politicians’ private lives) and “personalization” (presence of a “human example or human face” or any reference to emotions). Content analysis once again places Spain as the outlier, with less personalization and privatization than Denmark and Britain. Across the three countries, personalized news decreases cynicism for citizens with low political interest whereas privatized news increases cynicism for all citizens, thus demonstrating that infotainment’s effects differ depending on the specific type and the specific audience.

Finally, the book compares the extent to which audiences are more or less satisfied with the news, proceeding from the premise that media satisfaction is linked to trust in government and thus necessary for the optimal functioning of democracy. The authors show that perceptions that the news media adhere to the watchdog ideal (objectivity, factuality, and critical coverage) substantially increase levels of public satisfaction; overall, watchdog perceptions and satisfaction are lowest in Spain.

Throughout the book, the authors position themselves as optimistic contrarians. Against the widespread pessimism about the supposedly destructive effects of political journalism, they show that things are not so bad (at least in northern Europe; the United States, they concede, might be a different story). And, yet, their hopeful findings are often based on the small positive effects they find for citizens with low political interest. Generally downplayed by the authors are the negative effects on citizens with high levels of political interest, whose cynicism, for example, is increased by both privatized and personalized news: Can a healthy democracy afford to write these citizens off?

The book concludes with a strongly stated normative prescription: The single best “right mix” for political journalism is “a high degree of professionalism in journalism, a low degree of political parallelism, a strong public broadcasting system, and moderate degrees of commercialism and competition” (p. 170). This prescription is mostly unobjectionable, but it is also unnecessarily modest. For Albæk et al., it is the right mix for a low-demanding procedural model of democracy, the kind that would make Schudson’s monitorial citizen happy.

I prefer to read this book in a more ambitious light. As the authors clearly state, “Differences in citizens’ perceptions and cognition in different countries can be partly explained by the different conditions under which journalists work and by the content they produce” (p. 179). In short, supply can shape demand. If this is true, one could be excused for positing that media that provide more structural context, more critical coverage of corporate power, more opportunities for reasoned deliberation, and more encouragement for collective action just might constitute more deeply informed,

engaged, and yes, (productively) dissatisfied citizens. In any case, this indispensable book will provide the template to test these and a multitude of other hypotheses about the effects of political journalism on democracy.

Douglas M. McLeod and Dhavan V. Shah

News Frames and National Security: Covering the Big Brother. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xv + 220 pp. ISBN 978-0521130554.

Reviewed by: Gianpietro Mazzoleni, *University of Milan, Italy*

DOI: 10.1177/1940161215598137

The conflict between the defense of civil liberties and the implementation of measures to guarantee national security is not an issue that came to the attention of citizens of democratic countries and became an object of scholarly investigation only in recent years. The cold-war age and other recent war times have kept alive the debate on the extent governments can surveil the lives of private citizens to prevent espionage, leaks, foreign aggressions, and terrorist attacks.

However, the passage of the USA Patriot Act by the Bush administration immediately after 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have brought the dilemma to the center of the U.S. public debate, involving politicians, public officials, the military, the media, and the citizenry through the Obama administration. Other events, like Wikileaks and Snowden's leaking of classified documents of the National Security Agency (NSA), have inflamed the debate at times to paroxysmal intensities. The way national media covered the U.S. administration's policies embodied by the NSA's strict surveillance of communications (phone calls, e-mails, Web activity, and others) raised concern among many critics. The impression was that the media supported the argument that a sacrifice of individual rights was necessary to thwart new terrorist attacks. This particular issue is perfect stuff for academic research. A group of scientists from the University of Wisconsin, under the direction of two leading political communication scholars, Douglas McLeod and Dhavan Shah, seized the opportunity to investigate into the influence of the media coverage of the tension between civil liberties and national security on public attitudes. Their book is a detailed account of the research effort that rests in the popular (in the academia) domain of frame analysis studies.

The book explores the frames favored by journalists and editors of influential printed media outlets in reporting about government surveillance policies and targeted groups. Through a series of experimental studies, the book eventually offers a number of answers about the impact of those frames. Two newly developed integrated models of communication framing guided the research: the Message Framing Model (MFM) and the Message Processing Model (MPM). The MFM connected framing to the various

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message systems, like language cues used by the media to label issues and groups, and to the journalistic practices of personalizing news stories. The MPM linked the processing of framed messages to the effects on thoughts, feelings, judgments, and actions, on the assumption that certain cues may modify the perceived meaning.

The book consists of eight chapters. The first provides the conceptual framework of the entire project, which draws on past research on framing effects and is enriched by the two new models, described in detail. It states the hypothesis that “news story effects will be a function of . . . frames, as they interact with the predispositions of the audience” (p. 37).

The second chapter contextualizes the theoretical focus, testing the hypotheses of message framing and processing in the decade of U.S. history identified by the label of “War on Terror” (2001–2009). One finds a useful review of the most salient moments in which national security and civil liberties came into conflict. It highlights how in the early stages tragic events fueled arguments for compressing civil liberties in the interest of national security and the later resurgence of sensitivity about those liberties vis-à-vis the subsiding of war efforts abroad (i.e., Iraq and Afghanistan). In such context, the research focused on the “expectation that certain persistent frames contained in media representation of applications of the PATRIOT Act shape the sophistication, tolerance, and participation of news consumers” (p. 40). Accordingly, the hypothesis reads, “The use of individual exemplars to frame stories about the government’s surveillance of domestic groups might reduce citizens’ complexity of thought, their openness to different social and political groups, and their willingness to engage in debate over civil liberties” (p. 40).

Chapters 3 through 7 collect five different experimental studies, coauthored by researchers of the team at the University of Wisconsin, which provide insights into the effects of framing on political attitudes and behaviors, by isolating how the frames favored by journalists in constructing the debate on civil liberties shaped public responses to the purported danger of domestic terror and government surveillance.

Chapter 8 wraps up the research and discusses the findings of each single study and of the whole project. It carries as title the subtitle of the book “Covering ‘Big Brother,’” an explicit reference to George Orwell’s famed work on the intrusive and deadly control on citizens’ private life. (It appears a bit odd that the popular nickname—a clear depiction of the U.S. government’s illiberal policies—is used only in the last chapter).

Each of the five experimental studies focuses on separate issues, but all are closely connected with the main focus of the research illustrated and commented in the opening and closing chapters. The research design uses traditional content analysis of the news coverage (280 articles of the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, and *AP* from 2001 to 2008) and survey data gathered by independent bodies between 2001 and 2013.

What does come out of such composite array of research methods and questions? What is the contribution of this study to a greater comprehension of framing effects, in general, and in the case in point, in particular?

What the authors expected is fully confirmed by the data analysis: in the particular political climate that accompanied the implementation of measures of the War on

Terror, the codes and practices of journalists to frame stories around individual targets of surveillance, like personifying the domestic threat—eventually influence the citizens' attitudes, raise fear and anxiety, and thus make them more inclined to accept a limitation of their own personal freedom as well as that of suspected groups. "Framing that enhances a sense of danger and threat is a potent tool in the hands of powerholders" (p. 159), is the all but consolatory concluding remark that the authors make, vis-à-vis the consistent evidence of the adherence of the printed media to the old principle of "My Country, Right or Wrong," the same that during the first Gulf War had kept the media from criticizing the administration and the military engaged with "the boots on the ground" in Iraq. Only during the Obama administration have there been signs of a "resurgence" of attention to the erosion of civil liberties caused by the War on Terror. Unfortunately, the study brings no evidence of the change in the journalistic approach, being limited to the years when the Patriot Act was enforced.

What the Wisconsin researchers have found is certainly a great advancement in the framing effects studies, significantly more on the framed message processing front (the MPM model) than on the message framing one (MFM). We certainly get to know that the U.S. media used a pro-surveillance frame, but we know from well-established scholarship that personalization of stories, sensationalism, and emotion stirring are part of the codes of much contemporary journalism. The experimental studies in the book are a major step forward in the understanding of the subtle processing mechanisms of certain frames in the news, and how this processing turns into cognitive, affective, and behavioral effects.

The book should be read not only by academics but also by bards, intellectuals, politicians, and political activists that hold dear the defense of civil liberties in challenging times: It provides them substantial food for thought!