

Not All News Sources Are Equally Informative: A Cross-National Analysis of Political Knowledge in Europe

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Abstract

Across a sample of twenty-seven European nations, we examine variation in the level of factual political knowledge in relation to self-reported exposure to news programs aired by public or commercial channels, and to broadsheet or tabloid newspapers. Unlike previous studies, we estimate the effects of exposure to these news outlets while controlling for self-selection into the audience. Our results show that the positive effects of exposure to broadsheets and public broadcasting on knowledge remain robust. Finally, we show that only exposure to broadsheets (and not to public broadcasting) narrows the knowledge gap within nations; relatively apathetic individuals who read broadsheet newspapers are able to “catch up” with their more attentive counterparts.

Keywords

media effects, media contents, political knowledge, knowledge gaps, Western Europe

Introduction

The news media represent the principal intermediary between real-world events and the public. Since people depend on the media for information about the course of public affairs, the exercise of informed citizenship requires not only motivated citizens but also a media environment that provides an abundant supply of news.

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Communication scholars have identified both between-nation and within-nation variation in the production and delivery of news. The former is attributable to differences in national media systems (see Hallin and Mancini 2004). In public service systems—countries that support public broadcasting and actively regulate commercial broadcasters—television newscasts with considerable substantive content air frequently during peak viewing hours. In market-based systems, on the contrary, unregulated commercial networks respond to market forces and offer news programming that is superficial and sporadic (Aalberg et al. 2010). Thus, public service systems provide greater opportunities for citizens to encounter informative news (Aalberg and Curran 2012; Curran et al. 2009; Iyengar et al. 2010; Soroka et al. 2013).

At the within-nation level of analysis, there is variation in news programming across print and broadcast news sources. Most studies document that the effects of exposure to broadcast news on knowledge gain are typically null or even negative, whereas exposure to print sources is associated with significant gains in knowledge (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Newton 1999; Price and Zaller 1993; Robinson and Levy 1976).

Within-nation variability in the informative effects of the news media is not limited to the differential effects of particular sources. There is also the possibility of a further contingency: that exposure to news programming facilitates political learning among different strata of the news audience. Because attentive citizens are more likely to learn, exposure to news may increase the existing gap in political knowledge between the “haves” and “have-nots.” According to this derivation of the knowledge gap hypothesis (Donohue et al. 1975; Hwang and Jeong 2009), groups higher in socioeconomic status or political motivation acquire media-transmitted information at a faster rate than lower status or less motivated strata.

This article attempts to bridge the comparative and within-nation literatures on source differentials in the transmission of information. We examine variation in the level of factual political knowledge in relation to self-reported exposure to print and broadcast news outlets that offer a preponderance of soft or hard news programming. Using a sample covering twenty-seven European democracies, fifty-eight television networks, and eighty-four daily newspapers, we show that exposure to hard-news-oriented sources (especially broadsheet newspapers but also public broadcasting) produces significant information gain while exposure to soft-news-oriented outlets (e.g., tabloid newspapers) does not. The differential ability of sources to transmit politically relevant information also explains why it is possible for relatively apathetic individuals who read broadsheet newspapers to “catch up” with their more attentive counterparts at least in the relatively information-rich context that we analyze here, namely, the 2009 European Union electoral campaign.

The methodological contribution of the study is to disentangle the effects of exposure to news sources on political knowledge from the opposite possibility, namely, that more attentive citizens seek out hard news. We demonstrate that the observed effects of exposure to broadsheet newspapers and public television newscasts remain robust—albeit weakened—after we implement an estimation methodology (propensity score matching) that takes into account the tendency of more informed individuals to

self-select into the audience for broadsheet newspapers and public broadcasting. Thus, unlike the vast majority of previous studies, our estimates of the effects of particular media sources on political knowledge take into account motivational or resource-related biases in the use of these sources.

Theoretical Expectations

The debate about the potential effects of the media on political knowledge is well alive in the communication literature. While there is little doubt that the news media matters as providers of political information for citizens, the empirical record about the informative effects of media exposure is mixed. Past studies lamented the low quality of information provided by the media (especially television) and linked media exposure to a decrease in citizens' political knowledge (Putnam 2000). Others, however, show that media exposure is related to political learning (Norris 2000) while still others emphasize the contingency of media effects on political learning and knowledge, reporting null or even negative effects of television and positive effects of newspapers (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Eveland 2001; Newton 1999).

It is difficult to interpret the available evidence because these studies are plagued with methodological problems, the most important being the fact that they do not consider the content of the media in their analysis. In contrast, they tend to use approximate self-reported measures of media use (Barabas and Jerit 2009). These shortcomings can produce systematic over (infra) estimations of the informative effects of the mass media (Druckman 2005). There is, however, a recent trend in the literature that addresses this limitation by including measures of media content in their empirical analyses, thereby going beyond the general (and somehow ambiguous) hypothesis that media coverage impinges on citizens' knowledge to actually demonstrating which elements of media coverage matter for knowledge. More specifically, these studies have demonstrated that the informative effects of news stories depend very much on the density of information they contain (Jerit et al. 2006); on the volume, salience, and prominence of news media coverage (Barabas and Jerit 2009); and on the type of news stories (i.e., hard news vs. soft news; Curran et al. 2009). Or put differently, the informative effect of the media depends very much on the content delivered by different media sources: Serious, in-depth news can inform the public whereas superficial and sensationalist news does not.

Although previous studies hypothesize a slow but permanent process of convergence between national media systems (see Hallin and Mancini 2004), the truth is that systematic comparative tests of the hypothesis are scarce and their results inconclusive. While some studies show a general increase in the commercialization of television channels (Klimkiewicz 2010) and the convergence of journalistic norms (Plasser 2005), a recent comparative study shows clear differences across media systems both in the supply of news and in the potential informative effects of such news (Aalberg and Curran 2012). Moreover, there is an abundance of evidence showing that public broadcasters deliver substantive news more frequently than privately owned television networks (Aalberg and Curran 2012; Brekken et al. 2012; Curran et al. 2009, 2012; de

Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; Iyengar et al. 2010). Unlike commercial networks, which have compelling incentives to “popularize” the content of their news offerings (by emphasizing sex, sleaze, and scandal), public broadcasters are mandated to deliver news programs that educate rather than entertain and to air their newscasts during periods of high viewership (Curran et al. 2009; de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; Hallin and Mancini 2004: 280; Holtz-Bacha and Norris 2001; Newton 1999). These programming differences make for stronger learning effects exerted by the public broadcaster (e.g., Curran et al. 2009; Iyengar et al. 2010). This constitutes the first hypothesis (H1) we test here.

While differences in the content and frequency of news programming delivered by public and commercial broadcasters are well known (see Aalberg et al. 2010), researchers have given less attention to a parallel distinction within the print sector, with equally important consequences for the supply of news. We refer to the distinction between broadsheet and tabloid daily newspapers. From the days of the “penny press,” tabloid newspapers have consistently attracted relatively large circulations by responding to popular demand. Tabloids focus heavily on entertaining subject matter including celebrity life, scandals, and sports (Rooney 1998; Tiffen 2011). Given their distinctive emphasis, tabloids are derided by journalism scholars who treat broadsheets as the print equivalent of the public service broadcaster (Tiffen 2011; for a dissenting view, see Örnebring and Jonsson 2004). However, there is only limited evidence concerning the differential contributions of tabloids and broadsheets to their audience’s level of political knowledge. Exposure to broadsheet newspapers is positively associated with political knowledge in Denmark, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; Newton 1999), but ours is the first study to replicate this finding across a large sample of nations and outlets. The second hypothesis we test (H2) states that in comparison with tabloids, broadsheets are more likely to inform citizens.

A final question derived from the informative effects of the media literature addresses the extent to which news sources tend to inform all citizens equally. The hypothesis that media exposure can potentially increase the existing knowledge gap among citizens has a long tradition in the discipline of communication and derives from the original work of Tichenor et al. (1970) who argued not only that the information rich get richer when exposed to media outlets but also that this gap might increase as mass media circulation expanded. This hypothesis has generated a substantial body of research and an ongoing active debate over the existence and nature of a socially structured knowledge gap (Hwang and Jeong 2009).

Higher status socioeconomic or politically motivated groups are expected to acquire media-transmitted information at a faster rate than lower status or less motivated groups. As a result, media exposure exacerbates existing inequalities in political knowledge. However, exposure to sources regularly offering high levels of substantive content may actually decrease the knowledge gap (Eveland and Scheufele 2000), especially during periods when news coverage peaks, for example, election campaigns. Under these circumstances (i.e., information-rich contexts), exposure to newspapers and television news programs may reduce rather than increase the knowledge gap (van Aelst et al. 2012).

Previous studies have shown not only that information-opulent environments accentuate the abilities and willingness of citizens to pay the cost of becoming informed about politics but also that information-rich settings contribute to a reduction of the inequalities in knowledge (Berggren 2001; Fraile 2013; Iyengar et al. 2010). More specifically, these studies show that the importance of abilities (Berggren 2001), motivation (Iyengar et al. 2010), and socioeconomic status (Fraile 2013) in explaining political knowledge varies across contexts, being less important in information-rich environments, but especially relevant in information-poor contexts. Thus, our last hypothesis (H3) stipulates that those media sources presenting informative effects in information-rich contexts (such as the context of the EU election campaign under analysis here) reduce the knowledge gap between low status and unmotivated citizens, and their high status and motivated counterparts.

Research Design: Data and Techniques

To test our hypotheses, we rely on comparative data consisting of twenty-seven democracies included in the 2009 European Election Survey (EES); data can be accessed at http://www.piredeu.eu/public/Data_Release.asp. These countries encompass significant variation in the structure of media markets, the extent of regulation of commercial broadcasters, and the relative strength of the mass circulation press. These are critical system-level attributes that are the basis for differentiating between particular media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

Although this study focuses on differences across news outlets (and not across countries), we believe that maximizing the number of countries under analysis makes our results more generalizable. The existing cross-national literature on information gain through media exposure typically focuses on a limited set of nations representing the market-based and democratic corporatist models of media systems (see, for instance, Aalberg and Curran 2012). In contrast, the data used here allows us to test for difference in source effects across twenty-seven European nations representing a variety of media systems.

The 2009 EES data were collected following the 2009 European Parliament elections (between June 4 and 7, 2009). The intended sample size was one thousand successful interviews within each of the twenty-seven EU member states. Data collection was done by computer-assisted telephone interviewing (details about data collection can be seen in van Egmond et al. 2010).

Our analysis is based on a multi-item measure of political knowledge. The survey included seven fixed-choice questions (using a true/false format) measuring various aspects of citizens' knowledge of the EU (e.g., identifying EU member states, awareness of EU institutional arrangements, etc.) as well as their knowledge of domestic national politics (e.g., the identity of a major cabinet minister and the rules of the "democratic game" of each respective country). Our measure of knowledge is the number of correct responses provided (from zero to seven correct responses). Unfortunately, the survey did not include questions that refer explicitly to current events or soft news. Our indicator is thus a blend of "civics" or general knowledge and

some hard news knowledge. The online appendix contains the exact wording of the seven questions (Table 1). Since general political knowledge is known to depend primarily on long-term, pre-dispositional factors such as education and political attentiveness and is less susceptible to short-term factors such as the level of media coverage (see Jerit et al. 2006), our dependent measure provides a conservative test of the role of media content. Any effects of the information environment on general knowledge would likely be weaker than the corresponding effects on issue-specific or event-centered political knowledge.¹

Next, we analyze the measure of knowledge as a function of individual-level exposure to particular broadcast and print sources. Respondents were first asked, "In a typical week, how many days do you watch the following news programs?" In each country, the response options included the two or three main national news broadcasts including at least the most widely watched public and commercial television newscast.² On the basis of this item, we measured respondents' level of exposure to newscasts aired by public or private broadcasters.

In the case of exposure to newspapers, the survey asked, "In a typical week, how many days do you read the following newspapers?" The choice set included up to three major daily national newspapers. For each country, the 2009 EES study included one right-wing and one left-wing broadsheet paper and one tabloid paper. For countries without a pure tabloid, the most sensationalist-oriented daily newspaper was included. Respondents who reported reading either a tabloid-sensationalist or broadsheet newspaper were scored according to their frequency of exposure to each type of newspaper from zero to seven days a week.³

A detailed list of the broadcasts and newspapers considered here for each country and its correspondent classification as public or commercial and broadsheet or tabloid-sensationalist is given in the online appendix, Tables 3 and 4 (for broadcasts and newspapers, respectively). For the case of the broadcasts, the distinction is clear (public vs. commercial channels). In the case of newspapers, as noted above, only seventeen countries included a proper tabloid. Another four included a newspaper that is clearly sensationalist: *Il Giornale* in Italy, *De Telegraaf* in the Netherlands, *Vesti Segodnya* in Latvia, and *Correio da Manha* in Portugal. The remaining six countries (Cyprus, France, Greece, Luxemburg, Malta, and Spain) included only broadsheets and no tabloids.

We validated our classification of newspapers and television channel in two ways. First, we analyzed the content data of the European Parliament Election Study, which spans a total of 142 news outlets. We calculated the percentage of total stories provided by each outlet that could be considered either hard news or soft news. The results show that in general newspapers provide a higher level of hard news coverage than television. More importantly, they show that "quality" (i.e., broadsheet) newspapers present more hard news than tabloids or sensationalist newspapers, with only two exceptions. Finally, the findings also show that commercial channels tend to provide a lower ratio of hard news than public television channels.⁴

Our second validation method is based on the European Media System Survey (Popescu et al. 2010) in which a group of country experts rated particular news sources according to the extent these sources provide accurate information based on credible

and expert sources.⁵ Without exceptions, the experts rated sources classified as public broadcasters and broadsheet newspapers more favorably than commercial broadcasters and tabloid-sensationalist newspapers.⁶

Once we have validated the classification scheme and demonstrated that broadsheets and public broadcasts provide more hard news coverage than tabloids and commercial broadcasts, we turn to the individual-level survey data to assess the effects of exposure to sources on political knowledge. The typical methodology for estimating the impact of exposure to news sources on political knowledge is ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. When the data are structured in two levels (as is the case here, individuals and countries), the appropriate estimation model is multilevel regression. However, conventional regression analysis cannot disentangle learning effects (i.e., knowledge gain) stemming from exposure to particular sources from compositional differences in the audience for different sources. Clearly, exposure to media sources is endogenous to political knowledge; people more interested in politics gravitate to news sources that cater to their interests.

We adjust for self-selection into particular audiences by using propensity score matching. Matching is typically used as an observational substitute for randomization. In the case of news audiences, the selection of news sources is not based on randomization but instead on choice; therefore, any estimate of “treatment effects” stemming from exposure to particular sources will be upwardly biased. Propensity score-based matching attempts to reduce the bias in the estimate of the treatment effect by comparing individuals in the exposed and non-exposed conditions who have equivalent scores on relevant covariates. These covariates, of course, include the standard antecedents of knowledge, that is, individual differences in motivation and ability (Althaus 2003; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1990)

The first-stage estimation equations for deriving the propensity to be exposed to any of the four sources considered here include covariates theorized to be substantively related to citizens’ exposure to news: education, sex, age, political interest, and a measure of general exposure to media (and not news). Several studies analyzing individual-level variation in citizens’ news consumption across countries in Europe have found that these are the strongest predictors (see, for instance, Aalberg et al. 2013; Blekesaune et al. 2012; Elvestad and Blekesaune 2008; Shehata and Stromback 2011). We then compute the mean effects of exposure to different news sources on the measure of knowledge after matching on the relevant propensity scores.

Our final analysis explores the extent to which exposure to sources that deliver hard news narrows or widens the knowledge gap (defined in terms of both resources and motivation). Here, we revert to the conventional, multilevel regression approach since these results were not undermined by the propensity score matching analysis.

Results

We begin by presenting the results of a conventional multilevel regression analysis of the effects of self-reported exposure to different sources on political knowledge (Table 1). While exposure to newscasts from public broadcasters exerts significant

Table 1. The Informative Effects of Exposure to Broadcast and Print Sources (Multilevel Estimation).

Independent Variables	
General exposure to media	.093*** (0.006)
Public broadcasting news exposure	.024*** (0.004)
Commercial broadcasting news exposure	-.031*** (0.004)
Broadsheet news exposure	.079*** (0.004)
Tabloid news exposure	-.015* (0.006)
Level of education	.270*** (0.008)
Male	.655*** (0.020)
Age	.032*** (0.003)
Age quadratic	-.0002*** (0.000)
Political interest	.659*** (0.022)
Intercept	.792*** (0.123)
R ² within	.19
R ² between	.43
R ² overall	.20
N Level 1 (individuals)	25,737
N Level 2 (countries)	27

Source. Our elaboration on the 2009 European Election Survey (EES) Voter Study (Advanced Release, July 2010).

Note. Dependent variable is the number of correct answers (from 0 to 7). Independent variables include general weekly exposure to the media ("In a typical week, how many days do you follow the news?" From 0 to 7 days), weekly exposure to public broadcasting news, weekly exposure to commercial broadcasting news, weekly broadsheet reading, weekly tabloid reading, education (from 0 to 6), male (1 for male, 0 for female), age (in years), political interest (1 for those who declare to be very and quite interested in politics, 0 for those who are not interested in politics). The specific broadcasts and newspapers considered for each country and their correspondent classification (public vs. commercial; and broadsheet vs. tabloid) are listed in the online appendix (Tables 3 and 4).

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

positive effects on knowledge, exposure to news provided by commercial broadcasters has the opposite effect. Similarly, the coefficient for exposure to broadsheet newspapers is positive and significant, while exposure to tabloids is not. Overall, the results show clearly that the relationship between media exposure and knowledge is conditional on source. News sources more likely to deliver hard news (public broadcasters and broadsheets) contribute to the acquisition of political knowledge, while sources more likely to emphasize soft news (commercial broadcasters and tabloids) do not.

We can visualize the magnitude of the source effects identified in Table 1 by plotting the fitted political knowledge scores in relation to changes in weekly exposure to media sources from the minimum (never) to the maximum value (seven days a week). As shown in Figure 1, the gray area on either side of the fitted line represents the 95 percent confidence band around the point estimate.⁷

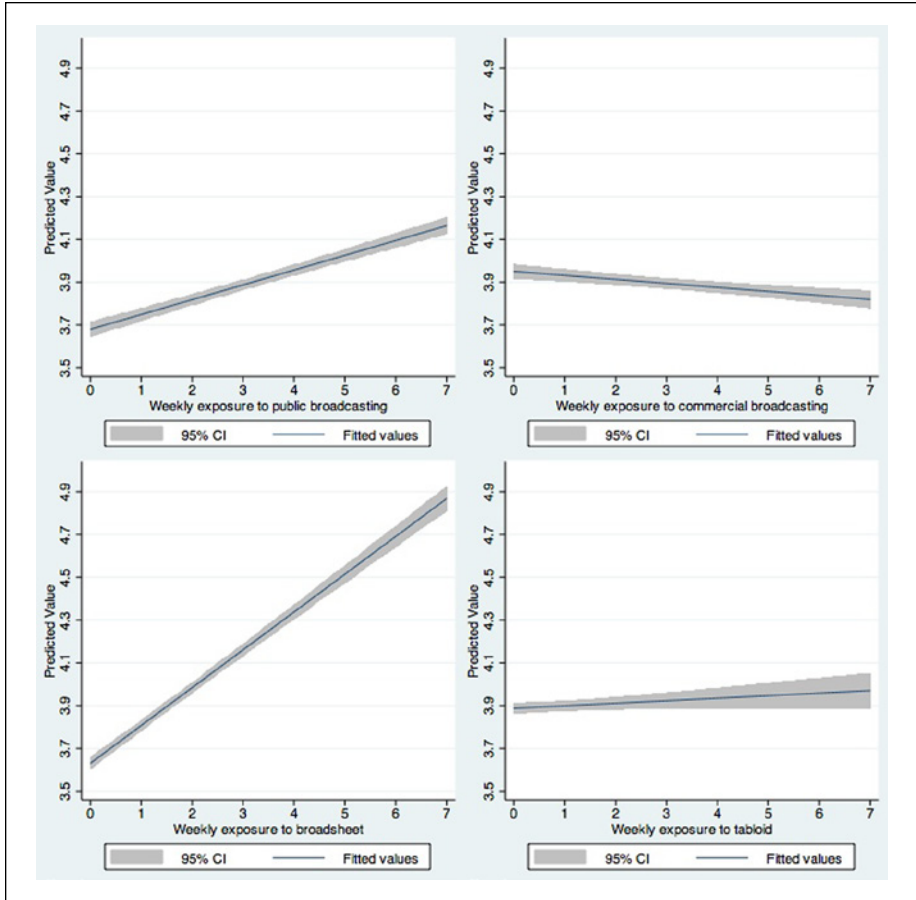


Figure 1. Predicted values of knowledge as exposure to news sources increases. Source. Our elaboration on the European Election Survey (EES) Voter Study (Advanced Release, July 2010). Note. Calculations are made on the basis of Table 1.

Although exposure to public broadcasters and broadsheet newspapers both boost knowledge, the effect of broadsheet newspapers appears to exceed that of public broadcasting. The fitted value of political knowledge for a given citizen who self-reports no exposure at all to news programs aired by the public broadcaster is 3.7 (see the top left graph in Figure 1). This value increases to 4.2 for a citizen reporting the maximal level of exposure. This amounts to an effect size of around half an additional correct answer out of the seven political knowledge questions. Exposure to broadsheet newspapers shows a stronger effect size (more than double the effect of the public broadcaster) of around 1.2, that is, moving from the minimum to maximum level of exposure results in slightly more than one additional correct answer. (The predicted

mean knowledge increases from 3.6 to 4.8 correct answers as shown in the bottom left panel of Figure 1.) In contrast, the effects of exposure to commercial newscasts and tabloid newspapers appear negligible (see the corresponding graphs in Figure 1).

Thus far, we have relied on conventional multilevel regression to document that exposure to hard-news-oriented sources is related to higher levels of general political knowledge in Europe. We must treat these results with some skepticism because of the inherently self-selected nature of media audiences. In general, more motivated, informed and knowledgeable citizens are the most likely to seek out hard news. Of course, we cannot definitively overcome this causal circularity between knowledge and source selection since we do not have longitudinal data.

While the panel design (see, for instance, de Vreese and Boomgaarden 2006; Janssen 2009) provides some leverage over questions of changes in knowledge, it does not directly address the problem of endogeneity. People who read broadsheets may register greater increases in knowledge over time not because of the political content delivered by the broadsheet but because they are especially attentive to political news. An alternative strategy for estimating treatment effects in non-randomized contexts is propensity score analysis (Levendusky 2011). The underlying idea is to implement a series of comparisons between treatment and control groups within subgroups defined by covariates that predict selection into the treatment group. This means we are, in fact, comparing cases that are essentially indistinguishable with respect to background factors, except for the fact that some are exposed to a particular news source and others are not.

Propensity score matching was designed to overcome failures of random assignment in experiments where compliance with assignment to treatment is often correlated with attributes of the subject population. In observational studies, where physical control over the treatment is impossible, assignment to “treatment” is typically conditional on a selection process that is driven by the very same factors that affect the outcome variable. The fact that the audiences for hard news are drawn disproportionately from the ranks of the politically engaged makes it necessary to estimate the average treatment effect after first adjusting for self-selection into the treatment group (for reviews of the matching methodology, see Caliendo and Kopeinig 2008; Imbens 2004). Since we have information on the main factors structuring exposure to media sources (covariates), we can at least partially overcome the problem of self-selection and recover an unbiased estimate of the treatment effect.

Of course, matching does not overcome all problems of endogeneity in the estimation of the media effects. Instead, a properly specified propensity score equation only yields more accurate (and typically more conservative) estimates of treatment effects in comparison to the estimates obtained by the standard OLS regression technique. In short, we see propensity score matching as a potentially useful technique to ameliorate some, though not all of the problems associated with self-selection (for a similar view, see Levendusky 2011; Soroka et al. 2013). This is especially true considering that there are relevant content differences across the media outlets analyzed here (see the results summarized in Tables 5 and 6 in the online appendix), with broadsheets

Table 2. Matching Results.

	Treated	Controls	Difference	SE	t Value
Public broadcasts					
Unmatched	0.585	0.532	0.053	0.003	16.27
ATT	0.585	0.572	0.013	0.003	3.66
Commercial broadcasts					
Unmatched	0.551	0.567	-0.016	0.003	-4.97
ATT	0.551	0.608	-0.057	0.014	-4.20
Broadsheets					
Unmatched	0.631	0.512	0.118	0.003	35.75
ATT	0.631	0.583	0.048	0.008	5.48
Tabloids					
Unmatched	0.561	0.558	0.003	0.004	0.75
ATT	0.561	0.667	-0.005	0.008	-0.66

Source. Our elaboration on the 2009 European Election Survey (EES) Voter Study (Advanced Release, July 2010).

Notes. Propensity scores are based on probit equations with the following independent variables: age, gender, education, political interest, and general weekly exposure to the media. For each of the four treatment variables, the propensity score matching equation satisfies the balancing property. ATT = Average Treatment Effects.

presenting the highest percentage of hard news followed by public broadcasts, commercial broadcasts, and finally tabloids.

To compute the propensity scores, we first define exposure to the treatment by reducing the scale of the weekly exposure question to a simple dichotomy. In effect, we contrast those with some exposure to the source in question (e.g., public-broadcasting-oriented news) with those not exposed at all. This strategy is necessary to generate propensity scores for exposure to each of the media sources analyzed here (Levenduski 2011; Soroka et al. 2013). Since the logic of matching is to compare treated and untreated observations, we need to dichotomize exposure to news. Following previous studies (see, for instance, Soroka et al. 2013), and for the sake of statistical efficiency (i.e., having enough observations in each of the two categories), we created binary treatment variables that divide the sample roughly in half. This is true for all four treatment variables except one: exposure to tabloids (where the distribution is skewed with 17.08 percent of respondents declaring to be exposed vs. 82.92 percent unexposed).⁸

We then estimate first-stage equations for each of these treatment variables as a function of the standard predictors of news media exposure: respondents' education, sex, age, political interest, as well as an indicator of general media use (not specifically referring to news). For each of the four treatment (source) variables, the propensity score matching equation satisfied the necessary balancing properties.⁹

Table 2 shows the matching results contrasting the differences in knowledge between the treated and untreated group (i.e., citizens exposed and not exposed to a given source). More specifically, for each outlet, we see in the first line the differences

in knowledge between respondents exposed versus not exposed before matching, while in the second line, we see the same differences after matching (i.e., once we implemented the matching technique). In the online appendix—following the approach suggested by Becker and Ichino (2002)—we also provide a comparison of results based on four different propensity score matching algorithms (see Table 7 in the online appendix). While none of them is a priori superior to the others, their joint consideration offers a way to assess the robustness of the estimates (Becker and Ichino 2002).

The most noteworthy result in Table 2 is that the informative effects of exposure to broadsheet newspapers survive the implementation of matching (and according to Table 7 in the online appendix, no matter which matching method is employed). Although the magnitude of the coefficient measuring the treatment effect decreases noticeably after matching, the pattern of results obtained in Table 1 (Equation 2) persists. This is also the case for exposure to public broadcasting where matching shrinks the magnitude of the coefficient. Moreover, Table 7 in the online appendix shows cases of estimated average treatment effects on the treated that are non-significant (e.g., in the case of estimation with the Radius matching algorithm). Thus, both the informative effects of exposure to news programs aired by public broadcasters and news from broadsheet newspapers appear to survive this second more conservative estimate of treatment effects. These findings are consistent with a recent study based on a smaller sample of nations that also implements matching technique (Soroka et al. 2013).

Having demonstrated that the effects of exposure to broadsheet newspapers and public broadcasting on knowledge are robust, we proceed to examine the extent to which these particular media sources contribute to widen or narrow information inequalities between the “haves” and “have-nots.” There are two main sources of information inequality: inequality stemming from differential motivation or differential resources. For this analysis, we revert to conventional multilevel regression analysis since we have demonstrated that it provides a valid (although somehow less conservative) estimate of the informative effects of newspapers and public broadcasts.

We estimate the effects of exposure to broadsheet and broadcasting news on information inequality by specifying an interaction term between exposure to broadsheets (and public broadcasting) and education (an indicator of resource inequality) on the one hand, and exposure to broadsheets (and public broadcasting) and political interest (an indicator of motivational inequality) on the other. The obtained results are shown in Table 3 (Equations 2 and 3, respectively).

Equation 1 in Table 3 replicates Table 1. Equation 2 adds the interaction terms between exposure to both broadsheet newspapers and public broadcasts and education, while Equation 3 adds the corresponding interaction terms for political interest. Thus, while Equation 2 explores the contribution of both broadsheets and public broadcasts to the resource-based knowledge gap, Equation 3 addresses the impact of both broadsheets and public broadcasts on the motivation-based knowledge gap.

The results from Table 3 indicate that exposure to broadsheets, but not public broadcasting, has the expected leveling effect on the knowledge gap. The interactions

Table 3. Effects of Exposure to Broadsheets on the Knowledge Gap (Multilevel Estimations).

	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3
General exposure to media	.093*** (0.006)	.093*** (0.006)	.092*** (0.006)
Public broadcasting exposure	.024*** (0.004)	.020*** (0.009)	.025*** (0.006)
Commercial broadcasting exposure	-.031*** (0.004)	-.031*** (0.004)	-.031*** (0.004)
Broadsheets exposure	.079*** (0.004)	.109*** (0.011)	.106*** (0.007)
Tabloids exposure	-.015* (0.006)	-.014* (0.005)	-.015* (0.010)
Level of education	.270*** (0.008)	.274*** (0.012)	.264*** (0.008)
Male	.655*** (0.020)	.653*** (0.020)	.654*** (0.020)
Age	.032*** (0.003)	.033*** (0.003)	.032*** (0.003)
Age ²	-.000*** (0.000)	-.000*** (0.000)	-.000*** (0.000)
Political interest	.659*** (0.022)	.652*** (0.022)	.719*** (0.034)
Education × broadsheets		-.008** (0.000)	
Education × public broadcasting		-.001 (0.002)	
Political interest × broadsheets			-.041*** (0.0008)
Political interest × public broadcasting			-.003 (0.007)
Intercept	.792*** (0.123)	.760*** (0.120)	.767*** (0.113)
R ² within	.19	.19	.19
R ² between	.43	.44	.44
R ² overall	.20	.21	.21
N Level 1 (individuals)	25,737	25,737	25,737
N Level 2 (countries)	27	27	27

Source. Our elaboration on the 2009 European Election Survey (EES) Voter Study (Advanced Release, July 2010).

Note. Dependent and independent variables are the same as in Table 1 plus the corresponding interaction terms in Equations 2 and 3.

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

between exposure to broadsheets and education and interest were both significant and negatively signed. In contrast, the interactions did not reach statistical significance for the case of public broadcasting.

The assessment of the magnitude of the interactions requires that we plot the expected marginal effect of each of the components of the knowledge gap (education and interest) for individuals either exposed or not exposed to broadsheet newspapers (see Brambor et al. 2006). The solid sloping line denotes the marginal effect, and the dashed lines indicate a 95 percent confidence interval based on the estimates of Equations 2 and 3 in Table 3, respectively. When the value 0 of the predicted marginal

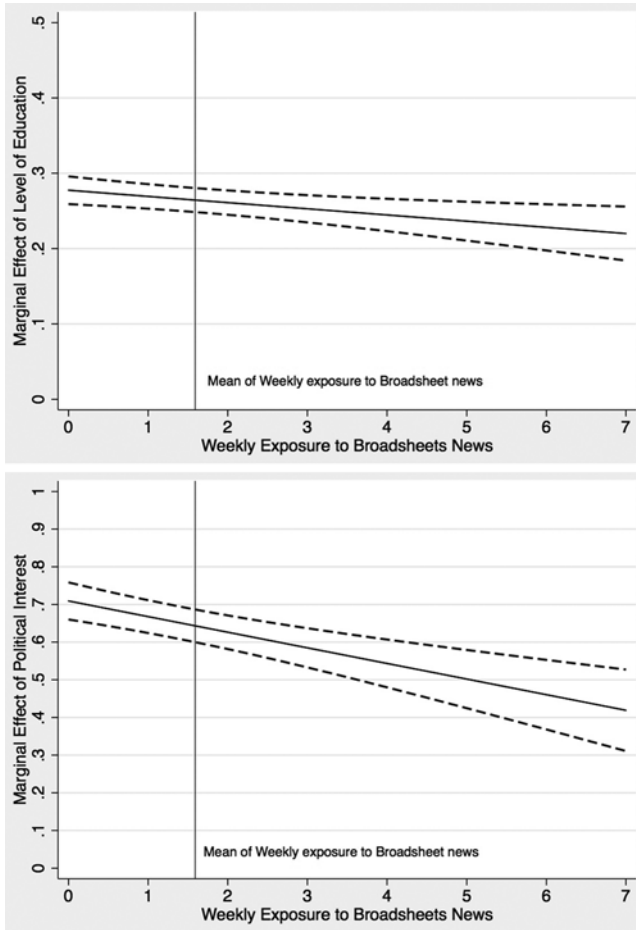


Figure 2. The leveling effect of exposure to broadsheets news on the knowledge gap.
 Source. Our elaboration on the European Election Survey (EES) Voter Study (Advanced Release, July 2010).
 Note. Calculations are made on the basis of Table 3 (Equations 2 and 3).

effect is not within the upper and lower bounds of the confidence interval, the marginal effect is statistically significant. As can be seen in Figure 2 (see the top graph of the figure), the marginal effect of education on knowledge is always significant, but it slightly decreases (from .28* to .21*) as weekly exposure to broadsheets increases.¹⁰

The results are also relevant in the case of the motivational knowledge gap (see the bottom graph of Figure 2). Here, the marginal effect of political interest on knowledge

is always significant but decreases substantially (from .71* to .41*) as citizens' weekly exposure to broadsheets rises. Or put another way, among less exposed citizens, the effect of political interest on knowledge is about twice as large (.71*) as among highly exposed citizens (.41*). Clearly, the reading of broadsheet newspapers contributes to a leveling of the knowledge gap. We discuss these findings and their implications for future research in the last section.

Discussion and Conclusion

The practice of serious journalism contributes to an informed public. Our evidence shows that exposure to broadsheet newspapers and public broadcasts that typically cover hard news results in higher levels of knowledge. This implies that it is not the medium per se but the content delivered by particular media sources that matters. In-depth treatment of public affairs informs, superficial and sensational treatment does not.

Notwithstanding the argument that all news sources are increasingly responding to consumer demand, thus creating "convergence" of content across sources (see Plasser 2005), our analysis confirms that news programs aired by the public broadcaster tend to be more substantive than the offering of commercial channels. After adjusting for selection into the public broadcaster's audience, our analysis finds that viewers exposed to newscasts delivered by the public broadcaster are better informed than those who tune in to commercial broadcasters. In addition, our study breaks new ground by showing that the distinction between public and private broadcasters is overshadowed by the distinction between broadsheet and tabloid daily newspapers. More specifically, we demonstrate that the audience for tabloids is substantially less informed about public affairs than readers of broadsheet newspapers. In the case of broadcast sources, we find that the advantages associated with exposure to the public broadcaster also survive controls for self-selection into the audience, but the magnitude of their informative effects appear somehow smaller than those of the broadsheets. Consequently, it is only broadsheets and not public broadcasters who also have the capacity to narrow the gap in knowledge between more and less advantaged citizens.

These last findings confirm not only that information-rich contexts can overcome the costs of becoming informed about politics but also that information-rich environments contribute to a reduction of the inequalities in knowledge (Berggren 2001; Fraille 2013; Iyengar et al. 2010). In the case of the EU electoral campaign (which can be reasonably considered an information-rich context), broadsheet newspapers present relevant informative effects that reduce the knowledge gap between low resource and unmotivated citizens and their high resource and motivated counterparts.

Despite previous studies arguing the impossibility of systematically demonstrating media influence on political attitudes and behavior (see Bennett and Iyengar 2008; Mondak 1995; Newton 2006), we demonstrate that news stories containing serious and in-depth information have the capacity to inform their audiences. In line with recent innovations in the study of knowledge acquisition (Barabas and Jerit 2009;

Curran et al. 2009; Jerit et al. 2006), we overcome some of the methodological problems affecting previous studies. Our study considers not only measures of media content but also implements a more conservative estimation strategy (propensity score matching) to document the informative effects of media sources.

Of course, our conclusions are subject to several caveats. Most notably, we have focused on within-country differences across outlets but have ignored differences across countries. In countries where there is greater variation in news content across sources, we would expect strengthened source effects on knowledge. The extent to which the conditional effects of sources on knowledge are further conditioned by country or media system attributes, however, is the subject of future research.

In comparison with the extant literature, our evidence is relatively robust. Despite the difficulty of untangling cause and effect relationships in observational mass media research, and despite the fact that the data analyzed here are cross-sectional, we have adjusted for self-selection tendencies within particular audiences, something that to the best of our knowledge represents an innovation in media effects research (for a parallel effort, see Soroka et al. 2013). The use of matching bolsters our claim that the informative effects of broadsheets and public television news are genuine, rather than an artifact of self-selection.

In closing, we reiterate that our analysis provides conservative estimates of the effects of media content on political knowledge given the nature of the survey questions comprising our dependent variable. General knowledge is known to depend more on long-term pre-dispositional factors (such as education or motivation) and less on short-term contextual factors (Jerit et al. 2006). With alternative measures of knowledge that tap awareness of issues and events in the news, the effects of sources on information gain will likely be enlarged, thus strengthening the argument that the delivery of news is a significant determinant of what citizens learn about the political world.

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Notes

1. Cronbach's alpha, a standard measure of scale reliability, was .625. We also subjected the items to factor analysis and found that they yielded a single dimension.
2. This "program list" approach has two main advantages over standard measures of media exposure such as weekly exposure to news or the amount of time devoted to various genres

- of programming. First, it decreases the cognitive demands placed on respondents, and second, it increases content validity by more accurately incorporating the relevant domain of exposure (Dilliplane et al. 2013).
3. Respondents who do not mention a tabloid are given a score of no exposure (zero).
 4. These results are included in more detail in the online appendix, Tables 5 and 6 and their correspondent comments below.
 5. In all, 838 experts responded to an online survey. Details on the selection criteria, questionnaire design, data collection, and response rates are given in the study report: <http://www.mediasystemsineurope.org/files/emss10all.pdf>
 6. Detailed results on the expert ratings for each of the outlets analyzed here are presented in the online appendix (see the last column in Tables 3 and 4).
 7. Fitted values of political knowledge in Figure 1 are calculated from Table 1, and with all predictors (except the one of interest in each case: weekly exposure to each outlet) set to their typical values (i.e., means for quantitative variables and proportions for categorical variables).
 8. We have replicated the analysis with a different re-codification of each of the binary variables by considering 1 (those declaring to be exposed more than three days per week) versus 0 (those declaring to be exposed less than three days per week), and the results are equivalent.
 9. Specific results of testing the balancing property of each of the propensity score calculated here are summarized in the online appendix (see Figure 1, Distribution of the Estimated Propensity Scores Across Outlets), which shows that for all media sources, observations with the same propensity score have the same distribution of observable covariates independent of treatment status.
 10. The marginal effect of education on knowledge appears to be very slight, but consider that the variable ranges from 0 to 6. Therefore, an average marginal effect of 0.22 implies a potential maximum effect of 1.32 additional correct answers if we compare the lowest educated with the highest educated citizen. Conversely, an average marginal effect of 0.28 implies a potential maximum effect of 1.68 additional correct answers.

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Shanto Iyengar's teaching and research address the role of the news media and mass communication in contemporary politics. He is the author of several books including *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide* (W. W. Norton, 2007), *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate* (Free Press, 1995), *Explorations in Political Psychology* (Duke University Press, 1993), and *News That Matters: Television and American Opinion* (University of Chicago Press, 1987). His research has also been published by leading journals in political science and communication.

Press-Party Parallelism and Polarization of News Media during an Election Campaign: The Case of the 2011 Turkish Elections

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine press-party parallelism during the 2011 national elections in Turkey. The article reports findings from a content analysis of 9,127 news articles and editorial columns from fifteen newspapers regarding the trajectory of press-party parallelism over the course of the twelve-week national elections campaign period. We focus on two indicators of press-party parallelism: (1) respective “voice” given to the two leading parties, calculated as the ratio of news that quoted sources from the incumbent *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) to the leading opposition party *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP) and (2) news articles’ tones toward AKP and CHP. The newspapers that were content analyzed were first categorized into three groups based on survey data regarding the voting intentions of their readers: (1) a group of “conservative” newspapers whose readers intended to vote primarily for AKP, (2) a group of “mainstream broadsheets,” and (3) a group of “opposition” newspapers with a readership base intending to vote for CHP. The findings suggest that over the course of the election campaign, internal pluralism in both conservative and opposition papers declined in terms of voice given to respective parties and tone of news coverage.

Keywords

press-party parallelism, Turkey, media systems, election campaigns, polarization

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As politicians and voters increasingly communicate via mass media, the interdependence between media and political institutions raises concerns about the ability of media to inform and foster a forum for deliberation (D'Alessio and Allen 2000; Strömbäck 2008; Tresch 2009). Debates regarding this interdependence between media and political institutions focus on issues related to media bias and, particularly, press-party parallelism, defined as the degree of alignment between a group of newspapers and a political party (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

Generally, the literature on press-party parallelism either focuses on cross-country comparisons depicting different degrees of press-party parallelism (Van Kempen 2007) or follows trends in the extent of press-party parallelism over relatively longer time periods (Bayram 2010), concentrating on changes in press-party parallelism across elections (Wilke and Reinemann 2001). In this article, we instead analyze trends in the degree of parallelism in media coverage within an election campaign. We first focus on the political clusters of newspapers in the Turkish market from a historical perspective and link these groupings to representative data from the Turkish Election Study (TES) for the national elections in 2011. We then follow the coverage of the election campaign across these political groupings of newspapers throughout the election campaign via content-analysis data. We also show how campaign coverage provided a selective response to daily changes in the public agenda and effectively became more polarized during the 2011 campaign. As such, we exemplify how newspaper content can be used to uncover trends during the course of an election campaign and show that changes in press-party parallelism can manifest not only over longer periods of time (with changes in political environment and media market structure) but also during the course of a specific election campaign.

We use the case of Turkey in our analyses for it constitutes not only a significantly under-studied media market in the literature but also because it forms an exemplary experience in press-party parallelism during the formation of a predominant-party system.¹ The coming to power of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* [AKP]) marks a turning point in modern Turkish democracy. AKP portrays itself as a coalition of center-right and conservative pro-Islamists (Kalaycıoğlu 2010). It not only succeeded in winning three consecutive general elections between 2002 and 2011 but also enlarged its vote share effectively turning the once fractionalized and volatile Turkish party system into a relatively stable predominant-party system (Gümüüşü 2013). From early in their tenure, discussions regarding the independence of media from political institutions (and particularly, the ruling AKP government) have received both national and international attention (e.g., Christensen 2007; Kaya and Çakmur 2010; Semetko 2010). Therefore, Turkey is a critical case that can help further our understanding of how press-party parallelism develops during the potential emergence of a predominant-party system.

In addition to providing an in-depth analysis of developing press-party parallelism in a predominant-party system, we also extend the literature with an underutilized methodological approach that allows us to focus on the relationship between press-party parallelism and specific issue developments over an election campaign. To date, most studies related to press-parallelism in Turkey have either utilized a

content-analytic approach that aggregated data from an election period using a limited sample of newspapers (Balkir et al. 2008) or have utilized micro-level data about individual-level readership to assess the level of press-party parallelism (e.g., Çarkoğlu and Yavuz 2010). Consequently, like most of the studies included in D'Alessio and Allen's (2000) meta-analysis and studies since then (e.g., Druckman and Parkin 2005), research on press-party parallelism and media bias in Turkey did not establish a baseline that can be used to assess bias. By adopting a time-series perspective in the depiction and analysis of press-party parallelism, we bypass this shortcoming and are able to link the degree of bias in press coverage to developing public agenda during the election campaign.

Accordingly, we aim to introduce a fresh perspective to the debates about press-party parallelism using original data from Turkey by combining micro-level data regarding newspaper readership from a nationally representative survey with a content analysis that tracked changes in daily news coverage of political parties and their leaders during the 2011 general elections. We anchor our analyses of press-party parallelism to the start of the campaign period and follow its development throughout the twelve-week campaign period.

Our methodological approach helps reveal substantial findings about press-party parallelism in Turkey. In addition, our findings have important implications for the literature on press-party parallelism and media systems. First, as noted earlier, the Turkish case represents an emerging predominant-party system that constitutes a relative rarity among democratic systems. As Pempel (1990: 1) notes, in the exceptional one-party dominant states “despite free electoral competition, relatively open information systems, respect for civil liberties, and the right of free political association, a single party has managed to govern alone . . . without interruption, for substantial periods of time.” The changing nature of the media systems as they relate to politics offer a potential explanatory framework that can account for the establishment and maintenance of electoral dominance in such exceptional democracies with one-party domination. Therefore, this study can be a part of the larger framework on comparison of media systems in different political settings. Second, in terms of its ownership pattern, the Turkish media system can be characterized as having a corporatist-clientelistic structure. As we will discuss in the following section, this corporatist-clientelistic structure has important implications for press-party parallelism. Namely, if a media system has a corporatist-clientelistic structure, to the extent that media outlets are inclined to be responsive not only to political developments but also to voting preferences of their reader base (Bernhardt et al. 2008; Hopmann et al. 2011), one can expect important changes in the level of press-party parallelism even over short periods of time such as during an election campaign.

Based on these arguments, we have several expectations. First, we expect to see a high level of press-party parallelism given the electoral dominance of one party in Turkey and the relatively fragmented nature of the opposition parties. In addition, emergence and consolidation of a predominant-party system could be explained better when we take into account the rising press-party parallelism within a clientelistic media system. Hence, we argue that the predominant-party system interacts with the

clientelistic media ownership structure to increase the correspondence between political parties, their constituencies, and the media. Second, we argue that important political developments—and particularly election campaigns, when political parties are highly active in terms of reaching out to the electorate and voter preferences are crystallized—are suitable periods to study such shifts in press-party parallelism. Hence, our study is a longitudinal study focusing within a case to follow the causal process. To follow details over time, we benefit from both the content of news and political parties' political campaign advertisements. The timing of the advertisement campaigns and political parties' decisions regarding which media outlets to place the advertisements provides further leverage for our research. Indeed, our findings from news content as well as the campaign ads corroborate our expectations about the variance in the level of press-party parallelism.

Our results not only show significant differences between partisan newspaper groups in terms of coverage of political parties but also depict how, over the course of the election campaign, dynamic changes, likely in the form of increased polarization in the coverage of political parties, are observed as an indicator of press-party parallelism. We show that the dominant ruling party AKP has tremendous advantage in the media market. AKP not only gets covered more frequently and more favorably among a large proportion of newspapers but also possesses a dominant position in the use of campaign commercials in the newspaper market. At least partially, such an advantageous position in the newspaper market may account for the creation and maintenance of a predominant-party such as AKP in Turkey.

Press-Party Parallelism and Media Systems

Press-party parallelism, initially conceptualized by Seymour-Ure (1974) as the extent to which the structure of the media system parallels the political system, principally hinges on three related factors: political parties' ownership of or involvement in the functioning of media organizations, partisanship in the editorial decisions made by news organizations, and the party affiliations of news organizations' audiences.

Several factors may potentially influence partisanship of news coverage within a media system. These include commercialization and level of competition in a given media system (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2010; Mancini 2013), media institutions' judgments about reader preferences (Wring and Deacon 2010), organizational ties between media and political institutions (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002), and polarization in the general political environment (Bernhardt et al. 2008).

With respect to the role that commercialization may play on partisanship in news content, one frequently voiced expectation is that profit orientation may weaken partisan political control. Hallin and Mancini (2004) contend that commercialized newspapers will tend to emphasize information over commentary. Likewise, it is often argued that, particularly in media markets that are characterized by monopolistic competition, news organizations will not have sufficient incentive to differentiate themselves from competitors (Baker 2002) and consequently they will be likely to voice multitude of perspectives in an effort to appeal to as wide a reader base as possible (Seymour-Ure

1998). Conversely, recent work on the impact of commercialization on news coverage indicates that as a result of heightened reader erosion and fragmentation, commercial media outlets are becoming increasingly motivated to tailor their content to the political leanings of their target readers (Mancini 2013; Peake 2007; Wring and Deacon 2010).

Commercialization may also create an impetus for media organizations to engage in clientelistic relationships with political institutions (Besley and Prat 2006). Particularly in Mediterranean and southeast European democracies, clientelism has been shown to result in utilization of media ownership to form political alliances (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002). Accordingly, formation of such alliances often involves media mergers and consolidation as a means through which organizations can position themselves strategically (Anderson and McLaren 2012).

This complex relationship between commercialization, market orientation, and clientelism is also influenced by the political environment in a given country at a given time period. Deeper polarization in a political system is likely to contribute to press-party parallelism and news slant (Bernhardt et al. 2008; Hallin and Mancini 2004; Seymour-Ure 1974). This will particularly be the case in corporatist-clientelist media systems within which editorial decisions are based on a set of overlapping factors, such as the need to cater to the preferences of the readers and the protection of existing ties with political parties (specifically political parties that are in control or likely to be in control of the government; Hopmann et al. 2011). In this article, we argue that clientelism and commercialization combined are important motives for further political polarization in the media.

These four factors, namely, commercialization, political polarization, ties between media and political institutions, and newspapers' judgments about reader preferences, which influence press-party parallelism in a media system, are all effectively at play in the Turkish case. With the liberalization of the Turkish economy since the 1980s, the media sector in the country has not only expanded but also got restructured under the heavy influence of commercialization, with corporate management becoming the dominant form of administration of news outlets (Kaya and Çakmur 2010). The media sector has become considerably fragmented with the expansion of the private television and radio stations and more recently the expansion of online and mobile media usage. From the very beginning, the influence of political parties, their institutional ties and regulatory effect over the newspapers has been quite high in Turkey (Bayram 2010). The party system, which forms the background of this interaction between the media sector and politics, has also been characterized by high fragmentation, volatility, and rising ideological polarization (Sayarı 2007). With the third consecutive electoral victory for the AKP in June 2011, these salient characteristics of the Turkish party system have arguably come to a halt. Many have contended that following AKP's electoral victories, Turkey is now a predominant-party system, which by definition is characterized by low fragmentation and declining electoral volatility (Çarkoğlu 2011; Gümüüşçü 2013). All of these factors provide the foundation for our efforts to diagnose the extent of press-party parallelism and political bias in newspaper coverage of the

2011 general elections. Below, we briefly evaluate this historical background and link them to the above outlined factors that may influence press-party parallelism.

Press-Party Parallelism and the Turkish Media System

Since AKP came to power by winning approximately 34 percent of the popular votes in the 2002 general elections, press freedom and media bias have become heavily debated issues. These debates mostly focus on how, during AKP's tenure, political pressure on the press has increased and how mainstream media were quickly (re)configured to create what some critics call *yandaş* (proponent, supporter, or advocate) media; a term used to describe uncritical-partisanship of AKP.

According to the most recent report by Reporters without Borders, as of 2013, Turkey ranks 154th out of 179 countries in terms of press freedom, down from the 2011–2012 ranking of 148th. This decline is attributed to a number of developments, such as the increasing number of prosecuted journalists, publishers, and activists, bans on Internet Web sites, recent journalist layoffs that some critics believe are the result of government pressure, and ongoing defamation suits launched by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan against members of the media. Although these developments cannot be attributed solely to the clientelistic structure of the media, they are highlighted in the debates among scholars and journalists; hence, they constitute the context within which we present our findings.

Turkey has always had poor scores in terms of media independence (Bayram 2010; Van Belle 2000). However, particularly since the early-1990s, following the deregulation of the media market and the subsequent commercialization, a number of factors have contributed to the growing corporate-clientelism in Turkish media. First, media owners increasingly relied on clientelistic relationships with the state to gain a competitive edge in their “non-media” businesses (Christensen 2007; Finkel 2000). Second, ownership of many newspapers was transferred from family-owned companies to conglomerations, resulting in an increasing concentration of ownership in the media market (Semetko 2010).

In many respects, the corporatist-clientelist media system was already well in place when AKP came to power in 2002. After coming to power, and during their nine-year tenure leading to the elections in 2011, AKP was very quick and effective in utilizing this media structure to realign clientelistic relationships in its favor.² In 2004, the newspapers (e.g., *Star Gazetesi*) and TV stations (e.g., *Star TV*) that were owned by the Uzan Family and Cem Uzan, a businessman and the leader of one of the main opposition parties, the Young Party (*Genç Parti* [GP]), which received a critical 7.5 percent of popular votes in 2002, was taken over by Saving Deposit Insurance Fund (*Tasarruf Mevduatı Sigorta Fonu* [TMSF]), which is a regulating body attached to the Prime Minister's office. After several changes in ownership, the *Star* newspaper was acquired by a conservative media company. In 2007, TMSF took over media holdings of the Ciner group, including newspapers *Sabah* and *Takvim* and one of the most popular national TV channels in Turkey (ATV). TMSF later sold these newspapers and the TV channel to their sole bidder *Turkuaz* media, a company run by AKP leader Recep

Tayyip Erdoğan's son-in-law (Ognianova et al. 2012). Arguably, given the failing financial circumstances of the associated media groups, TMSF's motivation in the takeover cannot be considered to be solely political. However, regardless of the motivation, this intervention ended up with these media conglomerates being sold to the corporations that are known to be close to AKP.

Table 1 summarizes the developments in the ownership structure and circulation shares of major newspapers. The major changes in ownership took place mostly in 2007, for *Sabah* (with approximately 11 percent circulation share in 2002), *Star* (with approximately 10 percent circulation share in 2002), and *Takvim* (with approximately 5 percent circulation share in 2002). With these changes, in 2007, approximately 25 percent of the newspaper circulation moved toward groups that are closely allied with the ruling AKP. *Milliyet* and *Vatan* also were sold by the Doğan Media Group to Demirören-Karacan Group in April 2011, a few weeks before the 2011 general elections. Overall, during the first nine years of the tenure of AKP, approximately 30 percent of the Turkish newspaper circulation has changed hands.

Although significant ownership changes have taken place, this picture may be hiding the underlying shift in the content of newspaper coverage. Below, we depict this change over the course of the election campaign of 2011. To summarize these changes relating to press-party parallelism and polarization throughout the 2011 campaign period, we focus on two related constructs: voice allocation to parties and their officials, and favorability to political parties. If a political actor has a voice in the media, it means that the actor is being treated as an agent (Ferree et al. 2002). In many respects, voice is related to the "status conferral function" (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1948) of media. That is, by giving voice to a political actor, the media not only gives an opportunity to the actor to be heard but also confirms the actor's potential as a difference maker in the polity (Ferree et al. 2002; Tresch 2009). Hence, by comparing the voice given to the two largest parties in the fifteen largest Turkish newspapers, we trace how press-party parallelism and polarization develops within a campaign period.

Unexpected developments, scandals, and tactical moves during a campaign may cause newspapers to allocate more space and voice to a given party or a candidate (Niven 2002). This does not necessarily imply that more voice allocation directly translates into more favorable coverage. The underlying mechanism in favorability relates to the explicit tone of a newspaper toward different parties and can be influenced by market pressure, corporate policies, and editorial bias (Druckman and Parkin 2005). Therefore, we will also analyze favorability to political parties during the campaign period to provide additional evidence regarding the evolution of press-party parallelism and polarization.

Method

As Table 1 summarizes, our analysis focused on 15 newspapers with the highest circulation in Turkey, making up about 79 percent of the total newspaper circulation in 2011. The period of analysis covers the duration of the election campaign period for twelve weeks, from March 20 to June 10, 2011, two days before the general elections. In total, 1,245 daily newspaper issues were analyzed.

Table 1. Major Newspapers in Turkey, Ownership, Circulation, and Political Alignment, 2002–2011.

Newspaper	Founding Year	2002			2007			2011			Factor Analysis Results	
		Ownership	Circulation Share (%) ^a	Group	Ownership	Circulation Share (%) ^a	Group	Ownership	Circulation Share (%) ^a	Group	Factor I Scores ^b	Notes
<i>Akşam</i>	1918	Çukurova	9.3	Çukurova	3.7	Çukurova	2.8	Mainstream	0.358	Mainstream	Taken over by SDIF in 2013. An ex-AKP MP has been appointed to head its administration	
<i>Cumhuriyet</i>	1924	Cumhuriyet	1.9	Cumhuriyet	1.5	Cumhuriyet	1.1	Opposition	1.245	Opposition	Owned by the Cumhuriyet Foundation since the passing of founding family member Berin Nadi in 2001	
<i>Habertürk</i>	2009					Ciner	5.7	Mainstream	1.367 ^c	Mainstream		
<i>Hürriyet</i>	1948	Doğan	16.2	Doğan	11.1	Doğan	9.3	Mainstream	0.501	Mainstream		
<i>Milliyet</i>	1950	Doğan	10.4	Doğan	4.4	DKY	3.4	Mainstream	0.666	Mainstream	Bought by DKY Corporation on April 2011	
<i>Posta</i>	1995	Doğan	12.0	Doğan	12.8	Doğan	10.0	Mainstream	0.210	Mainstream		
<i>Sabah</i>	1985	Ciner	10.6	Çalık	9.4	Çalık	7.6	Mainstream	-0.267	Mainstream	Taken over by SDIF in 2008	
<i>Sözcü</i>	2007	Gözcü	NA	Gözcü	NA	Sözcü	4.9	Opposition	1.122	Opposition	Founded as continuation of Doğan Media Group's Gözcü (Observer) by its employees	
<i>Star</i>	1999	Star (Uzan)	9.7	Star Group	2.2	Star Group	3.3	Conservative	-0.688	Conservative	Taken over by SDIF in 2004	
<i>Takvim</i>	1994	Ciner	NA	Çalık	5.1	Çalık	2.3	Conservative	-0.513	Conservative	Taken over by SDIF in 2008	
<i>Türkiye</i>	1970	İhlas	8.1	İhlas	3.5	İhlas	3.0	Conservative	-0.760	Conservative	Founded as Hakikat (the Truth)	

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Newspaper	Founding Year	2002		2007		2011		Factor Analysis Results		Notes
		Ownership	Circulation Share (%) ^a	Ownership	Circulation Share (%) ^a	Ownership	Circulation Share (%) ^a	Factor I Scores ^b	Group	
Vakit/Yeni Akit	2001	Vakit	2.5	Vakit	1.4	Vakit	1.0	-1.441	Conservative	The name of Anadolu'da Vakit (Times in Anatolia) is changed to Akit in 2010
Vatan	2002	BGY	NA	Doğan	4.2	DKY	2.3	1.015	Opposition	Founded by BGY. Taken over first by Doğan Media Group (2007) and then by DKY (2011)
Yeni Şafak	1994	Albayrak	4.3	Albayrak	2.4	Albayrak	2.2	-1.441	Conservative	
Zaman	1986	Feza	10.7	Feza	12.9	Feza	19.5	-1.373	Conservative	Linked to the Fethullah Gülen Movement
Total			95.7%		74.6%		78.4%		55% of the variance	

Note. SDIF = Savings Deposit Insurance Fund; MP = member of parliament; AKP = *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*; CHP = *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*; TES = Turkish Election Study; BGY = *Bağımsız Gazeteciler Yayıncılık AŞ*; DKY = *Demirören and Karacan Yayıncılık*.

a. Circulation figures are from Medyatava.com.

b. For a given newspaper, the higher the Factor I scores, the higher the proportion of readers who intend to vote for CHP.

c. The TES data contained a very low number of respondents who indicated that they read *Habertürk* newspaper (14 out of 775). Hence, the factor score for *Habertürk*, which would categorize this newspaper as being close to "opposition", was not based on readership data that can be considered as stable in the sense that the addition of a few more AKP readers would have led the newspaper to be categorized as "mainstream." Hence, based on secondary information about readers targeted by *Habertürk*, we decided that the face validity of the categorization would improve if *Habertürk* was categorized as a "mainstream" newspaper rather than as an "opposition" newspaper.

We sampled two pages from each daily issue of a newspaper: the first page of every issue and a randomly selected page that contained at least one news story about politics in Turkey. For the purposes of this analysis, a political news story about Turkey was defined as any news article or commentary that is related to Turkish politics or a political figure from Turkey. For instance, news stories about conflicts in Libya were coded as being about Turkish politics if either a Turkish political figure was cited/quoted in the story or the story discussed Turkey's involvement in the conflict. All of the news stories in the first page as well as the randomly selected page were content analyzed. In total, we analyzed 18,395 news stories and 9,127 (49.61 percent) of these were about Turkish politics.

A total of twenty-one coders analyzed the sampled news articles. Intercoder reliability (Krippendorff's α) was calculated using sixteen sample news articles that would not be coded for the analysis. The average reliability for all the variables in the project was .71, higher than the minimum acceptable level of .68 (Neuendorf 2002). In this paper, we focus on two variables from the content analysis: voice given to and favorability toward the ruling AKP and the main opposition, the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* [CHP]). Reliability scores for voice and favorability were .81 and .76, respectively.

Voice allocation was measured by a variable that counts the number of quotations from AKP and/or CHP officials in a given news article. Using number of quotations, we operationalized voice allocation by calculating the ratio of news stories within which a party official or a candidate was quoted to the sum of all news stories in a given day.³ As a second measure for operationalizing voice, we also calculated the respective ratio of voices given to AKP and CHP by dividing AKP's voice allocation to CHP's for each day.⁴

Our second variable, favorability to the respective parties, was coded as an ordinal variable, ranging from 1 (*extremely negative*) to 7 (*extremely positive*) where a value of 4 denotes a mixed/neutral tone toward the party. This captures the general tone of the news story toward both AKP and CHP. If the party or any individual officially related to the party was not mentioned in the story explicitly, then this variable was coded as missing. AKP was mentioned in 52.16 percent of the news stories and CHP was mentioned in 34.43 percent of all the 9,127 political news stories.

For both variables, the unit of analysis was the news article. Daily average values were calculated and all of the relevant data were based upon a moving average of seven days. This resulted in 498 values per variable, measuring voice and favorability for eighty-three days, three newspaper groups, and two parties.

In addition to using the data from content analysis, we also used data from a nationally representative, face-to-face survey of voters from the same period (TES).⁵ Using this data, we categorized the content-analyzed newspapers into three groups based on the voting intentions of their readers. Based on the party choices and newspaper readership preferences from this survey, we were able to identify 687 respondents who indicated that they read one of the fifteen newspapers coded. Out of these 687 respondents, 569 indicated that they would vote for one of the four largest parties that have seats in the Turkish Grand National Assembly: AKP, CHP, the Nationalist Action Party

(*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi* [MHP]), or the Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi* [BDP]).

Based on the voting intentions of these respondents, for each newspaper, we calculated the percentage of respondents who would vote for one of the four parties. Using this cross-tabulation, we conducted a factor analysis. The factor analysis scores denote the place of each newspaper and proximity of newspapers toward each other with respect to the party preferences of their readers. Loading scores indicate that AKP and CHP load on the first dimension, which explains 55 percent of variance in party support across fifteen newspapers while MHP and BDP load on the second dimension, which explains 32 percent of variance. For the second dimension, factor scores indicate that there were only two newspapers that occupied the opposite polarities, with all other newspapers falling more or less at the center. As a result of this lack of variance in the second dimension, we grouped newspapers according to their scores from the first factor. Table 1 summarizes distribution of fifteen newspapers in three political groups based on the first factor that loads on AKP–CHP dimension. The “conservative” group’s readership base consists mainly of AKP supporters (with roughly 70–95 percent of the readers intending to vote for AKP) whereas CHP supporters constitute the “opposition” group’s main readership base. There is also a group of “mainstream broadsheets” in between these two opposite factions. The voting intentions of the readers of mainstream broadsheets reflected the election outcomes in 2011, with about 40 to 60 percent of their readers intending the vote for AKP. Circulation shares of these fifteen newspapers indicate that while mainstream newspapers have the largest circulation rate (38.8 percent), the conservative group is a close second (31.3 percent). Both groups circulate much more than the opposition group (8.3 percent) newspapers. Such grouping of newspapers according to voting preferences of their readers enables us to delineate how the current competitive environment in the Turkish media, coupled with market orientation of actors within the industry, may influence press-party parallelism and polarization in coverage of political parties (AKP and CHP) as the election campaign period evolves.

Results

Voice Given to AKP and CHP

Conservative newspapers quoted AKP officials and candidates in 18 percent of all political news, while the same value was 6 percent for CHP. Voice in the mainstream newspapers was 17 percent for AKP and 12 percent for CHP. Only the opposition newspapers allocated more voice to CHP than they did to AKP: In opposition newspapers, average voice percentage was 12 percent for AKP and 13 percent for CHP. Voice allocation to AKP and CHP by each newspaper is summarized in Table 2.

Figure 1 shows the voice allocated to AKP and CHP in three different newspaper groups throughout the election campaign period. Linear trends indicate that as the Election Day approached, all the newspaper groups allocated more voice to the candidates and officials from AKP. Even among opposition newspapers, voice allocated to

Table 2. Descriptive Summary for Content-Analysis Variables.

	Number of Articles Coded	Percentage of Articles Quoting AKP	Percentage of Articles Quoting CHP	Mean Favorability to AKP (SD)	Mean Favorability to CHP (SD)
<i>Akşam</i>	568	14	11	3.77 (1.53)	4.29 (1.53)
<i>Cumhuriyet</i>	803	9	14	2.68 (1.38)	4.77 (1.47)
<i>Habertürk</i>	616	17	16	3.69 (1.46)	4.13 (1.29)
<i>Hürriyet</i>	608	18	15	3.59 (1.59)	4.19 (1.45)
<i>Milliyet</i>	687	16	14	3.64 (1.47)	4.09 (1.37)
<i>Posta</i>	418	15	11	3.81 (1.43)	4.30 (1.41)
<i>Sabah</i>	575	20	6	4.79 (1.35)	3.34 (1.36)
<i>Sözcü</i>	649	9	13	2.25 (1.23)	4.79 (1.16)
<i>Star</i>	585	21	6	4.91 (1.42)	2.72 (1.39)
<i>Takvim</i>	365	24	6	5.06 (1.40)	3.39 (1.47)
<i>Türkiye</i>	702	18	5	5.25 (1.43)	2.89 (1.51)
<i>Vakit/Yeni Akit</i>	826	13	4	4.98 (1.52)	2.15 (1.23)
<i>Vatan</i>	599	19	11	3.55 (1.68)	4.13 (1.64)
<i>Yeni Şafak</i>	556	20	5	5.14 (1.39)	2.62 (1.33)
<i>Zaman</i>	570	16	8	4.99 (1.40)	2.98 (1.50)

Note. Favorability scores range between 1 (extremely negative) and 7 (extremely positive). AKP = *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*; CHP = *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*.

AKP increased as the elections loomed. Given that AKP was the incumbent party and that all newspapers were covering election platforms of the two largest parties, an increase in the voice given to AKP in opposition newspapers is not surprising.

As the lower pane of Figure 1 indicates, CHP's voice allocation greatly contrasted with that of AKP. For both mainstream and opposition newspapers, the voice given to CHP increased as Election Day approached, as it did for AKP; but this increase in voice given to CHP is lower than the increase in voice given to the incumbent AKP. In addition, the voice given to CHP by conservative newspapers actually decreased as the campaign progressed. Clearly, the coverage of the main opposition party became increasingly partisan especially across the conservative and opposition newspapers as the campaign progressed.

Figure 1 also shows that mid-April, when there were nine weeks left to the elections, represents an anomaly within which conservative newspapers tended to give more voice to CHP (17 percent) than the opposition (9 percent) and mainstream (15 percent) newspapers. Upon further analysis, we found that this increase in voice given to CHP representatives was related to a crisis within CHP that dated back to one year prior to the elections. On May 10, 2010, the previous leader of CHP, Deniz Baykal, resigned following a sex-tape scandal. After Deniz Baykal's resignation, CHP experienced a transformation. The newly elected leader of the party, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, stated that he would change the "status quo" within the party. In many respects, this change involved the elimination of party officials who were close to the previous leader. Therefore, when the party announced its list of candidates (in Turkey candidates are delegated by the central party administration rather than based on primary

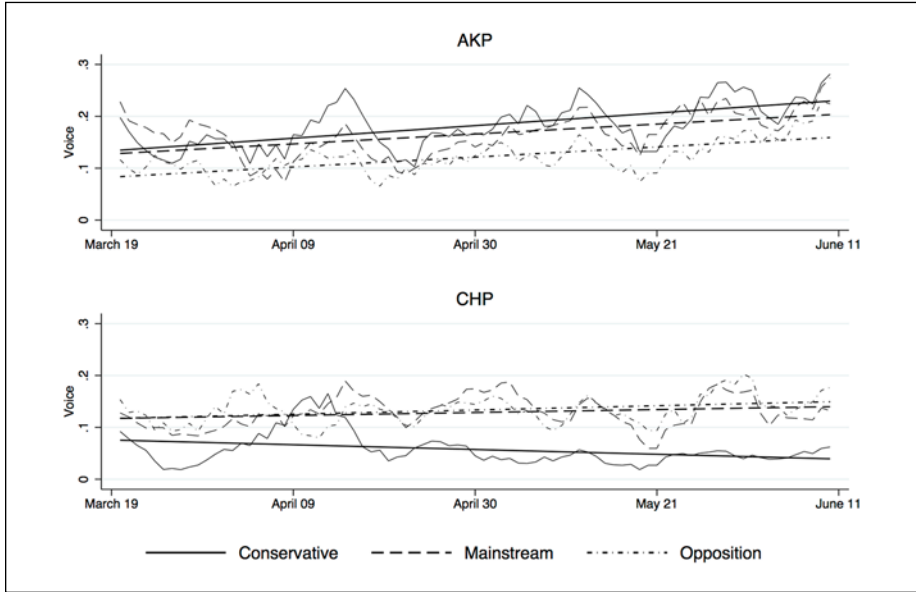


Figure I. Voice given to AKP and CHP.

Note. AKP = Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; CHP = Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi.

elections by members) on April 12, 2011, the coverage in the conservative newspapers was about the continuing conflict within the party ranks. In other words, although more voice was given to CHP candidates and officials because of the new candidate lists, this voice was mostly in the shape of representatives from different factions of the party “attacking” each other. In this respect, this coverage implied that CHP was not fit to rule Turkey. Indeed, the average favorability of the conservative newspapers to CHP was 3.4 (*slightly negative*), while it was 4.5 (*slightly positive*) to AKP in this outlier week when candidate lists were announced.

There were additional noteworthy fluctuations in the voice given to the two political parties in different newspaper groups. For example, in the early days of May, six weeks prior to the elections, there was an abrupt increase in the voice was given to CHP in mainstream broadsheets and a slight increase in opposition papers. Further analysis reveals that during this week, alleged corruption in the CHP controlled municipality in İzmir led to several arrests. When covering these arrests, mainstream papers tended to quote CHP representatives, who claimed that the arrests were a ruse by the AKP government. For instance, in a news story published in *Hürriyet* on May 5, CHP’s leader Kılıçdaroğlu accused the Prime Minister Erdoğan for alleged corruption in the municipality of Kayseri, ruled by AKP, claiming that the arrests against İzmir CHP officials aimed to divert attention from this corruption case. In the very same week, the increase in the voice given to CHP in opposition papers was not due to this incident but was rather about various claims made by the CHP leader about both local- and national-level corruption in the AKP government. In a story published on

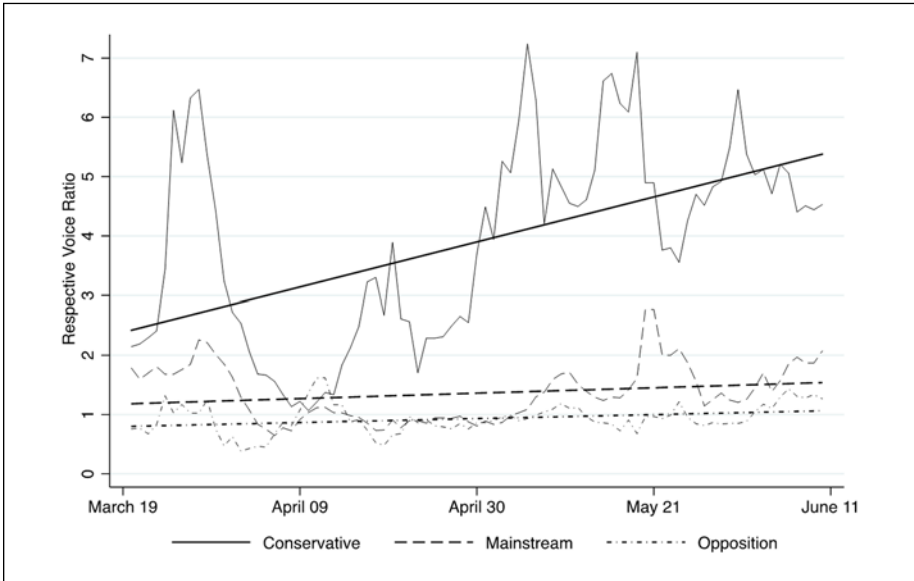


Figure 2. Respective voice: AKP to CHP sources.

Note. AKP = Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi; CHP = Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi.

May 4 by *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, Kılıçdaroğlu accused Recep Akdağ, incumbent minister of health from AKP, for trying to cover up an investigation on a high-profile case of corruption in Van province.

Despite the presence of such exceptional weeks during which CHP received considerable voice, the overall picture suggests that CHP had a clear disadvantage in terms of getting their voice heard in the media. As shown in Figure 2, which displays the respective voice each party received (the ratio of voice AKP received to voice CHP received), this disadvantage became more pronounced in the second half of the election campaign, particularly in conservative papers. In the first half of the election campaign, voice ratio was 2.74 in the conservative newspapers; it increased to a staggering 5.08 in the second half, $F(1, 81) = 80.52, p < .001$. In mainstream newspapers, the voice ratio increased slightly from 1.19 to 1.52 in the same period, $F(1, 81) = 11.22, p < .01$, and in opposition newspapers, the increase in the ratio was from 0.86 to 1.00 indicating that these newspapers tended to allocate equal voice to two parties in the second half of the campaign period while they had more quotes from CHP officials in the first half, $F(1, 81) = 6.86, p < .05$.

Tone of Coverage of AKP and CHP

To compare newspaper groups' (conservative, mainstream, opposition) favorability to AKP and CHP, we calculated daily average favorability scores for newspapers in each group. There were 4,761 news stories that mentioned AKP. Of these, 42 percent were

Table 3. Comparison of Newspaper Groups Favorability to AKP and CHP.

Group Differences	AKP	CHP
Conservative–Opposition	2.18***	-1.82***
Mainstream–Opposition	1.04***	-0.42***
Mainstream–Conservative	-1.14***	1.40***

Note. AKP = *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*; CHP = *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*.

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

neutral/mixed, while 30 percent were negative and 28 percent were positive. As expected, conservative newspapers, whose reader base is mostly comprised of AKP voters, favored AKP more. In these newspapers, 52 percent of the news about AKP were positive, 42 percent were neutral/mixed, while only 6 percent were negative. Mainstream broadsheet newspapers tended to have a neutral/mixed tone toward AKP: 20 percent of the news articles were positive, 28 percent were negative, and 52 percent were neutral/mixed. Opposition newspapers had a negative tone toward AKP in their news stories: 61 percent of the stories were negative, 32 percent were neutral/mixed, and only 7 percent were positive. There were 3,142 news stories that mentioned CHP. Out of this total, 45 percent were neutral/mixed news, while 35 percent had a negative tone and 20 percent had a positive tone. Conservative newspapers had a very negative tone toward CHP throughout the election campaign period: 63 percent of the stories had a negative tone, 32 percent were neutral/mixed, and only 5 percent were positive. Mainstream newspapers tended to be neutral: 21 percent of the stories had a negative tone, 23 percent had a positive tone, and 56 percent were neutral/mixed. Opposition newspapers tended to be slightly positive toward CHP: Only 11 percent of the stories had a negative tone, 50 percent were neutral/mixed, and 39 percent were positive. Table 2 presents the average scores for favorability toward AKP and CHP in each newspaper.

Table 3 summarizes the comparison of average favorabilities to respective political parties across different newspaper groups. Conservative newspapers' average favorability toward AKP was 2.18 points more positive than opposition newspapers' favorability to AKP, $F(2, 246) = 254.58, p < .001$, and 1.04 points more positive than mainstream papers' favorability to AKP, $F(2, 246) = 254.58, p < .001$. Meanwhile, opposition newspapers' average favorability toward CHP was 1.82 and 0.42 points more positive than that of conservative newspapers, $F(2, 246) = 153.03, p < .001$, and mainstream newspapers, $F(2, 246) = 153.03, p < .001$, respectively.

Figure 3 summarizes the progression of favorability toward AKP and CHP in three different newspaper groups throughout the election campaign. Over the twelve-week-long election campaign period, conservative newspapers became increasingly more favorable to AKP whereas opposition newspapers became more negative. For the first six weeks of the campaign period, average favorability to AKP in the conservative group was 4.74; in the second half of the election campaign, favorability to AKP increased significantly to 5.17, $F(1, 81) = 6.24, p < .05$. For the mainstream group,

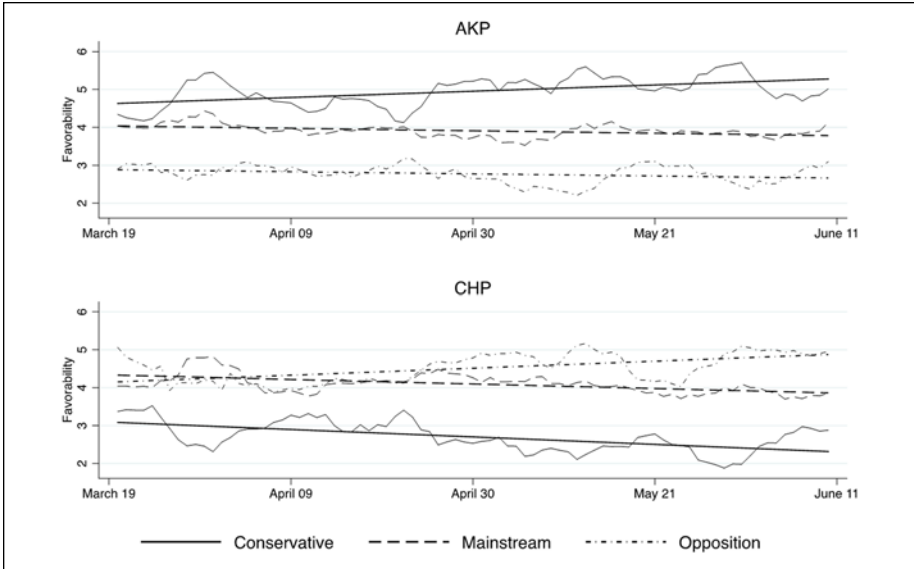


Figure 3. Favorability to AKP and CHP.

Note. AKP = *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*; CHP = *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*.

there was a slight decline from 3.97 to 3.83 for favorability to AKP in the same period, but this change was not statistically significant, $F(1, 81) = 1.97, p = .16$. For the opposition group, there was a decline of 0.20 points from an already negative value of 2.87 to 2.67 when the elections became closer in the second half of the campaign, but this decline was not statistically significant, either, $F(1, 81) = 2.49, p = .11$.

The lower pane of Figure 3 traces the favorability of the coverage of CHP in three newspaper groups throughout the campaign period. For both conservative and mainstream newspapers, favorability toward CHP decreased as Election Day approached. Conservative newspapers showed a considerable decrease in favorability to CHP from 2.93 in the first forty-two days to 2.44 in the second forty-one days $F(1, 81) = 9.05, p < .001$. Mainstream newspapers also showed a decrease in favorability to CHP in the same time period from 4.22 to 3.97, $F(1, 81) = 4.82, p < .05$.

Unlike conservative newspapers and mainstream broadsheets, opposition newspapers tended to be more positive toward CHP. However, this slightly positive tone toward CHP was not as strong as conservative newspapers' positive tone toward AKP. Indeed, at the beginning of the campaign period, opposition newspapers' favorability to CHP was similar to mainstream newspapers' neutral/mixed tone. There are several different, yet complementary, factors that may explain this lack of positive coverage of CHP in opposition newspapers in comparison to the positive coverage of AKP in the conservative newspapers. First, as discussed above, particularly at the beginning of the election campaign period, CHP was experiencing important intra-party competition. Arguably, while leadership change increased the expectations from the party, for many

CHP voters, these expectations remained largely unfulfilled during the 2011 election campaign period. Second, clientelist commercialization of the media market develops in parallel to the shift toward a predominant-party system within which the electorate for the opposition was divided between parties (CHP, MHP, BDP) with different ideological orientations, making it less likely for opposition newspapers targeting these readers to be as homogeneous, in terms of favorability to CHP, as conservative papers were in their favorability to AKP. Yet, as the election campaign progressed, there was a significant increase in opposition newspapers' favorability to CHP. The favorability score of opposition newspapers toward CHP increased from 4.28 in the first six weeks of the election campaign to 4.75 in the second half of the election campaign, $F(1, 81) = 8.27, p < .01$.

Given the expanding favorability gap across the partisan newspaper groups, an immediate question of interest concerns the use of commercials by the political parties in their election strategies. As we also coded political advertisements given to the three newspaper groups by two parties during the election campaign period, we can depict how the two parties used their financial power as they picked different newspapers for their commercials.

We coded the space allocated to a political advertisement given by AKP and CHP in the fifteen newspapers selected for the content analysis. Results revealed that AKP allocated more resources to newspaper campaigns than CHP. AKP started its advertisement campaign on May 9, 2011, approximately a month before the elections and had a stable campaign strategy, buying a full page of advertisement per newspaper every day of the remaining campaign period from each newspaper except *Cumhuriyet* and *Sözcü* newspapers in the opposition. This campaign strategy indicates that AKP did not differentiate between conservative and mainstream newspapers while it refrained from publishing any advertisements in *Cumhuriyet* and *Sözcü*, two newspapers known for their vehement opposition to AKP. CHP did not invest as much on newspaper advertisements as AKP. Out of all of the 535 advertisements we coded, AKP had a share of 75 percent (405 pages) of advertisements while CHP had a share of only 8.2 percent (44 pages). The analysis also indicates that CHP preferred to publish its ads in mainstream and opposition newspapers. The only exception for this preference was the 2 pages of advertisements published in the *Takvim* newspaper from the conservative group less than a week to the election.

Discussion

The aim of this paper was to investigate press-party parallelism in the 2011 national elections in Turkey. Utilizing data from a nationally representative survey of Turkish voters, we first divided the fifteen major newspapers in Turkey into three groups based on the voting intentions of their reader base. The three groups of newspapers were a "conservative" group of newspapers supporting the ruling AKP, "opposition" newspapers whose readers were leaning toward voting for CHP, and a number of broadsheets that we named "mainstream."

The results indicate that there is a clear divergence in voice given to respective parties by opposition and conservative newspapers. However, for “mainstream” newspapers, the ratio of voice given to AKP and CHP is in line with an often used benchmark of balanced coverage, defined in terms of the correspondence between the percentage of votes that a party receives (50 percent for AKP to 26 percent for CHP) and its visibility in media coverage (D’Alessio and Allen 2000; Hopmann et al. 2011).

A similar trend is observed with respect to the tone of coverage of the political parties during the election campaign. First, press-party parallelism is clearly evident, with “conservative” newspapers covering AKP considerably favorably and CHP considerably unfavorably; “opposition” newspapers covering AKP considerably negatively and “mainstream” newspapers’ tone toward both parties being consistently neutral. Second, as with the respective “voice” given to each political party throughout the duration of the election campaign, press-party parallelism significantly increases in the second half of the twelve-week campaign period, suggesting further polarization in the media environment as the election campaign progresses. Namely, as the Election Day approaches, the conservative newspapers favor AKP and disfavor its opposition CHP while opposition papers favor CHP and disfavor AKP in a more pronounced way.

These findings have important implications for understanding press-party parallelism in media systems of “non-Western” democracies. Previous research has indicated that particularly in Eastern Europe (Jakubowicz 2007), South America (Albuquerque 2005), as well as in Southern Europe (Papatheodorou and Machin 2003), the relationship between political institutions and media exhibits features (e.g., high political clientelism) that are very similar to what we have discussed above with respect to Turkey. According to Voltmer (2012), the concept of political parallelism, as applied to Western democracies may not be particularly apt in understanding political alignments in such systems. Consequently, she argues, media systems in democracies outside the Western world can be characterized as hybrid media systems that are not only related to their Western predecessors but also influenced by the political systems they operate in.

In many respects, the Turkish political system constitutes a good example of the hybrid nature of media systems in “non-Western” democracies. And the findings presented in this article have a potential to shed light on the implications of this hybrid nature of media systems on press-party parallelism. First, the findings regarding the respective coverage of AKP and the main opposition party CHP is indicative of the deep gap between the dominant party and opposition parties in predominant-party systems. Second, it can also be argued that since 2002 elections, two different political systems have coexisted in Turkey (Sayarı 2007): an electoral system within which there is high political fragmentation, which can be seen as a characteristic of pluralist systems; and a parliamentary system that is dominated by a single party, which is a characteristic of predominant systems. We believe that the existence of such duality in the political system may explain the nature of the gap we observed in the coverage of the AKP and the CHP. Namely, we observed that whereas conservative newspapers’ favorability to AKP was high and opposition newspapers’ favorability to AKP was low, the favorability of tone toward CHP is not strong (indeed very close to the neutral score) even among opposition papers. In other words, while the media system (and the

electoral system) has been polarized as pro vs. anti-AKP, given the highly fragmented nature of the electoral opposition, no single opposition party seems to be able to garner enough popular support among the electorate, and perhaps consequently in the media, as a viable alternative to AKP. To that extent, the findings from this study underline the importance of understanding how variations in the structure of opposition (i.e., unified vs. fragmented) in predominant-party systems may influence the extent to which media amplify existing power imbalances.

Third, the media system in Turkey is characterized not only by clientelism but also by a corporatist structure—often associated with media markets in liberal systems (e.g., the United States)—within which the players (media companies) need to cater to specific reader segments. This characteristic of the Turkish media system may be of particular importance in explaining the observed increase in press-party parallelism in the later stages of the political campaigns. Namely, a highly competitive media market within which newspapers have distinct target readers based on ideological orientation may be seen as a factor that explains the further polarization of news coverage as voter preferences crystallize during election campaign periods.

The potential impact of commercial imperatives on coverage of political parties also raises important questions about the influence that political parties may have on campaign coverage as advertisers. How much space were parties able to occupy in the newspapers with their own commercials? Where do parties' commercials flow? How does this flow change over the campaign period? First, we see that the beginning of campaign advertisements in the first week of May coincides with a significant increase in the respective voice ratio of AKP to CHP (from 2.74 to 5.08 in AKP's favor in conservative newspapers, and from 1.19 to 1.52 in AKP's favor in mainstream broadsheets). Although it is not possible to draw conclusions about causality, it should be noted that along with this increase in respective voice ratio, we see that the AKP dominates the advertising campaign expenditures with 75 percent of all advertisements put on newspapers during this period of the election campaign. CHP had approximately one-ninth of the commercials put by the AKP in print media. Our analyses also show that both parties appear to advertise on newspapers that have a relatively more favorable tone toward their own party. While this finding may be indicative of a tendency of both parties to use advertising to reward newspapers that are favorable to them, it may also be due to campaign strategies that are oriented toward mobilizing their voting base rather than trying to convert voters from other parties. In either case, the findings presented in this article underline the need to further study the relationship between use of campaign funding for mass media advertising and media coverage a political party receives.

In addition to furthering our understanding of press-party parallelism in predominant-party systems, this article also provides a novel approach to studying press-party parallelism in general. An important problem with the current literature on media bias and press-party parallelism pertains to the lack of a commonly accepted baseline with which we can operationalize these concepts (D'Alessio and Allen 2000). This paper provides an alternative approach by establishing a *relative baseline* at the beginning of an election campaign and then tracking the changes in parallelism over the course of

the campaign, rather than relying on an absolute benchmark against which bias should be evaluated. We find that as competition gets heated toward the end of the campaign, the favorability gap toward the two leading parties increases among partisan newspaper groups. This is not surprising given the polarized nature of political competition and rising press-party parallelism in Turkey. Also, we were able to account for short-term fluctuations in the degree to which different newspaper groups appear to favor and disfavor different parties by tracking favorability and voice daily.

The potential implications of such polarization in news coverage are reminiscent of discussions from similar studies that raise questions about the ability of such a media system to create a common field of values. Particularly, if it remains unchecked, such polarization and parallelism can potentially decrease voters' trust in the institution of journalism,⁶ and also it may reduce incentives to pursue centrist tendencies. Decreasing amount of mainstream coverage can further polarize the political realm, creating a vicious circle of press-party parallelism and political polarization (Chan and Suen 2009). We also need to question whether the presence of mainstream broadsheets that have remained more or less neutral throughout the campaign can help in creating a balance between what is described as peripheral media and a core media that can act as an intermediary. This is particularly important because, as Patterson and Donsbogh (1996) argue, overt partisanship can become more accountable only if it remains in check by competition.

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Notes

1. Sartori (1976: 196) defines predominant-party systems as polities "where a single party is consistently supported by a winning majority of voters . . . and thus is able to monopolize power."
2. For a historical evaluation of this period, see also Kaya and Çakmur (2010).
3. If there were ten political news stories in a specific day and four of them had a quoted statement from a representative of *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP), the daily AKP voice would be 0.4.
4. Ratios higher than 1 indicate that the newspaper gave more voice to AKP officials for the selected week, whereas values lower than 1 indicate higher voice to *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (CHP).
5. For summary of the Turkish Election Study (TES) data, see Çarkoğlu (2012).
6. Indeed, in terms of public's trust in the press, Turkey's rank was thirty-two out of thirty-four European countries in the 2012 Eurobarometer Survey.

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How Political and Media System Characteristics Moderate Interactions between Newspapers and Parliaments: Economic Crisis Attention in Spain and the Netherlands

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Abstract

This paper investigates the multidirectional causal relationships between negative economic coverage in two national newspapers and parliamentary questions addressing the economic crisis in Spain and the Netherlands, while controlling for the “real” economy as portrayed by stock market indices. Weekly level vector autoregression (VAR) analyses demonstrate for both countries that newspaper coverage is affected by stock market ratings and parliamentary questions. In Spain, newspaper coverage also affects parliament. A more detailed analysis shows that in Spain, the newspaper that is close to the government is ignored by the opposition as a source for parliamentary questions, while this newspaper also ignores the attention the opposition pays to negative economic developments in its parliamentary questions. In the Netherlands, we do not find any differences across newspapers. These findings reflect the differences in political and media systems and specifically the differences in the levels of consensus-orientation and political parallelism between the two countries.

Keywords

agenda setting, media bias, parliament, partisan journalism

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Introduction

The past years have witnessed an unprecedented economic crisis that has especially hit Europe very hard. Banks collapsed and needed to be rescued by major money injections financed by national governments. The common European currency, the Euro, has been seriously threatened in its existence. In this turbulent setting, journalists and politicians are highly relevant actors. On the one hand, previous research has shown that during times of economic downturn, the mass media affect citizens' opinions and attitudes to a larger extent than in times of economic prosperity. Consumer confidence, for example, is partly driven by (negative) economic coverage (Hollanders and Vliegthart 2011). On the other hand, politicians try to do whatever is in their power to ostracize the crisis and reestablish economic trust among the electorate—but will need media to reach their constituency. The responses of both actors to each other, as well as to short-term changes in the economic situation, are highly relevant to understand the impact of the crisis on the society at large. In this paper, we study the interaction between media and politics and their responses to changes in the economic situation in Spain and the Netherlands. Both countries are long-term members of the European Union (EU) and adopted the Euro as their currency, but show considerable differences in their political and media systems.

To assess the interaction between media and politics, scholars have relied on a political agenda-setting, or agenda-building, perspective (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). Here, the focus is on the transfer of issue attention from the political agenda to the media agenda, and vice versa. We rely on this approach but focus on an explicit comparison between the countries. So far, only few studies have explicitly compared political agenda-setting effects in different countries (Van Noije et al. 2008; Vliegthart and Walgrave 2011a) and have only to a limited extent developed explanations for cross-national differences. Here, we demonstrate how differences in the political system and media system moderate relationships between media and politics. The economic issue lends itself particularly well for such an analysis, as controls for “real-world” developments are widely available. Taking those into consideration circumvents problems with omitted variable bias (Vliegthart and Walgrave 2011b). Only few studies have so far included appropriate controls for real-world developments in their agenda-setting studies (Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg 1995; Soroka 2002; Van Noije et al. 2008; Vliegthart and Roggeband 2007). We rely on “crisis” attention—that is, attention to negative economic developments, thus singling out that attention that is especially prevalent in the context of economic crisis. The next section will be devoted to the introduction of our hypotheses.

Theory

Political Agenda Setting

The question “who follows whom” in the relation between politicians and journalists has in recent years become a key focal point in the study of political communication

(Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). Numerous studies have considered the impact of media coverage on the political process. Next to surveys with journalists (Van Aelst et al. 2008), content analysis is the most popular analytical technique that is used to address this question. Here, a systematic comparison between a wide variety of textual output from the political process—ranging from policy documents, debates, and parliamentary questions to transcripts of press conferences—is systematically compared with newspaper and television coverage. In line with both traditional mass communication research as well as with the emerging political agenda's approach inspired by the work of Baumgartner and Jones (1993) in political science, the attention for issues is the main object of investigation.

While the main interest in this paper lies in the country-level comparison between Spain and the Netherlands, we first focus on the general patterns of agenda-setting interaction between media and politics. Scholars describe the relationship between journalists and politicians as extremely close and as mutually dependent: Journalists need politicians as an important source of relevant political information, while politicians need journalists to make the electorate aware of their views and actions. Agenda setting offers a powerful and straightforward set of theoretical and empirical tools to investigate the interaction and to assess the influence one has on the other. As Jones and Baumgartner (2005) argue convincingly, (political) attention is a scarce resource and a prerequisite for policy change. Indeed, numerous studies have used the agenda-setting perspective to study the interaction between media and politics, both in a U.S. context and non-U.S. context (Berkowitz 1992; Boydston 2013; Chaqués-Bonafont and Baumgartner 2013; Edwards and Dan Wood 1999; Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg 1995; Soroka 2002, 2003; Vliegthart and Walgrave 2011a; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006; Wanta and Foote 1994; Wanta et al. 1989). In the European context, the focus is mostly on the impact of media on politics, while many of the U.S. studies study the reversed relationship (e.g., Edwards and Dan Wood 1999; Wood and Peake 1998). The vast majority of those studies demonstrate the presence of agenda-setting effects: If the attention for a topic goes up on one agenda—being it media or politics—the other agenda will follow. While we focus our attention on the economic crisis specifically, there is no reason to expect a different dynamic here. This expectation is confirmed by several recent studies that move beyond issue attention and look into frame building effects: The transfer of frames from one area to another shows a similar dynamic as the transfer of issue attention does (Hänggli and Kriesi 2010; Vliegthart and Roggeband 2007). We additionally know that political actors, even if they belong to the opposition, are important news sources for journalists and are likely to get covered (e.g., indexing theory, Bennett 1990, see also Graber 2010). It is highly likely that coverage on the economic crisis is largely negative. With this focus on *negative* economic developments, there is additional reason to expect a mutual relationship: Journalists are especially sensitive to negative information (Soroka 2006), while the coverage with a critical, negative, and risk emphasis tends to increase the attention of politicians (and other social actors; Baumgartner et al. 2007). Furthermore, in a recent study on agenda-setting patterns in Denmark, Thesen (2013) demonstrates that opposition parties respond more strongly

to news that has a negative valence. The key question in this paper is whether the relationships between newspapers and parliaments differ across different political and media systems.

Cross-National Differences

The main aim of this study is a comparison of the interaction between media and politics in different countries. Here, we need to take into consideration political and media system characteristics of each country that might account for possible different outcomes. In this section, we argue that characteristics of the political system result in different overall effects of media on politics, whereas characteristics of the media system result in effects of media on politics and vice versa that differ across outlets in Spain, but not in the Netherlands.

Political system differences. A key aspect of political systems is the distinction between single-party and multiparty governments (Carter and Farrell 2010). We believe that this distinction has a large impact on the way especially opposition parties use parliamentary questions. In the case of single-party governments, opposition parties will not feel any constraints in using media coverage as ammunition to attack government. In multiparty government constellations, opposition parties might feel more hesitation to do so. After all, it could well be that the government parties they scrutinize with their questions will be partners in a government in the (near) future.

Spain and the Netherlands share several political system characteristics but differ on the single-party versus multiparty government characteristic. Both are multiparty democracies with a bicameral system. The main legislative body, the *Congreso de los Diputados* and the *Tweede Kamer*, is elected through a system of proportional representation with closed party lists. The political party is the central institution. In the Netherlands, the whole country is treated as a single district, resulting in a very high levels of proportionality. Spain, on the contrary, is divided into a high number of small districts and a limited number of representatives is elected per district, resulting in a low level of proportionality that is even further decreased by an electoral threshold of 3 percent. This threshold is absent in the Netherlands (Carter and Farrell 2010). These differences result in a completely different composition of parliament and government. In Spain, two parties dominate parliament and the largest of them forms the government. Only a small number of regional parties coexist next to the *Partido Popular (PP)* and the *Partido Socialista Obrero Español (PSOE)*. In the Netherlands, parliament consists of multiple parties and at least two and often three parties are necessary to form a government that can rely on a majority in parliament. The need to form coalitions is reflected in a long-standing tradition of consensus politics (Andeweg and Irwin 2009). We expect that those differences translate in different levels of media influence.

In Spain, parliamentarians from opposition parties as well as from the government party can ask parliamentary questions. Once a week, Spanish members of parliament (MPs) have the opportunity to monitor the government by asking oral questions in the plenary sessions. Here, they get an immediate response. Written questions can be

submitted at any point in time and have to be answered within a few weeks. Based on a system of quotas, question time for oral questions is divided between political groups. In our case, the main opposition party, *Partido Popular*, asks by far the most questions, but also other political parties (such as *Izquierda Unida*, *Catalan Convergència i Unió*, and *Partido Nacionalista Vasco*) and MPs from government party *PSOE* ask questions. Also written questions can be asked by both opposition and government parties. When it comes to the economy in general and the economic crisis in particular, however, the overwhelming majority of questions is asked by opposition parties.¹ In the Netherlands, both opposition parties and government parties use the parliamentary instrument of question asking. Alike Spain, oral questions are asked in the weekly question hour. Written questions can be submitted at any moment. Opposition parties are likely to use these questions as a way to scrutinize government, but government parties also use the questions to signal their issue priorities and in some instances even to provide government officials with a platform to highlight their achievements. Thus, while in Spain, in the case of the economic issue, parliamentary questions merely reflect the opposition's agenda, in the Netherlands, they provide a more general picture of the political agenda—including considerable input from all parties in parliament. This difference does not necessarily mean that they are more or less relevant in one of the countries: In both instances, these questions are part of—and maybe the most comprehensive aspect of—what has been labeled the “symbolic” political agenda (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006), which has most often no consequences for policy making, but signals priorities and offers political parties the opportunity to respond to the “issues of the day.” Many agenda-setting studies have used parliamentary questions as a measure of the political agenda (e.g., Chaqués-Bonafont and Baumgartner 2013; Thesen 2013; Vliegthart and Walgrave 2011a, 2011b). By including both oral and written questions, we combine a visible measure with limited space (oral questions that are constrained to a few per week) with one that is less visible, but allows for more and a wider range of issues to be brought forward by parliamentarians.

In Spain, throughout our research period, the conservative *Partido Popular* was the main opposition party thus asking the largest amount of questions. In the Netherlands, the opposition consisted of various parties with different political leanings, which also differed throughout the years, as governments consisting of different political parties were in office during our research period.

For reasons of comparison and substantial interest, we focus our analysis on parliamentary questions asked by opposition parties. Results from earlier agenda-setting studies in Spain and the Netherlands seem to be in line with this expectation: Chaqués-Bonafont and Baumgartner (2013) reveal strong agenda-setting effects of newspaper coverage on oral questions asked in parliament. For the Netherlands, Van Aelst and Vliegthart (2013) emphasize that media might be frequently used as a source of information by parliamentarians, they seldomly have an autonomous influence. This is in line with the notion that in the case of multiparty governments, opposition parties are more constraint to use media to attack government—after all, they could be at the

negotiation table together in the near future. Thus, we anticipate stronger political agenda-setting effects in Spain. Our first hypothesis reads as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The effect of newspapers on parliament is stronger in the situation of a single-party government than in the case of a multiparty government.

Media system differences. The two countries under investigation also differ in their media systems. Political parallelism, that is, the extent to which ties between media outlets and parties exist, is a key aspect in the distinction in different media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004). It is this level of parallelism that is likely to determine the extent to which different parties and outlets follow each other's attention for negative economic coverage. Higher levels of political parallelism are likely to result in stronger relations between certain outlets and parties, while other relations are small or completely absent.

Spain is a country that falls in the Mediterranean polarized pluralist model. It shows high levels of political parallelism and lower levels of professionalization compared with the Netherlands. These characteristics are reinforced by the relatively short period in which Spanish democracy has been in place. During forty years of dictatorship, the mass media had to follow the guidelines imposed by Franco's regime. Only when Franco died in 1975, the process of democratization started to open the political system. The media became, if maybe only apparently, more liberal. Some authors highlight that "an incomplete professionalization" took place (Ortega and Humanes 2000: 162–268). The result is a situation in which Spanish journalists are formally independent but they tend to have a clear ideological orientation that is linked with a political party. Some authors consider ideological orientation to be quite belligerent and they highlight that there is an ideological influence between the parties and the main newspapers' editorial line (González and Bouza 2009; Sampedro and Seone 2008). Spain can still be characterized as a media system with a high degree of external pluralism as the media coverage by different outlets reflects different points of view within society (Llorens 2010). Journalists in Spain report a significantly higher level of partisanship than journalists in other countries in Western Europe, including the Netherlands (Van Dalen et al. 2012).

The Netherlands has a democratic-corporatist system that was traditionally characterized by partisan media and strong ties between parties and media. Nowadays, journalists operate independent from political parties and the profession is regarded as highly professionalized (Vliegenthart 2012). A system of "pillarization" existed until the sixties of the previous century. The society was largely divided along religious and ideological cleavages and only at the elite level, cooperation and consensus making takes place. Strong ties between media outlets and political parties existed and coverage was highly favorable toward politicians who belonged to the same pillar. Strong secularization and the rise of television, among others, quickly removed the pillarized structure of Dutch society. Nowadays, media outlets are independent from political parties and most are driven by commercial considerations more than anything else. Thus, while, for example, newspapers have a certain political orientation, they function completely independent from political parties and are likely to report on the wide variety of viewpoints that are present in Dutch politics.

In the literature, the strong connection between journalist and politician has been labeled *political parallelism* (Hallin and Mancini 2004). It indicates that news media are partisan biased and the media system “reflects” the party system. In both Spain and the Netherlands, politicians are likely to more closely follow media outlets that have the same political leaning as they have and vice versa (Van Aelst and Vliegenthart 2013), but more so in Spain than in the Netherlands. When asked about their role perceptions, Spanish journalists indeed score highest on the impartial-partisan continuum, leaning more toward partisanship than their counterparts in other European countries. This partisanship translates into bias: Journalists cover politicians who are ideologically close more favorably (Van Dalen et al. 2012). Also Van Kempen (2007) demonstrates empirically that the levels of press-party parallelism are considerably higher in Spain compared with the Netherlands. Those stronger connections between politicians and journalists are likely to translate into higher levels of divergence across outlets, not only in terms of tone but also in terms of attention politicians and their political activities receive (Mena 2012). Concretely, when the ideology of the main opposition party and newspaper match, it is likely that dependencies between parliament and medium are larger. Chaqués-Bonafont and Baumgartner (2013) show for Spain that, when the focus is on the attention for the economy, little evidence for patterns of political parallelism can be found: For all media outlets, the issue is simply too important to ignore. However, it is likely that those differences are reflected in the way the issue is portrayed or framed (Chaqués-Bonafont and Baumgartner 2013: footnote 6). With the focus on negative economic coverage, this qualitative aspect of the coverage is part of our investigation.

Translated to the outlets under investigation, the different levels of political parallelism in Spain and the Netherlands result in the hypothesis that the conservative newspaper in Spain (*El Mundo*) more strongly affects and is more strongly affected by parliamentary questions than its socialist competitor (*El País*), as the questions are asked by the conservative party. In the Netherlands, we do not expect those differences to exist between the newspapers included in this study: *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad*. Thus, our hypotheses read as follows:

Hypothesis 2a (H2a): In the case of high levels of political parallelism, the newspaper that leans toward the opposition has a stronger influence on parliamentary questions than the newspaper that leans toward the government. This difference is absent in the case of low levels of political parallelism.

Hypothesis 2b (H2b): In the case of high levels of political parallelism, parliamentary questions have a stronger influence on the newspaper that leans toward the opposition than on the newspaper that leans toward the government. This difference is absent in the case of low levels of political parallelism.

Method

To test our hypotheses, we rely on weekly time-series analyses in both Spain and the Netherlands for the period June 2004 until June 2011 (362 weeks in total). A weekly analysis seems appropriate, because it is the lowest aggregation level possible for at

least oral parliamentary questions that are asked during weekly question hours. Other authors employing similar designs have used either weekly (e.g., Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011a, 2011b; Walgrave et al. 2008; Wood and Peake 1998) or higher aggregation levels (e.g., monthly, Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2004; Soroka 2002; Van Noije et al. 2008). While for other issues this higher aggregation level might be appropriate, we believe that interaction between media and politics, and also the impact of stock markets on both, takes place at shorter time intervals when it comes to economic issues, especially in economic turbulent times. Stock market ratings and media coverage change considerably from week to week (and even from day to day), and parliamentary attention does as well, as we will see below.

During the period 2004–11, both countries faced a considerable economic downturn. Especially Spain has been hit hard by the worldwide economic recession. In this country, the crisis spurred due to the crash of the building market and the long-term loans in 2008. After a decade of economic growth, in February 2009, Spain, along other European economies, entered the recession and in 2012, is facing its worst crisis in the last fifty years. Unemployment increased severely during this period and reached a level of 24.4 percent in March 2012—in 2007, it was only 7.2 percent. The high unemployment rate also plays a role in the decrease of internal consumption and consumer confidence. Since 2009, the country has almost continuously witnessed economic decline: In this period, the gross domestic product (GDP) decreased with a couple percent. Due to the banking crisis and Spain's rising debt, investors became more reluctant to invest and that affected the stock market. The economic crisis was not truly recognized by the government till the spring of 2010. Forced by EU authorities, the country has faced considerable budget cuts in 2010–11. During the research period, the country was governed by the socialist *PSOE*.

In the Netherlands, the consequences of the crisis have been less severe, but also this country faced a considerable increase in unemployment during the second part of our research period (from the lowest point of 3.6 percent at the end of 2008 to 5.6 percent at the end of 2011), accompanied by a sharp decline in consumer confidence. In several quarters in 2009 and 2011, the country faced economic decline, up to over 2 percent in terms of its GDP. Also in this country, the crisis resulted in considerable budget cuts by the government and the consequences of the crisis were especially felt in the housing market. In addition, in 2008, due to the credit crisis, several banks needed large amounts of government support to circumvent a collapse. The country was governed by various coalition governments from 2005 to 2011. Until February 2007, the country was governed by the Christian-Democrats *Christen Democratisch Appèl (CDA)* and the Conservative-Liberal party *Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie (VVD)*, partly together with the social-liberal party *Democraten66 (D66)*. From 2007 until 2010, *CDA* governed together with the social-democratic *Partij van de Arbeid (PvdA)* and the small Christian party *ChristenUnie*. From October 2010 until the end of the research period, *CDA* and *VVD* formed a minority coalition that was supported by the far-right party *Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)*.

The following variables are included in our analysis:

Parliamentary questions. In both countries, both written and oral parliamentary questions that dealt with the economic crisis were collected from the respective official parliamentary websites (www.congreso.es and www.officielebekendmakingen.nl) and aggregated to a weekly level. Relevant questions were identified using the structural equivalents of the following search strings: (economy OR economic) AND (crisis OR recession OR fall OR downturn).² Newspaper articles were collected using the same search string (see further below). This is a rather straightforward and “simple” operationalization, but we are confident it is a valid one for several reasons. First of all, several other studies (e.g., Hollanders and Vliegenthart 2011; Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2013) have used similar search terms and have demonstrated their validity. Second, we coded a sample of four hundred newspaper (hundred per newspaper) articles and hundred written parliamentary questions (fifty for each country). We determined tone about the economy (ranging from -1 to $+1$) and whether the economy was the major topic of the article/question, a minor topic, or no topic. Results demonstrate that—as one would expect—coverage is in general negative, but not overwhelmingly so: After all, coverage that reports recovery from the crisis is also included. Scores are $-.60$ for *El Pais*, $-.67$ for *El Mundo*, $-.32$ for *NRC Handelsblad*, $-.30$ for *de Volkskrant*, $-.30$ for Spanish questions, and $-.24$ for Dutch questions. Also the fact that scores are more negative for Spain does not come as a surprise. It reflects the deeper economic crisis in that country. Furthermore, a large majority of the items deal with the economy as the major issue (scores ranging from 82 percent for *El Pais* to 64 percent for Dutch questions), with only a very small minority actually not being about the economy at all (scores range from 2 percent for Spanish questions to 12 percent for Dutch questions). Third, a moderate to strong negative contemporaneous correlation between media coverage and our measurement of the “real” economic situation (log-transformed stock market indices, see further below) exists at the weekly level: $-.45$ for Spain and $-.79$ for the Netherlands. This is an indication that our measurement of media coverage reflects the economic situation pretty well. Fourth, we compared our data with the data of the Comparative Agendas Project (www.comparativeagendas.info). In this project, a wide variety of political agendas in various countries are coded for topics according to a standardized codebook. We compared the weekly relative attention for the economy issue according to those codings with our measurement of economic crisis coverage. As the concepts and measurement only partly overlap and in some instances, the underlying material differs, one would again expect positive correlations, but only moderate ones. For Spain, we have the codings for oral questions and for front-page coverage of *El Pais* and *El Mundo*³—for oral questions, $r = .45$; for newspaper coverage, $r = .48$. For the Netherlands, we have a media data set consisting of a sample of front-page coverage in *de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad* at our disposal, as well as a sample of written parliamentary questions: for the newspapers, $r = .26$; for written parliamentary questions, $r = .09$. Indeed, in all instances, the results show positive and significant correlations.

The search string resulted in a total of 344 questions for Spain (147 oral and 197 written) and 367 questions in the Netherlands (45 oral and 322 written). For the

Netherlands, we made an additional selection of those questions asked by opposition parties (284 questions in total).⁴

Media attention. Using the same search string as for parliament, the weekly number of hits that appeared in two national quality newspapers are collected in LexisNexis. As an alternative measure, we looked at the number of articles. Correlation between the two measures was very large (ranging from $r = .95$ to $r = .99$ on the newspaper level).

For Spain, the newspapers are *El Pais* (a left-wing newspaper, politically close to the government party *PSOE*) and *El Mundo* (a conservative newspaper, politically close to the main opposition party *PP*). In the Netherlands, the newspapers are *de Volkskrant* (a Center-Left newspaper) and *NRC Handelsblad* (a Center-Right newspaper). The total number of hits summed up to 100.293 (49.927 articles) for *El Pais*, 80.696 (32.670) for *El Mundo*, 14.888 (6.637) for *de Volkskrant*, and 25.806 (10.913) for *NRC Handelsblad*. There is a substantial difference in amount of negative economic coverage between the two countries: This might partly reflect a structural difference between the newspapers (Spanish newspapers are larger), but is possibly partly a consequence of the severity of the economic crisis in both countries.

Control variable: stock market. For Spain, we use the weekly closing number of the stock market exchange in Madrid, the Índice Bursatil Español (IBEX). For the Netherlands, we use the same number for the Amsterdam Exchange Index (AEX), the Amsterdam stock market exchange. This measure is considered a good reflection of short-term variation in economic circumstances. While other measures such as consumer confidence, unemployment and GDP would have been viable alternatives, they are not available at a weekly level and often reflect mid-term rather than short-term changes in the economic situation. These economic circumstances are expected to be reflected in media coverage (see, for example, Goidel and Langley 1995; Hollanders and Vliegenthart 2011; Sanders et al. 1993; Wu et al. 2002) as well as in political attention (Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg 1995). As stock market indices go up, political and media attention for the economic crisis is expected to go down. Data are collected from www.google.com/finance. In both instances, we use logged values, as this is common in econometric analyses to account for possible problems with heteroskedasticity (Hollanders and Vliegenthart 2011).

Analysis

We rely on a vector autoregression (VAR) analysis (Brandt and Williams 2007) for each of the two countries. This approach treats all main variables in the system to be endogenous—that is, possibly affected by other variables. As we anticipate that parliament and media can impact each other, this method is appropriate in our case. The VAR analysis estimates in separate equations the current value of each of the endogenous variables based on its own past and the past of the other variables (lagged values). Both stock market ratings and consumer confidence (both lagged one week) are included in all equations as exogenous variables. VAR analysis assumes (mean-) stationarity, that is, the mean of the variables is constant over time. This assumption seems problematic for at least some of our variables, because the economic situation

Table 1. ADF Tests.

Variable	Absolute Values	Differences
Spanish newspapers	-3.093* (1)	-13.804
Spanish parliament	-7.736 (3)	-16.336
IBEX	-1.838* (1)	-13.478
Dutch newspapers	-2.579* (2)	-13.343
Dutch parliament	-2.908* (5)	-13.414
AEX	-1.848* (0)	-9.833

Note. All ADFs are calculated including a time trend; the number of lags for the ADFs is reported in parentheses (selection based on Akaike Info Criterion). ADF = Augmented Dickey–Fuller
 *p < .05 (non-stationarity).

as reflected by the stock market and possibly also the political and media attention is dramatically changing during the period under investigation. Indeed, the Augmented Dickey–Fuller (ADF) test, which provides a formal assessment of the assumption, fails to reject the null hypothesis of non-stationarity in all cases except for attentiin in Spanish parliament (see Table 1).

Consequently, all variables are differenced. ADF tests on the differenced values indicate that they are all stationary (see Table 1). Mathematically, our models look as follows:

$$\Delta\text{parliament}_t = \alpha^{\text{parliament}} + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_i^{\text{parliament}} \Delta\text{parliament}_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_i^{\text{parliament}} \Delta\text{newspapers}_{t-i} + \beta^{\text{parliament}} \Delta\text{stockmarket}_{t-1} + \beta^{\text{parliament}} \Delta CC_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t^{CC},$$

$$\Delta\text{newspapers}_t = \alpha^{\text{newspapers}} + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_i^{\text{newspapers}} \Delta\text{parliament}_{t-i} + \sum_{i=1}^k \beta_i^{\text{newspapers}} \Delta\text{newspapers}_{t-i} + \beta^{\text{newspapers}} \Delta\text{stockmarket}_{t-1} + \beta^{\text{parliament}} \Delta CC_{t-1} + \varepsilon_t^{\text{newspapers}}.$$

The appropriate number of lags *k* is established based on a model comparison and accompanying fit statistics, mainly the Akaike Info Criterion. We allow a maximum number of four lags, because it seems reasonable that influences between media and parliament take place within a month. For both Spain and the Netherlands, a model with four lags turns out to be the best one. We additionally tested models that account for seasonality, that is, models that included the scores of the parliament and newspapers one year earlier as additional independent variables. These independent variables turn out to be insignificant. While indeed, one might anticipate some seasonality to be present—parliament does not meet in the summer and will ask no oral questions, but written questions can still be submitted—it is apparently rather weak.

VAR analyses is based on ordinary least squares (OLS) estimations, making it robust against moderate violations of normality—as present especially in the parliamentary data due to relative low means. While the results of a VAR analysis resembles those of a set of OLS regressions, individual coefficients should be interpreted with caution due to the possible problems with multicollinearity, especially due to possible

high correlation between lags of the same variable. Instead, several other indicators provide useful information and help to evaluate the results. Central in the interpretation of the results is the notion of *Granger causality*. A variable x is argued to Granger-cause another variable y if the prediction for y based on its own past is improving when adding x 's past to the equation. It thus indicates whether x exerts a significant influence on y . It does not tell us much, however, about the size or direction of this influence. Therefore, the *cumulative impulse response function* (CIRF) and the *decomposition of the error forecast variance* (FEVD) are also considered. The first helps to acquire insight in the consequences of a shock (impulse) in one variable at time 0 on the following values of the other variables. In that way, we obtain a more specific picture and graphical representation of the direction and size of the over-time effects of one series on the other series and in that way, it contributes to the understanding in the dynamic interaction between the variables. The forecast error variance indicates for each variable over time what portion of the movement in a series can be attributed to its own shocks versus shocks from the other variables. In other words, this method estimates over time the amount of variation in each of the endogenous variables that can be attributed to its own past and to the past of each of the other endogenous variables.

To test H1, we summed up the scores of the two newspapers and used this additive index as our measure for newspaper coverage. To test H2, we repeated the original analysis two times, substituting the additive index for the separate newspaper series for Spain. Finally, for the Netherlands, we witness changing coalition governments in the period under investigation. Therefore, also the newspaper that is closest to opposition changes over time. Additional series are constructed and their effects are compared. For newspaper close to the government, we use *NRC Handelsblad* when Conservative-Liberal party *VVD* is part of the coalition (before 2007 and from 2010 onward) and *de Volkskrant* when the social-democratic *PvdA* (2007–10) is part of the coalition—reflecting the political leaning of those newspapers (Van der Eijk 2000). For the newspaper close to the opposition, we use the reversed combination.

Results

Figure 1 presents the series for Spain. As can be seen from this figure, the IBEX reaches its highest levels in the months before the collapse of the building bubble early 2009. Although most of the parliamentary questions are asked after this high-impact event, already before 2009, the opposition expresses its worries about the state of the Spanish economy and how it is affected by the global economic crisis. Newspaper coverage also shows the largest peak early 2009 and reaches considerably higher levels after the collapse of the housing market than before. The separate newspapers correspond to a considerable extent in their over-time coverage: The correlation between the separate series for *El Pais* and *El Mundo* is $r = .73$. The other variables also show correlation as expected: Correlation between parliament and newspapers is $r = .37$; between newspapers and IBEX, $r = -.45$; and between parliament and IBEX, $r = -.18$.

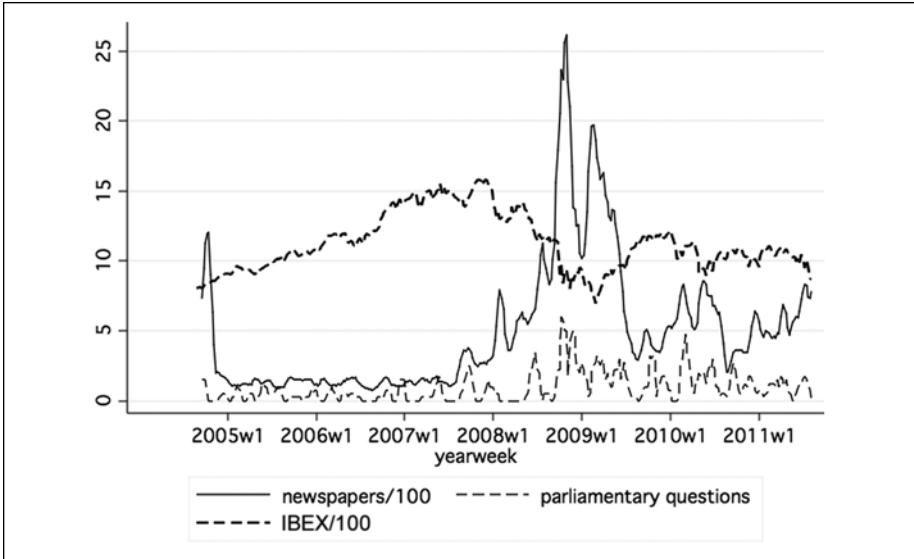


Figure 1. Parliamentary questions, newspaper coverage, and IBEX in Spain.

Figure 2 represents the Dutch situation. The stock market index AEX shows a similar development as the IBEX—this is not surprising considering the strong connection between the various stock market exchanges throughout Europe (and worldwide for that matter). Newspaper coverage shows the highest peaks in the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009—when the “credit crisis” was at its height. Parliamentary activity increased considerably after 2009 as well. Overall, the Dutch system shows somewhat higher levels of integration than Spain—that is, stronger correlation between the key variables in our analysis. Correlation between the two separate newspapers—*de Volkskrant* and *NRC Handelsblad*—is $r = .93$; for newspapers and parliament, $r = .64$; for newspapers and AEX, $r = -.79$; and parliament and AEX, $r = -.54$. This does not mean, however, that we find stronger causal relationships as well. This depends on the outcomes of the VAR analyses, which focus on the lagged values of the independent variables.

The results from the first VAR model show that we can predict considerable amounts of variation in the change in the dependent variables, both in Spain and the Netherlands. Explained variances range from 15.5 percent (changes in Spanish newspaper coverage) to 46.3 percent (changes in Spanish parliament). Results furthermore indicate that for some of the variables, there is some autocorrelation left in the residuals. This indicates that not all information from the series’ own past has been used to predict the current value. Additional analyses suggest that this problem can be accounted for by adding additional lags to the model. This, however, results in models that are less efficient but essentially provide the same results. Here we choose to present the most parsimonious models that include four lags of each of the variables.

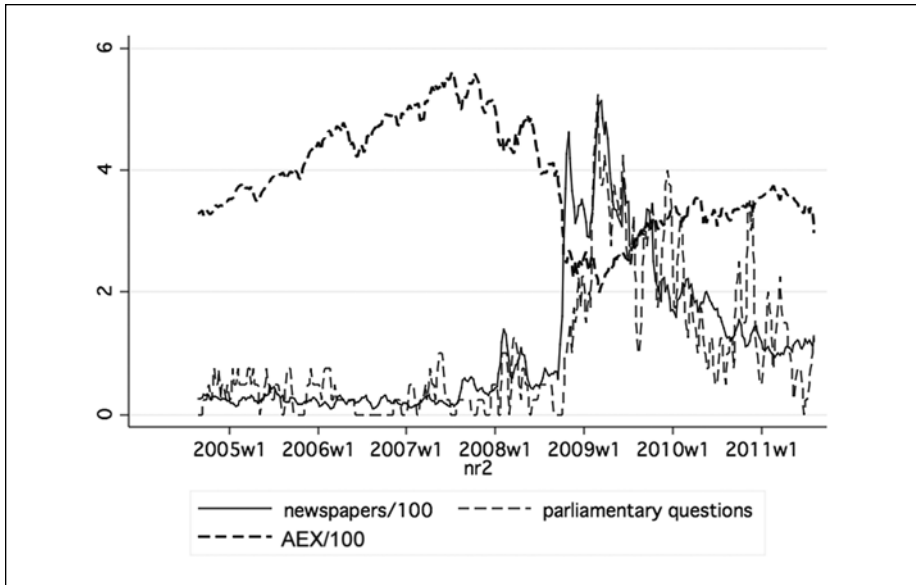


Figure 2. Parliamentary questions, newspaper coverage, and AEX in the Netherlands.
 Note. AEX = Amsterdam stock market exchange.

Table 2. Interactions between Newspapers, Parliamentary Questions, and IBEX in Spain.

	Newspapers	Parliament
Newspapers ($t - [1-4]$)		19.981*** (.00095)
Parliament ($t - [1-4]$)	17.666** (12.278)	
IBEX ($t - 1$)	-575.911*	-7.293**

Note. For the interaction between newspapers and parliament, Granger-causality tests are reported with cumulative impulse response functions (after eight weeks) for significant relationships in parentheses; for the effect of the IBEX, the regression coefficient of the lagged value is reported.

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

Tables 2 and 3 contain the results of analyses focusing on the effects of newspaper coverage on parliamentary questions. Granger-causality tests demonstrate that this effect is present in Spain ($\chi^2 = 19.981, p < .001$), but not in the Netherlands ($\chi^2 = 5.545, ns$). A further inspection of the CIRF (see Figure 3a and 3c) suggests that after eight⁵ weeks, each additional mentioning on negative economic developments in Spanish newspapers has resulted in .00095 additional parliamentary question on those issues, while in the Netherlands, there is no significant change at any point in time. The effect in Spain seems substantially limited, but considering high level of variation ($SD = 183.22$) in newspaper coverage, a substantial shift in media coverage results in a more than marginal response by parliament. The decomposition of the forecast error variance

Table 3. Interactions between Newspapers, Parliamentary Questions, and AEX in the Netherlands.

	Newspapers	Parliament
Newspapers		5.546
Parliament	9.827* (1.090)	
AEX ($t - 1$)	-206.257**	0.013

Note. For the interaction between newspapers and parliament, Granger-causality tests are reported with cumulative impulse response functions (after eight weeks) for significant relationships in parentheses; for the effect of the AEX, the regression coefficient of the lagged value is reported. AEX = Amsterdam stock market exchange.

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

furthermore suggests that after an eight-week time span, 5.3 percent of the variation in parliamentary questions can be attributed to media attention. The result is in line with H1 that predicted a larger effect of newspaper coverage on parliamentary attention in Spain compared with the Netherlands. An additional look at the decomposition of the error variance—offering an indication of the explanatory power—confirms this conclusion. For Spain, we find that after eight weeks, newspaper coverage accounts for 5.33 percent of the variance (± 1 *SD*, confidence intervals [CIs] = [2.53 percent, 8.15 percent]), while in the Netherlands, this is 0.97 percent (± 1 *SD*, CI = [0.03 percent, 1.92 percent]). As CIs do not overlap, the explanatory power differs significantly.

We also looked into the reversed relationship and anticipated an effect of parliamentary attention for negative economic developments on media coverage. For both Spain ($\chi^2 = 17.666$, $p < .01$) and the Netherlands ($\chi^2 = 9.827$, $p < .05$), we find that a Granger-causing relationship exists. The CIRF shows that for Spain, an additional parliamentary question results in 12.24 additional references to negative economic developments in the subsequent eight weeks (see also Figure 3b). For the Netherlands, this number is considerably lower: 1.090. Figure 3d suggests that after two weeks, one parliamentary question has resulted in three additional negative references in newspapers, but this effect wears off over time. In both instances, the decomposition of the error forecast variance for the same period suggests that shocks in parliamentary questions account for a small part of the variation in media attention: 3.4 percent in Spain and 2.4 percent in the Netherlands. Thus, results are largely comparable across the two countries.

For our control variable, we find that for both countries, stock market ratings in the previous week indeed have a negative influence on the number of negative references in national newspapers. In Spain, a one-unit change in the log-transformed IBEX results in almost 553 less references, while in the Netherlands, a similar change in the AEX is followed by 203 less references. Furthermore, we find an effect of the stock market on parliamentary attention, but only in Spain. In the Netherlands, this relationship is not significant.

Finally, we discuss the results for H3a and H3b that deal with cross-national differences in the position of separate newspapers in both countries. We expected Spanish

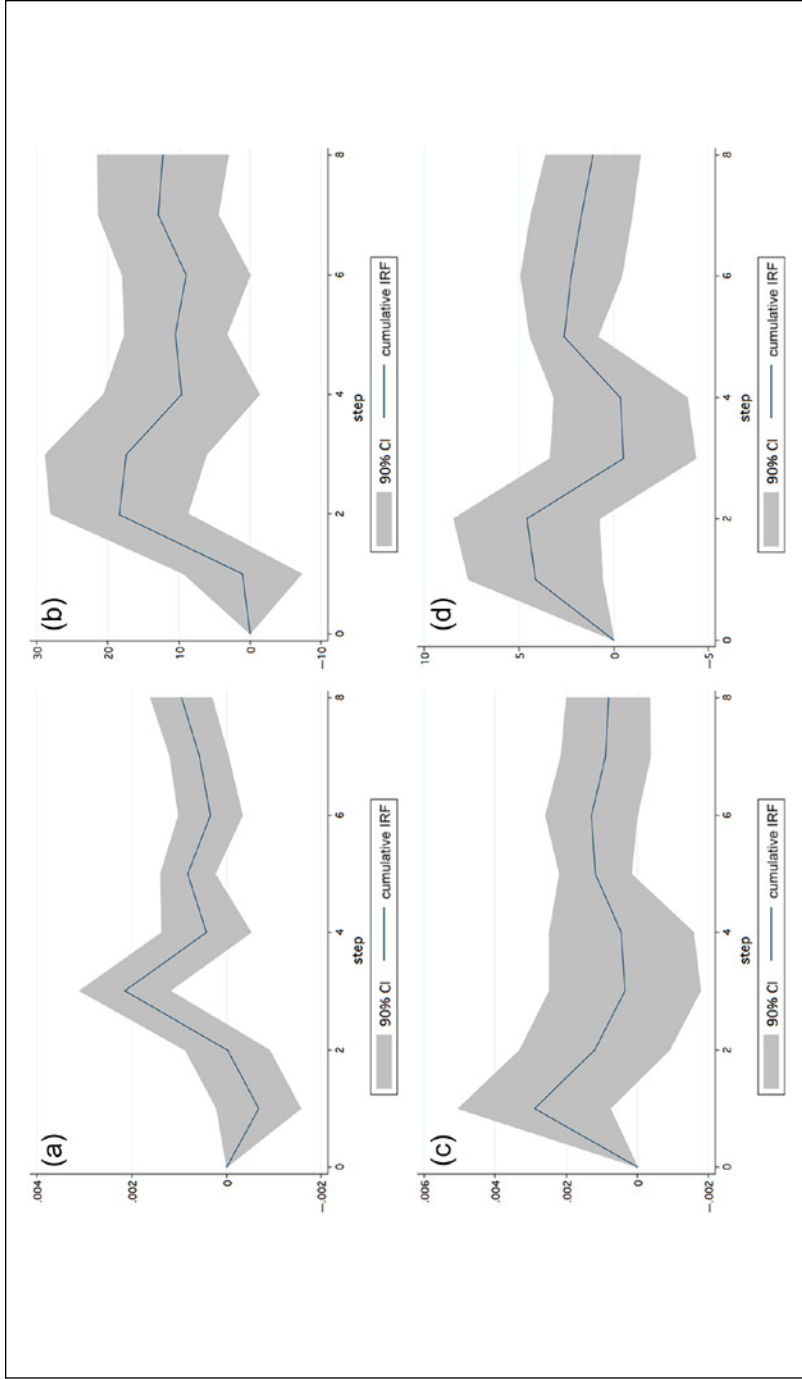


Figure 3. Cumulative IRFs for the interaction between media and parliament.

Note. The figures report the cumulative change in the dependent variable due to a one-unit increase in the independent variable; (a) effect of newspapers on parliament in Spain, (b) effect of parliament on newspapers in Spain, (c) effect of newspapers on parliament in the Netherlands, and (d) effect of parliament on newspapers in the Netherlands. IRF = impulse response function; CI = confidence interval.

newspapers to have a differential impact: *El Mundo* is argued to affect parliament more than *El Pais*. We did not anticipate finding such differences between newspapers in the Netherlands (H2a). Results confirm the hypothesis. An analysis substituting the cumulative newspaper attention including both Spanish newspapers with the series for *El Mundo* shows that this newspaper is Granger-causing parliamentary attention ($\chi^2 = 28.263$, $p < .001$), with one additional reference in this newspaper resulting in .00104 additional questions in the following eight weeks. The decomposition of the forecast error variance shows that shocks in *El Mundo* account for 6.4 percent of the variation in parliamentary questions after eight weeks (± 1 SD CI = [3.63 percent, 9.24 percent]). Contrary to *El Mundo*, coverage in *El Pais* does not affect parliamentary questions ($\chi^2 = 5.870$, *ns*), and the decomposition of the forecast error variance indicates a significantly lower score: 1.57 percent (± 1 SD CI = [0.11 percent, 3.03 percent]).

In the Netherlands, we find no difference if we compare the opposition leaning newspaper with the other newspaper. We account for the fact that different coalition governments were in office during our research period and have *NRC Handelsblad* considered to be closer to government when the *VVD* is in office and *de Volkskrant* when the *PvdA* is in office. Results show that also in this analysis, no significant differences exist: The newspaper closer to the opposition is affected by parliamentary questions ($\chi^2 = 8.415$, $p < .10$), but the same goes for the newspaper closer to government ($\chi^2 = 7.860$, $p < .10$). Also, further analysis does not reveal any differences in, for example, the forecast error variance. H2b focuses on the reversed relationship: the impact of parliament on media. Here the hypothesis suggests that *El Mundo* is affected more by parliamentary questions than *El Pais* and that such a difference does not exist for the Dutch newspapers. Results show that *El Mundo* is significantly affected by parliamentary questions ($\chi^2 = 26.966$, $p < .001$), with each additional question resulting in 10.03 additional references in *El Mundo* and shocks accounting for 5.53 percent (± 1 SD CI = [3.35 percent, 7.72 percent]) of the forecast error variance after eight weeks. *El Pais* is not affected by parliamentary questions ($\chi^2 = 2.420$, *ns*) and the forecast error variance is again significantly lower: 0.67 percent (± 1 SD CI = [0.00 percent, 1.60 percent]). In the Netherlands, newspapers do not affect parliamentary questions—either leaning toward the opposition ($\chi^2 = 2.203$, *ns*) or not ($\chi^2 = 6.236$, *ns*). Results are thus in line with H2b.

Conclusion

The past years, Western Europe has faced an unprecedented economic crisis. This crisis was reflected in large decreases in stock market ratings, high levels of negative economic coverage, as well as increased political attention to this economic crisis. This paper has demonstrated the interdependencies between media and politics and demonstrates that a cross-national, comparative aspect adds to understanding of those interdependencies. It is one of the first studies that looks at the interaction between media and politics in a cross-national perspective and especially demonstrates the moderating role of one of the key characteristics of the media systems: political parallelism. More specifically, the results for the two countries under investigation, Spain and the Netherlands, differed in three respects.

First of all, while the causal relationship between media and politics in Spain is clearly bi-directional, in the Netherlands, we only find evidence for newspaper coverage being affected by parliamentary questions. As we expected, based on differences in their political system and the resulting coalition governments and consensus-orientation, Dutch opposition parties are more reserved in their use of media coverage as a source of questions about the economic crisis. In Spain, however, a more “classic” process of political agenda setting took place, where opposition parties used information from media coverage to attack government. A second difference between the two countries is that in Spain, political attention to the economic crisis is also impacted by the stock market, while this is not the case in the Netherlands. This might well reflect the tense and highly uncertain situation in Spain, where the crisis was a lot more severe and changes in stock market ratings warrant an immediate political response.

The final and most interesting difference between Spain and the Netherlands is the finding that in the first country, only the newspaper that is ideologically close to the opposition plays a role in the agenda-setting process. The newspaper that is close to the government is ignored by the opposition as a source for parliamentary questions, but it also ignores the attention the opposition pays to negative economic developments itself. In the Netherlands, we do not find those differences. These results reflect the polarized pluralist media system of Spain. They indicate that partisan leaning of the press is clearly reflected in the content of the newspaper. More specifically, the presence of political parallelism is clearly reflected in relationships between politicians and journalists. This conclusion, being in line with other studies (González and Chavero 2011; Mena 2012; Sampedro 1997), indicates that different media promote positions with a distinct political shade. This is not necessarily a bad thing, because, as a whole, they contribute toward a representation of the different positions of the political spectrum. The polarization of positions results in a tendency where certain political issues and frames are reproduced by certain media and ignored by others.

This study is not without shortcomings. Most notably, our content analysis of media coverage and parliamentary questions is not very fine-grained. A more detailed analysis of both media and politics can help to further increase our understanding of the interaction between the two. For example, does the use of certain frames (e.g., conflict) increase the impact of media on politics? Our approach, however, did allow for the analysis of a large amount of material covering a considerable time span. In that way, we obtained a clear and interesting picture of the mutual dependencies between media and politicians. Those dependencies are argued to characterize contemporary everyday politics. As this paper demonstrates, they are indeed clearly present, also in times of severe economic crisis.

The findings contribute to the literature that focuses on the factors that moderate the relationships between media and politics and add political parallelism as an important element. Future research should further explore the role of this and other possible media system characteristics in affecting relationships between media and parliament. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that in such investigations, it is useful to consider multiple media sources in political agenda-setting studies, because different media might have structurally different influences on parliamentary activity.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Notes

1. In our data set, roughly 89 percent of the questions are asked by opposition parties. In the data set from the comparative agendas project (see also "Method" section), this percentage is 90.4 for the economic issue.
2. In Spanish: (economia or economic*) AND (crisis OR recesion OR retroceso OR caida); in Dutch: (economi*) AND (crisis OR recessie OR krimp OR neergang OR teruggang).
3. Thanks to Laura Chaqués-Bonafont for putting these data to our disposal.
4. We considered conducting analyses for separate parties, which would have been especially interesting for the Netherlands. However, both for substantial and pragmatic reasons, we refrained from doing so. Substantially, we want to focus on general agenda-setting patterns and the moderating role of political and media systems. A focus on different political parties would possibly distract from this key objective. In addition, the number of questions asked in both countries is not particularly high. If we would further disaggregate our data to the party level, that would result in even lower means and a lot of zeros, leading to all kind of additional statistical problems.
5. Here, we report cumulative impulse response function (CIRF) and decomposition of the error forecast variance (FEVD) after eight weeks. This time span captures the direct effects of independent on the dependent variable as well as the indirect effect through lagged values of the dependent variable.

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Cultivating an Active Online Counterpublic: Examining Usage and Political Impact of Internet Alternative Media

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Abstract

While alternative media have long been playing important roles in the politics of protests and resistance in many countries, the Internet has led to the emergence of online alternative media and arguably expanded the reach of such outlets. This article focuses on the audience of Internet alternative media. It examines the factors associated with usage and whether and how usage relates to political participation. Analysis of survey data ($N = 1,018$) in Hong Kong shows that, not surprisingly, Internet alternative media usage was driven by preexisting political attitudes and critical views toward the mainstream media. But social media usage could also drive alternative media usage even among people who did not hold congruent preexisting attitudes. Meanwhile, alternative media usage leads to protest participation and support for unconventional protest tactics. The study thus provides empirical evidence regarding how Internet alternative media can facilitate the formation of an active online counterpublic and the role of social media in potentially enlarging the counterpublic.

Keywords

alternative media, Internet, media audiences, political participation, social movements, civil society

Introduction

As Internet technologies proliferate, the production, circulation, and reception of public affairs information have become more diverse and diffused. The emergence of

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Internet alternative media challenges the power and authority of the mainstream media in portraying social reality. Broadly defined, alternative media encompass an array of media outlets standing in contrast to mainstream media in ownership structure, operation model, production norms, content, and/or relationships with audience (see Atton 2002, 2004; Atton and Hamilton 2008; Bailey et al. 2008).¹ This study is concerned with alternative media focusing on politics and public affairs. Such alternative media often jettison the conventional journalistic norms of objectivity and impartiality to espouse specific political views. They are sometimes labeled as “critical media” (Fuchs 2010) or “radical media” (Downing 2001) for their overt antagonism toward the political-economic establishment. In fact, many politically oriented alternative media have close connections with social movement groups (Atkinson 2010).

With such avowed orientations, the audiences of alternative media are expected to be more politically informed and active. Nevertheless, over the years, alternative media studies have focused mostly on production and content, leaving audience reception underexamined (Downing 2003). A number of important questions are yet to be systematically addressed. For usage, what factors drive exposure to alternative media? In the online arena, can alternative media reach those people who do not share their espoused political orientation? To what extent do social media facilitate access to online alternative media? For impact, how do alternative media usage and personal political views combine to shape people’s political participation?

Answering these important questions will help us understand the capability of Internet alternative media to cultivate an enlarged and active counterpublic. While the Internet has long been envisaged as a catalyst of political deliberation and engagement (e.g., Chadwick 2006; Dahlgren 2005; DiMaggio et al. 2001), studies on online alternative media can demonstrate how specifically the Internet can cultivate political activism.

This article focuses on Hong Kong, where several prominent online alternative media have emerged alongside the growth of protest politics in the society at large (Lee and Chan 2013; A. Y. So 2011). The next two sections further elaborate on the major conceptual arguments and issues. Hypotheses and research questions are then set up by putting the conceptual concerns within the local context. The survey method and data will then be presented.

Usage of Internet Alternative Media

Alternative media existed long before the emergence of the Internet and have taken various forms such as newspapers, magazines, radio, films, and documentaries (Downing 2001). When the Internet was popularized in the 1990s, some scholars have raised concerns about the political-economic, regulatory, and technological constraints of adopting the Internet for alternative media practices (Atton 2002; Downing 2001). Despite the constraints, the Internet has fostered the growth of alternative media in several ways. The Internet has given rise to new practices and tactics, such as alternative computing, online culture jamming, open-source media practices, and online participatory journalism (Lievrouw 2011). The interactive and user-friendly characteristics

of the technology have facilitated people's participation in coproduction of alternative media content (Gillmor 2004). More fundamentally, the Internet lowered the production and distribution costs for alternative media, thus allowing them to reach a wider audience. As Owens and Palmer (2003) pointed out, the Internet can help activist groups solve the long-existing dilemma of either depending on the mainstream media but losing control of their representation or using alternative media but failing to reach the general public.

Nevertheless, whether online alternative media can reach a wider audience is also dependent on whether people will opt to consume alternative media. As Bennett and Iyengar (2008) have argued, the emergence of new media has provided a "high-choice" media environment where audiences can consume more niche media. The Internet thus facilitates selective exposure. Indeed, political issues are found to be more likely than other topics to trigger selective exposure, especially in intense political periods (Stroud 2008). If selective exposure predominates, one can expect Internet alternative media users to be largely restricted to people with congruent preexisting views. Besides, as alternative media aim to challenge the symbolic power of mainstream media (Couldry and Curran 2003), their audiences are expected to be critical toward the mainstream media. Tsftati and Cappella (2003) found that intense skepticism of and erosion of trust in the mainstream media could contribute to alternative media usage.

However, there are also reasons to believe that the audience of Internet alternative media will not be restricted to people with congruent preexisting beliefs. First, some scholars have argued that the selective exposure phenomenon is overstated (Holbert et al. 2010). That is, selective exposure is only a tendency, the strength of which is often moderate or even weak. Many people are still exposed to media with contrary views. Second, the boundaries between different media outlets are blurred in the online arena as people can move effortlessly from one platform to another and can incidentally or accidentally encounter an online media outlet simply by clicking (or misclicking) a link.

Third, the rise of social media has provided new distribution networks for alternative media content. Besides websites, many activists have started using social media platforms, such as *Twitter*, *YouTube*, and *Flickr*, for alternative media practices (Poell and Borra 2011). People can easily access alternative media content by subscribing to the activists' social media accounts. More importantly, social media users can also encounter alternative media content via the sharing by their online friends who are Internet alternative media users. A recent study in the United States, for instance, exactly shows that *Facebook* users often incidentally encounter and consume news on the social media site when engaging in other online activities (Mitchell et al. 2013).

Therefore, one can expect social media usage to relate to exposure to Internet alternative media. On one hand, the strength of this relationship depends on people's preexisting beliefs. Those who hold attitudes congruent with the alternative media's orientation are still more likely to access such media outlets via social media. But, on the other hand, the linkage between social media usage and Internet alternative media exposure may be present even among people who do not hold congruent preexisting beliefs. Social media may be capable of expanding the audience base of Internet alternative media.

Internet Alternative Media, Counterpublic, and Political Participation

Besides factors driving exposure, this study also examines the impact of online alternative media usage on political participation. There are competing arguments about the overall impact of Internet alternative media in this regard. Some scholars have posited that alternative media usage will strengthen and reinforce people's preexisting attitudes, and this will in turn lead to polarization within the general public. Sunstein (2001) has painted a bleak picture of "deliberative enclave" within which the uncritical discussion of like-minded people will undermine rational deliberation and lead to extremity. In the online arena, the concern is that if selective exposure predominates, audiences will be trapped in an "echo chamber online" (Garrett 2009) where their already partisan views will be reinforced rather than negotiated and challenged. This phenomenon of "cyber-balkanization" (Kobayashi and Ikeda 2009) could lead to broader consequences of the erosion of democracy.

Dismissing the above pessimistic views, others have argued that, instead of creating an enclave for like-minded people, online (as well as off-line) alternative media can facilitate the activation and expression of voices excluded from the mainstream media. In this line of thinking, the mainstream media fail to provide a truly diverse range of viewpoints to the public and often ignore the voices of marginal and/or minority groups (e.g., Dahlberg 2007). To remedy this situation, alternative media constitute an "alternative public realm" (Downing 1988) or "subaltern public sphere" (Squires 2002), which help organize counterpublics (Warner 2002).

The notion of counterpublic is premised on a conception that a society is composed of multiple and diverse publics, with some of such publics being excluded from or subordinate to the mainstream society due to unequal power relationships (Asen 2000; Warner 2002). Fraser (1992: 123) defined the concept as "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs." Counterpublics can be formed based on political or religious beliefs, ethnic, class or gender background, or other constructed identities. What is common, however, is their similar engagement in such counterhegemonic practices as staging collective actions and establishing alternative media (Asen and Brouwer 2001). Through these practices, counterpublics "test the reactions of wider publics by stating previously hidden opinions, launching persuasive campaigns to change the minds of dominant publics, or seeking solidarity with other marginal groups" (Squires 2002: 460).

This study holds that Internet alternative media can help cultivate counterpublics due to several considerations. First, the echo chamber critique presumes the predominance of selective exposure, and the previous section has already argued that Internet alternative media may be capable of reaching a wider public. The notion of counterpublic does not deny selective exposure, but it also does not presume that Internet alternative media users are restricted to people holding congruent views.

Second, the echo chamber critique connotes that the organizers and audience of the online media platforms are inward-looking. Many Internet alternative

media, however, do aim at engaging a wider audience and influencing broader public discourses. The notion of counterpublic better captures this outward-looking character of the phenomenon.

Third, while the notion of echo chamber tends to highlight the effect of attitudinal reinforcement, the notion of counterpublic foregrounds the impact of alternative media on opinion formation or “response shaping” (Holbert et al. 2010), which points to the impact of alternative media as beyond attitudinal reinforcement. Alternative media do not only give expression to already existing voices of the marginalized; they are often sites where such voices can be articulated in the first place. As Rauch (2007) conceives, alternative media audiences constitute an interpretive community. Alternative media are sites where people sharing similar political orientations articulate their responses to concrete matters or new issues.

Fourth, the concept of counterpublic also points to the mobilization impact of Internet alternative media. Alternative media often have close associations with activist groups, which therefore are key sites for the transmission of social movement information. They also tend to portray social movements favorably in coverage (Song 2007), whereas the mainstream media have long been regarded as exhibiting a pro-establishment bias (Boykoff 2006; Gitlin 1980). The counter news framing by alternative media can help sustain collective actions and recruit new participants.

A range of hypotheses regarding the impact of online alternative media on its audience can potentially be articulated based on the idea of counterpublic formation. This study is not a comprehensive analysis of the impact of Internet alternative media though. The analysis will focus on the impact of Internet alternative media usage on actual protest participation and attitude toward unconventional forms of protest actions. The concrete hypotheses will be set up below after a brief discussion of the context.

Background and Hypotheses

This article examines the case of Hong Kong, where Internet alternative media had emerged and grown rapidly in the past decade. The phenomenon is arguably partly driven by increasing public distrust in the mainstream media in face of increasing political control. The Chinese government has attempted to control the Hong Kong media through co-opting media owners, building personal relationships with the journalists, setting up norms of political correctness by occasionally voicing criticisms toward the press, and news spinning (Lee, forthcoming). However, as Hong Kong is an international city governed by the constitutional principle of “one country, two systems,” and given the commercial character of the media system in place and the professionalism of the journalistic corps (C. Y. K. So and Chan 2007), the Chinese government often has to exercise its influence in a more covert, indirect, and careful manner than it does in mainland China. The control tactics are primarily aimed at inducing media self-censorship, which was indeed regarded as a serious problem in the city (Lee and Chan 2009). Ma (2007) thus described the state–media relationship in posthandover Hong Kong as under a dynamic process of “constant negotiation amidst self-restraint.”

Due to increasing erosion of press freedom, Internet alternative media become the sites where critical views can be freely expressed and the performance of the mainstream media monitored and critiqued. In fact, the emergence of Internet alternative media in the past decade can be considered as a testimony to the society's resistance to political control of media communication (Ip 2009). Their growth has also been in tandem with the city's pro-democracy movement (Leung et al. 2011) and the rise of social mobilization in general (Lee and Chan 2013). Nowadays, Internet alternative media are part and parcel of Hong Kong's contentious politics.

Among all, the *Hong Kong In-media (In-media)* and *The House News (THN)* are the exemplars of pro-democracy alternative news websites. Founded in 2004, *In-media* is an open-publishing alternative website having close connections with the social movement sector. It gained recognition for its high-profile participation in movements against the government's neoliberal development agenda, including the anti-World Trade Organization protest held in Hong Kong in 2005. In contrast, launched in 2012, *THN* modeled itself explicitly after *The Huffington Post* in the United States. Emphasizing news curation and the offering of "breaking views," the website provides readers with daily news digests and quick commentaries on breaking news stories. Financially, *In-media* relies on donation from supporters, whereas *THN* is a business (though the founder is still searching for a viable business model at the time of this study²).

Despite the differences, *In-media* and *THN* are both committed to progressive socio-political changes. Putting much emphasis on covering political gatherings and protests and on facilitating or even mobilizing their audiences to participate in these events, they do not emphasize objectivity and neutrality in their content, and both often publish critical viewpoints toward the mainstream media. These characteristics justify treating them as Internet alternative media. Both websites featured prominent contributors comprising of veteran social activists, ex-journalists, other media personalities, famous writers, and sometimes liberal-minded business professionals. These contributors could be considered as constituting what Atton and Wickenden (2005) called the counterelites. Their contributions are central to the two websites' role of opinion leadership.

Several hypotheses are set up for analysis by combining the conceptual and contextual considerations. As pointed out earlier, we expect preexisting views and social media usage to relate to Internet alternative media usage. As the most prominent online alternative media sites in Hong Kong are strongly pro-democratic, people with stronger support for democratization should be more likely to use online alternative media. Besides, given the concern with press freedom in Hong Kong, citizens who regard self-censorship as a serious problem in the mainstream media are also more likely to turn to online alternative media.

Moreover, social media such as *Facebook* have acquired an increasingly important role in shaping Hong Kong people's political attitudes and behaviors (Lee 2014; Tang and Lee 2013). To increase publicity and influence, both *In-media* and *THN* have set up *Facebook* pages, so that the citizens can redistribute their contents by sharing them online. Recent studies in other countries have shown close linkages between social media and online alternative media in movement mobilization (Bennett and

Segerberg 2013; Fenton and Barassi 2011; Poell 2013). This study therefore expects social media usage and Internet alternative media exposure to relate to each other at the individual level.

The previous two paragraphs thus lead to the following three hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Support for democratization relates positively to Internet alternative media usage.

Hypothesis 2: Perception of media self-censorship relates positively to Internet alternative media usage.

Hypothesis 3: News acquisition via *Facebook* relates positively to Internet alternative media usage.

While Hypotheses 1 to 3 indicate three main effects, preexisting attitudes may also condition the impact of social media usage on Internet alternative media usage. People with pro-democracy views and those critical toward the mainstream media should be more likely to read an article from or follow a link to the alternative media sites when the latter are shared by friends via social media. Hence, two interaction effect hypotheses are stated:

Hypothesis 4: The relationship stipulated in Hypothesis 3 is stronger among supporters of democratization.

Hypothesis 5: The relationship stipulated in Hypothesis 3 is stronger among people who perceive media self-censorship as serious.

Stated as such, Hypotheses 4 and 5 do not specify the exact pattern of interaction effects to emerge. We do not expect the impact of social media to be completely restricted to those holding pro-democracy views or critical attitude toward mainstream media. Social media usage should be capable of generating Internet alternative media exposure even among those who hold other beliefs. Hypotheses 4 and 5 only mean that the impact of social media usage would be even stronger among people with certain attitudes. In other words, we expect preexisting beliefs and attitudes to serve as contributory conditions instead of contingent conditions (Eveland 1997) for the impact of social media.

Regarding the impact of alternative media usage, this study focuses on participation in protests and attitude toward unconventional protest tactics. Following arguments about the role of alternative media in cultivating counterpublics and communicating mobilizing information and messages, we expect exposure to Internet alternative media to relate to stronger protest participation. Meanwhile, at the time of the study, the emerging “Occupy Central” movement for universal suffrage in 2017 constituted one of the hottest political issues in Hong Kong. The movement refers to an unprecedented civil disobedience campaign to be conducted in 2014 or 2015 in case the Chinese and Hong Kong governments refused a genuine universal suffrage for the 2017 Chief Executive election. As civil disobedience is arguably a “new concept” in public discourse in the city, such idea has generated fervent debate in the media, with

conservative politicians criticizing civil disobedience as a threat to law and order. The movement, however, received positive coverage by Internet alternative media. Tony Choi, the founder of *THN*, even publicly supported the movement. We expect alternative media users to be more receptive to the Occupy Central movement.

The above considerations lead to Hypotheses 6 and 7:

Hypothesis 6: Internet alternative media usage relates positively to protest participation.

Hypothesis 7: Internet alternative media usage relates positively to support for the planned civil disobedience campaign for universal suffrage.

Finally, while alternative media may promote activism by circulating mobilizing information and messages, they may generate actions and attitude formation mainly among those who already share similar political orientation promulgated by the alternative media outlets. In this study, Internet alternative media exposure is likely to have effects on political actions and attitudes mainly among supporters of democratization. This is the last hypothesis for analysis:

Hypothesis 8: The relationships stipulated in Hypotheses 6 and 7 are stronger among supporters of democratization.

Data and Method

Sampling

Data analyzed below were collected from a telephone survey conducted by the Centre for Communication and Public Opinion Survey at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in April 2013. Target respondents were all Cantonese-speaking city residents aged eighteen or above. To derive the sample, phone numbers were first generated by systematic sampling using the most recent residential phone directories. The last two digits of each number were deleted and replaced by the full range of two-digit figures from 00 to 99 to include nonlisted numbers. This procedure generates a database from which phone numbers were chosen randomly by computer. The most recent birthday method was used to select the target respondent from a household. A total of 1,018 interviewees were completed.³ The response rate is 36 percent according to American Association for Public Opinion Research formula 3.

Operationalization of Key Variables

Internet alternative media usage. The survey asked the respondents to indicate whether they were aware of and, if yes, how frequently they read *In-media* and *THN*, respectively. The answering categories include 1 = “have not heard of it,” 2 = “have heard of it but have not read it,” 3 = “have read it once or twice,” and 4 = “read it occasionally or regularly.” For *In-media*, only 4.6 percent of respondents indicated they “read it

occasionally or regularly,” and another 2.0 percent of respondents “have read it once or twice.” About 10 percent (9.8 percent) said they “have heard of it but have not read it,” while the remaining 83.6 percent “have not heard of it” at all. Likewise, the corresponding percentages for *THN* are 5.4, 2.6, 12.7, and 79.3, respectively. The generally low levels of public awareness and usage should not be surprising though, given the status of the two websites as alternative media outlets. Exposure to the two outlets are quite substantially correlated with each other ($r = .45, p < .001$). As this article is concerned with the conceptual category of Internet alternative media instead of the two websites as individual outlets, answers to the two questions were averaged to form an index to simplify the analysis ($M = 1.31, SD = 0.64$).

News acquisition on social media. The survey asked the respondents whether they used the social media platform *Facebook*, the most prominent and widely used social media site in Hong Kong.⁴ Those who answered “yes” were further asked how often they used it to acquire news information. Answers were registered by a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 4 = *frequently* ($M = 0.92, SD = 1.11$).

Perceived seriousness of media self-censorship. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *not serious at all*, 4 = *very serious*) whether media self-censorship is serious on eight types of news: (1) corruption of Chinese government leaders, (2) human rights in China, (3) problems and deficiencies of the Hong Kong government, (4) scandals of Hong Kong politicians, (5) scandals of big corporations and tycoons, (6) cross-strait relations, (7) Taiwan independence, and (8) the issue of Tibet. The items were averaged to form an index of perceived seriousness of media self-censorship ($M = 1.99, SD = 0.68, \alpha = .89$).

Support for democratization. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) whether they supported the abolition of the functional constituencies in the Legislative Council ($M = 3.53, SD = 1.27$). Functional constituencies refer to the component of the current legislature returned by elections in which only a small proportion of the population had the right to vote. Abolishing functional constituencies is one of the goals of the city’s pro-democracy movement.

Protest participation. The survey contained four questions about respondents’ participation in (1) the pro-democracy July 1 demonstration in 2012, (2) the annual June 4 candlelight vigil commemorating the Tiananmen student movement in China in 1989, (3) the antinational education campaign in 2012, and (4) “other protests and rallies.” The answer to each question was simply “yes” or “no.” A 0 to 4 index on protest participation was created by summing the items ($M = 0.53, SD = 0.95, \alpha = .66$).

Support for civil disobedience. The respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disapprove*, 5 = *strongly approve*) whether they supported the plan of the “Occupy Central” civil disobedience campaign ($M = 2.53, SD = 1.41$).

Control variables. Four demographics (gender, age, education, and household income) and four other variables are included in the analysis as controls. *News exposure* was the average of respondents' self-reported exposure, registered by a scale ranging from 1 = *no exposure at all* to 6 = *sixty-one minutes or above*, to newspapers and television news ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.27$, $r = .28$, $p < .001$). *Internal efficacy* was the respondents' agreement with the 5-point Likert-scaled (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*) statement "I have enough ability to understand politics" ($M = 3.22$, $SD = 1.00$). *External efficacy* was the respondents' agreement with a similarly scaled statement "The Hong Kong SAR government is willing to accept public opinion" ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.13$). Finally, *collective efficacy*—people's beliefs in the capability of people as a collective actor in effecting social change (Lee 2006)—was indicated by respondents' agreement with the statement "The collective actions of Hong Kong people, such as protests and demonstrations, can exert great impact on public affairs" ($M = 3.29$, $SD = 1.15$).

Findings and Analysis

Factors of Internet Alternative Media Usage

The analysis begins with an examination of the factors driving Internet alternative media usage. Hierarchical regression analysis was conducted for the purpose. The regression model contains all the controls, the main effect variables for Hypotheses 1 to 3 (i.e., support for democratization, perceived media self-censorship, and news acquisition via social media), and two interaction terms for testing Hypotheses 4 and 5 (News acquisition via social media \times Support for democratization, and News acquisition via social media \times Perceived self-censorship). The interaction terms were centered by means to reduce multicollinearity.

Table 1 summarizes the results. Internet alternative media usage is not significantly related to any of the demographics in the full model. Respondents with higher levels of internal efficacy ($\beta = .11$, $p < .001$) and people with lower levels of external efficacy ($\beta = -.07$, $p < .01$) were more likely to be Internet alternative media audiences. These findings, though not hypothesized, are consistent with the idea that Internet alternative media can cultivate an active counterpublic, as they suggest that alternative media users tend to evaluate the political system more negatively and yet regard themselves as capable of understanding and participating in public affairs.

News exposure is positively related to alternative media usage. It suggests that alternative media usage does not preclude mainstream media consumption. Nevertheless, consistent with the hypothesis, alternative media usage is related to a more critical attitude toward the mainstream media, as illustrated by the significant coefficient obtained by the perceived self-censorship variable ($\beta = .13$, $p < .001$). Besides, support for democratization also has a significant, though relatively weak, relationship with Internet alternative media usage ($\beta = .07$, $p < .05$). Moreover, news acquisition via social media has a highly significant relationship with alternative media usage ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$)—The regression coefficient is substantially larger than the coefficients of the two attitudinal variables.⁵ This pattern is consistent with the

Table 1. Predictors of Internet Alternative Media Usage ($N = 1,018$).

	Internet Alternative Media Usage
Demographics and controls	
Sex (female = 2)	.05
Age	-.03
Education	.03
Income	.02
Internal efficacy	.11***
External efficacy	-.07**
Collective efficacy	-.04
News exposure	.03
ΔR^2	.16***
Main variables	
Support for democratization	.07*
Perceived media self-censorship	.13***
News acquisition via social media	.32***
ΔR^2	.14***
Interaction terms	
News acquisition via social media \times Support for democratization	.17***
News acquisition via social media \times Perceived media self-censorship	.11***
ΔR^2	.05***
Adjusted R^2	.33***

Note. Entries are standardized regression coefficients. Missing values were replaced by means.

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

argument that, in the online environment with the presence of social media, attitude-based selective exposure is present but not overwhelming.

While the second block of factors provides support to Hypotheses 1 to 3, the actual effect of the independent variables should be understood together with the interaction effect patterns shown in the third block. The findings support both Hypotheses 4 and 5. The positive interaction effect coefficients mean that the positive relationship between news acquisition via social media and alternative media usage is even stronger among people holding pro-democracy views or critical views toward the mainstream media.

More important, considering the sizes of the regression coefficients, one can see that support for democratization and perceived self-censorship do serve largely as contributory instead of contingent conditions of the effect of social media on alternative media usage. For respondents scoring 1 *SD* above mean on support for democratization, Internet alternative media usage increases by about 0.49 *SD* (i.e., $0.32 + 0.17$) when news acquisition via social media increases by 1 *SD*. For those scoring 1 *SD* below

mean on support for democratization, Internet alternative media usage still increases by about 0.15 *SD* (i.e., 0.32 – 0.17) when news acquisition via social media increases by 1 *SD*. Social media usage ceases to enhance alternative media usage only for people about 2 *SD* below mean on support for democratization—by statistical definition a very small group.

Similarly, news acquisition via social media led to alternative media usage even among people who did not perceive self-censorship as a serious problem. The sizes of the coefficients suggest that news acquisition via social media does not lead to alternative media usage only when people are 3 (or more) *SD* below mean on the perceived self-censorship variable. In contrast, for people who score just 1 *SD* above average on perceptions of self-censorship, an increase in 1 *SD* in news acquisition via social media can lead to an increase of 0.43 *SD* (0.32 + 0.11) in alternative media usage.

Impacts of Internet Alternative Media Usage on Protest Participation

We can now turn to the impact of Internet alternative media usage on protest participation and attitude toward civil disobedience as suggested in Hypotheses 6 to 8. Two hierarchical regression analyses were conducted for the purpose. The independent variables are largely the same as those in Table 1. The only exceptions are the omission of perceived media self-censorship (which is not central to explain protest participation) and that the interaction between news acquisition via social media and perceived media self-censorship is replaced by Internet alternative media usage × Support for democratization, the interaction term central to Hypothesis 8. The interaction between news acquisition via social media and support for democratization is retained for illustrative purposes.

Table 2 summarizes the results. The first column shows that Internet alternative media usage is a significant positive predictor of protest participation ($\beta = .28, p < .001$). This is consistent with Hypothesis 6. In fact, the size of the main effect coefficient of alternative media usage is the largest among the three in the second block of factors (compared with $\beta = .18$ for news acquisition via social media and $\beta = .11$ for support for democratization).⁶

The second column of Table 2 shows that Internet alternative media usage also significantly predicts support for civil disobedience. This is consistent with Hypothesis 7. The size of the coefficient of Internet alternative media usage is smaller than that of support for democratization. This is understandable though, as the civil disobedience question refers specifically to the pro-democracy Occupy Central campaign in Hong Kong. Meanwhile, news acquisition via social media does not have a significant main effect on support for civil disobedience ($\beta = .02, ns$). Sharing and acquisition of news via social media may entail exposure to social movement information and message in general, but when it comes to an unconventional campaign, civil disobedience in this case, merely sharing news and public affairs information via social media does not seem to generate attitudinal support or actual participation.

Table 2 provides partial support for Hypothesis 8. The interaction between Internet alternative media usage and support for democratization is significant only in the case

Table 2. Impacts of Internet Alternative Media Usage on Protest Participation (N = 1,018).

	Actual Protest Participation	Support for Civil Disobedience
Demographics and controls		
Sex (female = 2)	-.05	-.02
Age	.03	-.08*
Education	.02	-.10**
Income	-.02	-.08*
Internal efficacy	.08**	.04
External efficacy	-.13***	-.28***
Collective efficacy	.02	.04
News exposure	.08**	-.02
ΔR^2	.15***	.17***
Main variables		
Support for democratization	.11***	.25***
Internet alternative media usage	.28***	.13***
News acquisition via social media	.18***	.02
ΔR^2	.17***	.09***
Interaction terms		
News acquisition via social media × Support for democratization	.05	-.01
Internet alternative media usage × Support for democratization	.07*	.05
ΔR^2	.01**	.00
Adjusted R^2	.32***	.25***

Note. Entries are standardized regression coefficients. Missing values were replaced by means.

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

of actual protest participation. Similar to the case of Table 1, support for democratization is mainly a contributory condition. People who score at 1 *SD* above mean on support for democratization will have their protest participation increases by 0.35 *SD* (0.28 + 0.07) when Internet alternative media usage increases by 1 *SD*. People who score at 1 *SD* below mean on support for democratization will still have their protest participation increases by 0.21 *SD* (0.28 - 0.07) when Internet alternative media usage increases by 1 *SD*. Internet alternative media usage will not enhance protest participation only when people score 4 or more *SD* below mean on support for democratization.

Discussion

This study examines the factors driving Internet alternative media usage and how such usage influences people's protest participation and acceptance of unconventional protest activities. It hypothesizes that alternative media usage is partly driven by selective exposure. Hence, preexisting beliefs should explain alternative media exposure. The

results confirm the expectation. In Hong Kong, democracy supporters are more likely to be the audience of pro-democracy Internet alternative media. Besides, alternative media usage can also be driven by the users' critical attitude toward the mainstream media. This study finds that Hong Kong people who perceived media self-censorship as a serious problem are more likely to be Internet alternative media user. Meanwhile, Internet alternative media usage is also related to a more negative evaluation of the responsiveness of the Hong Kong government. Taken together, these findings suggest that Internet alternative media have constituted an alternative political space attracting the liberal-oriented and critical-minded citizens in the city.

Perhaps more important, the findings also illustrate that Internet alternative media exposure was not limited to only those who held the beliefs and attitudes congruent with the orientation of the alternative media outlets. News acquisition via social media like *Facebook* has not only contributed to Internet alternative media usage among democracy supporters but also among those who did not exhibit strong political attitudes, pointing to the facilitating role of social media for wider circulation of alternative media content. As noted at the beginning of this article, alternative media forms have evolved alongside the development of new communication technologies. While the popularization of the Internet in the 1990s had already lowered the production and distribution costs for alternative media, social media have further strengthened their distribution networks.

A related implication is that the abilities and efforts of harnessing social media have become increasingly essential to alternative media to enhance publicity and extend their reach to the wider public. Alternative media practitioners are now required to put more efforts on constructing a wide social media subscriber web, tailoring content for social media circulation, and maintaining interactions with social media users. The growing importance of social media has offered not only opportunities but also challenges.

This study also sheds light on the political impact of Internet alternative media. Usage of Internet alternative media is expected to activate people's political participation through communicating mobilizing information and messages and to generate support for unconventional protest tactics. The findings support the hypotheses: Internet alternative media usage relates significantly to both protest participation and support for the Occupy Central civil disobedience campaign.

Admittedly, the cross-sectional nature of the survey does not allow the specification of causal direction. It is possible that, due to selective exposure, people attending to the Internet alternative media may already be predisposed toward protest participation. In reality, the most likely scenario is that protest participation and Internet alternative media usage mutually influence each other. With this limitation in mind, our findings are in line with claims that alternative media can influence protest actions and that the audiences of Internet alternative media constitute an active counterpublic. Indeed, alternative media theorists, especially those who adopt the notion of "radical media," have long pointed to the emancipatory and progressive potential of alternative media in informing and mobilizing people politically (Atton 2004; Downing 1984, 2001). This study has provided empirical evidences for this long-standing claim. Furthermore,

the close relationship between online alternative media usage and protest actions also suggests that alternative media may serve as a nodal point, or the so-called “movement nexus” (Hackett and Carroll 2006), to articulate the different voices of counterpublic members and to propel them into action.

It should be reminded that the audience size of online alternative media in Hong Kong, and thus the size of the counterpublic sustained, is small. Only a few percentages of the general public are regular readers of the two major online alternative media sites. This finding should not be surprising. Despite the help of new media, the size of alternative media audiences is likely to remain relatively small. This is partly because alternative media are typically not as resourceful as mainstream media, which therefore could not provide numerous quality contents to the audience. This is also partly because the content provided by the politically oriented Internet alternative media is likely to appeal mainly to the most politically sophisticated *and* critical citizens.

Nevertheless, the political impact of this “small” counterpublic shall not be underestimated. As Lee and Chan (2013) pointed out, in the contemporary protest politics in Hong Kong, the fervently expressed opinion of the “vocal minority” often has substantial impact on politicians and the government. This study suggests that, Internet alternative media, with the aid of social media, are playing a crucial role in cultivating and sustaining the counterpublic who can become activated into the vocal minorities on various issues. The Internet alternative media audience’s readiness to participate in protest and to embrace unconventional protest tactics can play an important role in fueling and shaping the development of local social movements.

More concretely, the cultivation of counterpublic is exemplified by *In-media*. In recent years, its members and audiences have been very active in social movements against the government’s neoliberal development agenda. This phenomenon resembles the experiences of some western advanced industrial societies in the 1970s and 1980s, where the developments of alternative media and new social movements were intertwined and interdependent (see Downing 1988; Mathes and Pfetsch 1991). According to some local political scientists, these new social movements reflected the turn to postmaterial values of the Hong Kong society, especially the technologically savvy younger generations (e.g., Ma 2011; A. Y. So 2011). In this regard, we can consider the developmental trajectory of Internet alternative media as a hallmark of the progressive sociopolitical changes of a democratizing society such as Hong Kong.

Here, it should be noted that Internet alternative media can exert such political impact in Hong Kong because the Internet arena is still relatively free from political interference. Unlike mainland China, the Chinese and Hong Kong governments did not engage in systematic Internet censorship in Hong Kong. But as the Chinese government continues to tighten the media control in the city (Lee, forthcoming), it remains to be seen whether political interference will be extended to the online arena, thus affecting the development of online alternative media.

Although this article is a case study of Hong Kong, it is argued to have implications to other societies where people may espouse similar doubts toward both mainstream media and political institutions. The Hong Kong case has shown that, when mainstream media in an open and technologically advanced society are perceived by the

public as failing the role of the “fourth estate” to exert checks and balances on the power-holders, it would provide an impetus to the rapid rise of online media to fill the void. With the public support, the online media may constitute a “fifth estate” as an emerging but legitimate political actor in activism in particular and contentious politics in general.

Therefore, going beyond the current findings, we can also suggest that Internet alternative media may have broader influences on public opinion at large especially during periods of heightened political activities. During such periods, people would have their political interests activated. The usual monitorial citizens would become a more attentive and active public (Boczkowski and Michelstein 2010). Hence, their exposure to Internet alternative media may increase. At the same time, the mainstream media may also be pressed for offering more in-depth political reporting and commentaries, and Internet alternative media can then serve as the ready and alternative sources of information and political views. Alternative media content may therefore be “re-mediated” by the mainstream media and reach the general public (Mathes and Pfetsch 1991).

Even in ordinary times, Internet alternative media may also have influence on the broader public through a classic two-step flow process. Having equipped with the information and views provided by the alternative media, the audiences of Internet alternative media may become opinion leaders for their friends. They can also actively share the content from alternative media with their friends via social media. In this case, the politically active alternative media audience, though constituting a minority in the society, may nonetheless exert a disproportionately large influence on public opinion.

Certainly, the ideas discussed in the two paragraphs above will necessitate further research. Besides, a few other limitations and possibilities of future research can be acknowledged here. First, this study looks at the political impact of Internet alternative media usage without specifying which particular aspects of usage have generated the impact. For instance, Stein (2009) content-analyzed social movement websites in the United States and identified several functions of such websites, including providing information, assisting action and mobilization, promoting interaction and dialogue, making lateral linkages, serving as outlet for creative expression, and promoting fundraising and resource generation. It is possible that each of these communicative functions has different impacts on the audiences. Related to this, another shortcoming of this study is that it has only one overall measure of protest participation and one measure of support for civil disobedience as an indicator of acceptance of unconventional protest tactics. Future research can examine a wider array of political activities and protest tactics.

Furthermore, while this study suggests that social media enlarge the reach of alternative media through demonstrating the relationship between social media usage and alternative media usage, it does not demonstrate exactly how frequently alternative media content is circulated via social media, and how people respond to alternative media content that comes to them via social media. Future research can go deeper into the intricate and interdependent relationship between social media and alternative media online, which holds one of the keys to understanding the capability of Internet alternative media in cultivating and sustaining counterpublics.

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Notes

1. Under the umbrella term of “alternative media,” there is a variety of models such as “community media,” “citizen media,” and “radical media,” among others. Each of them has more specific emphases and goals: “community media” emphasizes the integration and networking potential of alternative media (Lewis and Jones 2006); “citizen media” highlights citizen participation in production (Rodriguez 2001), whereas “radical media” points to their antihegemony potential and mobilizing power (Downing 1984, 2001). The common thread underlying the different models is their opposition to mainstream media.
2. Based on personal communications between the authors and the founder of *The House News* (THN).
3. The sample has 57.7 percent female, 16.4 percent aged between eighteen and twenty-nine, 12.3 percent between thirty and thirty-nine, and 20.1 percent between forty and forty-nine; 17.7 percent of the sample had university degrees, while 22.6 percent had primary school education or no formal education at all. According to government statistics, by the end of 2011, about 53.3 percent of Hong Kong people aged eighteen and above were female, 19.4 percent aged between eighteen and twenty-nine, 18.7 percent between thirty and thirty-nine, and 20.5 percent between forty and forty-nine; 19.4 percent had university degrees, while 21.3 percent had primary school education or no formal education at all. Sample-population discrepancies existed mainly in gender and age. The data were weighted by these two variables when conducting the analysis.
4. *Mingpao*, “Facebook Claims 2.9 Million Active Users in Hong Kong,” August 20, 2013. [in Chinese.]
5. Following Cohen et al.’s (2003) formula, alternative media usage relates to news acquisition via social media significantly more strongly than both support for democratization ($t = 5.48, p < .001$) and perceived self-censorship ($t = 5.62, p < .001$).
6. Again following Cohen et al. (2003), protest participation relates to Internet alternative media usage more strongly than both news acquisition via social media ($t = 2.49, p < .05$) and support for democratization ($t = 4.42, p < .001$).

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Consumer Demand for Cynical and Negative News Frames

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Abstract

Commentators regularly lament the proliferation of both negative and/or strategic (“horse race”) coverage in political news content. The most frequent account for this trend focuses on news norms and/or the priorities of news journalists. Here, we build on recent work arguing for the importance of demand-side, rather than supply-side, explanations of news content. In short, news may be negative and/or strategy-focused because that is the kind of news that people are interested in. We use a lab study to capture participants’ news-selection biases, alongside a survey capturing their stated news preferences. Politically interested participants are more likely to select negative stories. Interest is associated with a greater preference for strategic frames as well. And results suggest that behavioral results do not conform to attitudinal ones. That is, regardless of what participants say, they exhibit a preference for negative news content.

Keywords

negative news, strategy news, negativity bias, horse race, consumer demand, experimental design, gatekeeping

Literature in political communication often finds itself concerned with two related themes in media content: (1) negative news frames that generally cast politicians and politics in an unfavorable light and (2) cynical “strategy” coverage that focuses on the “horse race” and conflictual aspects of politics. The two themes may be related, insofar as strategic coverage implies that politicians are motivated only by power, not the common good (e.g., Capella and Jamieson 1997). Regardless of their relation,

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however, work on these frames typically makes two assumptions: First, they are bad for society; and second, their root cause lies in the actions of journalists.

We seek here to question the second assumption through a simple supposition: That the content of any given media environment is determined by some interplay between what media sources supply and what consumers demand.¹ Put simply, we argue that the proliferation of negative and/or strategic content is at least in part a function of individuals' (quite possibly subconscious) preferences.

Below, we present results from a lab study that explores this possibility. Our work is in part an extension of existing work focused on consumer interest in horse-race stories (e.g., Iyengar et al. 2004), or in negative content (e.g., Meffert et al. 2006), although it is among the first to simultaneously consider both. It is also to our knowledge the first exploration of news-selection biases outside the U.S. context, and/or outside the context of an election campaign.² Most importantly, however, our work relies on a new laboratory-study approach that has some advantages where both internal and external validity are concerned and that provides a rare opportunity to compare actual news-selection behavior with answers to survey questions about participants' preferences in media content.

The Cynical Media and Their Audience

That the media are negative and cynical about politics and politicians is widely agreed upon in the literature. Some scholars see this trend as a mutation from the media as a watchdog "Fourth Estate," into a hyper-critical "feeding frenzy" (Patterson 1994; Sabato 1991: 2). This view of a negative-centric press is echoed in numerous other U.S. studies (e.g., Blumer and Gurevitch 1995; Capella and Jamieson 1997; Edelman 1987; Farnsworth and Lichter 2007; Lang and Lang 1966, 1968; Lichter and Noyes 1995; Newton 2006; M. J. Robinson and Sheehan 1983; West 2001); it is also evident in Canada (e.g., Andrew et al. 2006) and in other countries around the world (Stromback and Kaid 2008).

There is a related and overlapping area of research focusing on "strategy" coverage. We rely here on Capella and Jamieson's (1997) definition of "strategy" coverage, which is said to include

- (1) winning and losing as the central concern; (2) the language of wars, games, and competition; (3) a story with performers, critics and audience (voters); (4) centrality of performance, style, and perception of the candidate; (5) heavy weighting of polls and the candidates. (Capella and Jamieson 1997: 33)³

This particular conceptualization of strategy coverage is related to negativity insofar as it calls into question the motivation of politicians and has been linked to increased cynicism in viewers (de Vreese 2004; Rhee 1997; Valentino et al. 2001a, 2001b). Jamieson and Capella argue that when the actions of those in politics are painted in a strategic light, viewers ascribe a motivation of power, rather than a concern for the common good, to those involved (also see Jones 2004; Patterson 1994). This type of

strategy coverage is also seen to be dramatically on the rise—again, in the United States (e.g., Capella and Jamieson 1997; Jones 2004; Patterson 1994; M. Robinson 1976), in Canada (Mendelsohn 1993; Pickup et al. 2010), and around the world (Stromback and Kaid 2008).

Why?—Supply-Side Explanations

Much existing work places the blame for strategic and negative political coverage on journalistic norms of cynicism toward public officials, stemming from a general decline of trust toward public figures in the United States from the 1970s onward (e.g., Capella and Jamieson 1997; Farnsworth and Lichter 2007; Lichter and Noyes 1995; Patterson 1994; Sabato 1991; West 2001). The argument is, in short, that the twin scandals of Vietnam and Watergate—as well as a desire to emulate investigative reporters like Woodward and Bernstein—moved journalists from “silent sceptics” to “vocal cynics” (Patterson 1994: 73–74).

It seems very likely that particular historical events, and the resulting journalistic norms, contribute to the production of both negative and strategic news frames. That said, the historical account does little to explain why negative and strategic coverage are pervasive outside the United States. Journalists in other countries may have had similar defining moments, perhaps; and notions of how to conduct journalism may well have seeped from the United States into other countries. But the apparent pervasiveness of negative and strategic coverage outside the United States does seem to beg for an argument not rooted just in American political history.

One such argument is that negative and strategic frames are the result of a news-making process that prioritizes new and exciting information. Political news focused on the “horse race,” conflict between politicians, or a series of errors made by individuals in the system, will provide fresh content much faster than political news that focuses on policy (Farnsworth and Lichter 2007; Patterson 1994). This explanation is likely more generalizable (i.e., more easily applicable outside the United States) than the historic/norms account. We suspect that neither explanation can fully account for the pervasiveness of negative and cynical news frames, however. Indeed, as we have argued above, while some weight should be given to how the practices of journalists on the supply side determine the content of media, we must also consider the demand side, that is, audience preferences.

Why?—Demand-Side Explanations

The existing literature is unclear about how media consumers feel about negative and/or strategic coverage, in part because many of the major works on the condition of political reporting in the United States focus on the process of producing news much more than on the ways in which we consume it. When the literature does address consumer demand, it most often focuses on the low and/or declining scores the public gives to media in surveys, as evidence of a distaste for the increasing prominence of negative and strategic frames.

There is indeed survey evidence suggesting that the public does not enjoy negative news frames (see, for example, Lichter and Noyes 1995; West 2001), but our own inclination is to be wary of survey questions on this issue. Attitudes on news coverage are likely influenced by the current tone of politics and the media. The particularly vitriolic political climate surrounding the first Clinton presidency may be what drove a downward shift in responses observed by both West, and Lichter and Noyes when writing in the 1990s, for instance. More importantly, it may be that respondents' stated preferences for news content do not reflect their actual news choices. That is, people may say they want one kind of news, even as they systematically select another.

There are certainly reasons to believe that this is true. There is after all a growing body of work describing a "negativity bias" in human behavior. In short, individuals may have a propensity to weight negative information more heavily than positive information. This seems relatively clear in work in psychology on impression formation (e.g., van der Pligt and Eiser 1980; Vonk 1996); it is reflected in work on loss aversion in economics (Kahneman and Tversky 1979); and it is evidenced in work on political behavior and communications as well (e.g., Altheide 1997; Diagnault et al. 2012; Harrington 1989; Patterson 1994; Shoemaker et al. 1987; Soroka 2012, 2014). Some work links the negativity bias to evolutionary processes (e.g., Shoemaker 1996; Soroka 2014; S. Soroka and McAdams 2014). Work also focuses on the importance of a reference point to the negativity bias: Humans tend to be mildly optimistic; negative information is thus further away from our expectations than is positive information; and we thus view negative information as more deviant and potentially more useful as well (e.g., Fiske 1980; Skowronski and Carlston 1989).

The notion that it is the potential usefulness of deviant/negative information that makes it particularly attention-grabbing is echoed in work on why news consumers have a rational incentive to focus on negative and/or strategic news frames. It has long been hypothesized that individuals seek "shortcuts" in their information gathering—shortcuts that can systematically bias their media content environments. This argument is rooted in both (1) Downs's (1957) argument that individuals have little incentive to become informed about or participate in politics, as the impact of their voting decisions on election outcomes is miniscule and (2) Fiske's (1991) notion of individuals as "cognitive misers." In both cases, citizens have limited incentives to pay close attention to most political information. For Fiske & Taylor (1991: 13), this means they will seek "rapid adequate solutions, rather than slow articulate solutions."

What is the nature of these rapid solutions? A focus on negativity, and/or strategy, and/or political conflict is a possibility. When politicians form a consensus around a policy, that policy is likely to be implemented whoever wins an election or political fight. However, where there is controversy or two opposing viewpoints, political support for one side may determine what is implemented, thus giving the individual an incentive to pay attention. In short, "The rational voter is engaged by political conflict and bored by political consensus" (Zaller 1999: 16). When media reduce complex political issues to strategy coverage that highlights disagreement, citizens reward them with increased viewership.

Theories focused on an evolution-inspired negativity bias, or on rational decision making to improve the cost–benefit ratio where political learning is concerned, are quite clearly related: Both suggest that the selection of negative and/or strategic information is for strategic (rather than just entertainment) reasons. The end result may be a preference for information that is negative, and/or strategic, and a body of media content that is produced to match that preference.

Note that this preference for negative and/or strategic information may be subconscious. That is, we may find ourselves selecting negative and/or strategic stories even as we state that we would like other types of information. The presence of survey responses that suggest some wariness about negative and strategic frames in media, even as media consumption seems to point toward a preference for those types of information, may reflect this fact. This would be in line with findings that individuals “frequently grumbled about oversimplified treatment of all news,” while being unwilling in their actual habits to view more complex coverage (Graber 1984: 105); or that those who call for public-affairs programming tend to not watch it when it is actually made available (Neuman 1991). In short, previous research already lends support to the notion that individuals’ conscious signaling of what news ought to be does not necessarily match their actual patterns of news consumption.

Previous research thus suggests three hypotheses. First, participants will be more likely to read news stories that are negative and/or strategy-focused. Second, those with a greater interest in politics will show a greater tendency toward negative and strategic stories. Third, story selection will be weakly correlated—or even entirely uncorrelated—with attitudes about negativity and strategy frames.

From Attitudinal to Behavioral Analyses

What we require is a way to examine news choices directly, that is, focusing on behavioral (actual news selection) rather than attitudinal (survey question-based) data. There are several valuable examples of this approach. Meffert et al. (2006) look at demand for negative information in an electoral campaign setting, in an experimental lab, using the “dynamic information-board” method pioneered by Lau and Redlawsk (2006). Iyengar et al. (2004) take a different approach: They send out to test subjects a CD with articles on the then-ongoing 2000 U.S. presidential election, and software that tracks participants’ news selection. Tewksbury’s (2005, 2006) approach is similar: He uses Nielsen Company data capturing the Web history of participants who sign into tracking software whenever they browse the Internet.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach. Iyengar et al. (2004) and Tewksbury (2005, 2006) allow respondents to participate at home, in a more natural environment than the experimental lab setting used by Meffert et al. (2006). The resulting external validity comes at a cost, however—They cannot fully control the experimental treatment, as participants may be viewing un-tracked news (not on the CD, or without signing in to tracking software), and people other than the participant may also be using the CD/software. Meffert et al., in contrast, have complete control over the information environment, but there are increased concerns about external

validity; and the experiment is quite clearly focused on a “motivated” campaign environment and may or may not apply to day-to-day passive news readership. In each of these cases, individuals are also acutely aware that their selections are being studied.

The Study

Our study is somewhat different from past work. In short, we rely on a method that attempts to maximize the benefits of the two approaches described above, while minimizing the negatives. The study is designed with four objectives:

1. Maximize the external validity of the study by creating as “natural” a news-reading environment as possible.
2. Minimize the effects of social desirability on news selection by making respondents believe that their news selections are not the object of study.
3. Use a laboratory setting that allows for a high degree of control over the material that is presented to individuals so that they have to make choices between alternatives.
4. Match news-selection decisions (behavioral data) with survey questions on participants stated preferences on news content (attitudinal data), so that implicit preferences for media content can be directly compared with explicitly-stated preferences.

The study that we designed to meet these goals proceeds as follows. First, groups of up to six participants enter a room, sit down at a computer, and are told that the purpose of the study is to track their eye movements as they watch a number of television news stories. Subjects are given a brief explanation of how the eye-tracking software operates. They are told that to obtain a baseline measurement on their eye movements, we will have them browse a Web page of recent news articles for between three and nine minutes. It is important that they read during that time (to calibrate the eye-tracking software properly), but they can choose whatever they like and proceed at their own pace. After they read articles, they will watch two television news stories. Finally, they will respond to a brief survey.

The critical part of this study is that there is in fact no eye-tracking software, and no video is recorded (though the Webcam light on the experimental computers was turned on make the eye-tracking story seem more credible)—What we are really interested in are the stories participants select from the news Web page.⁴ The idea of the eye-tracking story, then, is to encourage participants to read in a normal manner, as though their responses are not the object of study. They understand that they must read; but they can read whatever they like, and there is no sign that what they read is being monitored. The two videos are then included in the study only so that respondents believe that those are the objects of study, because we want to get responses to survey questions before the final debriefing.

The main component of this study, the artificial news Web page, is coded in html and run in the MediaLab software program. The database includes fifty articles in

total. All articles were selected by the coauthors from the two weeks directly preceding the study; all were about Canadian politics and written in English. All articles were also coded by a team of three expert coders for tone (positive/negative/neutral)⁵ as well as topic (policy/strategy/neither).⁶ Where topic is concerned, the coders were unanimous on topic for the vast majority (forty-three/fifty) of cases. This was true for both the article as a whole and for the headline alone—As we are interested here in the initial selection of stories, based on headlines, it is the topic of the headline that matters most. For tone, we do not expect complete intercoder reliability but rather treat intercoder differences as a sign of ambiguity. In short, if two coders see a headline as negative and a third coder sees it as neutral, then we see that article as less clearly negative than if all three coders agreed (as in, for example, Young and Soroka 2012).⁷ So our measure of tone is based on an average of the three codes, where -1 is very negative and $+1$ is very positive.

The sample of fifty articles was carefully selected to provide articles distributed across the range of tone of topic, as well as across a broad swath of national (domestic) political topics. Particular care was given to ensuring that no one political party was over- or underrepresented, and that particular current events did not dominate the article selection. In other words, as much care as possible was taken to ensure that there were not systematic biases in the content of any of the categories. In addition, each respondent was presented with a Web page of thirty articles, randomly drawn from the fifty-article sample, and presented in a random order.⁸

The study has (at least) two limitations. First, test subjects included one hundred undergraduate students at McGill University.⁹ This is a good number of participants, but there are of course limits to using undergraduate subjects. Note, however, that we are not attempting to make a population estimate but rather trying to uncover a cognitive process. As such, the fact that our sample is not representative with respect to education, age, and income should be a relatively minor problem (see, for example, Morton and Williams 2008).¹⁰ Second, like almost any lab study, there is the possibility of confounding effects—The main concern is that implicit cues can be given regarding what sort of behavior the study is looking to find by simple acts such as reading the briefing in a certain manner (McDermott 2002). This concern was minimized in this case by sticking carefully to the text written for briefings, a text that emphasized the eye-tracking portion of the study, while presenting the news-selection “baseline measurement” as almost an afterthought.¹¹

Properly implemented, our design made it very likely that subjects would focus on their actions in the fictional video study, while acting in a more natural manner in the news-selection section of the study. The deception thus accomplished objectives 1 and 2 above. Of course, we can never fully remove the artificiality of the lab environment, or for that matter, match the “natural” environment of at-home studies (Iyengar et al. 2004; Tewksbury 2006). We nevertheless believe that our approach balances the concerns of external and internal validity in a way that improves upon those studies.¹²

A survey was administered after the fictional eye-tracking study, including a battery of questions on news content, as well as a series of basic demographic and partisanship variables. We cannot avoid the possibility that survey responses are affected by the

Table 1. Aggregate Story Selection.

	Unclear	Policy	Strategy	Total
Negative	—	P:598 S:63 10.5%	P:885 S:78 8.8%	P:1483 S:141 10.5%
Neutral	P:73 S:16 22%	P:444 S:44 9.9%	P:84 S:6 7.3%	P:601 S:66 9.1%
Positive	P:59 S:9 15.2%	P:540 S:59 10.9%	P:677 S:40 6.0%	P:1275 S:108 8.5%
Total	P:132 S:25 18.9%	P:1582 S:166 10.5%	P:1646 S:124 7.6%	—

Note. P is the number of stories presented to all respondents, and S is the number of stories selected by respondents.

stories respondents read in the news-selection section of the study. As news selection should be conditioned by underlying preferences in news, however, we believe that contamination of survey responses by Web news is in this case relatively unlikely. And to minimize the effects of video news on survey responses, each participant is shown two videos chosen at random from a pool of five. These five videos are drawn from a previous study (Soroka and McAdams 2014), where the aim in this case was to select videos that were relatively mundane—They vary in tone from mildly negative to mildly positive. Information on the videos used is included in the online appendix.

Results

The Impact of Topic and Tone

Table 1 shows some basic diagnostic data for the study. Reported for each cell is the number of stories in that category presented to all respondents over the course of the study (P); the number of stories in that category selected to be read by respondents (S); and finally the percentage of stories read out of those presented. The table thus offers a broad picture of participants’ tendencies to select some types of stories over others.

Looking across the “total” rows and columns allows us to compare the relative performance of articles on tone and topic. Note first that the differences in the percentage read between categories seem relatively small—The range is from 6.0 (for positive, strategic stories) to 22.0 percent (for unclear, neutral stories). These are not inconsequential differences, however. Each respondent was presented with 30 stories, of which individuals read approximately three stories on average (min = 1, max = 10). In total, 315 out of the 3,360 stories presented to all respondents combined were actually read. If tone and topic have no effect on the respondents, then we should expect

the frequency of each cell to be 9.6 percent. It is deviations from this value, 9.6 percent, that suggest impacts of topic and/or tone.

With that in mind, note that results for tone are in the expected direction. Negative stories were chosen 10.5 percent of the time, compared with 9.1 percent of the time for neutral stories and 8.5 percent for positive stories. Results for topic appear to run contrary to expectations. Strategy stories were selected 7.6 percent of the time, while policy stories were selected 10.5 percent of the time.

The basic descriptive data in Table 1 likely lack a few important control variables and thus understates the influence of both topic and tone on news selection. A set of more complete logit analyses are presented in Table 2. All models use each person–story combination as a case and predict whether a particular story, for a particular individual was selected (1) or not selected (0).

While our main interest is in how the tone and topic of a particular story affect its selection, we first include several important control variables in each model. The placement of stories on the Web page likely matters to story selection, so we capture placement in two ways: Column is coded as 1 for the left column and 2 for the right column, and row is coded from 1 to 15 based on the row in which a story appeared.¹³ (Recall that stories are randomly ordered for each participant.) Because the amount of time varied across participants, we also include time, coded as 5, 7, or 9 for the number of minutes a participant had to read the stories.¹⁴

All models are estimated using a simple random-effects logit estimation (to account for the fact that cases are not independent, as there are thirty cases per respondent).¹⁵ Table 2 shows the resulting odds ratios, capturing the probability of a story being read. For the sake of comparison, the table includes models used in subsequent sections as well; for the time being, we focus just on models 1 and 2. The first few rows allow us to look at some basic diagnostics of how individuals read news stories on the page. The column in which a story appears, left or right, does not seem to matter to the likelihood that it is selected by respondents. The row in which a story appears does matter—moving down one row decreases the likelihood of selection by roughly 3 percent. The time respondents had to read the news page also matters, of course—Each additional minute leads to increased probability of a story being read of about 11 percent.

Our main interest in model 1 is the effect of the topic and tone of articles. The former is captured with a binary variable, equal to 1 for stories with headlines that are strategy (rather than policy) oriented; and recall that tone is an interval-level measure ranging from -1 (negative) to $+1$ (positive). Results for topic and tone largely confirm what we have seen in Table 1. A one-unit shift upward in tone makes a story roughly 13 percent less likely to be selected. Positive stories are thus 26 percent less likely to be selected than are negative stories. That said, the effect of tone is significant only at $p < .10$. The impact of topic is more robust: Strategic stories are 33 percent less likely to be selected than are policy stories.

Model 2 tests the possibility that topic and tone interact. Results suggest that they do: In this interacted model, there is no discernible direct effect of tone, but the direct impact of topic strengthens somewhat and is augmented by tone. In short, strategic stories are particularly unpopular when they are positive. But the combined effects of

Table 2. Modeling Story Selection.

	Model							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Column	0.873 (0.105)	0.874 (0.105)	0.869 (0.105)	0.866 (0.105)	0.864 (0.104)	0.861 (0.104)	0.868 (0.104)	0.873 (0.106)
Row	0.970 (0.013)	0.969** (0.013)	0.971** (0.013)	0.971** (0.014)	0.970** (0.014)	0.970** (0.013)	0.970** (0.013)	0.971** (0.013)
Time	1.116** (0.050)	1.116** (0.050)	1.127** (0.051)	1.128** (0.052)	1.125** (0.051)	1.127** (0.051)	1.126** (0.051)	1.126** (0.051)
Topic (Strat = 1)	0.626*** (0.078)	0.596*** (0.077)	0.619*** (0.077)	0.260*** (0.098)	0.620*** (0.077)	0.443*** (0.090)	0.619*** (0.077)	0.569*** (0.092)
Tone (-1/+1)	0.871* (0.070)	1.007 (0.109)	0.934 (0.213)	0.864* (0.069)	1.027 (0.129)	0.861* (0.069)	0.847 (0.139)	0.864* (0.069)
Topic x Tone		0.727** (0.118)						
Interest			1.151 (0.349)	0.723 (0.256)				
Interest x Tone			0.889 (0.283)					
Interest x Topic				3.587** (1.859)				
Country (CAN = 1)					0.916 (0.141)	0.762 (0.139)		
Country x Tone					0.750* (0.122)			
Country x Topic						1.724** (0.441)		
Prefs:Neg							0.929 (0.293)	
Prefs:Neg x Tone							1.050 (0.354)	
Prefs:Strategy								0.832 (0.244)
Prefs:Strat x Topic								1.386 (0.552)
Constant	0.077*** (0.025)	0.077*** (0.026)	0.066*** (0.026)	0.089*** (0.037)	0.078*** (0.027)	0.086*** (0.030)	0.076*** (0.027)	0.077*** (0.026)
n (cases)	3,360	3,360	3,330	3,330	3,330	3,330	3,330	3,330
n (individuals)	111	111	111	111	111	111	111	111

Note. Cells contain odds ratios from random-effects logistic regression with standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Table 3. The Estimated Impact of Topic and Tone.

	Policy	Strategy
Negative	.103 (.013)	.086 (.011)
Neutral	.104 (.008)	.064 (.007)
Positive	.104 (.013)	.048 (.009)

Note. Cells contain the estimated probability of story selection (with standard errors in parentheses) based on results for model 2 in Table 2.

topic and tone are difficult to discern from the coefficients in Table 2 alone. Table 3 thus shows the estimated probability of story selection (holding other variables at their current values) by both topic and tone.¹⁶ Note that changing the tone makes no difference to the likelihood of selection for policy-oriented stories; but it clearly matters to the likelihood of story selection for strategic stories (cutting the likelihood of selection nearly in half). Put differently, strategic stories are only interesting when they are negative. That said, these estimates also make clear the fact that strategic stories are in this case systematically less popular than policy stories.

The Moderating Effects of Political Interest

Recall that we also want to know how interest in politics affects the basic relationship, with the hypothesis that politically interested individuals are more able to use strategic and/or negative news. We capture political interest by relying on the following question, included in the post-survey:

- *Political Interest:* How interested in politics are you generally, on a scale where 0 means *no interest at all*, and 10 means *a great deal of interest*?

We are interested here not in the direct effect of political interest (in fact, we do not expect any direct effect) but rather in the moderating effect that interest may have on either or both of tone and topic. Models 3 and 4 in Table 2 thus show results allowing both tone and topic to interact with our measure of political interest.

To avoid problems with collinearity, interactions with tone and topic are included in separate models. Model 3 shows results in which interest interacts with tone. The interaction is negative, pointing toward the possibility that those with high levels of interest may be less likely to select positive stories. The coefficient is insignificant, however. Model 4 shows results in which interest interacts with topic—Here, the interaction clearly matters. Those with low interest in politics are highly unlikely to select strategic stories (as evidenced by the now-very negative coefficient for topic); those with very high interest are, in contrast, very likely to select strategic stories. The results for model 4 are laid out in more detail in Table 4.

Table 4 repeats what we have already seen in Table 3, though here we show results for low-interest (interest = 0.33, the 10th percentile) and high-interest (interest = 1, the

Table 4. The Estimated Impact of Topic and Tone, by Interest.

	Low Interest		High Interest	
	Policy	Strategy	Policy	Strategy
Negative	.131 (.018)	.057 (.011)	.108 (.017)	.101 (.017)
Neutral	.115 (.008)	.049 (.009)	.095 (.013)	.089 (.014)
Positive	.101 (.015)	.042 (.009)	.083 (.013)	.078 (.014)

Note. Cells contain the estimated probability of story selection (with standard errors in parentheses) based on results for model 4 in Table 2.

90th percentile) participants. Including the effect of political interest serves to strengthen results for tone. This is apparent in the coefficient for tone in Table 2, and it is also clear in these predicted values: the likelihood of story selection decreases as tone increases across all four columns (albeit marginally in some). But the critical result in this table is the gap between policy and strategy stories for low-interest participants, which is very high, and the same gap for high-interest participants, which is very low (indeed, insignificant). Results suggest, then, that is high-interest, not low-interest, participants who are drawn to strategic stories. This finding supports the notion that interest in strategic stories is driven by a rational desire to acquire information.

Our data offer one additional means of exploring what leads participants to select negative and/or horse-race stories. The McGill University campus has a good number of international students, and our study accordingly includes a significant subsample that is not Canadian.¹⁷ Nationality can, in some sense, act as a less nuanced but higher valence measure of political interest. We might well expect non-Canadians to approach our Canadian political news stories differently; put more precisely, we might expect that Canadians see a greater utility in negative and strategy news than do individuals from other countries. As such, we would expect that these categories are viewed relatively more frequently by Canadians.

Models 5 and 6 in Table 2 thus show results from models in which nationality (Canadian = 1) is interacted with both tone and topic. We see from model 5 that the odds ratio for tone—here the result for non-Canadians—approaches one and is not statistically significant, meaning these individuals selected positive and negative news in equal proportions. The result for the interaction—which represents the coefficient for Canadians—reveals that Canadians are increasingly likely to read news articles as they become more negative, with negative articles being 50 percent more likely to be selected than positive articles. Model 6 interacts nationality and topic. The coefficient for topic suggests that non-Canadians are nearly 66 percent more likely to read policy stories over strategy stories. Canadians, on the contrary, are significantly more likely to read strategy stories.

These results for nationality are clearer in Table 5, which shows predicted likelihood of story selection by topic and tone interacted with the nationality of participants. The top panel of Table 5 shows results from the model in which nationality and tone are interacted (model 5). Here, we see the much steeper impact of tone for native

Table 5. The Estimated Impact of Topic and Tone, by Nationality.

	Foreign Participants		Native Participants	
	Policy	Strategy	Policy	Strategy
Nationality × Tone				
Negative	.107 (.017)	.069 (.012)	.128 (.016)	.083 (.011)
Neutral	.110 (.012)	.071 (.009)	.101 (.010)	.065 (.008)
Positive	.112 (.018)	.072 (.013)	.080 (.012)	.051 (.009)
Nationality × Topic				
Negative	.138 (.019)	.066 (.012)	.109 (.014)	.085 (.011)
Neutral	.121 (.015)	.058 (.010)	.095 (.010)	.074 (.009)
Positive	.106 (.015)	.050 (.010)	.083 (.011)	.064 (.010)

Note. Cells contain the estimated probability of story selection (with standard errors in parentheses) based on results for models 5 and 6 in Table 2.

participants. Indeed, tone does not appear to matter at all for foreign participants at all. For native participants, negative stories are selected roughly 50 percent more than positive ones. The bottom panel of Table 5 shows results from the model in which nationality and topic are interacted (model 6). Here, we see the greater likelihood of native participants selecting strategy stories. It is still the case that policy stories are selected more; but the gap between the two narrows considerably—particularly compared with the foreign participants, who select policy stories two to three times more often than strategy ones.

These differences between native and foreign audiences may, again, shed light on what motivates the selection of negative and/or strategic stories. If selection is driven solely by entertainment value, strategic and negative stories should be appealing to people no matter their background. This is not the case: Those with a more direct stake in Canadian politics are drawn to what may be seen as more informative stories.

There are admittedly alternative explanations for the findings in Table 5. Canadians, having had a great deal of exposure to these types of news frames, may be more accustomed to them, and thus demand them. If this is true, however, we might also expect to see significant differences within the Canadian sample for people who consume more or less media. In other words, if attraction to negative and horse-race news is a function of familiarity/exposure, media consumption should affect news selection. Interacting a variable for overall media consumption with both tone and topic of article headlines produces no significant results, however.

Does Behavior Match Preferences?

Recall that previous work finds a disjuncture between what people say they want from media content and what they seem to consume (e.g., Graber 1984; Neuman 1991). Previous work has not been able to compare directly the preferences and behaviors of media consumers, however. This is one advantage of the study conducted here.

We are able to examine the relationship between behavior and preferences using the following questions:

- *Prefs:Neg*—Is the media too negative and cynical about politicians and politics? [strongly agree (0), agree (1), disagree (2), strongly disagree (3)]
- *Prefs:Strategy*—Would you like to see more or less horse-race coverage, that is, coverage focused on polls and political competition? [more coverage (0), the same amount of coverage (1), or less coverage (2)]

The measures are intended to capture stated preferences about both negativity and strategic coverage, respectively. Model 7 in Table 2 includes the direct effect of *Prefs:Neg*, interacted with tone; the model thus tests for the possibility that those with preferences for more (less) negativity are more (less) prone to selection negative stories. Model 8 in Table 3 includes the direct effect of *Prefs:Strategy*, interacted with topic; the model thus tests for the possibility that those with preferences for more (less) strategic coverage are more (less) prone to select strategic stories. Neither interaction is statistical significant.¹⁸ Results thus suggest that story selection does not vary with stated preferences: Those who eschew negative stories in survey questions do not avoid them when reading the news, and those who are concerned about too much strategic coverage are no more likely to read policy stories. These findings help make sense of the disjuncture between attitudes and behavior noted in previous work; or, at least, these findings make clear that the disjuncture is not an error—It appears to be an accurate reflection of a gap between preferences and behavior.

Discussion and Conclusion

Why are negative and strategic news frames repeatedly presented in audience-seeking media, given that they do not appear to match the public's stated preferences for news? It has not been the purpose of this article to discount the supply-side explanations prominent in the literature—Journalistic norms and news values almost certainly contribute to the negative nature of news. But our results suggest that consumer demand matters as well.

Understanding the nature of consumer demand is central to understanding the nature of media content; and the fact that surveys find that media consumers want less negative, less strategic stories does not necessarily mean that they actually do. What we need, and what we have tried to extract in the study outlined above, is a measure of actual news selection. Our results suggest that, regardless of their preferences as stated in a survey, participants are more likely to select negative content. The bias toward negative content is greater for politically interested respondents, and politically interested participants are drawn to strategic frames as well.¹⁹

There are three important caveats. First, we cannot really discount the possibility that highly interested individuals just find negative/strategy frames entertaining, rather than strategically useful.²⁰ Second, we are looking at a nonelection context, and although we see advantages to exploring news consumption in this more “normal”

environment, doing so may affect levels of interest in strategic versus policy frames. Indeed, the difference between the results of this study and those of Iyengar et al.—implemented during the 2000 U.S. presidential election—may be a function of this shift in context. Third, research has been inconsistent in definitions of horse-race, strategy, and game-schema news frames (see de Vreese 2004), and our (relatively broad) definition of strategic news cannot easily be compared with work using different definitions. Of course, each of these limitations can be addressed with further study.

Note that we do not intend for these results to suggest that it is good that media content is overwhelmingly negative, or strategic, or both. We are agnostic on that issue, although we certainly do not want to use consumer interest as an excuse for the nature of media content. The relationship between demand and supply is almost certainly reciprocal. Media supply what consumers demand, but they likely help shape demand as well. Efforts on the part of journalists to produce more positive, substantive news content may well lead to a shift in consumer behavior. (That seems more likely over the long than the short term, however.)

Perhaps the important distinction is not between positive and negative news, but between news that is negative, and news that is cynical. A media that monitors the error of politicians is a central component of representative democracy. When political communication scholars write about the unhealthy impact of a negative press, then, they are likely not speaking of this error-monitoring role but rather content that unfairly paints politicians as untrustworthy, bad people. Perhaps what is needed is a move toward negative, yet *constructive*, political news. Efforts on the part of journalists to produce a brand of journalism that is line with their role as watchdogs might allow them to hold the attention of citizens, while also avoiding the corrosive effects of political cynicism (see, for example, Mann and Ornstein 1994; Moy and Pfau 2000).

For the time being, we take our findings as evidence of the importance of demand-based accounts of media content. This focus on demand is particularly salient given increasingly competitive media environments, which put pressure on news sources to prioritize stories that increase economic viability, rather than stories chosen for reasons of journalistic integrity (Bennett 2004; Fallows 1996; West 2001; Zaller 1999). The Internet makes the situation even more acute, because it allows for a much greater degree of consumer choice.²¹ Online competition for readers may lead to particularly negative and strategic coverage; and readers' own biases in news consumption may lead them to a selection of news that is particularly negative and strategic as well. Again, whether this is a bad thing is another matter—It may be that selecting negative and/or strategic coverage is an efficient way of learning about the state of politics. This is only speculation at this stage, however. What is clear above is that biases in news consumption likely play an important role in the degree to which news content is both negative and strategic.

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Notes

1. For a useful distinction of demand- versus supply-side accounts of media content, see Andrew (2007).
2. The importance of looking outside the United States is made clear in a section “Why?—Supply-Side Explanations.”
3. Note that more recent work has critiqued the literature for muddying the definition of strategic coverage: Aalberg et al. (2012) distinguish between the game frame and the strategy frame, for instance. For our purposes, the general definition will suffice, incorporating a combination of Aalberg et al.’s two categories.
4. Eye-tracking need not be a ruse, of course—There is a growing body of work in political communication that relies on eye-tracking. See Bucher and Schumacher (2006).
5. The tone of stories was, for coding, defined very broadly: Negative stories were defined as those in which, overall, the tone is negative; positive stories were defined as those in which, overall, the tone was positive. Stories which coders decided fit in neither of those categories were coded neutral. The three coders’ results were highly correlated, with an alpha of .81.
6. Policy stories are those that discuss the policies and policy proposals of government or opposition members in an in-depth way. They do not focus on competition but rather on the substance of policies. Strategy stories, in contrast, discuss politics and policies as a “game” with winners and losers, or emphasize the political conflict element in a given situation. They often include current poll numbers, or discuss how politics and policies affect future poll numbers. Policy-strategy codes from the three coders were highly correlated with an alpha score of .86.
7. There are no instances here in which codes range from negative to positive, just negative/neutral and positive/neutral.
8. For a list of article headlines and corresponding codes, see the online appendix.
9. Students were recruited using posters around campus; the resulting sample included students from most Faculties, that is, not just in arts or political science. The entire study was conducted in English, with Anglophone students.
10. Also see Note 20.
11. The full text of the briefing is including in the online appendix.
12. Put another way, the objective here should not be viewed as achieving “mundane realism” but “experimental realism.” See McDermott (2002).
13. Preliminary models included an interaction between column and row to test for the possibility that the two had an interactive rather than just an additive effect. The interaction was not statistically significant, and so it is not included here.
14. The varied reading time for participants was included as one possible test of the possibility that the selection of negative or strategic content is rooted not just in the “entertainment value” of these stories but in a (likely subconscious) belief that these stories are of greater value where becoming informed about politics is concerned. Our expectation was that when respondents knew how much time they had to read, they might choose stories more strategically. This was not the case, however—There is no interaction between time and a tendency to select either negative or strategy-oriented headlines.

15. Note that a more stringent approach is to use a cross-nested hierarchical model, allowing for heteroskedasticity both within respondents and within stories. Results do not change dramatically when we shift to that more complex estimation, though the statistical significance of story-level factors is of course reduced when we estimate 111 (respondents) times 30 (stories) random effects. We accordingly rely on the simpler model here; but all results are available upon request.
16. Note that Tables 3 through 5 show estimated probabilities of story selection rather than marginal effects coefficients, which illustrate the effect variables more directly. Estimated probabilities take into account both the direct and interactive effects of variables, exactly as an analysis of marginal effects coefficients would, of course—See Brambor et al. (2006) for a particularly valuable discussion of the interpretation of interaction models. We focus here on the estimated probability of story selection because we view it as a more substantively interesting quantity in this particular case; and the statistical significance of the interactions is captured in Table 3.
17. The other countries represented are as follows (*n* in brackets): Albania (1), Bangladesh (1), China (2), France (10), India (1), Pakistan (1), Sri Lanka (1), Trinidad and Tobago (1), the United States (18), and the United Kingdom (1).
18. Results do not change when the two interactions are included simultaneously.
19. Considering that low-interest individuals are those who self-select out of “hard” news anyways (see, for example, Prior 2007), the selections (i.e., demand) of higher interest individuals are therefore far more important in determining the makeup of news content.
20. Note also that to the extent that our student sample is more interested in politics than the average news consumer, our results may over-state the negativity bias—That is, completely disinterested news consumers may not exhibit the negativity bias found here. That said, news consumers are by definition at least party interested. And given that our student sample was drawn from outside political science, we have no reason to believe that our sample was unusually interested in politics.
21. There is of course a growing body of work on how increasing choice in media affects what people learn about politics. See, for example, Mutz and Martin (2001), Negroponte (1995), Prior (2005, 2007), and Sunstein (2007).

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Book Reviews

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Des Freedman and Daya Kishan Thussu

Media & Terrorism: Global Perspectives. Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2012. 336 pp. ISBN: 978-1446201589

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In the fourteen or so hours following the attacks of 9/11 till midnight that day, anchors, reporters, experts, and other sources used the terms “evil” sixteen times and “war” or “war on terrorism” ninety-three times in newscasts aired by ABC News, CBS News, and NBC News. In the same broadcasts’ discussions about possible or likely state involvement, Afghanistan was mentioned forty-three times and Iraq fifteen times. And there were many references to the need for strong state actions. In short, even before President George W. Bush addressed the nation that day and promised that “America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time,” the news media had set the table for Washington and its allies’ post-9/11 actions at home and abroad.

The major thread, explicit or implicit, from the introduction through the following seventeen chapters of the edited volume by Freedman and Thussu is not merely the linkage between media and terrorism as the title suggests. The major thread is U.S. and western responses to the inflated threat of terrorism and how the mass-mediated narratives and stereotypes highlight and support the agenda of policymakers—most of all at the expense of Muslims in the Middle East and South Asia as well as in the western diaspora. While the stereotyping of Arab and Muslim males as brutal, uncivilized, and potential terrorists was alive and well in the news, in Hollywood movies, and crime fiction long before the events of 9/11, the visual images and textual frames of an inherently dark side of Muslims and Islam became predominant after 9/11 and the following strikes in Madrid and London. As Lena Yayyusi notes, “the terms ‘Arab’ and ‘Muslim’ and ‘Islam’ have become discursively linked to the term ‘terror’” (p. 24).

The constructed “reality” of an “us” versus “them” divide that casts Muslims and Arabs as evil-doers and westerners as their victims flies in the face of statistics cited by several contributors. In post-9/11 Europe, significantly more terrorism was perpetrated by non-Muslim and in the United Kingdom a far larger number of terrorist acts were related to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Yet, news media in the United Kingdom, for example, reported far more often about “Islamists” and terrorism than on the involvement of Northern Irish groups in political violence.

While literally all chapters of this volume contribute in one way or the other to a better understanding of the importance of media in terrorism and what governments undertake in the name of counterterrorism with the support of compliant news and

entertainment media, several chapters are especially welcome additions to the pertinent literature. This is most of all the case for Helga Tawil-Souri's excellent chapter about the Arab media's framing of the "war on terror." Although there are now influential transnational Arab TV networks, the author makes clear that there are distinct differences in the media landscapes of the twenty-two Arab countries along with some similarities. As for jihadist media, she writes that "just as there is no such thing as a unified 'global jihad,' in cyberspace too, jihadists' spaces are neither homogeneous, uniform, secure, nor static" (p. 245). She provides a most interesting analysis of jihadist Internet sites and the "relative minor (quantitative) presence" of Al Qaeda Central in this respect.

Of particular interest are also chapters about changes in Russian news reporting about terrorism by Elena Vartanova and Olga Smirnowa; television's depiction of immigration in France by Tristan Mattelart; South Asia as the frontline of the so-called war on terrorism by Daya Kishan Thussu; Hollywood's portrayal of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the context of counterterrorism by Oliver Boyd-Barrett, David Herrera, and Jim Baumann; and the exploitation of entertaining electronic gaming as military recruitment tool by Toby Miller.

While the stereotyping of Arabs and Muslims preceded the strikes in New York and Washington, D.C., in western newscasts, movies, and crime fiction, this edited volume provides indeed a much needed global perspective.

David Ryfe

Can Journalism Survive? An Inside Look at American

Newsrooms. Malden: Polity Press, 2012. 220 pp. ISBN 978-0-7456-5427-0.

Reviewed by: C. W. Anderson, *College of Staten Island (City University of New York), NY, USA*
DOI: 10.1177/1940161214529605

Since at least 2007, American journalism has presented researchers with a puzzle, one that we might call "the crisis paradox." Journalism, it is widely acknowledged, is in serious trouble—a fact borne out by economic trends at newspapers (all, or nearly all, pointing down), levels of journalistic trust and prestige (down again), and the cultural crisis brought about by the emergence of quasi-journalistic actors (bloggers, partisan reporters, aggregators, newly empowered experts, public relations officials) onto the very visible public space made possible by the Internet. And yet, despite the rhetoric of crisis, news organizations, with only a few exceptions, and most of those very recently, continue to carry on just as they always have for at least the last three decades. There is a gap, it seems, between the discourse of disaster and the very real steps taken to address the crisis head on.

Can Journalism Survive? An Inside Look at American Newsrooms, by David Ryfe, provides some plausible answers to the question of why this gap between understanding and action exists, and this may be his book's most important accomplishment.

entertainment media, several chapters are especially welcome additions to the pertinent literature. This is most of all the case for Helga Tawil-Souri's excellent chapter about the Arab media's framing of the "war on terror." Although there are now influential transnational Arab TV networks, the author makes clear that there are distinct differences in the media landscapes of the twenty-two Arab countries along with some similarities. As for jihadist media, she writes that "just as there is no such thing as a unified 'global jihad,' in cyberspace too, jihadists' spaces are neither homogeneous, uniform, secure, nor static" (p. 245). She provides a most interesting analysis of jihadist Internet sites and the "relative minor (quantitative) presence" of Al Qaeda Central in this respect.

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Reviewed by: C. W. Anderson, *College of Staten Island (City University of New York), NY, USA*
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Since at least 2007, American journalism has presented researchers with a puzzle, one that we might call "the crisis paradox." Journalism, it is widely acknowledged, is in serious trouble—a fact borne out by economic trends at newspapers (all, or nearly all, pointing down), levels of journalistic trust and prestige (down again), and the cultural crisis brought about by the emergence of quasi-journalistic actors (bloggers, partisan reporters, aggregators, newly empowered experts, public relations officials) onto the very visible public space made possible by the Internet. And yet, despite the rhetoric of crisis, news organizations, with only a few exceptions, and most of those very recently, continue to carry on just as they always have for at least the last three decades. There is a gap, it seems, between the discourse of disaster and the very real steps taken to address the crisis head on.

Can Journalism Survive? An Inside Look at American Newsrooms, by David Ryfe, provides some plausible answers to the question of why this gap between understanding and action exists, and this may be his book's most important accomplishment.

Structured in traditional ethnographic style, with an introduction, three chapters of fieldwork at different, individually bounded field sites across the American Midwest, and two chapters of concluding discussion, the book unwinds logically, if depressingly. Chapter 1 provides an overview journalistic crisis and should be commended for identifying the problem as one with deep historical roots that pre-date the Internet. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 are the empirical heart of the book, with the ethnographic research presented in them taking place at the “Daily Bugle,” (a pseudonym), “The Herald” (also a pseudonym), and the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*. In each chapter, Ryfe probes the different organization and institutional factors that retard innovation, from habits to the weight of legacy investments to the difficulty in imagining alternate journalistic futures. I know of no better analysis of the cultural and occupational roots of journalism’s inability to change than these three chapters. The author treats complex concepts with subtlety and intelligence. Chapter 5 draws on Bourdieuean field theory and neo-institutional perspectives to document the way that a social field “unravels.” Chapter 6 concludes by positing a remarkable “alternative vision” of journalism’s future, one that draws both on dissident normative theories of news (the public journalism movement) and the plethora of new journalistic experiments (data journalism, foundation supported journalism, etc.) popping up across the fragmenting journalistic field.

Ryfe’s ultimate answer to the basic question, “can journalism survive?” would thus appear to be a fairly blunt, “no”; reframed in more nuanced terms, the answer might be that a few news organizations will survive but that local/regional journalism as a practice and public commitment are in for some difficult times. His answer to a second, more implicit and in some ways more interesting question—“why can’t journalism change?”—provides a welcome sociological response to a question that is most often answered in economic, technological, or managerial terms. While technological change, economic catastrophe, and executive incompetence may have launched the crisis in American news, the inability to deal with it must be seen through the light of journalism’s organizational routines and its powerful normative commitments.

What, to conclude, might Ryfe’s book tell us about the project of studying journalism on a more meta-methodological level? What can we learn from this book, not simply about the future of journalism but about the future of qualitative research on news production and newsroom culture? The past decade has witnessed not only a crisis in American news production, but it has also witnessed a remarkable efflorescence of ethnographic work in American newsrooms. Pablo Boczkowski launched the revival in 2004 with *Digitizing the News* and his 2010 sequel, *News at Work* (Boczkowski 2004, 2010). Nikki Usher’s book on the *New York Times* is due sometime this year (Usher, 2014). A number of journal articles and monographs have been written that extend this ethnographic newsroom research in fascinating ways. *Can Journalism Survive?* is a vital contribution to this important genre of communications research.

As Marx once speculated in a different context, however, the book may also contain within it the seeds of its own demise. If the journalistic field really *is* unraveling, if various factors have “weakened the boundaries of the field, made it more porous, and allowed organizations in the field to grow more dissimilar” (p. 155), then it might be

worth speculating for how much longer journalism scholars can be content studying journalism from within the boundaries of that (unraveling) field. *Can Journalism Survive?* is a remarkable contribution to the classic genre of the newsroom ethnography. It may also, unexpectedly, serve as that genre's valedictory work.

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- Usher, N. 2014. *Making News at The New York Times*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Stuart Allan

Citizen Witnessing: Revisioning Journalism in Times of Crisis. Cambridge: Polity, 2013. 254 pp. (ISBN: 978-0745651965)

Reviewed by: Lily Canter, Course Leader BA Journalism, Sheffield Hallam University, South Yorkshire, UK

DOI: 10.1177/1940161214531328

Like a journalist on the front line, from the very first page of his book, Allan races straight into the action, dropping the reader into northern Pakistan moments before the clandestine killing of Osama Bin Laden on May 1, 2011.

What follows is a detailed account of how the news unfolded to the world and placed the accidental journalism of a tweeting IT consultant at its epicenter. This is just one of many historic and contemporary examples of crisis reporting examined in Allan's comprehensive study of the conceptualization of citizen witnessing.

Charting the diverse arguments surrounding the notion of bearing witness as a journalist and as a citizen, the tome uses a cacophony of international examples not least the home movie footage of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, the prevalence of Twitter and Flickr in the aftermath of the Mumbai bombings, and the revolutionary role of Facebook and Twitter during the Arab Spring.

Chapter 1 begins with a contextual analysis of the crisis in journalism and the challenge to professional ideology in a Web 2.0 world where everyone can potentially be a publisher/broadcaster. Unlike the structured professional ideas of journalism, Allan argues that citizen journalism is usually organic, often accidental and occasionally proactive. From the oft, it is clear that this is a book of argument, analysis, and contradiction, which aims to encourage a reconnection between journalists and audiences rather than offer up neat solutions or rigid definitions.

This objective approach, which explores each argument and counterargument with exacting precision, is exactly what makes this text essential reading for undergraduate and postgraduate journalism and media students. Indeed after reading just the first

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chapter, I ordered a number of copies of *Citizen Witnessing* for my university's library. The breadth and depth of the book mean that individual chapters can also be selected for reading lists without the reader feeling they have been short changed.

Conversely, perhaps one of the minor criticisms that could be leveled at the book is its propensity to recount acts of citizen witnessing in meticulous detail, which, although fascinating, sometimes digress from the argument or have the potential to distract the reader. A case in point is the insightful examination of the assumed birth of the amateur news reporter—the video recording of the assassination of U.S. President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963. The footage and subsequent use of it is described at length in chapter 3, with Allan's exactitude extending to the model of movie camera (a Bell & Howard 8-mm Director Series model, with telescopic lens, loaded with color Kodachrome II safety film) and the saga surrounding the exclusive rights and use of the footage.

Nonetheless, this historic perspective is a welcome one, as rather than taking a deterministic approach, it contextualizes the development and evolution of citizen journalism rather than assuming it is a consequence of new media technology. Furthermore, chapter 2 explores the theoretical back chapter of objectivity in journalism via Lippmann and Dewey, along with historic definitions of witnessing and spectatorship. Drawing on media studies and philosophy, in chapter 4, Allan examines the modern features of the eye witness, again charting its evolution from past to present. Perhaps, at this point, it may have also been pertinent to explore the terminology and definition of "crisis reporting," which is surprisingly lacking in any depth.

This combination of historic contextualization, theoretical analysis, empirical research, and news case studies (citizen and journalist) makes what could have been an impenetrable academic text, a lively, inspiring, and thoughtful read accessible to scholars and students alike. The combination of theory and practice also help to underpin the validity of Allan's contemporary concept of "citizen witnessing." A compelling argument for this nuanced strand of citizen journalism is made throughout the book, together with the role it has to play alongside traditional forms of journalist witnessing. Allan acknowledges the criticisms—often made by defensive, established journalists—made toward citizen journalism but in doing so offers the counterargument of the increasingly vital role the public play in the breaking and telling of news, and their democratic right to do so.

It is apparent by the middle of the book that the shift of focus is moving from the historic perspective toward landmark events of the noughties through to the more recent past where citizen witnessing has become an increasingly integrated—and expected—part of the news process. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on specific forms of citizen witnessing, that of activist journalism, in particular civic protest (2008 Greek protests, 2010/2011 Arab Spring, 2011 London riots) and the tactile role of commended/reviled Web site WikiLeaks. In light of the recent U.K. Government Communication Headquarters (GCHQ) snooping revelations by Edward Snowden via *The Guardian*, chapter 6's discussion of the ambivalent, slippery role of WikiLeaks and whistleblowers is a particularly relevant one. What is striking, however, is the co-dependence between WikiLeaks—the publisher of raw data—and traditional media—the stoics of

trust, authenticity, and analysis. The citizen may be the first witness on the ground, but it is the journalist who will shape the raw material into a story, fact check it, and distribute it. This is a theme that resonates throughout the text as Allan maintains that the journalist–citizen relationship is a mutual one of “respectful reciprocity” and the two can no longer exist in isolation as us and them.

Yet the text recognizes that this uneasy marriage is not without its tensions as the reliance on citizen witnessing can create a hyperreality, which in the case of the Arab Spring led to social media becoming the story while the millions of people uninvolved in the uprisings were simply overlooked. Furthermore, replacing the journalist as witness with technology as witness has a tendency to reduce crisis reporting to a series of “pictorial options,” which lose sight of the human. However, despite the existence of vehement, and in some cases justified, criticism toward citizen journalism, Allan remains optimistic, conceding that the contemporary role of journalism is to create spaces bridging the gap between journalists and citizens—a notion that journalists, academics, and educators should arguably embrace.

Bart Cammaerts, Alice Mattoni, and Patrick McCurdy, eds.

Mediation and Protest Movements. Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013. 275 pp. ISBN: 978-1-84150-643-2.

Reviewed by: Patrick D. Murphy, *Temple University, Philadelphia, PA, USA*

DOI: 10.1177/1940161214531819

Mediation and Protest Movements examine the capacity of social movements to utilize communication and take advantage of media technologies to develop diverse and reciprocal horizontal networks, foster the creation of epistemic communities, and disrupt normative relations between established media and its publics. The edited collection is also invested in bringing the field of media studies, social movement studies, and democratic theory into a more productive and contextually grounded dialogue. The authors assert that such a dialogue is long overdue and that a less siloed approach to research is capable of providing a far more comprehensive analysis of contemporary protest movements in relation to complex media environments, and by extension a decidedly more nuanced understanding of the exercise of symbolic power.

Eschewing the Internet-centric approach often assumed to lie at the heart of contemporary social activism, the focus of this volume is instead trained on how mediation processes are embedded in and enabled by activists’ routines and contentious performances. As such, the emphasis is appropriately placed on the potentialities and limits of “agency” (the capacity to act), with special attention on the notion that technological change has created new opportunities for media consumption, production, and distribution, thus radically transforming the relationship between audiences and producers. The result, as the authors show, has been the rise in activist, often counter hegemonic voices that circulate not only horizontally between social movement communities but also vertically to penetrate formerly “mainstream” political arenas

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through strategies that subvert established codes of communication and challenge the primacy of official sources. Although often fragmented, decentralized, provisional, and sometimes even anarchist, these alternative voices can nevertheless serve to contest the legitimacy of established media power and help shape a more diverse and democratic public sphere by expanding the range of information and ideas and by offering different (often more organic) representations.

The book is organized into two parts. The first half (chapters 1 through 6) is dedicated to teasing out a theoretical understanding of the relationship between social movements and communication environments. As the book's title suggests, in this section, the authors engage theoretical questions concerning mediation processes and media practices. Drawing from diverse range of writers including Gitlin, Habermas, Mouffe, Bakhtin, Chomsky, Castells, Hall, Silverstone, Downing, McChesney, Jenkins, Couldry, and others, the theory chapters are empirically grounded in studies of social movements and protests from different parts of the world. Here, the authors productively wrestle with issues central to deliberative democracy, such as participation, recognition, representation, networking, diversity, resistance, and mobilization, in relation to what the editors map out as four core themes:

- (1) the importance of visibility and the dialectic between media production and protest performances;
- (2) the nature of symbolic power and its links to the discursive;
- (3) the precise role of technology and networked opportunities/constraints for protest and resistance; and
- (4) the role and position of "audiences" and "publics." (pp. 9–10)

These core themes and guiding issues are theoretically fleshed out in different ways through communication centered conceptual frames, such as "repertoires of communication" (chapter 2, by Alice Mattoni), "lay theories of activism" (chapter 3, by Patrick McCurdy), "vertical and horizontal media oriented practices" (chapter 4, by Anastasia Kavada), "transmedia mobilization" (chapter 5, by Sasha Costanza-Chock), and, interestingly, satyagraha nonviolence and longitudinal communication efficacy (chapter 6, by Sean Scalmer). Of these, Costanza-Chock's conceptualization of "transmedia mobilization" as a "process whereby a social movement narrative is dispersed systematically across multiple media platforms" (p. 100) is perhaps the most provocative, as it considers how participation and cocreation can take shape through multiple entry points and thus anticipates how transnational activists' networks that strengthen movement identity can be constituted through "open" linkages.

Through specific case studies, the second part of the book (chapters 7 through 12) draws from the theoretical considerations highlighted in the first to help explicate how, in a variety of ways, protest movements have taken advantage of technological and cultural opportunities to build community and animate social action. These chapters range from analysis of how social media and Web 2.0 platforms can be used to increase visibility and punctuate the political commitment of movements to how the mixing of mediated and nonmediated communication practices can engender activism, but collectively focus on how communication environments are shaped through activists' negotiation of the constraints and opportunities within evolving mediascapes. In some

very interesting ways, the chapters in this half of the book make salient how “visibility” and “symbolic power”—key objectives and points of struggle for social movements—are produced dialectically through movement strategies and communication practices. For example, in chapter 7, Charlotte Ryan and her coauthors chart a step-by-step “how to” approach to media movement strategies, bringing Freirean participation theory into play with feminist and learning methodologies to create collaborative, equitable action-oriented campaigns of intervention and recognition. And in chapter 10, Simon Teune provides an illuminating case study of how protestors of the 2007 G8 summit were able to break through the filters of the “official” versions of the protest by crafting performative, “newsworthy” visual events to gain visibility.

Both parts of the book come together to present an encouraging assessment of how the trajectories and possibilities of media technologies and communication practices serve as interactive and discursive tools for activists and protest movements. However, while optimistic, the writers in this collection take an appropriately sober view, refraining from becoming overly celebratory of how mediation processes simply fuel contemporary repertoires of contention and participation. That is, along with successes and potentialities, they also identify the limitations and challenges that media-related practices bring to the objectives of protest movements, such as poor message design, lack of cultural translation and resonance, the problem of “slactivism” (passive, online participation), overreliance of market-based platforms, and above all, the limits to inclusion and mobilization. Indeed, in chapter 11, Lisa Brooten calls attention to these points by chronicling the extreme challenges that shape alternative media and civic dialogue in the Philippines—a country where “media access is not widely conceptualized as a communication right” (p. 239)—thus reminding readers that in some parts of the world, civil society is defined more in relation to threats than opportunities.

Acknowledging these challenges and threats, *Mediation and Protest Movements* nevertheless leans into the possibilities that emerging mediascapes offer protest movements. In this respect, from Peter Dahlgren’s Foreword to the closing chapter, the collection anticipates a conversation moving into the future framed by an ongoing understanding of the structures, tools and tendencies of media industries, and audiences that activist must both negotiate and make creative use of to successfully confront pressing social issues. In fact, one of the more interesting indicators of this in the book is the issue of the environment as related to mediation and protest movements. This theme first appears in passing in the Introduction as part of how protestors have elaborated “image events” but is later taken up in association to climate change in chapter 8. Here authors Julie Uldam and Tina Askanius explore the use of “mobilization video” (in this case, specifically the anti-COP15 video, *War on Capitalism*) to call for confrontational action. It is a highly useful case study of civic participation seeded through an emerging genre that is closely aligned with noninstitutional politics and resistance. However, beyond this singular chapter, the collection misses the opportunity to more fully interrogate this most crucial of “future” concerns: how environmental activists have employed communication strategies to register environmental injustices or shake public complacency by speaking against the grain of dominant environmental discourses.

The thin presence of this one point of analysis notwithstanding, the editors have assembled a superior collection grounded in careful theoretical considerations and empirically rich case studies, covering a broad landscape of social movement questions and concerns as related to the affordances of media and communication. The value of this edited volume thus lies in how it situates the capacity of media to network advocacy communities, engender mobilization, facilitate intervention, and erase borders between activists and journalists, thus underscoring the vital place of communication in contemporary social movements. But importantly, it also shows how the agency of social movements can express key democratic principles (e.g., participation, deliberation, equality, accountability, human rights) in highly reflexive ways *through* mediation processes. For these reasons, *Mediation and Protest Movements* is an important contribution to both the body of literature on protest movements and the field of media studies.