MASS MEDIA AS A POLITICAL CAREER MAKER

Annelien Van Remoortere

Universiteit Antwerpen

Faculteit Sociale Wetenschappen

Departement Politieke Wetenschappen

Mass media as a political career maker

Proefschrift voorgelegd tot het behalen van de graad van doctor in de Sociale Wetenschappen: Politieke Communicatie aan de Universiteit Antwerpen

Te verdedigen door

Annelien Van Remoortere

COLOFON

Promotoren

Prof. dr. Stefaan Walgrave

Prof. dr. Rens Vliegenthart

Antwerpen, 2021

Members of the Doctoral Commission

Prof. dr. Tamir Sheafer

Prof. dr. Peter Van Aelst

Dr. Sanne Kruikemeier

Members Doctoral Jury

Prof. dr. Claes de Vreese

Dr. Steve Paulussen

Mass media as a political career maker

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figures

Tables

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

During my master's, I did an internship at Terzake, the daily Flemish current-affairs program of the public broadcaster VRT. Each day, politicians were invited to the show to comment on and discuss the political topic of that day, and I soon became completely intrigued by how these political guests were selected. The first order of the day was to call all high-ranking politicians, party leaders, and cabinet members involved in issues on this topic and extend them an invitation to the show. More often than not, these top politicians would decline the invitation. Terzake was presented by two female journalists who often took a tough and critical approach. It quickly became clear that top politicians often have little desire to defend their policies when they will be met with criticism. After the high-ranking politicians declined, the focus would shift to lower ranking (e.g., MPs) politicians involved in the topic. Preference was given to politicians who had been on the show before who the journalists knew would perform well. The journalists knew which politicians were good on camera and which politicians would be better avoided. Lower ranking politicians would, in my experience, almost always say yes to the invitation. On one occasion, a politician who was on a ski trip with her family flew back to Belgium to appear on Terzake that night. Although I found the whole process extremely interesting to follow, it was the aftermath of that episode that made me realize I wanted to study this further. During my three-month internship, I often had the impression that appearing on Terzake had a significant impact on politicians, especially within their own party. Lesser-known politicians had an opportunity to prove their potential to the party elites if they could hold their own on Terzake. The female politician who had come back from holiday made a good impression; fragments of the episode were circulated on social media, and she subsequently seemed to be promoted more by her own party. This field experience sparked my interest in studying this more systematically, suggested the subject of my master's thesis, and formed the basis for this dissertation.

The influence of media on politics has intrigued many researchers before me. The relationship between mass media and politics is a mutually dependent and ever-changing one that has important implications for society and democracy. Informing citizens is a primary function of mass media, and due to the lack of personal contact between citizens and politicians, mass media are the most important intermediaries between citizens and political actors (Bennett and Entman 2001; Nimmo and Combs 1983; Strömbäck 2008). The media inform citizens about political institutions, events, and processes, which is important because citizens need to be aware of politicians' activities, political ideas, and policy proposals in order to make informed choices during elections and hold politicians accountable after elections (Gershon 2012b; Johnson and O'Grady 2013; Sellers and Schaffner 2007).

Researchers have proposed various theoretical frameworks to understand the complex relationship between media and politics. Most of the theoretical frameworks in the field of political communication can be divided into two groups. The first group of scholars primarily sees political variables as dominant, whereas the second group focuses more on media variables. The best known theory from the first group of scholars is Bennet's (1990) indexing theory. In this theory, Bennett claims that the greater the level of elite consensus, the smaller the range of debate in the news media. The idea here is that journalists are only interested in the opinions of political elites and do not cover ideas that were not formulated by these elites (Bennett 1990). A similar theory was proposed by Wolfsfeld (2011) in his politics-media-politics (PMP) principle. This principle is based on two claims. Wolfsfeld (2013) first suggested that the relationship between media and politics should be seen as a cycle in which changes or variations in the political environment lead to changes in the media environment, which lead to more changes in the political environment. Thus, the main idea is that everything starts from politics and that the political context should always be considered when studying media effects on politics. However, Wolfsfeld's (2013) second claim about the PMP model is that the media can play an independent role because they transform the political reality into news stories. Media can never fully represent any particular situation, and certain editorial choices are inevitably made. Although everything happens within a political context, the way a media outlet independently decides to cover certain political realities has an impact on politics. Those in the other group of theorists, who focus mainly on media variables, have suggested that the importance of media for electoral success has driven parties to adapt to the media. They have described this adaptation process as the "mediatization of politics," claiming it indicates a shift from political logic to media logic within political systems (Strömbäck 2008). Simply put, the mediatization of politics is "a long-term process through which the importance of the news media as an institution, and their spill-over effects on political processes and political institutions, has increased" (Esser and Strömbäck 2014, p. 22). Strömbäck (2008) stated that politics can be mediatized in four dimensions. The first dimension encompasses the extent to which the media form the most important source of information and channel of communication. A second dimension focuses on how independent the media are from other social and political institutions, and the third dimension is about the extent to which media content is guided by media logic or political logic. The fourth and final dimension concentrates on political actors and the degree to which they are guided by media logic or political logic. Previous research has focused primarily on the three first dimensions and thus on changes at the structural level within political and social institutions and organizations (e.g., Donges and Jarren 2014; Udris and Lucht 2014; Mazzoleni 2008; Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2011). In this dissertation, I focus on the micro level and thus on the fourth dimension.

Both abovementioned theoretical fields embody parts of a very complex reality. The transfer from politics to media counterbalances the media-to-politics transfer. This first transfer, however, is very often studied, whereas the latter still lacks empirical evidence. We know from ample research that political power generates media attention and subsequently political success. However, the mechanisms of media's influence on

political power have been studied much less. Researchers have studied the effects of media coverage on election outcomes (e.g., van Erkel et al. 2020; Aaldering et al. 2018) and political actors' policy success or agenda-setting power (Sevenans et al. 2016). However, media's direct effects on political power has not been thoroughly studied. To address this gap in the literature, I studied the influence of the media on three important stages of a political career (being selected as candidate, becoming popular, and being promoted to minister/party leader; see **Figure 1** below), offering an answer to the following research question:

RQ: How do mass media influence the careers of individual politicians?

Notice that in this dissertation, "media" is interpreted as mass media. In the above example of the female politician on Terzake, both traditional and social media played a role in her rise to popularity. Although the direct cause was her appearance on Terzake, it was social media that seemed to further energize the attention she received. All research has its limitations, and in this dissertation, I chose to focus only on traditional media. This might seem to be an old-fashioned choice, seeing that social media obviously have an important role in the relationship between media and politics. I believe, however, that traditional media channels often still form the initial ignition of career success. Naturally, the importance of traditional media is not fixed in stone and can change over time. One day, social media will perhaps completely take over the role of traditional media outlets, but for now, important lessons can still be learned by looking at how traditional media outlets have influenced career success for politicians in the last 20 years.

MEDIA AND POLITICS

Providing information is one of the main functions of mass media in healthy democracies, but ample research has shown that media do not merely act as an information relay but exert considerable influence over their audiences (Iyengar and McGrady 2007; Preiss et al. 2007). Media can influence audiences through, among other factors, the topics and actors they cover and the framing they use. Of course, it is not only citizens who use the media; political elites also rely, to a large extent, on the media for information, allowing the media to directly and indirectly impact various levels of politics on a daily basis.

Most studies have looked at the media effects of issues in the news (McLeod et al. 2002; Scheufele 2000; Weaver et al. 2004). Decades ago, researchers found an association between media attention on issues and subsequent political attention on these issues (Kingdon 1989). This agenda-setting power of the media means that mass media influence which issues are seen as legitimate concerns by political actors (Cobb and Elder 1971; Walker 1977). Studies have empirically shown that the amount of media attention an issue receives corresponds with political attention and action related to the

issue, e.g., political actors asking question, initiating bills, and giving speeches (Cook et al. 1983; Walgrave et al. 2008). Past research has focused on the circumstances under which media influence the political agenda. They found that not all political actors are influenced equally. Opposition parties are impacted more by the media than are coalition parties (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011). Some media outlets also have more effect than others; newspapers were found to have a stronger influence on the political agenda than television (Walgrave et al. 2008), and some news coverage was more likely to impact political agendas (Soroka 2002; Thesen 2013). A process similar to the one behind the media's agenda-setting power influences the salience of political parties. Like issues, political parties can be perceived as more legitimate and gain more attention through being featured more in the media (Hopmann et al. 2010). Studies have shown that citizens who are exposed to news coverage change their ideas based on the content (e.g., Norris et al. 1999), and media coverage thus influences political opinion. Two main aspects of media coverage that are often studied are visibility, or the attention given to certain issues or actors, and tone, or the positive or negative framing of the issues or actors (Schulz 1994; Walgrave and De Swert 2004; Hopmann et al. 2010; Zaller 1996).

Semetko and Schoenbach (1994) were among the first to study the effect of media on citizens' evaluation of parties. They found that even a small change in the media visibility of a political party could explain a positive change in party evaluation. This finding was confirmed by Hopmann et al. (2010). Norris et al. (1999) conducted an experiment and found no effect for visibility but did find that a positive tone toward particular parties led voters to have more positive evaluations of those parties. This tone effect was also found by Soroka et al. (2019), especially among voters who had no strong party identification. Visibility and tone thus seem to influence the vote choice of citizens, and this is especially important in multiparty democracies. In these countries, voters choose between different parties that often do not have strong ideological differences. Being both visible and portrayed in a positive way is thus crucial for political success. Because media coverage affects voters' conceptions about political parties, it is logical for parties to do everything in their power to get into the media in a favorable manner. Political parties have therefore gradually adapted to the media's needs and standards of newsworthiness, sometimes even pushing political logic aside. Political actors often adapt to media logic out of strategic considerations, and such adaptation does not necessarily come naturally. Politicians' main goal is to be successful within the political system. Building political success is a complex and demanding process that mainly requires political logic. This political work is, however, translated to citizens by the media, so media logic must also be considered. The tension between political logic and media logic within politics is closely linked to the mediatization of politics, with political actors attempting to influence the media by adapting to media logic while also protecting their own integrity and not straying too far from their own political logic.

1

Strömbäck (2008) described the mediatization process in four phases. This process should be understood as a dynamic process where different degrees of mediatization can exist in the same political context at the same time. In the first phase of mediatization, mass media are the most important source of information exchange between citizens and the political world. In this phase, political parties take the media into consideration when trying to shape or react to public opinion. Thus, there, media logic has at least some effect on political actors, but it is still very limited. In the second phase of mediatization of politics, media become more independent and are completely guided by media logic instead by political logic. Media no longer just mediate messages but also make their own judgments regarding what messages are appropriate from the perspective of their own norms, values, and format. This media independence increases the importance of media logic because political actors need to consider it if they want to influence the content of news coverage. Political actors and institutions might still have the upper hand, but they cannot control the media or unconditionally use them to further their own interests. In the third phase, the power balance between media and politics shifts. Media become so important in the daily life of both citizens and political elites that political actors need to adapt to the logic of the news organizations. Political actors must accept that they can no longer rely on the media to accommodate them. This forces political actors to further increase their media skills, and it makes media considerations an increasingly integral part of even the policy-making processes. Political actors thus adapt in this third phase of mediatization to media logic, but they are still able to follow political logic to a certain extent. Political actors make this adaption to media logic because they deem it necessary, but they protect their integrity and safeguard the difference between mediated and non-mediated reality. In the fourth and final phase of mediatization, political actors no longer just adapt to media logic but actually internalize it and allow media logic and the standards of newsworthiness to become built-in parts of governing processes. The process is no longer one of adaption but has instead become the adoption of media logic. The intensity of media experiences is stronger than in earlier phases, and politics and society are influenced by the media to such an extent that the media and their communicative output is almost impossible to avoid (Strömbäck 2008).

The described process is, however, not linear, and variations between and within countries can be expected. Not all institutions and political actors are impacted by media logic to the same degree. Moreover, specific contexts such as elections can also cause a change. This in-country variation was reported in research on mass media's political agenda-setting power. Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) found that the influence of media is dependent on the kind of issues and coverage, the time period, and the specific type of media. Most studies in both agenda-setting and mediatization of politics largely focus on the macro level and thus study the effect of media on political institutions and actors, such as political parties, governmental agencies, or political interest groups. The micro level, or how media impacts individual politicians, is less researched.

MEDIA AND INDIVIDUAL POLITICIANS

In the last few decades, however, attention to the micro level, and thus individual politicians, has increased (Mondak 1995; Norris 1997). Researchers have paid more attention to the mechanisms underlying the influence of media on individual politicians. First, researchers have devoted a lot of attention to which individual politicians have access to the media. Researchers assumed far-reaching media influence, so the main question became which politicians experienced this influence by appearing in the media.

The competition to get into the media is considerable, and multiple researchers studied who, exactly, gets into the media and why (Vos 2014). Studies have led to mixed findings about different characteristics, but the one characteristic that was shown to guarantee a place in the spotlight, regardless of context or time, is political power (Vos 2014). I noticed this during my internship, when high-ranking politicians were always contacted first, and numerous studies have proven that politicians with political power indeed find it much easier to get news coverage and are thus able to get their message across more easily. Journalists are more interested in political elites, and when deciding who to cover, they often follow the "trail of power" (Bennett 1996). It is, in a way, not surprising that powerful politicians receive more media attention given that they are simply more newsworthy. The more powerful a politician is, the more likely they are to have an impact on the country (or even the world). Seniority was also found to have an effect, but only during election periods (Cohen et al. 2008; Fogarty 2008; Tresch 2009). Political extremity was found to have an effect in the U.S. (Payne 1980; Cook 1986) and Israel (Sheafer 2001), although others did not find such an effect (Cohen et al. 2008; Tsfati et al. 2010). For party attachment, no clear effect was found. Some researchers found that being a member of a party with a great vote share could enhance news coverage (Van Aelst et al. 2008; Payne 1980; Tresch 2009). Sociodemographic variables such as gender and age also yielded mixed results (Midtbø 2011; Vos 2013). Political work did not generate extra media attention (Payne 1980; Sheafer 2001; Tsfati et al. 2010; Fogarty 2012), although some studies found opposite results (Arnold 2004; Gershon 2012a; Midtbø 2011; Tresch 2009; Tsfati et al. 2010).

This, however, does not mean that journalists always automatically feature those in power. Although journalists generally follow the trail of power (Bennett 1996), making political position the most important criterion, specific media skills also significantly influence who gets into the news (e.g., Sheafer and Tzionit 2006; Van Aelst et al. 2008; Midtbø 2011; Gershon 2012a). This finding can be seen as a manifestation of the mediatization of politics. Less powerful politicians could get into the media by sending out press releases to journalists (Fogarty 2012; Gershon 2012a; Midtbø 2011), being very motivated to get into the news (Cohen et al. 2008; Sellers and Schaffner 2007), or having (charismatic) media skills (Sheafer 2001; Wolfsfeld and Sheafer 2006). Media skills can thus be crucial for politicians to compete against other politicians (Altheide

2004), to strengthen their positions, and to achieve their goals in the mediatized political landscape (van Erkel et al. 2020). Media skills are not easy to define, in part because they are used in different contexts. Sheafer (2001), however, combined the findings from different fields and studies into a five-category conceptualization of media skills. An overview of these categories with examples is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Five categories of media skills, as proposed by Sheafer (2001), with examples.

Category	Example
1. Political initiative and creativity	· A politician who often submits legislative proposals. · A politician who has new and original political ideas or offers solutions to political problems that are "outside the box".
2. Communication initiative and creativity	· A politician who often takes the initiative to communicate to the larger public. · A politician who shows much originality and creativity in the way and the content they communicate to the larger public.
3. Rhetorical and dramatic abilities	· A politician who has good public speaking skills. · A politician who is a highly effective orator.
4. Cooperation with politicians	· A politician who is has good working relationships with other politicians. · A politician who has a strong record of cooperating with colleagues across party lines .
5. Cooperation with journalists	· A politician who is has good working relationships with journalists.

Access to the media might, in itself, affect politicians' policy success (Elmelund-Præstekær and Wien 2008; Kunelius and Reunanen 2012). To achieve policy success, politicians must build support and form alliances with other parties or politicians. Although part of creating support and cooperation is accomplished outside the media, political actors use the media to put pressure on potential allies, make their preferences clear to everyone (Kumar 2007), and maximize internal cohesion (Kernell 2006). External pressure, of which media attention is an indicator, plays a role in policy change (Walgrave et al. 2006). By going public on certain issues, politicians can put pressure on others to speak out about those issues and take a stance. Politicians try to get media coverage for particular issues to influence the direction of parliamentary debates and promote their issue agendas (Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). Melenhorst and Van Aelst (2017) found that politicians deliberately tried to appear in the media 24 hours before important policy debates or the beginning of important vote in order to steer the debate or outcome in their desired direction. Media attention can thus underline or reinforce political actors' existing positions (Melenhorst 2015). The media can also influence the policy success of individual politicians through the information they provide. Politicians learn from the media about the salience or interpretation of an issue, and the media can reveal new information to the politician. Such information

can be useful for politicians who aim to solve problems in a certain policy domain and can increase a politician's policy success (Sevenans 2018; Van Aelst and Walgrave 2016). Thus, the policy success of individual politicians is affected by both access to the media and the information provided by the media.

MEDIA AND POLITICAL CAREER

Apart from influencing policy success, mass media can also have an impact on the career success of individual politicians. Political career success is often reduced to electoral success, and studies have focused on how media coverage influences the electoral outcome for individual politicians, but research has almost completely neglected how media can influence other career stages for politicians. This is remarkable given that electoral outcome is not the only measure that defines politicians' success. Political success goes far beyond only election results, and because of the narrow focus on elections, few researchers have investigated the influence of media on other aspects of career success. Take, for example, Sammy Mahdi, the current Belgian Christian democratic junior minister for migration and asylum. Considering only his electoral success, he would seem to be a rather unsuccessful politician. In the last elections in 2019, he was first on the successor list and only got into parliament because another politician declined the position. He was appointed junior minister in the government De Croo on October 1, 2020, and he was made responsible for one of the most mediatized policy portfolios: migration. Although his electoral success is minimal, he has had political success in other areas.

The influence of media on the electoral success of politicians is often measured based on news coverage. Here, in line with studies about the electoral success of political parties, news coverage is studied in terms of visibility and the tone of the coverage. Visibility is the amount of access a politician receives, or the number of media appearances a politician makes. The tone of news coverage is the way in which a politician is described in the media. Researchers mostly differentiate between positive, neutral, and negative tone. Many voters are not politically interested and base their vote on what they see in the media. This makes a politician's portrayal in the media essential. Within the U.S. literature, many researchers have studied how the media affect presidential approval ratings and candidate assessments (e.g., Althaus and Kim 2006; Edwards et al. 1995; Lodge et al. 1995; Pan and Kosicki 1997). These studies suggested that newspaper coverage affects citizens' candidate preferences (Dalton et al. 1998). Domke and colleagues (1997) focused on visibility and tone and found that media coverage was a strong explanatory factor for changes in public preferences. This study showed that more positive news coverage resulted in more public support for the candidate, whereas negative coverage had the opposite effect (Domke et al. 1997).

1

Research that focuses on Western European multiparty systems is much less common. The fact that political parties are the central actor in most Western European political systems resulted in less research on individual politicians. **Table 2** gives an overview of previous studies that looked at the effect of media on the electoral success of individual politicians.

Table 2. Overview of studies that focused on the influence of media coverage (visibility and/or tone) on individual politicians.

Study	Media outlet	Country	Visibility?	Tone?	Function
Semetko and Schoenbach (1994)	TV news/ Newspapers	Germany	yes	yes	Chancellor candidate
Oegema and Kleinnijenhuis (2000)	TV news	The Netherlands	yes	yes	Party leaders/ Ministers/ MPs
Brettschneider (2008)	TV news	Germany	yes	yes	Chancellor candidate
Sheafer (2008)	TV news/ Newspapers	Israel	yes	no	MPs
Van Aelst et al. (2008)	TV news/ Newspapers	Belgium	yes	no	All candidates
Balmas and Sheafer (2010)	Newspapers	Israel	yes	yes	Party leaders
Hopmann et al. (2010)	TV news	Denmark	yes	yes	Party leaders
Bos (2012)	TV news/ Newspapers/ Infotainment Programs	The Netherlands	yes	no	Party leaders
Boomgaarden et al. (2012)	TV news/ Newspapers	The Netherlands	no	yes	U.S. presidential candidates
Geiß and Schäfer (2017)	(Evening) TV news	Germany	yes	yes	Chancellor candidate
Aaldering et al. (2018)	Newspapers	The Netherlands	yes	yes	Party leaders
van Erkel et al. (2020)	Newspapers	Belgium	yes	no	All politicians

Overall, studies that focused on news coverage found a significant influence on the electoral success of individual politicians. Most of these studies, however, focused on powerful politicians such as party leaders, chancellor candidates, or ministers. However, studies by Oegema and Kleinnijenhuis (2000), Van Aelst et al. (2008), Sheafer (2008) and van Erkel et al. (2020) incorporated MPs and demonstrated that media also impact the electoral success of lower ranking politicians. Most studies primarily looked at television news. Van Aelst et al. (2008) studied different media outlets and found that appearances on television news had a substantial impact on political success.

Newspapers in particular proved to have a significant effect on the less well-known candidates who never appear on television. The studies listed in **Table 2** focused on the influence of media on electoral outcomes and were mainly conducted in the weeks or months before elections. An important exception is van Erkel et al. (2020), who found the effects for media visibility to depend on time. Visibility benefited top candidates during long campaigns (one year before the elections), whereas media attention during short campaigns (one month before the elections) mattered more for ordinary candidates (van Erkel et al. 2020).

This research indicates that mass media have an influence on political agendas and that news coverage (visibility and tone) increases policy and electoral success; overall, media coverage positively, and quite directly, influences the success of politicians. Previous research found overwhelming evidence that political power ensures media coverage, but how media influence who becomes powerful is less clear. Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) described how political parties adapt to media logic in the fourth and final phase of mediatization. They stated that political parties not only adapt their communication to media logic but also adapt their internal organization to media logic. This organizational adaptation is first done by hiring specialized communications personnel who create a professional communication and media management strategy (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos 2010). These communications specialists then become part of the highest level of the party decision-making structure (Dozier and Gruning 1992). In a last and ultimate step, Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) expect parties to select representatives based on media logic. They explained that although many considerations are important selectors will "[emphasize] media performance and skill when selecting representatives" (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013, p. 344). Based on this research, I expect the media to have an effect on other stages of a political career as well.

Moreover, the influence of media on career success can be strengthened by an additional, more indirect, effect. Politicians strongly believe in the power of mass media (Van Aelst et al. 2008; Cohen et al. 2008; Strömbäck 2011), and it is exactly this perception by political elites of the importance of media that further drives the influence of media. Politicians thus engage in a self-fulfilling prophecy in which their belief in the significant influence of media actually increases the influence of media. Tal-Or and colleagues (2009) noted that "some of the most interesting effects of media on society take place because people think media are influential" (Tal-Or et al. 2009, p. 99). If politicians believe that media are powerful, they will also behave as if the media are powerful. Because politicians adapt their behavior based on this belief, the impact of media becomes real (Schudson 1995). This mechanism is called "the influence of presumed influence" (Gunther and Storey 2003), and in this dissertation, I argue that not only do politicians adapt their own behavior according to the presumed influence of media but party elites also make decision based on presumption. This

1

presumed influence of media affects decision to select or promote politicians. Within the agenda-setting research, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) found a similar effect. They stated, "the more politicians believe in the media's political almightiness, the more they are inclined to embrace media topics … and the mightier the media are" (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006, p. 100).

The PMP principle—the process through which political power leads to media coverage, which in turn leads to political career success—has great value and has been sufficiently proven. Wolfsfeld (2013) suggested that the PMP principle could be slightly modified to better grasp certain situations. He proposed a PMP principle in which he explained that media sometimes give an unusually large amount of attention to a certain political action, which then makes the political event more important than it would have been. He also proposed the MPMP principle (media-politics-media-politics) in which he states that sometimes media actions precede any political changes. In this dissertation, I argue that in some cases, the process can also be considered to follow a media-media-politics (MMP) logic. Media skills can generate media coverage, which in turn can lead to political career success. This naturally does not mean that I see media as the most important or only determinant of political career success; I merely propose that media might have an influence that has been largely overlooked. In **Figure 1,** this process is presented graphically.

Figure 1. The PMP principle reformed as the MMP model in which, along with power (and other political variables), media variables codetermine who will be successful.
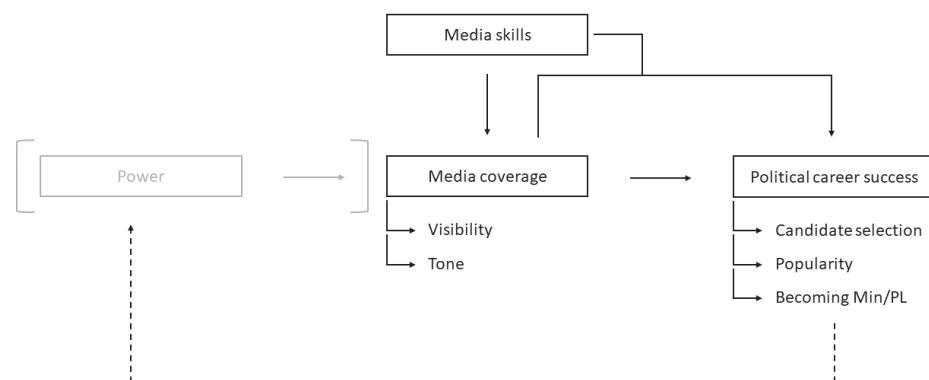
The impact of media on political careers is twofold. First, media coverage, both visibility and tone, generates name recognition and positive evaluations by voters, which in turn might lead to more popularity and political influence. Second, political parties are very aware of the effect of media coverage on political success, and because of this, parties will favor candidates or politicians who show potential media skill or make decisions based on past media performance. In this dissertation, I studied the impact of media on three important career stages. I started from the idea that the ultimate goal of all politicians is to impact and make policy decisions (Strøm and Müller 1999). To do this, they must take different steps. First, politicians need political power to be selected as a candidate. Next, politicians need popularity to be considered an asset to their party and, in time, generate electoral success. Finally, politicians need to be promoted or elected into higher office.

CANDIDATE SELECTION

If parties indeed adapt to the media through their selection of representatives, like Strömback and Van Aelst (2013) stated, this would mean that media logic and thus the potential of getting into the media impacts the candidate selection of political parties. The first crucial milestone every politician must achieve is being selected as a political candidate. No previous research has studied how parties' candidate selection process, one of the most internal political processes, is influenced by media logic. One can observe that the communication techniques of parties have changed to better fit the requirements of the media and that parties include media specialist when making big decisions. Selecting candidates based on their media skills, however, represents an internalization of media logic of a completely different order. Candidate selection is one of the main functions of political parties and a crucial step in the political system of parliamentary democracies. Behind closed doors, political parties de facto decide what parliament will look like. By first selecting candidates and then deciding the list position of those candidates, political parties essentially choose their future MPs. Voters might determine who gets elected in marginal seats, but the safe seats are decided by the parties long before the elections (Norris and Lovenduski 1995).

When parties select leaders and candidates, many considerations are important. Studies on legislative recruitment offer initial insights in which characteristics matter in the selection process. Studies that focused on gender found that female potential candidates were less likely to be selected than were their male counterparts (Fox and Oxley 2003; Norris 1997). Different results were found for ethnic minorities, for which women were selected more frequently than men (Celis et al. 2011). Overall, however, being part of an ethnic minority is still more a disadvantage than an advantage for potential candidates (Anwar 2001; Brouard et al. 2018). Loyalty was also studied, especially in studies that focused on the renomination of candidates, but results were mixed (Depauw and Martin 2009; Frech 2016). Seniority or experience was found to be an advantage for potential political candidates, as reflected in the growing percentage of experienced politicians in British parliament (Evans 2012). Norris (1997) also found that education and affluence were criteria worked to potential candidates' advantage. Other criteria, such as expertise, were also mentioned as important traits for political candidates (Katz 2001; Hazan and Rahat 2010).

Only a few studies included media skills, which, in a way, was not surprising. Defining and measuring media skills is complicated, and few researchers have successfully ventured into this area. One study, conducted in the 1970s, presented speaking abilities as a criterion British selectors could consider when selecting candidates. Poor speaking skills turned out to be the undesirable quality mentioned most frequently by the selectors (Bochel and Denver 1983). Sheafer and Tzionit (2006) studied the effect of media skills on the electoral success of politicians in Israel and found that media skills mattered in candidate selection but only when the selectorate was inclusive and consisted of a large group of people. These studies seem to at least partly confirm that political parties' candidate selection process is indeed influenced by media logic, but further research is needed.

POPULARITY

Once politicians are selected as candidates, they should work on their popularity. Public support is needed for every politician who wants policy and career success. Before, during, and after elections, a politician should always try to connect with citizens and generate support. Studies have mainly focused on electoral success, and although elections are a measure of popularity, they do not give the full picture. Periods between elections are very often neglected, and therefore, we know how the media impact the electoral popularity of individual politicians but do not really know how the overall popularity of politicians is impacted. Citizens' opinions and ideas are not only formed during campaign times. Politicians do not suddenly become popular in the month before the election; rather, their image is built in the years between elections. An election campaign alone is often simply too short for candidates to rise to media prominence and gain popularity (Jungherr 2014). Moreover, studies have shown that campaign periods change the dynamic between media and politics compared with routine periods. Media outlets prepare for elections months beforehand, and everything is more structured and planned compared with routine periods. There is less room for new issues (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006) and little space for unexpected news (Jungherr 2014). This naturally impacts which actors are featured in the news during campaign time. Some researchers found that political news coverage becomes more balanced during elections and that a larger variety of politicians gain news attention (e.g., De Swert and van Aelst 2009). Others, however, expect there to be less room for lesser-known politicians during election times and that these ordinary political actors can potentially be more visible during routine times (Jungherr 2014). In any case, it seems that election periods and routine periods differ in several respects and might both yield effects that can be potentially different. A focus on elections alone is not enough.

Preference votes are of course a straightforward popularity measure, but most countries also extensively poll public opinion in between elections. In many of the opinion polls, voters are asked about their political preferences and which politicians

they would give their vote to. Previous research showed that polls are very frequently covered in the news (Strömbäck 2012). Journalists discuss and interpret the results, compare them with previous polls, and cast predictions about what the results exactly mean for certain topics/parties/politicians (Larsen and Fazekas 2020). Popularity polls present quite dramatic value, so journalists often use horse-race coverage in which terms such as winner, loser, exceeding expectations, etc. are freely used (Iyengar et al. 2004). Studying popularity polls is especially interesting because multiple media effects can be distinguished. First, it can be expected that media coverage already (co)determines which politicians will be included in popularity polls in the first place. Second, by reporting about the popularity polls, media can create a "bandwagon effect" (e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Nadeau et al. 1993; Schmitt-Beck 2003; Faas et al. 2008) in which the support for a politician who emerged as most popular is boosted among citizens because they see the candidate as successful. Lastly, politicians follow the media very closely and are very interested in these opinion polls. If a politician is polled as popular, this could increase their chances within the media because the party top realizes the electoral potential of that politician. Media visibility can generate popularity because the news coverage of these popularity polls can boost, in its turn, the popularity of politicians and can increase politicians' political success due to "the influence of presumed influence" mechanism (Gunther and Storey 2003).

BECOMING MINISTER OR PARTY LEADER

After taking the above two career steps, politicians can be promoted or elected into a higher office. Most politicians have the ultimate goal of obtaining a high function, and although the prospect of a high salary, a staff, and a private driver may play a part, stepping up mainly stems from a desire to bring change to society (Strøm and Müller 1999). Politicians have ideals and ideas that they want to translate into policy and legislation. In most countries, ministers and party leaders hold a central and powerful role in the political system. Both positions have daily contact with the media, although in different ways. Ministers are in the first place policy makers. They develop, implement, and defend their policies. This requires a great deal of media skills, especially when policies are not technical and controversial. Party leaders are, much more than ministers, the central party soldiers who play the attack and defend game in the media arena (Thesen 2011). They are the prime gladiators who confront other party leaders in the media and who spearhead their parties' electoral campaigns. Naturally, party leaders have important internal management tasks as well, and they are the guards of the ideological party line. Their main task is, however, external and consists of embodying the party in the public realm.

Considering the importance of media in the daily job description of both ministers and party leaders, it is remarkable that no previous research has zoomed in on the effect of media on becoming a minister or party leader. Some researchers studied

whether ministers were first in parliament or not and to what extent their ministerial function was preceded by an important function within their party (e.g., De Winter et al. 2000). Additionally, some recent attention has been given in different systems to the social background characteristics of ministers and to various factors such as their education and occupation (e.g., Turner-Zwinkels and Mills 2020), their political preferences and their match with that of the caucus (e.g., Kam et al. 2010), or even the political careers of their relatives (e.g., Smith and Martin 2017). Studies that focused on the Belgian case put forward factors such as the distribution of ministerial mandates over internal party factions, the balance between continuity and innovation, geographic representation, and gender balance as determining ministerial selection (Dumont et al. 2008). Scholars have speculated about the softs skills needed to make a viable minister—such as "political skills" (De Winter 1991, p. 51), the capacity to handle many policy fields, or good working relationships with other MPs (Dumont et al. 2008, p. 134)—but none of these studies speculated, or even simply mentioned, the possible role media proficiency might play in ministerial selection. The work on party leader selection devoted just a little more attention to broad media access as an asset of leaders. However, the comparative work on party leader selection mostly deals with how leaders are selected rather than why (e.g., Pilet and Cross 2014). Still, it explicitly recognizes that party leaders are the external face of their party in the media and thereby implicitly acknowledges that good media skills are a prerequisite for being chosen, but no studies have explicitly focused on this.

GOAL AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The influence of mass media on the political career of individual politicians is thus the point of departure in this PhD. The overall aim is to study three different career steps in a longitudinal way (2000-2019) by using (mainly) automated content analysis. In this dissertation, the influence of mass media is measured by studying newspaper coverage of individual politicians and focuses on the visibility and tone of news articles. The former indicates the extent to which politicians obtain media exposure, whereas the latter concerns the negative/neutral/positive presentation of politicians in the news media (Sheafer 2001). The largest part of this dissertation is focused on career steps (Chapters 1-3), while in the last chapter, the findings from Chapters 1-3 are extended and put into perspective by studying the influence of power on media visibility.

CASE

This dissertation focuses on the case of Belgium, and more specifically on Flemish politicians originating from the northern, Dutch-speaking part of the country. Belgium is a federal state with three separate regions: Flanders, Wallonia, and Brussels, each with its own party system, political candidates, and media system. Belgium is a monarchy and a federal parliamentary democracy with a bicameral parliament composed of

a senate and a chamber of representatives. The chamber's 150 representatives are elected under a proportional voting system from 11 electoral districts. Every region also has a separate government and parliament, and citizens from one region cannot vote for parties or candidates from another region. Belgium has compulsory voting and thus maintains one of the highest rates of voter turnout in the world. The focus in this dissertation is thus on Flemish politicians. Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, reflects over 60% of the population. The candidate selection of all Flemish parties is rather exclusive and done by a small group of elite politicians. These selectors determine who will be on the ballot list and which position they receive. The Belgian political system is a clear example of a PR-list system with a flexible list. Political parties thus determine the order of their ballot list beforehand, but citizens can change this order by casting enough preferential votes for a candidate. Citizens can opt for two kinds of votes: a list vote or a preferential vote. Ministers in Belgium are singlehandedly selected by the party leader and thus not elected. Party leaders themselves are, in contrast, elected by a larger and inclusive group of people, being all party members or all party delegates attending a national party congress (Wauters et al. 2015). Belgium is furthermore known to be a strong multiparty system where individual politicians are loyal to their party. The communication and voting behavior of politicians is very much dictated by the party top, and deviations from the party line are rare (Depauw 2003). Individual politicians are subordinate to the party and do not have many opportunities to develop their own profile in the media. Personalization in Belgium is relatively low. This makes Belgium an interesting case to study. In fact, it rather is a least, or less, likely case in which to find strong media prominence effects. If an effect of media prominence in Belgium is found, it can be assumed that similar, and probably even stronger, effects will be found in other countries where politics is more personalized and where media attention may even be more important in a politician's career.

The two (biggest) language regions in Belgium have completely independent media systems. The Francophone media only serve the Francophone citizens (Wallonia and Brussels) and the Flemish press only Flanders, independently of each other. The Flemish media system has been categorized as democratic-corporatist, implying strong professionalization of the journalistic profession and a considerable level of state intervention to protect press freedom; it is comparable to the systems of Scandinavian and other Western European countries (Hallin and Mancini 2011). The Flemish media system has historically been characterized by political parallelism, but today the affiliations between press outlets and parties have disappeared (De Bens and Raeymaeckers 2007). This dissertation is largely based on newspaper coverage content (Chapters 2-4). The choice to study newspapers was made because television coverage is more narrowly focused on top politicians. Although television news is often seen as the driving force behind mediatization (Van Aelst et al. 2012), lower ranking politicians only very rarely appear on television news, which makes television less suited for this research. Newspapers generally have more political news than television news does

because they are less restricted in their coverage due to available space and production costs (De Vreese et al. 2006). As a result, newspaper articles feature a wider variety of politicians, and more fine-grained newspaper coverage is necessary to find nuanced differences between individual politicians.

METHOD

A majority of studies on the content of news coverage are, quite obviously, content analyses (Benoit 2014; Graber 2004). This method is widely used in political communication research and makes it possible to quantify different content dimensions of (news) messages (Benoit 2014). Many studies that use content analysis are, however, limited in scope and studied period. Content analyses are quite time-consuming seeing that researchers must design a codebook that should be extensively tested and controlled for inter-coder reliability. The actual coding often entails thousands of messages, articles, or media fragments, and content analysis is therefore often limited in the amount of news coverage that is analyzed and the period that is studied. In this dissertation, I studied coverage of newspapers for a period of almost 20 years (2000-2019) using automated content analysis. Automated content analysis can identify patterns in journalistic data that traditional analysis would not, or only with great effort (Flaounas et al. 2013). Additionally, it can provide "harder" evidence for what journalism scholars might already have suspected based on qualitative or small-scale quantitative research, help to sketch the bigger picture, and save time and money (Boumans and Trilling 2016). There are of course drawbacks to using automated methods seeing that language is complex and multifaceted. Manual coding should be preferred for certain studies, but for this dissertation, automated content analysis offers advantages. A much bigger set of data could be coded for my two key variables, visibility and sentiment, and after using a manually coded sample for both visibility and tone, automated coding models were created that were tested until sufficient reliability and validity were reached.

When it comes to automated content analysis methods, three approaches can be identified. First, an often used method in political communication research is the dictionary approach. This approach is based on a simple principle in which a list of key words is used to automatically determine the category of a document. This list of key words is manually constructed, and the computer simply detects the key words in documents and labels the articles. The major advantage of this method is that it is quite straightforward and usable by researchers who lack an extensive background in machine learning. The dictionary approach is in general very reliable seeing that it always detects the key words in the document. The downside, however, is that validity can be quite low. This approach does not account for the fact that some words have a different meaning based on context (Boumans and Trilling 2016). A second approach is the supervised method. This method learns a function that, given a sample of data and corresponding outputs, best approximates the relationship between input and output observable in the data. This method requires manual labor because it relies on a subset of hand-coded data and is thus particularly suited for data sets that are too large to code manually. A supervised machine learning algorithm basically learns from the decisions made by human coders. There are many advantages to this method: Once the model is trained, it can be used again, which significantly increases research efficiency. Moreover, the supervised method is also very transparent and can be easily reproduced. The downside of this method is that manual coding is the gold standard and the supervised model can thus never outperform a human coder (Boumans and Trilling 2016). The final method is an unsupervised approach, which infers the natural structure present in the data. This approach is thus very inductive because is finds patterns in the data without any help from human coders. The "openness" of this method is also its biggest downside. The unsupervised method finds patterns, but the interpretation of outcomes proves to be quite difficult (Boumans and Trilling 2016). To analyze the newspaper data, I opted to use a supervised machine learning method. The data consist of a large corpus of news articles (N = 2,162,424) over a period of almost 20 years (2000-2019). This analysis was done within a bigger research project led by Prof. Dr. Gunnar Thesen from the University of Stavanger. Because the task at hand was classifying articles into predetermined categories (e.g., negative, neutral, positive in the case of sentiment), a supervised approach was more suitable. Unsupervised approaches, which do not presume any categories beforehand, group similar documents together into clusters. This entails the extra difficulties of defining a similarity metric and the manual interpretation of the resulting clusters. The biggest disadvantage of these data is that I was not able to study the content of the news articles in detail. This dissertation is mainly focused on systematic and longitudinal trends in media coverage, and very detailed information about the articles is thus not provided.

To pre-process the more than 2 million raw articles, natural language processing (NLP) was used to clean and transform the data. Coded articles that were manually labeled for junk/non-junk and tone were used to train a random forest classification model using a TF-IDF (term frequency and inverse document frequency) vector as features. In this way, "junk" articles (e.g., weather, horoscopes, sports) were filtered out and a tone was assigned to every article. Next, the articles were queried for the presence of national political actors. These actors include all individual politicians that were active on the national and Flemish level. Every individual politician received a unique actor ID, and the coded politicians were subsequently linked to an actor database I constructed with additional information about age, gender, party (majority/opposition, number of votes last election), and function. In this way, the media visibility and tone of each individual politician active since 2000 were measured. The career of every individual politician was also mapped, and every change in function was incorporated in the database.

STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Figure 2 provides insight into where the various chapters of this thesis should be situated within the previously proposed process.

Figure 2. Graphical representation of which aspects the different chapters study.
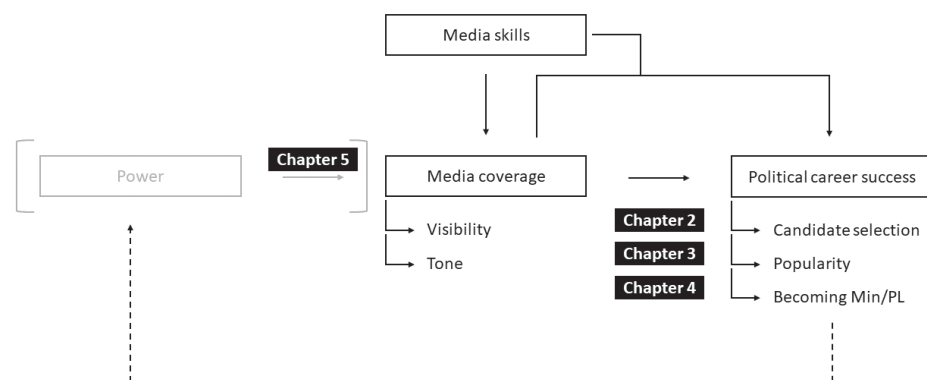
The first chapter of this dissertation focuses on the candidate selection of political parties or the moment selectors decide which of the aspiring politicians will become a candidate. The candidate selection of parties is one of the main functions of political parties and a crucial step in the political system of parliamentary democracies and is, at least in Belgium, held behind closed doors. A small group of selectors decide which candidates are selected and which position they will get on the list. This first, and a crucial, step in a politician's career is thus difficult to study. Automated content analysis, the method used in the other chapters, is not applicable here. The only way to actually uncover what is going on behind the closed doors of the candidate selection is to ask selectors, or the top politicians of each party, how they select candidates and what the influence of media skills is in this decision. Twenty-four selectors, or elite politicians, were asked about the influence of media when selecting candidates. The interviews uncovered that media skills have a significant influence on who gets selected and on the position they get on the electoral list. I also found an increasing evolution in the importance of media skills, confirming that even the selection of candidates is dictated by media logic. Finally, I uncovered that the mental process selectors go through during candidate selection is affected by attributive projection. Selectors project their own abilities on potential candidates, and this largely determines how important they deem media skills. I argue that this projection enlarges and intensifies the mediatization process.

The second chapter zooms in on how media coverage (both visibility and sentiment) influences the popularity of individual politicians. Political success is often measured by studying electoral outcome, and researchers thus primarily focus on the weeks or months before an election. In this chapter, I argue that the periods in between elections should receive more attention seeing that campaign periods change how the media covers politics (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006; De Swert and van Aelst 2009). Other media effects can thus be expected. How citizens feel about politicians is not solely determined in campaign periods. Politicians do not suddenly become popular in the month before the election; rather, their image is built in the years between elections. An election campaign alone is often simply too short for candidates to rise to media prominence and gain popularity (Jungherr 2014). My research focuses on routine periods and measures political success by studying public opinion polls and more specifically the popularity polls of individual politicians. In Belgium, these popularity polls receive a great deal of media attention, and being polled as popular might thus affect political success. However, not all politicians are included in the popularity polls. Only 30 politicians are "short-listed." In this chapter, I study first how media visibility and tone impact being included in the polls. Next, I focus on how media visibility and tone affect the actual popularity score of the included politicians. I find that overall media visibility can have an impact on popularity, both for being included and for the actual popularity score. This media effect is specifically important for MPs, as the function of higher ranking politicians (ministers/party leaders) already impact their popularity without media visibility. In addition, the media visibility of lower ranking politicians must be rather high to experience an impact of visibility. I know, however, from previous research that this is not an easy task because journalists generally follow the trail of power, and lower ranking politicians thus have relatively little chance of getting past the news gates. Generating negative attention to gain more visibility might not be a good idea seeing that I find a negativity bias. Positive news coverage does not impact popularity, whereas negative news coverage significantly harms popularity.

The third chapter zooms in on how important media visibility is to be promoted to minister or party leader, two central positions in the Belgian political system. I know from previous research that power generates media attention, and in this chapter, I examine if the opposite is also true: Does media attention (co)determine who will get a higher function? Elections decide which candidates are elected as members of parliament, but this is not the case for ministers or party leaders (Wauters et al. 2015). Although electoral outcomes play a role, it is not always the most popular politician who is chosen to be a minister. Being a senior politician and knowing all possible ministerial candidates personally, it can be expected that the party leader to a lesser degree relies on the candidates' media appearances to evaluate their fitness for the job. Expertise, specialization, loyalty, and personal friendships, together with all the intra-party balances that must be respected, all play a role (Vandeleene et al. 2016), and this reduces the weight of media proficiency in the selection decision. Party leaders themselves, in contrast, are, in Belgium as in many other Western European countries, elected by a larger and open group of people, being all party members or all party delegates attending a national party congress (Wauters et al. 2015). It is to be expected

that this much more inclusive selectorate, not knowing all candidates personally, relies more on the candidates' media appearances when making up their mind. Of course, in reality, the party establishment sometimes publicly supports one candidate, and very often, this "recommended" candidate wins the contest. The role of media in this important (s)election of ministers and party leaders has never been systematically studied. In this chapter, I find that media occurrence matters for being promoted to a top function in Belgium, more so for becoming a minister than for becoming a party leader. Furthermore, rejecting my initial idea based on political mediatization theories, the influence of media occurrence does not change over time.

Because this dissertation studies a period of almost 20 years, including elections and routine periods, it is important to know how political power exactly generates visibility to put my findings of the previous chapters in perspective. Political power is the most important control variable in this dissertation; therefore, good insight into how different political functions generate visibility for individual politicians is needed. The last chapter of this dissertation thus takes a step back and focuses on which politicians are visible in the news. This chapter studies the case of Belgium for the same period as the previous chapters and compares the findings for Belgium with a similar (the Netherlands) and different (the U.K.) political system to study the influence of power on media visibility thoroughly. The fact that political power generates media visibility is seen by many researchers as one of the rules of thumb of political communication. However, most of the existing research focused on one point in time (Vos and Van Aelst 2018) or on one specific country. Various researchers have pointed out that different contextual characteristics such as political system, electoral system, and the corresponding power hierarchy in a country influence which politicians receive media coverage (Boumans et al. 2013; Hallin and Mancini 1984; Holtz-Bacha et al. 2014; Kriesi 2012; Schoenbach et al. 2001). Hence, different political actors might have access to the media in different political contexts. Although many studies have already focused on the influence of power on media coverage, this chapter uses a novel method (automated content analysis) over a longitudinal period (2000-2017) to verify if previous (more fragmented) research can be confirmed. I find that overall, more powerful political positions receive more media coverage compared with regular members of parliament in all three country contexts. Of these political actors, the prime minister is the most visible. This finding is most pronounced for the U.K. However, for other political actors, such as ministers and party leaders, I find country-specific differences. Although party leaders are more visible than ministers in Belgium and the U.K., this finding is reversed in the Netherlands. These findings go against the expectation that party leaders would receive more attention in consensus democracies because multiple parties have a share of power and party leaders must maintain the coherence in coalition governments (Vos and Van Aelst 2018). I also included the influence of election campaign periods on politicians' visibility in my analysis. Based on previous research (Semetko and Schoenbach 1994; Domke et al. 1997; De Swert and van Aelst 2009), my expectation was

that during elections, news coverage of political actors would become more balanced. Indeed, in all three countries, the prime ministers and ministers in cabinet seem to lose their visibility advantage over ordinary members of parliament during elections. Party leaders, however, seem to gain media attention during the election campaign. Therefore, although different political actors seem to take up a more central space in the news during elections, I cannot unambiguously conclude that the news coverage becomes more balanced.

1

CHAPTER TWO

How mediatized is the Candidate Selection of Political Parties?[1]

The mediatization of politics is an often mentioned phenomenon within political communication in the past decennia. Researchers generally believe that a change from political logic to media logic has transformed both the nature of politics and the relationship between politics and the media. As Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) however point out, the evidence for such mediatization of politics is mostly unsystematic and even anecdotal. The theory of mediatization is not often used to actually do empirical research and research often simply refers to it to describe a systematic and aggregated process of change in politics. This process of change is characterized by many shifts eventually ending with the internalization of media logic in politics or as Strömbäck (2008) puts it: "the standards of newsworthiness become a built-in part of the governing processes" (Strömbäck 2008 , p. 239). One important structural change that Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) mention is that parties select leaders and other political candidates based on media logic and thus based on the skills potential candidates and leaders have that makes engaging with and adapting to the media possible. If Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) are right, and many believe they are, this would mean that even the most internal political process is dictated by the logic of the media. If candidates are indeed selected based on media skills, rather than on political skills like expertise or ideology, this could have far fetching implications on the very nature of politics.

Not many researchers have studied how the internal political processes are influenced by media logic. Sure, one can observe that the communication techniques of parties have changed to fit the requirements of the media better or parties hiring media specialist and including them when making big decisions. Selecting candidates based on their media skills is however an internalisation of media logic of a completely different order. The candidate selection of parties is one of the main functions of political parties and a crucial step in the political system of parliamentary democracies. Behind closed doors, political parties de facto decide what parliament will look like. By first selecting candidates and then deciding the list position of these candidates, political parties have the power to choose their future MPs. Voters might determine who gets elected in marginal seats but the safe seats are long before the elections decided by the parties (Norris and Lovenduski 1995).

This exploratory paper is one of the first papers that looks into how candidate selection is influenced by the mediatization of politics by directly asking selectors how they make their choices and the role media skills play in this. Not only do we find that media skills have a big influence on who gets selected and the position they get on the electoral list; we also find an increasing evolution in the importance of media skills confirming that even the selection of candidates is dictated by media logic. Lastly, we uncover that the mental process selectors go through during candidate selection is affected by attributive projection. Selectors project their own abilities on potential candidates and this largely determines how important they deem media skills. We argue that this projection enlarges and intensifies the mediatization process even further.

CANDIDATE SELECTION

The candidate selection of political parties has been extensively studied but researchers have focused mainly on the selection procedure. These studies look into the more technical side of selecting candidates, i.e. who selects, where the selection is done, who can be a candidate, etc. Following the conceptualization of Rahat and Hazan (2001), different researchers, in a multitude of countries, have uncovered the specifics of this procedure (e.g., Shomer 2009; Vandeleene et al. 2013). These studies into the selection procedure ensure that we know a lot about the legal and formal restrictions involved in the selection process and thus how candidates are selected, but a big part of the candidate selection is still surrounded by mystery. There is still a lot to be discovered about what the decision of selectors, elite politicians who compose the electoral lists, is based on or what it is influenced by.

Why certain candidates get selected mainly depends on which characteristics, traits or skills, selectors deem important in potential candidates. Studies into legislative recruitment give a first insight in which characteristics matter. Studies that focus on gender find that potential female candidates are less likely to get selected compared to their male counterparts. Researchers explain this by pointing to stereotypes that the selectorate holds (Fox and Oxley 2003; Norris 1997). Members of the selectorate form an idea about the perfect political candidate, and females, and the stereotypical characteristics that are ascribed to them, do not fit this picture (Norris and Lovenduski 1995). This is found to be especially true for safe list positions (Ryan et al. 2010) or functions in the political field that are labelled as hard or masculine (Vallance 1979; Rasmussen 1983; Bird 2003). Potential female candidates are thus less likely to get selected, especially for a safe seat position, than their male counterparts. Different results were found for ethnic minorities. Here, women are selected more than men (Celis et al. 2011). Overall, however, being part of an ethnic minority is still more a burden than an advantage for a potential candidate (Anwar 2001; Brouard et al. 2018). Loyalty is also studied often especially in studies that focus on renomination of candidates (Depauw and Martin 2009; Frech 2016). Other characteristics or personal skills of potential political candidates are less studied. Seniority or experience could be an advantage for potential political candidates as indicated by a growing percentage of experienced politicians in British parliament (Evans 2012). Norris (1997) also found that being educated and affluent are criteria that could work in the potential candidate's advantage. Other criteria, like expertise, are often mentioned as important for political candidates (Katz 2001; Hazan and Rahat 2010) but not studied a lot.

Strikingly, media skills (and in extension mediatization) are hardly studied. One study, conducted in the 70s', presented speaking abilities as a criterion British selectors could take into consideration when selecting candidates. Being a poor speaker turned out to be the most frequently mentioned undesirable quality by the selectors (Bochel and Denver 1983). An important exception is the study conducted by Sheafer and Tzionit (2006). They studied the effect of media skills on the electoral success of politicians in Israel and found that media skills matter for candidate selection but only when the selectorate is inclusive. When the selectorate is comprised out of a few political elites, and thus very exclusive, no effect was found for media skills. Since this influential study, no further research into the influence of media skills on the candidate selection was done.

MEDIA SKILLS

This is not entirely surprising seeing that media skills are a difficult subject to work with. Media skills are mentioned in different fields (e.g., charisma studies, leadership studies, political communication, psychology), but a comprehensive definition or operationalization for measuring media skills does not exist. Under the pretext of "you-know-it-when-you-see-it", media skills have become a vague umbrella-concept that shelters many different traits, characteristics and competences. Within political communication, and more specifically "mediatization of politics"-studies, media skills are often mentioned. Researchers generally agree that due to the mediatization media skills have become more important because they enable an actor to get across their message in the media. In the first place because having these media skills gives an individual politician access to the media. Research found that although journalists generally follow the "trail of power" (Bennett, 1996), and political position is thus the most important criterion, media skills are the second most influential factor to get into the news (e.g., Sheafer and Tzionit 2006; Van Aelst et al. 2008; Midtbø 2011; Gershon 2012b). Apart from getting into the media, media skills also have an effect on *how* a politician get across their message (Sheafer and Tzionit 2006; Cohen et al. 2008; Esser and Strömbäck 2014). Politicians with good media skills are generally framed in a more positive way by journalists (Sheafer 2001). Electorally speaking, this is crucial (Aaldering et al. 2018).

Media skills are as stated above mentioned in different studies and fields, resulting in a fragmented description of media skills ranging from specific communication cues like metaphors (Antonakis et al. 2011) to maintaining a good working relationship with journalists (Tenscher 2004). Sheafer (2001) was the first to combine the findings from previous research into a comprehensive conceptualization. He divides media skills (or as he calls it charismatic communication skills) in five categories. The first category he distinguishes is political initiative and creativity of a political actor. The second category is comparable but focused on communication initiative and creativity of a political actor. The third category focuses on dramatic and rhetorical abilities. The fourth category is cooperation with politicians and the fifth category cooperation with journalists. These categories refer to the ability to form relationships with other politicians and journalists.

The concept of media skills is thus very wide-ranging, complex and interpreted differently based on the context it is used in. Because of the different ways media skills can be interpreted, we controlled in our interviews for this. The moment a politician mentioned media skills, we asked them to clarify what they exactly understood under media skills. Naturally, not every politician gave the exact same answer and different politicians put an emphasis on a different specific skill. Overall, however, the mentioned skills are in accordance with the categories proposed by Sheafer (2001). Nine out of the 24 interviewed politicians described media skills as skills that enable politicians to communicate in a personal, appealing way with the public. Skills like the ability to emotionally touch people during speeches or interviews, appealing to voters by showing personality and emotions, and connecting with people (through the media) were mentioned. 15 out of the 24 interviewed politicians put more emphasis on practical media skills. They clarified that media skills are having the required abilities to get into the media and anticipate and/or deliver messages in the best way possible. Mentioned skills varied from building a strong working-relationship with journalists, sending out press releases at the right moment to the right people, being able to give a soundbite that journalists could easily integrate into news reports and even being able to lower your voice for television news such that they come across more trustworthy. Although we could distinguish two groups in the emphasis they put on certain skills, most of them also briefly referred to the skills mentioned by the other group. Overall, the politicians saw dramatic and rhetorical abilities, initiative and creativity in one's communication and working with (people in) the media as part of media skills. We can thus be quite certain that they all had a similar interpretation of media skills in mind, when discussing them.

DATA

In this exploratory study, elite interviews with 24 Dutch-speaking Flemish top selectors in Belgium are analysed. The high level of accessibility to the political elite in Belgium presents a rare opportunity to get an insight into the importance of media skills during the candidate selection.

Belgium uses a semi-closed list system during elections. Voters can vote for a party as a whole and as such confirm that they agree with the proposed list order by the party. Voters can, however, also cast a preference vote for certain candidates. Candidates with a lot of preference votes can "break" the list order and be elected even though the candidates above them are not elected (Deschouwer 2012). In reality, however, only very few candidates manage to bypass candidates that are higher on the list (André et al. 2017). The fixed list order determined by the party thus largely decides who gets

elected. Overall, parties are quite free in who they put on the list. Almost everyone can become a candidate for a party if they have the Belgian nationality and are at least 18 years or older. There are two other important limitations. First, Belgium has a gender quota that ensures that there is an equal amount of men and women on the list. The first two list positions on an election list have to be a male and female candidate (Celis et al. 2011). Secondly, they are bound to a geographical dispersion when composing the national lists. The selectorate in Belgium is rather exclusive and consists only of elites. The exact composition of the selectorate is not known, but for each party certainly the party leader, ministers and caucus leader play a role in the national list formation. The selection of candidates is similar for most Flemish political parties and done by a closed selectorate. Members have minimal influence and can, in some parties, only give their consent about the proposed model list before the elections.

The interviews were conducted as part of a larger project on representation by elites and the way elites get informed about public opinion. For this project, Belgian politicians were asked for a face-to-face meeting between March and June 2018. The question(s) about media skills were only posed to selectors i.e. (junior) ministers, party leaders and caucus leaders. 24 elite politicians agreed to participate, resulting in a response rate of 66%, which is particularly high for elite research. During the face-to-face meetings, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The questions about media skills were posed at the end of the interview and were preceded by questions unrelated to candidate selection or media skills to not prime the politicians. The elite politicians that participated were promised complete anonymity. There is an overview of the 24 different interviews with more information about duration and political function of the interviewed politicians in appendix. Party, gender, age and other specifics were not included to keep the interviews completely anonymous. Each interview got an ID and in the findings the used quotes are linked to these ID's. Our sample contains elite politicians from all Flemish parties (CD&V, Groen, N-VA, Open VLD, sp.a, Vlaams Belang) who are seated in the national parliament. The interviews were conducted by three different researchers but all of them followed the same interview protocol.

Despite the interviews being semi-structured, the researchers were instructed, with the exploratory design of this study in mind, to allow the politicians freedom when answering the question(s), so different follow-up questions were asked. The main question we posed was: "When political parties select candidates for their electoral lists, many things can play a role. Can you indicate to what extent media skills affect the selection process of your political party?". In a second and third question we aspired to go deeper into the importance of media skills. First, we asked politicians why they thought media skills are important for potential candidates. The third question asked for a comparison between the importance of media skills and other skills during candidate selection.

METHOD

To analyse this data we used established procedures for grounded-theory-building using three predefined steps to analyse the data (Corbin and Strauss 1990). **Figure 1** offers a schematic representation of the followed steps. A first preliminary task, not included in the figure, was analysing the interviews in order to find preliminary trends in the answers of politicians. By going through the interviews systematically, we marked and numbered the different sentences or paragraphs that addressed a specific question. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, not all questions were posed in the same order and we structured the answers based on the question they addressed. Within these sentences or paragraphs, the parts that truly represent an answer to a question were underlined. This way the 24 transcripts were divided in sentences and paragraphs and reordered according to the question they answered. After reorganising the sentences and paragraphs, overlapping statements within the different answers were gathered in a document. The statements were subsequently checked to see if they were expressed by politicians of different parties and parliaments (federal/regional), to assess whether they are party/level specific or more generally expressed. These collected statements gave us a first insight into preliminary patterns within the politicians' answers, and form the foundation for our analysis.

In a first step, the different statements were grouped into seven first-order categories (see first column in **figure 1** below). All statements that answered a question in the same way were thus coded and grouped together. For example, the first question asked politicians to what extent media skills affect the selection process. Answers along the lines of: it is really not important, it does not matter, or media skills do not play a role at this stage; were coded by the category "media skills are not important". By collapsing the statements into 14 bigger categories, the data got a more workable structure. Furthermore, these 14 first-order categories allowed us to have a more detailed look at the data. Specifically, attention was paid to how the variance across politicians, based on their characteristics or background, was related to the given answer. Special attention was (again) given to party and level, but also gender and age.

In a second step, the first-order categories were, as can be seen in the middle column of **figure 1**, grouped under second-order themes that link them to answering-patterns across all questions. Answers stored under the first-order categories "Media skills used to be less important" and "nowadays media skills are important" were for example grouped under the second-order theme "evolution in importance media skills". These broader similarities can also enclose first-order categories that at first seemed con-tradicting. For example, "Yes, media skills are important" and "No, media skills do not matter" were in this step classified within one category named "the importance of media skills". This step made us go back to the recorded interviews to, with the first-order categories in mind, pay extra attention to the expressed tone and other

2

contextual information during certain statements. Ultimately, seven second-order themes, presented in the second column of the figure, were discerned.

In the final step of the analysis, the seven second-order themes were linked to three bigger dimensions found in the literature. This last step of the analysis is visualised in the third column of **figure 1** below. This way we could connect our findings to other theories and findings. The theoretical dimensions our themes were linked to are "Media Skills versus Expertise", "Mediatization" and "Projection". This last step elevates the findings of this specific case to more general findings.

Figure 1. Oversight of used method (grounded-theory-building) to analyse the interviews.
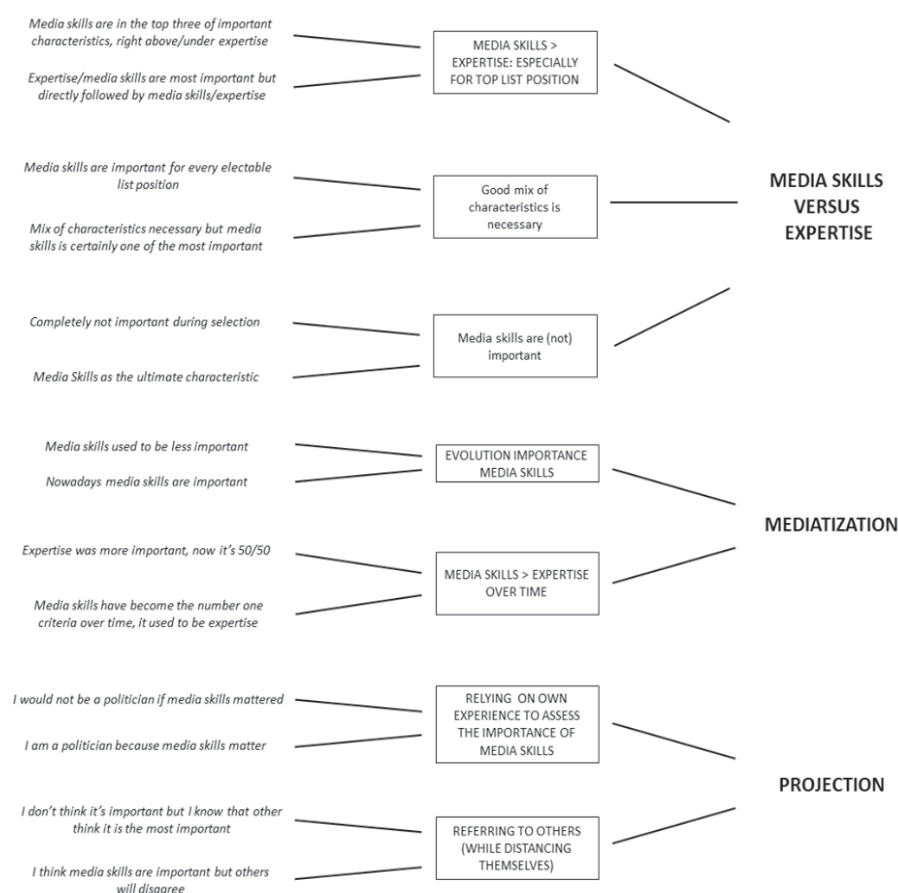
It is important to note here that we are aware of the fact that the patterns and thoughts expressed by the politicians do not necessarily rule out other thoughts, ideas or considerations they also had in mind but did not vocalize during the interviews. There is also the potential problem of social desirability felt by the politicians when answering the questions. Although the politicians were promised total anonymity, it could be that some of them felt uncomfortable or restricted to admit how important they thought media skills were. We, however, believe the influence of this on our findings to be limited.

FINDINGS

Media Skills

The first question we asked politicians was if media skills, as a measure for adapting to media logic, matter during the candidate selection. The straightforward answer to this question is: yes, they matter. Before we go into more detail about this, it is important to note here that the interviewed politicians hardly mentioned social media when discussing media skills. Only four out of 25 politicians said something about social media (only Facebook and Twitter were mentioned). The four politicians that did mention social media treated it more as an afterthought and stated briefly that social media is becoming an extra factor on top of everything else. When politicians in the interviews talk about media skills, we should keep in mind that they thus mean mass media skills.

18 out of the 24 interviewed politicians replied that media skills are important. The level of importance selectors attributed to media skills, however, fluctuated. Some were very clear and said that media skills are the number one criterion when selecting new candidates.

> *"I think that media skills, i.e. the ability to communicate fluently in different contexts with people in general or with specific people, is the absolute most important criterion. Some people are not great experts, not the biggest thinkers, ideologists or connoisseurs but manage to communicate certain points of view in a very clear way that also touches people. I think this is really important." (S10)*

> *"Yes, media skills matter. It is not the only thing that matters but people should stick on camera. The way they communicate and tell a story is part of a politician's job. A good politician knows how to communicate. Who does not know how to communicate is a bad politician." (S14)*

Most of the interviewed selectors stated that media skills are important, but explicitly referred to a mix of characteristics that is necessary in new potential candidates. Media skills are seen as a "booster" characteristic or skill to display and communicate the other strengths of a candidate to the broader public. A lot of the selectors made clear that it is never just media skills that matter. The other most regularly mentioned characteristic is expertise. Twelve of the eighteen selectors that said media skills matter, added that candidates should not only master media skills but should also have some level of expertise; or as some politicians further clarified: be good policy makers,

be (or have the potential to be) substantively strong and have a thorough knowledge and understanding of political dossiers. When these politicians were asked to choose between media skills or expertise as most important characteristic during candidate selection, opinions were divided.

"I personally believe that expertise is more important, because if you rely primarily on media skills you will encounter problems later on. That is my personal opinion, but in reality I see the exact opposite happening." (S8)

"Expertise is important but so are media skills. As a politician who is not the best communicator, this can be frustrating at times, but I agree that a good communicator should always get priority." (S17)

"Media skills are more important than expertise. If you are a boring professor with a lot of knowledge who can not explain anything without someone falling asleep, you should not be a politician. Profiles like that belong in the parties' think-tank." (S18)

Important to note here, is that when asked to choose between media skills and expertise, many of the interviewed politicians made clear that a different set of rules apply for the candidates who get a top (or electable) position on the list. The politicians made a different assessment for the first three people on the list. All politicians who mentioned these "top candidates" stated that for them, media skills are deemed crucial. These candidates are more in the public eye than the other candidates on the list and appear more often in television debates and interviews. They are questioned more about the ideas of the party and policy proposals, and have a bigger chance of eventually getting a higher political function.

"To be able to act on the top of the list, media skills are really important. Let me just put it this way, if you do not have media skills, you have a problem. Candidates with more of a technocrat profile are ranked below the media-skilled candidates. At the top of the list, media skills are vital." (S2)

"Media skills certainly matter when composing the most ideal list. First, you see if one can stand his/her ground in debates and is media skilled. When you have found these people, then you can complement the list with people who are experts or strong thinkers." (S4)

"Media skills matter, especially for the first three, i.e. the electable, places. For these places on the list, you know for sure that the candidates will be in front of cameras and will be in television debates. Therefore, it is crucial that these candidates can hold their own in these situations." (S16)

Other characteristics mentioned by politicians as important during candidate selection, can be largely divided into four groups. The first group entails all references to strong ideology. Some selectors expressed the need for candidates who really believe in what the party stands for and act within the political arena guided by their ideology. Others mentioned the importance of ideology in debates where candidates should have a solid ideological foundation they can always rely on. A second frequently mentioned trait is being a good party soldier. Hereto, selectors look for candidates who are active and embedded in different party structures. Candidates who are supported by a big part of the party, are loyal or not afraid to put in the extra hours for the general interest of the party are mentioned by the selectors. A third often mentioned trait is the electoral potential or the (potential) network of candidates. Local embedment, like being a mayor, or other interesting profiles are seen as a big advantage. A last group of characteristics entails all references to the personality of candidates. The interviewed politicians stated that they look for certain traits in candidates, like being able to handle attention and power, being stable, trustworthy and modest.

Not all interviewed selectors, however, indicated media skills as important. Six of the 24 interviewed politicians denied that media skills have an influence when selecting candidates. These six politicians are members of different parties, are not in the same age category and hold different political functions. One noticeable fact is that four out of six are female politicians. Considering that, in total, only six female politicians participated, the number of female politicians that said media skills are not important is proportionally high. A possible explanation for this is that female politicians think differently about the role of media than their male colleagues. This is supported by previous research. Research found that women are overall underrepresented in news coverage (Everitt, 2003). Journalists justify this by pointing at the fact that female MPs are more reluctant to act as a source in the news than their male counterparts (Vos 2013). Apart from female politicians being less eager to get into the news, Aalberg en Strömbäck (2011) also found male MPs to be more adjusted to the media logic than female MPs. In general, these six selectors said that media skills do not matter compared to other characteristics. Noticeable is that most of them alluded to the fact that media skills can be acquired once a candidate is elected.

"Media skills do not really matter. First, you should find the right candidates with expertise, who are willing to work on the narrative of the party. Candidates who have these characteristics can undergo media training later on." (S13)

"When we are discussing potential candidates who are not really media skilled, we often say that we will train them or that they will learn media skills as they go." (S23)

Mediatization

During the interviews, different politicians referred to an evolution in media skills. Some alluded to the fact that media skills used to be less important. Others implied that the very nature of the required media skills has changed.

"Media skills have become an increasingly more important criterion." (S19)

"The requirements that parties and the public opinion demand from media skills have increased. It used to be good enough to be a good speaker, purely the rhetorical side of it all. Now, candidates should be able to explain things in a brief but convincing way. They should also be able to do this in a natural manner and emotionally connect with their audience." (S22)

These remarks allude to a shift from political logic to media logic and seem to imply a mediatization of the candidate selection of political parties. Tools to handle the media, are now dominating candidate selection at the expense of expertise, i.e. a very political oriented quality. It were the older politicians that mentioned this shift and many of them seemed to regret this while also acknowledging that they understood that politics needed to change. In addition, some politicians also commented on the nature of the required media skills. These used to be more centered around rhetoric skills or "being a good speaker", while now the tone of one's voice, converting a message in a compelling soundbite, coming across as authentic, emotional and yet professional, etc. are qualities that are searched for in a candidate. Both these evolutions provide further indications for the mediatization of the selection of candidates.

Projection

Before starting the interviews, we expected politicians of the same party to assess the importance of media skills in a similar way, i.e. that the candidate selection was mediatised on party-level. This is however not the case. Apart from female selectors attributing less importance to media skills, we could not really find a pattern that explained the differences in the perception of media skills. After thoroughly analysing the interviews, we discovered that in many of the interviews politicians spontaneously referred to themselves when talking about media skills.

"Media skills are not important for me, but maybe I am not really impartial. When I started as a politician, everyone said that I had poor media skills. Now, nine years later, people still say the same. I, however, got 43 000 preference votes in the last elections and when I do home visits, no one ever tells me that my communication is bad." (S3)

"When I was an MP, the communication expert of the party told me that I would never be a popular politician. Not long after, I was picked up by the media, got a lot of preference votes and was the most popular politician for a few years in a row." (S24)

"I think that media skills is the absolute most important criterion. [...] I work really hard on my media skills. I ask feedback and, honestly, I think I am better at it than the average politician." (S10)

The interviewed politicians seem to project their own experiences or abilities on what they expect in potential candidates. How selectors assess media skills is thus influenced by how media skilled they perceive themselves. This behaviour relates to the, in psychology research often studied, concept of attributive projection (Holmes 1968). Since social projection was first mentioned by Allport (1924), the concept of people projecting their own ideas, goals, experiences, preferences and traits on others has become very influential within psychology (See Krueger et al. 2005 for an overview). Attributive projection, a sub-category of social projection, is in its most basic form the mental process in which a person projects characteristics or traits similar to his own onto other people (Holmes 1968). The idea behind this mechanism is that people try to see their environment as consistent as possible with their own ideas, and justify their own feelings through projection (Baumeister et al. 1998). Dunning and Hayes (1996) proved that people explicitly refer to their self-image when they judge or evaluate others. According to psychology research, people project their own traits onto others on a daily base. This finding of attributive projection among politicians thus is, on itself, not really surprising. However, when we apply this to the selection of potential candidates, the attributive projection gets normative implications.

Research in employment studies that looked at the effect of attributive projection during job interviews, found that the perception of similarities does influence decision-making (Festinger 1954). Interviewers who consider themselves similar to the applicant, will, on average, rate him/her higher and regard him/her as more qualified compared to others (Frank and Hackman 1975; Schmitt 1976; Graves and Powell 1988). This has been mainly tested for gender (Gallois et al. 1992; Powell 1987; Binning et al. 1988; Wiley and Eskilson 1985), race and age (Lin et al. 1992). These studies showed that attributive projection leads to perceived similarity in attitudes and values, which in turn first leads to the recruiter being more amicable during the interview. Subsequently, recruiters exhibit a positive bias in the information processing and final judgement after the interview (Graves and Powell 1995). The process of candidate interviews has proven to follow a certain (unconscious) mental pattern. First, interviewers evaluate how similar an applicant is to him- or herself. After this assessment, they determine if the candidate is competent and appropriate for the job (Howard and Ferris 1996).

2

Research within political science has not specifically focused on the selectors' behavior during candidate selection. In legislative recruitment research different biases (socio-economic, professional, minority and gender) in the recruitment of candidates (Norris 1997) were derived, by looking at the composition of the parliament. Gender bias is the most studied bias that systematically leads to underrepresentation of a group in the population. There are more male elite politicians who, in turn, select more male candidates, which leads to an underrepresentation of female politicians (Niven 2006; Lawless and Fox 2010; Freeman 2002; Carroll 1994; Sanbonmatsu 2006). We argue that there is a similar media skill bias (unconsciously) applied by Belgian selectors.

Although media skills can be trained and improved, talent plays a big role. Different politicians said during the interviews that media training only builds on someone's natural abilities. A bad communicator can not become a really good one regardless of the amount of training (S15, S21). Above, our findings demonstrated that media skills are becoming more important, especially for the top candidates on the list. These top candidates are likely to be elected and can eventually even become top politicians themselves. Chances are high that they end up as selectors and one day pick the candidates that go on the list. The increasing focus on media skills will establish a media-skilled elite that will not only consciously (they know that media skills matter and thus look for it) but also unconsciously (due to attributive projection) select media-skilled candidates. This evolution might seem trivial but this will come, as some politicians already stated in the interviews, at the expense of other characteristics like expertise, loyalty and trustworthiness. This can have far-reaching implications on the very nature of the political arena and in extension the democracy as a whole. Politics can lose their political reflex: a shift in focus from policy making to image-building and issue-framing in the media in a profound and drastic way. Media logic, driven by mediatization and enforced by attributive projection, can (more than we already found) become dominant in even the most internal processes of political parties.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

A lot has been written about the mediatization of politics and researchers overall agree that media logic is increasingly dominating political logic. Not many studies, however, really look at how political processes are influenced by this mediatization. This paper fills the gap in the literature by focusing on one of the most internal political processes of political parties: candidate selection. We interviewed 24 top selectors (ministers, party leaders and caucus leaders) who decide which candidates will go on the list. Interviewing these selectors gives us a rare insight in an otherwise completely closed-off political process.

Based on these elite interviews we find indications that the candidate selection of political parties is indeed mediatized. Previous research (Sheafer and Tzionit 2006)

found that media skills do not matter when the selectorate is exclusive. All parties in Belgium have an exclusive selectorate and still, we find that media skills matter when a select group (party leader, ministers, caucus leader) chooses the candidates. This finding could of course be explained by the different context (Belgium vs. Israel) but our second finding might give an alternative explanation. In the interviews, we find indications of an evolution in the importance of media skills. This evolution entails a shift in which media skills, or thus tools to handle the media, are now dominating candidate selection at the expense of expertise, i.e. a very political oriented quality. In addition, the interviewed selectors also commented on a shift in the nature of the required media skills. It used to be good enough to be a good speaker but now other requirements centered around media logic like producing soundbites, changing ones voice or pace, etc. are mentioned. These findings imply that candidate selection of political parties is influenced and shaped by media logic and provide thus an indication for mediatization. It could be that since Sheafer and Tzionit (2006) conducted their research, the role of media skills (even in contexts with an exclusive selectorate) has become more important. Although further research is needed to strengthen this idea, this paper is the first to study mediatization in the context of the candidate selection of political parties.

When looking at similarities between parties, we noticed that individual politicians from the same party do not necessarily select candidates in the same way. We found big differences across parties and this unveiled the underlying process of attributive projection. The selectors base their decision, when selecting candidates, mainly on their own experiences and characteristics. Attributive projection is normal human behavior but can have, in the selection of our future politicians, normative implications. Previous research found that male politicians are more implied to select male candidates and this in turn leads to an underrepresentation of women in politics. We expect something similar to happen with media skills. This might bring about an evolution in which media skills become dominant over all other characteristics of potential candidates and ultimately politics becoming completely media-centered, enforcing the mediatization of politics even further. This might result in significant changes in the characteristics of political actors.

The findings in this paper are based on a case study of one country and although the specific Belgian context certainly plays a role in our findings, we do believe that this gives a first insight in how mediatized the candidate selection of political parties in countries with an exclusive selectorate is. Belgium is a country with strong party loyalty and low levels of personalization. Finding indications of the significant impact media skills have in the selection of candidates in this context leads us to believe that in countries where individual politicians are more independent from their party and personalization is higher, media skills play an even more decisive role in the selection of candidates. Further research is needed to cross-validate our findings to other countries.

The biggest limitation of this paper is that our findings our solely based on interviews with top selectors. We do believe that we uncovered the main processes but systematic research in the form of surveys and experiments can give us more information about how mediatized candidate selection is. Another limitation is that the period in which the politicians were interviewed (March- June 2018) was almost four years after the last federal and regional elections. Ideally, these interviews would have been conducted closer to the elections so that the selection of candidates was still fresh in their minds. One politician, a party leader, indicated that he was not closely involved with the candidate selection at the time of the elections. To him and other politicians who had trouble recalling details from four years ago, we asked to answer how they would select candidates if it were elections in the following months and candidates had to be elected that instant.

Despite these limitations, we believe that this paper offers new insights in the closed-off political process of how candidates are selected and broadens our understanding of the increased mediatization of politics. It offers a first step towards further research into the mediatization of internal political processes and the psychological processes that can enforce this evolution.

APPENDIX

A.

Table A1. Overview of conducted interviews.

Interview ID	Political function	Duration
S01	Caucus leader	3min37s
S02	Caucus leader	3min16
S03	Caucus leader	10min04
S04	Caucus leader	2min56
S05	Caucus leader	5min
S06	Caucus leader	2min47s
S07	Caucus leader	7min52s
S08	Caucus leader	5min23s
S09	Caucus leader	8min28s
S10	Party leader	9min12s
S11	Party leader	8min9s
S12	Party leader	5min42s
S13	Party leader	10min22s
S14	Party leader	3min35s
S15	Party leader	5min50s
S16	Minister	4min
S17	Minister	4min19s
S18	Minister	6min40s
S19	Minister	8min7s
S20	Minister	5min5s
S21	Minister	10min20s
S22	Minister	4min40s
S23	Minister	7min10s
S24	Minister	5min20s
S25	Minister	6min4s

2

CHAPTER THREE

The influence of Mass Media on the Popularity of Politicians[2]

---

2   This chapter is under review as: Van Remoortere, A., Vliegenthart, R. (2021). The influence of mass media on the popularity of politicians.

Politics is in essence a constant competition. Politicians compete with each other for votes, political positions and popularity in an attempt to translate their ideological ideas into policy. Although a large part of this competition takes place in the political arena, much of it also partakes in the media. Due to a lack of face-to-face interactions voters have relatively little access to information about politicians. Therefore, they base their vote mainly on what they see in the media. Getting into the media generates name recognition and hence impacts the political success of politicians (Wolfsfeld 2011). Even with the growing importance of social media, mass media still hold a central position in politics. Social media give politicians an alternative route to connect with and inform voters. Recent research, however, showed that traditional media coverage is linked to which politicians become popular on social media (Van Aelst et al. 2017) and that traditional media coverage of individual politicians significantly affects the extent to which these politicians receive attention on social media (Kruikemeier et al. 2018). For many citizens the traditional media are still the main source of political information (Sparks 2010; Blumler 2015; Picone 2021) and mass media prominence thus still very much dictates the political success of individual politicians.

Due to its importance, the influence of media on the political success of politicians is often studied. Initially, studies have investigated which politicians get into the media. The one characteristic that proved to guarantee a place in the news spotlight, in different countries, times and contexts, is a high political position (for an overview see Vos 2014). Maybe not surprisingly, politicians with political power find it much easier to get media coverage. Journalists simply feature powerful politicians more because they have a higher newsworthiness. The more political power someone has, the more likely it is that they will have an impact on society (Wolfsfeld 2011). Studies have, apart from who gets into the media, also focused on the effects of this media coverage, especially on the vote choice of citizens (e.g., Hopmann et al. 2010; Geiß and Schäfer 2017; van Erkel et al. 2020). In these studies, political success is mostly interpreted as electoral success and the focus thus heavily lies on election periods. Occurring in the news is generally found to have a positive effect on electoral success. Citizens are more inclined to vote for politicians that appear often in the news (e.g., Bos 2012; Aaldering et al. 2018). In addition to their mere appearance in the media, the portrayal of political actors in the news has also been studied extensively. A positive portrayal in the media can have an important effect on political success. Many researchers have therefore studied the media's sentiment towards the political actors and its effect on how people actually vote. Different studies found that the sentiment of news coverage indeed influences the vote choice of citizens (Hopmann et al. 2010; Semetko and Schoenbach 1994; Schmitt-Beck 1996). Positive news coverage motivates citizens to vote for a certain party/politician, while negative news coverage discourages citizens to vote for that party/politician.

Hardly any of these previous studies however focus on the periods between elections. This is somewhat surprising as we can expect citizens to not only form their idea about politicians in the period just before an election but also in the years between elections. Electoral outcome is certainly a good indicator of how successful a party (party vote) or individual politician (preferential vote) actually is, but we expect that the popularity of political actors is, at least partly, formed during routine times. To deepen our knowledge about the influence of media on the success of politicians, the periods in between elections should be studied. Political opinion polls are the prime tool to study this, considering that, apart from voting, they are one of the few sources that offer an insight in public opinion. Public opinion polls are, moreover, not just passive measuring tools. Extensive research in public opinion polls has shown that these polls in turn affect public opinion (Moy and Rinke 2012; Strömbäck 2012; Hardmeier 2008). People turn to the media to learn what other people think, which they in turn might take into account when forming their own opinion. Being polled as very popular might, due to different mechanisms, lead to even more popularity. Studying these popularity polls in conjunction with media coverage provides important insights into how the media influence popularity in the years between elections.

First, this paper studies the effect of media on the odds of being included in public opinion polls. In Belgium, the case under study, bi-annual opinion polls are held that ask citizens about their political ideas and preferences. One of the subjects is the individual popularity of different politicians and these popularity polls receive a great deal of media attention. Many articles are devoted to which politician is the most popular, why certain politicians scored high/low and how the popularity of politicians changed in comparison to the previous poll. Not all politicians are, however, included in this popularity poll. Only 30 politicians are "short-listed". To be included in the popularity polls, political standing can be expected to play a defining role but not all high-position politicians are included. We first analyse whether media coverage (visibility and sentiment) has an influence on who is included in the popularity poll. Next, we study how the popularity score, once they are in the poll, is affected by media coverage (visibility and sentiment). We study this by analysing all newspaper articles (N = 1 241 867) from three main Belgian newspapers for 17 years (2003-2019) and linking them to the results of bi-annual public opinion polls for the same period. We found that visibility matters, both for being included in popularity polls as for the actual popularity score. This is especially true for lower ranking politicians (members of parliament). We also found a negativity bias. Negative sentiment in news articles has a negative effect on the popularity score of politicians while we did not find a significant effect for positive sentiment.

3

PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

Public opinion is a crucial concept in democracies and it is therefore not surprising that ways of measuring public opinion were sought from very early on. It is often assumed that public opinion polls are the most direct way to represent the general population. They are, in any case, the most researched form of public opinion representation (Asher 2016; Marsh 1985; Moy and Rinke 2012; Strömbäck 2012). Since the invention of scientific polling in the 1930s, opinion polls have become an important part of politics and the way media covers politics (Frankovic 1998). Previous research clearly showed that polls are very frequently covered in the news (Strömbäck 2012). Mass media, public opinion and opinion polls are closely linked. Evidence of this is the fact that different media outlets conduct or sponsor their own polls (Brettschneider 2008) and by doing so they de facto create exclusive news. This way, polls are a newsgathering tool over which journalists have full control. Journalists cover and interpret the results, compare them with previous polls and cast predictions about what the results exactly mean for certain topics/parties/politicians (Olof et al. 2006; Larsen and Fazekas, 2020). An extra bonus is that opinion polls, and especially popularity polls, bring along quite some dramatic value. Journalists can go all the way in using horse-race coverage in which terms as winner, loser, exceeding expectations, etc. can be freely used. This makes politics, an otherwise heavy topic, understandable and more appealing to politically uninterested readers (Iyengar et al. 2004).

Noticing how opinion polls are ubiquitous in media coverage of politics, many researchers have studied the effects of reporting about opinion polls, especially on electoral behavior. Three polling effects have been mainly studied. First, different researchers, using various study designs in different countries for different elections, found convincing evidence of a "bandwagon effect" (e.g., Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994; Nadeau et al. 1993; Schmitt-Beck 1996; Faas et al. 2008). This effect entails that polls boost support for parties/politicians that emerged as most popular. In addition, the opposite effect, namely the underdog effect, has been studied. This polling effect would lead voters to support a party/politician that is not performing well in the polls. Studies have, in apparent paradox to the findings above, found evidence of a boost in support for parties or politicians who were found to be losing in the polls (Lavrakas et al. 1991; Marsh 1985). A third often researched polling effect is strategic voting, which lead voters to choose a second-best option if their preferred party/politician seems to have little chance of success based on the polling results. This way voters seek to maximize their vote (Anderson 1965). In addition to the effect of polls on electoral behavior, researchers have also studied effects on political trust, political engagement and opinion expression (Mutz, 1998; Sonck and Loosveldt, 2010).

Polls thus do not simply depict the public opinion but also play an active role in shaping public opinion, or like Frankovic (1998) stated: "They not only sample public opinion,

they define it" (Mutz, 1998, p. 150). Designing an opinion poll is a process in which every step is defined by selectivity. The questions asked and the way they are formulated already influences how respondents think about politics and how they respond to the questions posed. An opinion poll, de facto, constructs a new reality based on some selected snippets of society. This constructed reality is then amplified once the poll and the polling results appear in the media, again influencing the broader public (Mutz 1998). This effect of polls is especially interesting in the case study at hand i.e. Belgium. Every six months, an opinion poll issued by the public broadcaster and an elite newspaper is conducted. One of the components is a popularity poll in which respondents are asked to select the name (or names) of a politician they could see themselves vote for. Respondents get a list of 30 politicians from which they can select one or multiple politicians. Interestingly enough, this hotlist of 30 politicians is composed quite arbitrarily by the journalists and experts who designed the opinion poll. The only rule they follow is that at least one politician of every party in parliament has to be included. The results of this popularity poll always receive a lot of media attention and the most popular politician is repeatedly announced in a multitude of articles in every important media outlet. The horse-race narrative is freely used in these articles, denoting winners and losers accompanied with speculations to explain these results.

THE INFLUENCE OF MEDIA ON POLITICS

Visibility

The influence of mass media on public opinion has been extensively studied. Media visibility, or thus appearing in the media, is one of the most frequently studied effects. Especially in the U.S., studies have focused on how the media effects presidential approval ratings and candidate assessments (e.g., Althaus and Kim 2006; Edwards III et al. 1995; Lodge et al. 1995; Pan and Kosicki 1997). Also in studies that focus on West-European countries, a significant influence of media visibility on party or preferential votes. Semetko and Schoenbach (1994) proved that even a slight change in the visibility of political actors could explain changes on party evaluations. Hopmann et al. (2010) found that the visibility of a political party increases the number of citizens that would vote for this party. A more recent study, conducted by Geiß and Schäfer (2017), also found that visibility of the two major German parties and their candidates was a good predictor for the vote intention of citizens in an election campaign, and that a higher visibility successfully increased their electoral success. Very similar results are found in a study by Oegema and Kleinnijenhuis (2000) on the Dutch national elections of 1998, where greater media visibility of party leaders increased the likelihood of people voting for that politician or their party. Van Aelst, Maddens, et al. (2008) studied different media outlets and found that appearances on television news have a substantial impact on political success. Newspapers in particular proved to have a significant effect on the less well-known candidates who never appear on television (Maddens et al. (2006). Moreover, more recent work that looked at the effect of party leaders appearing in

the news, found that media visibility of these politicians is likely to affect voters' vote decision. Bos (2012) demonstrated that media visibility is important for political success for all party leaders, irrespective of their political orientation. Aaldering et al. (2018) found that media visibility of political leaders positively influences the vote intention of citizens to vote for that party leader.

The influence of media visibility on electoral preferences is thus clear. Appearing in the media has a positive effect on electoral success. However, previous studies are all very narrowly focused on the months before an election. This while multiple studies have shown that campaign periods change the dynamic between media and politics compared to routine periods. Media outlets prepare for elections months beforehand and everything is more structured and planned compared to routine periods. There is less room for new issues (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006) and little space for unexpected news (Jungherr 2014). This naturally also impacts which actors are featured in the news during campaign time. Some researchers found that political news coverage becomes more balanced during elections and that a larger variety of politicians gain news attention (e.g., De Swert and van Aelst 2009). Others, however, expect there to be less room for lesser-known politicians during election times and that these ordinary political actors can potentially be more visible during routine times (Jungherr 2014). In any case, it seems that election periods and routine periods differ from each other in several respects. Researchers have focused mostly on election results seeing that they have a direct effect on the political landscape. There is however reason to believe that many opinions and ideas of citizens are formed during routine periods. Politicians do not suddenly become popular in the month before the election, their image is built in the years between elections. An election campaign alone is often simply too short for candidates to rise to media prominence and gain popularity (Jungherr 2014). van Erkel et al. (2020) found a different effect for media visibility related to time: visibility benefits top candidates during the long campaign (one year before the elections) while media attention during the short campaign (one month before the elections) matters more for ordinary candidates (van Erkel et al., 2020). This study demonstrates that media effects on political (electoral) success should not be considered as homogenous. Both different time periods as political functions might influence the effect of media on the success/popularity of political actors.

Being included and receiving a high score in popularity polls, can be a significant asset for the political success of a politician. For the Belgian case, the "hotlist" of 30 polled politicians seems to be composed based on the newsworthiness of different politicians. Not only (junior) ministers and caucus leaders are included. Over the years, quite some regular MPs managed to be included (for an overview of politicians in the popularity polls, see Appendix A). Because political power makes it more likely to be included in the poll, we differentiate between political function in our study. We expect media visibility to matter more for regular MPs, both when it comes to being included in the poll, as

well as for their popularity among citizens. Because they have a lower political function and are thus less familiar to most citizens, media visibility will be a prerequisite to be considered, both for inclusion in the poll, as well as for being a viable option in terms of voting. Based on previous research, we expect visibility to influence both being included in the polls as the actual popularity score politicians receive. We also expect a different effect for different politicians and this leads us to formulate the following hypotheses:

H1: Media visibility has a positive effect on the popularity of politicians.
H1a: Media visibility increases the odds of being ranked in a popularity poll.
H1b: Media visibility has a positive effect on the popularity score of politicians.

H2: Media visibility has a larger positive effect on the popularity of ordinary politicians (MPs) compared to higher ranking politicians (party leaders, ministers).

Sentiment
Apart from mere visibility, the sentiment of news coverage in relation to vote intention of citizens has also been extensively studied. Negative information is often considered to have more weight than neutral or positive information. Early research in social psychology found that negative trait-descriptions are more influential than comparable positive trait-descriptions (Anderson 1965; Hamilton and Zanna 1972; Koenigs 1974) and that negative first impressions are more resistant to change than positive first impressions (Beigel 1973; Richey et al. 1967). From this literature, negativity seems to have two main effects. First, negative information is more important than positive information when forming an idea about someone. Second, the consequences of negative evaluations are bigger than the consequences of positive evaluations (Lau 1982).

However, when we look at previous media effect studies, this negativity bias is not always confirmed. Norris et al. (1999) conducted an experiment and discovered that a positive tone towards certain political actors prompts citizens to feel more positive towards those actors. Interestingly, negative news content was found to be unimportant. Zaller (1992) found that the sentiment of a news message can, under certain circumstances, affect how citizens feel about political actors and their voting behavior. Similar results were reported in a study by Kleinnijenhuis et al. (2007) who proved that news coverage of either success or failure of political actors had a big influence on the evaluation of those political actors by citizens. Moreover, a long-term German study covering both election and routine periods found that the sentiment of evaluations in the media influenced the public contentment or discontentment with party leaders (Brettschneider 2002). Aaldering et al. (2018) discovered that positive coverage of political leaders increases support for the leader's party, while negative news coverage decreases this support.

Based on the above mentioned research, we expect that the sentiment of news coverage influences the popularity score of politicians. Politicians that are negatively covered in the news, will be perceived more negative which naturally influences their popularity score. The influence of sentiment on being included in popularity polls is less straightforward. On the one hand, the group of journalists and experts that select the 30 politicians that will be included in the popularity poll, might just want to include the most visible politicians, irrespective of how they were covered. On the other hand, we can also expect that the journalists and experts try to make an assessment of who should be in there based on an estimation of their popularity. A politician that is mostly negatively portrayed might be perceived by the journalists and specialist as too controversial to be popular. Based on this we propose following hypotheses:

H3: *Sentiment has an effect on the popularity of politicians.*

H3a: The more positive a politician is covered, the more likely (s)he will be included in a popularity poll.

H3b: The more positive a politician is covered, the more popular (s)he will be among citizens.

and the following research question:

RQ 1: Are the effects of negative news on popularity among citizens larger than the effects of positive news?

METHOD

Case

In this paper we, as mentioned above, study the case of Belgium, and more specifically of Flemish politicians originating from the Northern, Dutch speaking part of the country. The Belgian political system is known to be a strong multiparty system where individual politicians are loyal to their party and personalization is still quite low compared to other western countries (Depauw 2003). To measure news coverage of politicians, we studied newspapers. The choice for newspapers was made because television coverage is more narrowly focused on a few (top) politicians. We need the more fine-grained newspaper coverage to find nuanced differences between individual politicians. The Belgian media system has been categorized as democratic-corporatist, implying strong professionalization of the journalistic profession and a considerable level of state intervention to protect press freedom; it is comparable with the Scandinavian and other Western European countries (Hallin and Mancini 2011). Newspapers remain an important source of information in Belgium, readership and circulation is still relatively high. Furthermore, coverage in newspapers strongly correlates with other (online) outlets (CIM 2020). For this paper, we look at a representative sample of three of the most relevant newspapers. Two broadsheet papers, one being left-wing (De Morgen), another being more to the center (De Standaard) and one popular newspaper (Het Laatste Nieuws). These newspapers were selected based on readership numbers.

Furthermore, they represent the two biggest (and almost only remaining) media houses in Belgium (CIM 2020).

Data

News articles were collected by scraping Gopress (www.gopress.be), the official repository of all Belgian newspaper publishers, using Python. We collected every news article starting from 1 January 2003 until 31 December 2019. A first step in processing the data was creating a word embedding model to clean the news articles and code political actor presence. Hereto, the raw newspaper articles were used as input for a Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithm. The reason for parsing all articles using NLP is to clean the texts, and to reduce their complexity. Inflected forms of words are reduced to their dictionary lemma, while Universal Part-Of-Speech (UPOS) tags allow disambiguation between words that mean different things but are spelled in the same way (e.g., Green as a party name and green as a color). In addition, NLP parsing allows for a correct identification of sentence borders.

Before coding political actors for their presence in the collected news articles, we decided to filter out "junk" articles that are not relevant from a political perspective. All articles about sports, weather forecasts, recipes and horoscopes were discarded. By removing these articles we minimize the possibility of false positives, like mentions of for example athletes that share their name with a politician, are mostly filtered out. This was done by training student coders to manually code a sample of articles as "junk" or "not junk". When an acceptable reliability was reached (Krippendorff's alpha >= 0.85), the manually labelled articles were used to train a random forest classification model using a TF-IDF (term frequency and inverse document frequency) vector as features. This model then automatically filtered out all junk articles. After this automatic selection, we were left with 1 164 252 articles. The distribution between the newspapers is: 350 602 articles for *De Morgen*, 415 624 articles for *De Standaard* and 398 026 articles for *Het Laatste Nieuws*. Of these 1 164 252; 264 141 articles mention a member of parliament, minister, party leader or prime minister that was active in our studied period (2003-2019).

To study the popularity of politicians, results of popularity polls were collected. The biannual popularity polls were made available by Kantar TNS, the market research company that conducted the polls on behalf of the public broadcaster *VRT* and quality newspaper *De Standaard*. The question that is relevant for this paper asked participants: "If these politicians were to stand in the next election and you had the opportunity to vote for each of them, which of the following politicians could you imagine voting for?". The names of the different politicians were always placed in a random order, the parties were not mentioned and participants could select multiple names. As stated above, journalists and experts of Kantar TNS, *VRT* and *De Standaard* make a "hotlist" of 30 politicians themselves from which participants can pick their favorite politician.

Politicians who are included in this top 30 list are thus already sufficiently well-known to be considered by the experts and journalists. The popularity score is represented by the percentage of participants that selected the respective politician.

The two independent variables we are interested in, media visibility and sentiment, were constructed by analyzing the collected newspaper articles. To calculate media visibility the articles were queried for the presence of national political actors. These actors include all individual politicians that were active as either prime minister, party leader, (junior) minister and/or MP. Queries for these politicians (PM, ministers, party leaders and MPs), comprise the combination of given name and surname within 5 words of each other. A larger distance between the two would result in too many false positives, and a smaller distance in too many false negatives. The queries were also limited to articles published during the time the politician was in office. For ministers the queries can also include their formal title as an alternative for their given name (e.g., Minister Peeters and Kris Peeters are both valid hits). The result of these actor queries is a list of articles in which a given actor is present. Every individual politician was assigned a unique actorID and the coded politicians were subsequently linked to an actor database we constructed. There are in total 92 unique politicians in the database. Most of these 92 politicians were included in multiple popularity polls. Our database contains information about each politicians' political function (MP, junior minister, minister and Prime Minister), popularity and personal details (age, gender). In Appendix A the distribution in the popularity polls of the different political functions is presented. Overall, ministers are the most present, while junior ministers are often not included. MPs were, in general, featured more in the beginning of the researched period than in more recent years. The average age of the politicians in our database is 46.93 and 36% are female. This personal information was collected by consulting personal websites, party websites and Wikipedia pages. Visibility was calculated by simply counting the articles in which a certain politician is mentioned at least one time. The average visibility of the politicians on a monthly base is 8.0 and in **table 1** this average monthly visibility is shown per function. This table clearly shows that there are significant differences between the different functions. The Prime minister appears by far most in the media. Ministers and party leaders appear in the media a similar number of times and MPs are mentioned, on average, 3 times a month in the media.

Table 1. The average visibility and standard deviation (σ) of politicians with a different political function on a monthly base (2003-2019).

	Prime Minister	Ministers	Party leaders	MP
Average monthly occurrence (σ)	115.05 (62.37)	36.10 (24.85)	32.33 (35.85)	3.02 (5.35)

One of the challenges of automatically analyzing sentiment related to actors is that there are often multiple politicians mentioned within one sentence or article. Identifying the source, target or topic of the sentiment is currently infeasible with automated sentiment analysis systems. We therefore decided to work with a proximity-based method. As a result we are only able to determine the sentiment in close proximity to the subject of interest. Sentiment was calculated on sentence-level, providing a more fine-grained score compared to document-level analyses. However, document-level or for the purpose of this paper actor-level sentiment can be computed by aggregating the scores of individual sentences (those that relate to the actor of interest) into sentence groups.

The sentiment of the news articles was calculated by first manually coding the overall sentiment of a set of sentences as positive, neutral or negative. An intensive training was held prior to the actual coding and when an acceptable reliability was reached (Krippendorff's alpha >= 0.9), a set of 2000 sentences was manually coded. Next, a sentiment dictionary was built using a word embedding model and a seed dictionary (the seed dictionary proposed by Rheault et al. (2016) was largely replicated). The final sentiment dictionary is constructed by comparing the words of the corpus with the seed words based on their co-occurrence with other words. The summed cosine similarity of a corpus word with all seed words indicates its relative proximity to the group of positive/negative seed words. The words with the highest scores, positive or negative, are included in the final dictionary. As such, the sentiment dictionary is specific to the context of the corpus. Finally, this dictionary is further optimized by leveraging information from the manually coded sentences. Sentence-level sentiment is then calculated by adding the scores of the words in the sentence that are included in the sentiment dictionary and dividing it by the total number of words in the sentence. Then, actor-level sentiment is computed per politician occurring in an article, which entails the average sentiment of all sentences linked to the respective politician. For this paper, the average sentiment for every politician is calculated for each month by computing the mean actor sentiment of all articles in each respective month. In our model, this sentiment score is averaged over 6 months. Sentiment scores vary between -1 and 1. A score of 0 means that the sentiment is neutral, -1 indicates a very negative sentiment and 1 indicates a very positive sentiment.

The performance of the automated sentiment analysis system was evaluated on the manually coded training set, using 5-fold cross-validation, and reached acceptable levels. Hereto, sentiment scores were discretized into ordinal (-1 for negative, 0 for neutral and 1 for positive) scores. The balanced accuracy is 0.64, precision is 0.63, recall is 0.65 and F1 is 0.64.

Model

Our dataset has a pooled time series structure, with semesters (popularity polls) (t) nested in individual politicians (N). Specification of this type of models is not self-evident, as issues such as autocorrelation and heterogeneity can hamper correct estimations (Wilson and Butler 2007). To account for these issues, we estimate our main effects model using three alternative specifications: (1) fixed effects with a lagged dependent variable; (2) fixed effects without a lagged dependent variable; (3) random effects with a lagged dependent variable.

The lagged dependent variable accounts for autocorrelation, while fixed effects remove inter-politician variation and yield models that focus on temporal variation. As the use of both fixed effects and a lagged dependent variable in a single equation can yield inefficient estimations (Baltagi, 2001), in particular with a small number of t observations, we report our model with and without the lagged dependent variable. As fixed effects models do not allow to assess inter-individual variation in media effects, we report random effects models that control for politicians' background characteristics and allow to assess the differential impact of media across different groups of politicians.

As the inclusion of politicians in the polls is a binary variable, our first set of analyses are logistic regression models. Linear regression models are estimated for the popularity among politicians.

Results

Thus, to study the influence of media visibility and sentiment on the popularity of politicians, we look at popularity polls in two steps. First, we assess how important visibility and sentiment of news coverage in the six months before the poll are to be included in the popularity poll. Next, we study how media visibility and sentiment influence the actual popularity score of politicians.
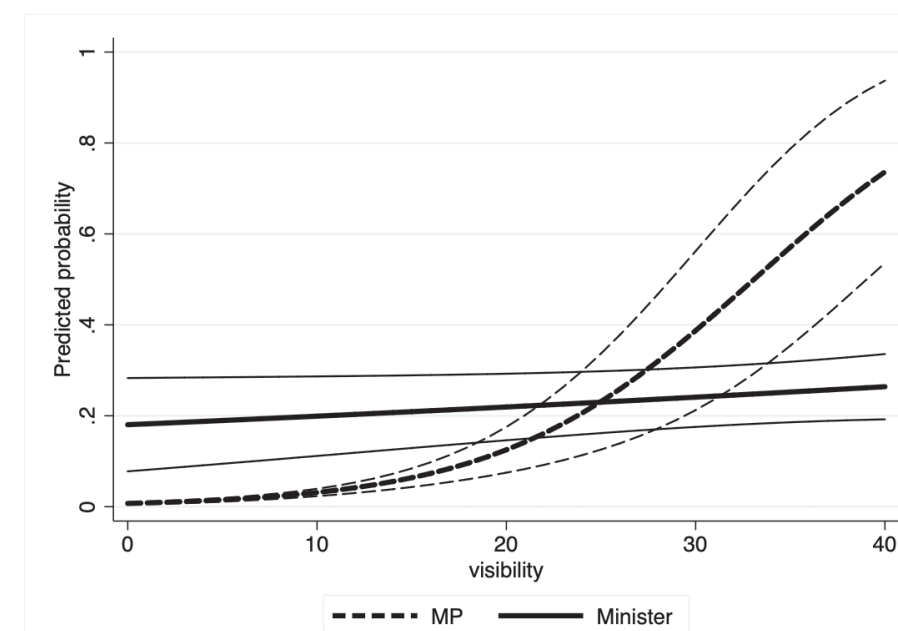
Table 2. Explaining inclusion in popularity poll.

Preference Votes	FE with LDV		FE		RE with LDV		RE with LDV (interaction)	
	Coef.	St.Err.	Coef.	St.Err.	Coef.	St.Err.	Coef.	St.Err.
Preference votes (t-1)	2.40***	.19			3.66***	.22	4.19***	.18
Visibility	.10***	.01	.14***	.01	.09***	.01	.17***	.02
Sentiment	1.94**	.98	.58	.77	.39	.65	.35	.72
Gender					.12	.31	.27	.32
Age					-.04**	.02	-.04**	.02
Junior minister[1]					1.65***	.51	.86	1.00
Minister[1]					1.47***	.36	4.08***	.50
Party leader[1]					3.23***	.47	4.14***	.66
Visibility*Jun minister							-.01	.05
Visibility*Minister							-.15***	.02
Visibility*Party leader							-.10***	.03
Constant					-4.11***	.76	-4.50***	.79
Pseudo R-squared	.50		.36		NA		NA	
AIC	633.54		891.59		115.40		1072.03	
N	1,456		1,666		5,749		5,749	

Note. Random effects logistic regression; *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1; [1]member of parliament is the reference category, prime minister is always included in the poll.

We find that visibility has a positive impact on getting into popularity polls throughout the different models, confirming hypothesis 1a. Here, the inclusion of a lagged dependent variable reduces the effect size considerably. In the random effects model an additional media occurrence per month yields a coefficient of .086. Sentiment is significant in our first model but when other variables are added, this effect disappears. Hypothesis 3a can therefore not be confirmed. Not surprisingly, function has an effect on being included in the popularity poll. Being a minister or party leader considerably increases the possibility (4.076 and 4.144 respectively) of being included in the poll. When we look at the interaction between visibility and function, we see that especially for MPs visibility matters. This difference in importance of visibility is also presented in **figure 1** below. For ministers, visibility clearly matters less than for MPs. Overall, visibility does not really affect the chance of being included in a popularity poll for ministers. For MPs that are, on average, featured more than 20 times per month in the news, the possibility of being included increases rapidly. An average MP however needs to be quite visible to be considered for inclusion in a popularity poll. For ministers, their high function alone is enough. This finding is in line with hypothesis 2.

Figure 1. Differential impact of media visibility on predicted probability to be included in popularity poll.

Note. Predicted probability of inclusion with other variables on their means and 95% confidence intervals

Table 3. Explaining popularity in popularity poll.

	FE with LDV		FE		FE with LDV (pos. vs neg.)		RE with LDV		RE with LDV (interaction)	
	Coef.	St.Err.	Coef.	St.Err.	Coef.	St.Err.	Coef.	St.Err.	Coef.	St.Err.
Preference Votes										
Preference votes (t-1)	.726***	.023			.726***	.023	.839***	.017	.809***	.017
Visibility	.023***	.007	.116***	.010	.022***	.007	.172***	.020	.149***	.016
Sentiment	5.569**	2.389	8.374**	3.494			4.102**	1.942	.119***	.023
Positive					-26.721	19.49				
Negative					-7.019**	2.539				
Gender							.442	.365	.745**	.358
Age							-.025	.019	-.030	.019
Junior minister							3.128***	.89	.183	1.524
							0	.	0	.
Minister							.586	.418	2.207***	.666
Prime Minister							2.382***	.79	7.799**	1.309
Party Leader							.417	.434	1.125*	.627
Visibility*Jun minister									.055	.040
									0	.
Visibility*Minister									-.074***	.022
Visibility*PM									-.106	.023
Visibility*Party leader									-.052***	.022
Visibility*Sentiment									.155**	.067
Constant	7.036***	.658	20.871***	.654	7.284	.674			3.104***	1.137
R-squared	.697		.395		.871		.874		.882	
N	743		876		743		743		743	

Note. *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1; for political function member of parliament is the reference category.

Next, we focus on the actual popularity score of politicians that were included in the polls (**table 3**). We see that visibility again has a positive impact on the popularity of politicians (once they are in the poll), confirming hypothesis 1b. In the random effects model an additional occurrence in an article per month yields a .172 increase in the popularity score of the respective politician. We see that a higher function again has an influence. Being a party leader (2.382) or a minister (3.128) ensures a higher score in the poll. We see that sentiment also has a positive significant effect, with a more positive evaluation in the media yielding a higher popularity score and thus a lower popularity score for more negative news coverage. With sentiment scores varying from -1 to +1, the coefficient of 4.102 is indicating that sentiment can make a substantial difference. The results are thus in line with hypothesis 3b. However, when we take a closer look at this (see fixed effects model with lagged dependent variable), we notice that only negativity is significant. This provides a partial answer to our research question: negative sentiment in an article has a negative effect on the popularity score of politicians, while positive news does not have a significant effect. This thus confirms the presence of a negativity bias in which negative news impacts the popularity of politicians whereas positive news does not make a difference.

Furthermore, we assess to what degree visibility effects depend on the position of the politician. Again, and in line with hypothesis 2, we see that effects are in particular prevalent for regular MPs, that need media visibility to gain a favorable public attitude. Ministers and party leaders, very prominent political positions, profit less from media attention, probably because they are already well-known and people have more stable attitudes towards them. **Figure 2** plots the difference in media visibility for MPs and ministers. To score high in a popularity poll, visibility again matters clearly more for MPs than for ministers.

Figure 2. Differential impact of media visibility on popularity.
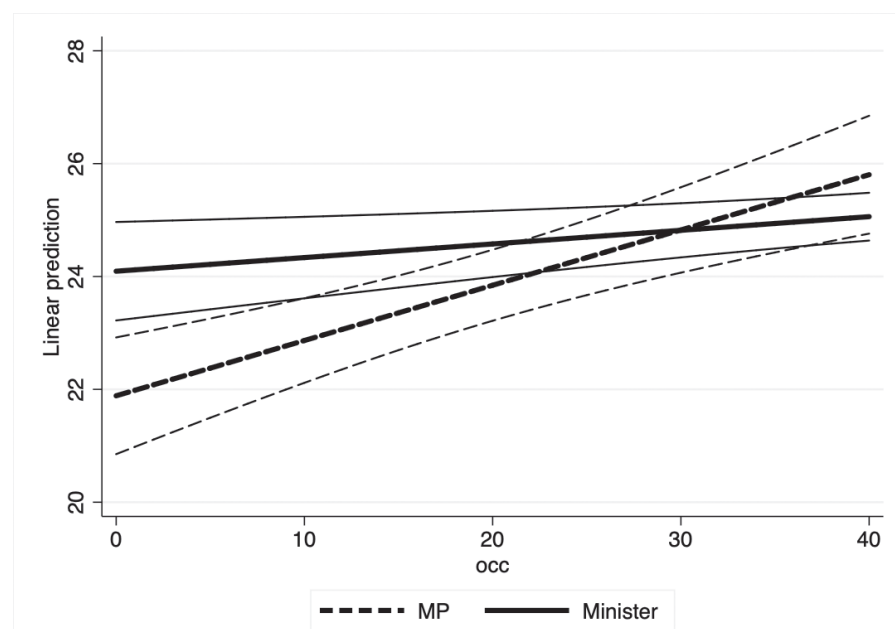
Note. Predicted popularity with other variables on their means and 95% confidence intervals.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Political success is often measured by studying electoral outcome and researchers thus primarily focus on the weeks or months before an election. In this paper we argue that the periods in between elections should get more attention seeing that campaign periods change how the media covers politics (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006; De Swert and van Aelst, 2009). Other media effects can thus be expected shortly before election periods compared to in between election periods. How citizens feel about politicians is not only determined in campaign periods. Politicians do not suddenly become popular in the month before an election, their image is built in the years between elections. An election campaign alone is often simply too short for candidates to establish media prominence and gain popularity (Jungherr 2014). Our research focuses on routine periods and measures political success by studying public opinion polls, and more specifically popularity polls of individual politicians. In Belgium these popularity polls receive a great deal of media attention and being polled as popular might thus affect political success. Not all politicians are, however, included in the popularity polls, only 30 politicians are "short-listed". First, we studied how media visibility and tone impacts being included in the poll. Next, we focused on how media visibility and tone affects the actual popularity-score of the included politicians.

We find that media visibility has a positive impact on getting into popularity polls. No significant effect was found for negative or positive sentiment, but we did find that the type of political function has an effect on being included in popularity polls. Ministers and party leaders have a much higher chance of being included compared to lower ranking politicians, but media visibility does not really play a role here. Having a higher political function is generally sufficient to be included in the polls. Media visibility thus especially matters for MPs. We, however, find that MPs need to be, on average, featured in the news more than 20 times per month, because from that point on the possibility of being included increases rapidly. An average MP thus needs to be quite visible to be considered for inclusion in a popularity poll. For the actual popularity score we also find a positive impact of media visibility. Again, having a higher function (party leader/minister) affects the popularity score. We also find a significant effect for sentiment on popularity scores but only for negativity. This indicates a negativity bias in which negative news impacts the popularity of politicians, whereas positive news does not make a difference. Again, we find that media visibility especially influences the popularity score of lower ranking politicians. Ministers and party leaders, very prominent political positions, profit less from media attention, probably because they are already well-known and people have more stable attitudes towards them.

Overall, media visibility can thus have an impact on popularity, both for being included as for the actual popularity score. This media effect is specifically important for MPs seeing that the function of higher ranking politicians (ministers/party leaders) already affects their popularity without media visibility. The media visibility of lower ranking politicians needs to be, in addition, rather high to experience an impact of visibility. We know however from previous research that this is not an easy task, because journalists generally follow the trail of power and lower ranking politicians thus have relatively little chance of getting past the news gates. Generating negative attention in order to gain more visibility might not be a good idea seeing that we find a negativity bias. Positive news coverage does not affect popularity, while negative news coverage significantly harms popularity.

We believe that this study is an important step in creating more attention for routine periods. Campaigns only last a few weeks while routine periods last four years on average. Ignoring these years in between elections prevents us from getting a full picture of exactly how media influence the popularity of individual politicians. Our study is however not without its limitations. First, this paper attempts to study a very complex process and popularity is influenced by multiple variables. Due to infeasibility not all possible control variables could be included. Other criteria like seniority and experience might influence the popularity of a politician but our study does not cover this. One way to further explore the direct effect of news coverage on the popularity of a politician is conducting an experiment in which citizens are directly exposed to (negative/neutral/positive) news coverage about individual politicians. This way a more direct effect of

3

visibility and sentiment could be established. Another limitation is that we only look at media occurrence in newspapers and do not consider television news. This method-ological choice was made because television coverage is more narrowly focused on top candidates, which makes television news less suitable. Adding television news would, in our opinion, not significantly change our results. The politicians that appear more often in newspapers are also more likely to appear in television news. Nevertheless, a future study should include television news considering that it is often seen as the main driving force behind mediatization and personalization of politics.

Using an automated content analysis has different advantages but naturally also some drawbacks. Automated methods have often been used to measure visibility and together with the many precautions we took and the data pre-processing we performed, we are confident that this measure is accurate and reliable. Measuring sentiment has proven to be more challenging. Positivity or negativity are more subjective than visibility and previous research has often struggled with this. Our method is not perfect but samples were manually coded after an extensive training stage in which a very high intercoder reliability was reached. Moreover, the performance of the sentiment classification model was rather high compared to previous studies that used automated sentiment coding. It is however a limitation that we are not able to measure sentiment directly related to politicians but only in proximity to them. Future research should take extra measures to (partly) solve this problem (see Fogel-Dror et al. (2019) for possible solutions).

Although the studied case is quite particular in the sense that popularity polls work with a shortlist of 30 politicians, we do believe that our findings have a generic quality. Media visibility can be expected to positively influence the popularity of individual politicians during routine times in other contexts. Research on election coverage also found an effect for visibility in different countries, so we have no reason to believe that our findings would not hold in other countries. The fact that we find a negative effect for negative sentiment in news coverage confirms the idea within psychology studies that negativity has a bigger influence than positivity. Again, there is no reason to believe that the Belgian case is exceptional and we thus expect to find very similar results in other contexts. Our results clearly beg for more research. Further studies should include more countries and a wider selection of media, to test the generalization of our findings. The role of social media on the popularity of politicians is another interesting avenue for future research. It could be expected that a big following or much activity on social media also impact the chance of being included in popularity polls. Overall, we think that using automated content analysis to study the media influence on popularity over a longer period is promising.

APPENDIX

A.

Figure A1. Distribution of politicians in popularity polls (2003-2019).

3
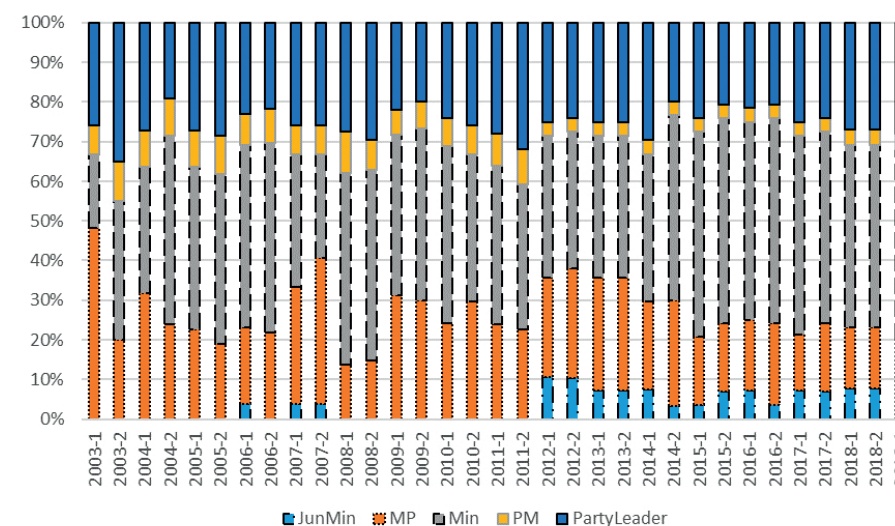
CHAPTER FOUR

Mass Media Occurrence as a Political Career Maker[3]

3   This chapter is published as: Van Remoortere, A., Walgrave, S., & Vliegenthart, R. (2021). Mass Media Occurrence as a Political Career Maker. The International Journal of Press/Politics, 19401612211021784.

Ample work in political communication showed time and again that high-level politicians get more media attention than their lower-ranking colleagues. With power comes media attention. More than hard work, charisma, age, gender or experience, it is the political function performed by politicians that is the crucial factor in explaining how much media attention they receive (e.g. Tresch 2009; Vos 2014). In parliamentary systems, two functions stand out: party leaders and ministers; politicians in those positions soak up a good deal of all media attention for politics. We know that power generates media attention. But what about the opposite relationship: does media attention also generate power? Does being in the media spotlight increase the chance that a politician will capture a powerful position? Or, more concretely, do the media (co-) determine who will become a party leader or minister? No research has tackled this question, while it is plausible that the causal relationship between power and media attention is bidirectional and mutually reinforcing.

The attention for individual level factors contributing to politicians' successes has increased in the last decades. Research found specific qualities of candidates that explain why some politicians succeed and others fail (Mondak 1995; Norris 1997). Rarely do those studies include media-related variables in addition to political variables and those that do, focus only on electoral success as the outcome variable (Sheafer and Tzionit 2006). Ministers and party leaders are the most powerful political actors in the Belgian political system, as in many other systems, but until now we do not really know why some politicians become minister or party leader and how media occurrence influences this. Therefore, in this paper, we examine the media path leading to power. Basically, two important career steps of politicians are assessed: becoming a party leader and becoming a minister[1]; we test whether, compared to those who did not make a top career, the politicians who came to take these steps were more prominent in the media *before* they moved up and became elite politicians. We draw on the case of Belgium here and leverage a longitudinal media content analysis of three newspapers (2000-2020) spanning two decades combined with a dataset of 531 national/regional politicians and their careers.

We find that media occurrence matters for being promoted to a top function in Belgium, more so for becoming a minister than for becoming a party leader. Furthermore, rejecting our initial idea based on political mediatization theories, the influence of media occurrence does not change over time.

WHY MEDIA ATTENTION LEADS TO POWER

Party leaders and ministers are often studied as they have a central role in the political system. But the comparative literature on what it takes to become a top politician is fairly limited. For some countries there is some early work about *ministerial* careers that focuses on whether ministers first were in parliament or not and to what extent

their ministerial function was preceded by an important function within their party (e.g. de Winter 1991). Also, some recent attention has been given in different systems to the social background characteristics of ministers and to various factors such as their education and occupation (e.g. Turner-Zwinkels and Mills 2020), their political preferences and their match with that of the caucus (Kam et al. 2010), or even the political careers of their relatives (e.g. Smith and Martin 2017). Yet, even in recent, large-scale comparative analyses of the selection of ministers the approach has been institutional and party-focused, and no substantial, empirical attention has been given to the role of media proficiency in making it to a ministership (see for instance: Dowding and Dumont 2008, 2014). More specifically, with regard to the Belgian case we study here (see below), the factors that have been put forward as determining ministerial selection are the distribution of ministerial mandates over internal party factions, the balance between continuity and innovation, geographic representation and gender balance (Dumont et al. 2009). Scholars did speculate about the softs skills needed to make a viable minister—such as "political skills" (de Winter 1991: 51), the capacity of handling many policy fields, or good working relationships with other MPs (Dumont et al. 2009: 134)—but *none* of these studies speculated, or even simply mentioned the possible role media proficiency might play in ministerial selection. Remarkably, when it comes to ministerial *resignations*, the role of the media and of public opinion *is* sometimes mentioned as being of importance in different countries (Dumont et al. 2009: 139; Brändström 2015). However, it is not very likely that the media would only matter negatively (for ending careers) and not positively (for making careers).

The work on *party leader* selection devoted just a little more attention to broad media access as an asset of leaders. But the comparative work on party leader selection mostly deals with how leaders are selected rather than why (Pilet and Cross 2014). Still, it explicitly recognizes that party leaders are the external face of their party in the media (e.g., Pilet and Cross 2015: 2) and thereby implicitly acknowledges that good media skills are a prerequisite for being chosen. Some even argue that we witness a "presidentialization" of election campaigns whereby party leaders are evolving into the sole embodiment of their party in the mass media (e.g. Mughan 2000; Balmas et al. 2014). Yet, again, as far as we can tell, no systematic empirical analyses are conducted that test the simple proposition that media prominence breeds party leadership. In sum, comparative political science scholarship examined the selection of ministers and party leaders from a predominantly institutional and party perspective largely neglecting the communicative aspect that comes with the highest office. This is remarkable, especially because ample research into elite perceptions has shown that politicians themselves strongly believe in the career controlling power of the media.

Studies in various Western European countries find the same pattern with politicians perceiving the media as very powerful in making or breaking their political careers (Van Aelst et al. 2008; Davis 2007; Lengauer et al. 2014). Work in communication science

has devoted a lot of attention to the media skills exhibited by politicians. This work has found, for instance, that media skills indeed yield media coverage (e.g. Wolfsfeld and Sheafer 2006) but it failed to examine whether media skills determine whether politicians come to be part of the small circle of elite politicians in the first place (but see the work by Sheafer 2008 finding that media skills affect electoral success).

It does not require extensive argumentation to make a plausible case that elite politicians are partly chosen because they have the qualities to make it in the media. In fact, there is a large literature on the mediatization of politics making the point that politics has become permeated by a "media logic" pushing the previous "political logic" aside (Strömbäck 2008). Many things that political actors do and undertake are deeply affected by the need to get covered by the media and, this way, to connect with the ever more volatile electorate. Many scholars have written about how political actors have come to adapt their communication and even their decision-making to fit the media's story-telling techniques and formats (Esser and Strömbäck 2014). In a similar vein, others have written about the permanent campaign (Blumenthal 1980) as the borders between election campaigns and routine times are getting blurred and political actors are continuously thinking about how things will play out in the media. If these mediatization scholars have a point, and there is ample reason to think they do, then it is not more than natural that the capacity to play the media, the ability to play by the media rules and to wrap up one's points into an attractive media format, is an essential feature of a successful elite politician.

Media skills, although very often mentioned in the literature, are not easily measured (Sheafer 2001). Therefore, in this study, we employ past media occurrence as a proxy of media proficiency. The best proof of possessing media skills is, naturally, past performance, i.e. whether a candidate top politician already attracted media attention before being chosen to become member of the small club of the powerful. In general and all other things being equal, we expect the media prominence of politicians to be a determinant of their being selected into higher office. Since we measure media prominence and not media skills in this paper, we refer, from now on, to media prominence as a driver of political careers.

The two higher office positions we are talking about here, ministership and party leadership, do probably not require media prominence to the same extent. This makes us expect that media prominence plays a larger role for being promoted to party leader compared to becoming a minister. Ministers are in the first place policy makers; they develop, implement and defend their policies. This definitely requires media presence, especially when policies are not technical and controversial, but foremost a great deal of expertise and political skills. Party leaders are, much more than ministers, and at least in the Belgian polity we are dealing with here, the central party soldiers who play the attack and defend game in the media arena (Thesen 2011). They are the prime

gladiators who confront other party leaders in the media and who spearhead their parties' electoral campaigns. Comparative research showed that party leaders generally are among the most mediatized politicians (Vos and Van Aelst 2018) and are, in Belgium, only outmatched in political power by the prime minister and vice prime ministers (Dewachter and Das 1991). Party leaders have important internal management tasks as well, and they are the guards of the ideological party line. But their main task is external and consists of embodying the party in the public realm. So, first, because of the different tasks they perform, we expect that media prominence is more important to be selected as a party leader than as a minister.

There is a second reason. The selectorate, the group of people who make the selection decision, is different for both positions. In Belgium, as in many countries, it is the party leader who singlehandedly selects the cabinet ministers of his/her party (Wauters et al. 2015). Although electoral outcomes play a role, it is not always the most popular politician that is chosen to be minister. Being a senior politician knowing all possible ministerial candidates personally, it can be expected that the party leader to a lesser degree rely on the candidates' media appearances to evaluate their fitness for the job. Expertise, specialization, loyalty, personal friendships, together with all the intra-party balances that have to be respected (see above), all play a role (Vandeleene et al. 2016) and this reduces the weight of media proficiency in the selection decision. Party leaders themselves, in contrast, are, in Belgium as in many other West-European countries, elected by a larger and open group of people, being all party members or all party delegates attending a national party congress (Wauters et al. 2015). It is to be expected that this much more inclusive selectorate, not knowing all candidates personally, relies more on the candidates' media appearances when making up their mind. Of course, in reality, the party establishment sometimes publicly supports one candidate and very often this "recommended" candidate wins the contest. Hence, party leader elections may appear more open than they actually are. But in general, it is clear that a much wider group of people is involved in selecting the party leader than in selecting a party's ministers. We expect that the smaller and more senior the selectors the less media prominence plays a role (Sheafer and Tzionit 2006). So, the diverging selection procedure as well points in the direction of media occurrence playing more of a role for party leadership selection than for ministerial selection.

H1: The more prominent the media coverage an MP receives, the more likely it is that they will acquire a top function (party leader/minister).

H2: The effect of media prominence on acquiring a top function is larger for party leader selection than for minister selection.

Mediatization is, as mentioned above, a key phenomenon within political communica-tion. Researchers generally assume some degree of mediatization of politics in most

Western countries without empirically assessing its presence and consequences, e.g. on political processes. For most countries, we have no idea how big the influence of mediatization on politics exactly is. The few studies dealing with mediatization in Belgium do confirm that Belgian politics increasingly follows a media logic (Driessens et al. 2010; Van Aelst et al. 2008; Ketelaars and Van Aelst 2020); these studies suggest that Belgian politics would momentarily be situated in the third or fourth phase of mediatization. However, these studies are not longitudinal, which makes it hard to assess whether and how the mediatization process unrolled over time.

The question for this study is whether the process of becoming a minister or party leader has changed in the past 20 years and whether the role of media prominence has increased or decreased. The gradually further developing mediatization process would make us expect that media prominence has become more important for making a top career in politics.

Yet, the emergence of the social media could have played a role as well, and maybe in the opposite direction. Social media, especially Twitter and Facebook, form an alternative channel for politicians to reach voters independently from traditional media. Politicians are less dependent on journalists and can directly communicate and engage with their followers. This way, politicians can bypass the traditional gatekeepers (Van Aelst et al. 2017). An additional advantage for politicians is that social media use demands few resources; using Facebook and Twitter are free and sending out Tweets or Facebook-messages requires little technical knowledge or time (Vergeer 2013). Considering all this, the social media breakthrough has sparked the idea that social media now provide a more equal playing field with more politicians getting a share of the attention. Less known or lower ranking politicians can compensate their lack of traditional media attention by being more present online (Lilleker et al. 2011). This way, backbenchers can strengthen their position in the party and traditional media occurrence might be less of a prerequisite to become a top politician.

Focusing on the Belgian case, we expect the effect of social media on mitigating the effect of media prominence on top careers to be limited. Van Aelst et al. (2017) showed that only about half of all Flemish candidates had an account on Twitter in 2014 and of those who were on social media only about 1 out of 10 candidates sent more than 100 tweets and could be considered as active users. Belgium seems to be a late adaptor when it comes to social media, leading us to believe that the traditional media is still important in impacting who will become minister/party leader. Thus, we hypothesize that the ongoing mediatization of politics outweighs the possibly countervailing force of social media adoption over time and that media prominence became more important over time instead of less important.

H3: The effect of media prominence on minister/party leader selection has increased over time.

DATA AND METHODS

Country case

In this paper we look at the case of Belgium, more specifically at Flemish politicians originating from the Northern, Dutch speaking part of the country. For this paper we only focus on members of parliament, both the national and the Flemish parliament. The Belgian political system is known to be a strong multiparty system where individual politicians are loyal to their party. The communication and voting behaviour of politicians is very much dictated by the party top and deviations from the party line are rare (Depauw 2003). Individual politicians are subordinate to the party and do not have many opportunities to develop their own profile in the media. Personalization in Belgium is relatively low. This makes Belgium an interesting case to study. In fact, it rather is a least, or less, likely case to find strong media prominence effects. If we find an effect of media prominence in Belgium, we can assume that we will find similar effects, and probably even stronger, in other countries where politics is more personalized and were media attention may even be more important in a politician's career.

The two (biggest) language regions in Belgium have a completely independent media system. The Francophone media only serve the Francophone citizens (Wallonia and Brussels) the Flemish press only Flanders, independently of each other. In this paper we only study Flanders. The Flemish media system has been categorized as democratic-corporatist, implying strong professionalization of the journalistic profession and a considerable level of state intervention to protect press freedom; it is comparable with the Scandinavian and other Western European countries (Hallin and Mancini 2011). The Flemish media system has historically been characterized by political parallelism, but today the affiliations between press outlets and parties have disappeared (De Bens and Raeymaeckers 2007).

For the period under study (2000-2020), the share of Belgian party leaders that first occupied an MP position is 69%, for ministers this percentage is 78%. So, top politicians in Belgium are mainly recruited out of parliament. The top politicians that were *not* first MPs are mainly recruited from the private sector and were not involved in politics before. They were probably selected because of their expertise (e.g., doctors) or because they were a celebrity or the children of well-known politicians. Most of them never appeared in the news before and their appointment as minister/party leader has very little to do with previous media appearances. Other mechanism are at play for this minority of top politicians and previous media prominence could not have been important for them becoming minister/party leader.

Because it is hard to take into account these politicians that were not first in parliament—with whom could we compare their media prominence with—we basically compare the media prominence of MPs who later became minister/party leader with those MPs

who did not. The media occurrence of MPs is determined by analyzing newspapers. Although television news is often seen as the driving force behind mediatization (Van Aelst et al. 2012), the choice for newspapers was made because television coverage is more narrowly focused on top politicians. This study is interested in the difference in media coverage between MPs, often back benchers. These lower ranking politicians appear on television news very rarely and this makes television less suited for this study. We need the more fine-grained newspaper coverage to find nuanced differences between the large group of backbench MPs.

On top of that, our choice for three newspapers is justified because these newspapers are a good proxy for all news coverage in Belgium. The coverage in newspapers strongly correlates with other (online) outlets (CIM 2020). For this paper we look at a good sample of three of the most relevant newspapers. Two broadsheet papers, one being left-wing (*De Morgen*), the other being more of the center (*De Standaard*) and one popular newspaper (*Het Laatste Nieuws*). These newspapers have a high readership (*Het Laatste Nieuws*) and are considered most politically influential (*De Morgen, De Standaard*). Further, these papers represent the two biggest (and almost only remaining) media houses in Belgium. Moreover, previous research found that Flemish elite newspapers (*De Standaard* and *De Morgen* in our study) have a significant impact on Flemish television agendas (e.g., Golan 2006; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008). We thus expect that MPs who appear (very) often in the studied newspapers also have a bigger chance of appearing on television.

Finally, due to the political relevance of the three selected newspapers, we are confident that the selectorate—the other politicians selecting ministers and party leaders—read these three newspapers on a daily base. A study in the news consumption of Belgian elites found that politicians spend on average three hours every day on catching up with the media and that they read especially newspapers (Van Aelst et al. 2008). So, it is likely that occurrence in these three specific newspapers is noticed by the selectorate.

News articles

News articles were collected by scraping Gopress (www.gopress.be), the official repository of all Belgian newspaper publishers, using Python. We decided to first collect every news article starting the first of January 2000 until 31 October 2020. To minimize the chance of false positives when coding for political actors, we decided to filter out all articles about sports, lifestyle, cooking, weather, … etc. This was done by first training student coders to manually code these articles as "junk". When an acceptable reliability was reached (Krippendorff's alpha = 0.85) an algorithm was trained to automatically filter out all these articles[2]. After this automatic selection, we were left with 1,241,867 articles, the distribution between the newspapers is 362,132 articles for *De Morgen*, 430,005 articles for *De Standaard* and 449,730 articles for *Het Laatste Nieuws*. The collected articles were, in a next step, automatically coded for political actors.

Actors

First, a database was put together including the names of all Flemish MPs that were active on the national or Flemish political level for the studied period (2000-2020). Concretely this means that we collected data for all Flemish politicians seated in the national and Flemish (regional) parliament. For every politician, personal information was collected by consulting the personal website of the politicians or their Wikipedia page. Age, gender, function, period they acted in that function and party were added to the database for every political actor. This way, we constructed the career path of all MPs. Next, an algorithm autonomously identified the names of the different politicians in the collected news articles. Every occurrence of a politician was coded using the actorID assigned to the specific politicians. In a next step, the actor database was updated with the media occurrence of each actor, based on the coded articles, for all 531 politicians.

Variables

The dependent variables are "becoming minister" and "becoming party leader". They were constructed by looking at the careers of the MPs in the database. If they became minister or party leader during the studied period, they were coded as "1". Politicians that never made it to minister or party leader received "0". To make the data comparable, MPs who had been party leaders or ministers before the research period or who occupied these positions at its start were filtered out. This decision was made because former top politicians generate more media attention even after they step down from their elite position and including these politicians would give a distorted image. The final database consists of "normal" MPs with no previous experience as minister or party leader. From these 531 MPs, 304 are male and the average age of MPs when being first elected in parliament is 43. The average length of parliamentary career of the MPs in our database is 5.5 year. When we compare the average length of the parliamentary career of future party leaders and future ministers, we see that future party leaders are an MP for an average of 2.8 years. For future ministers this average is higher with 4.9 years. It requires a longer parliamentary career to become a minister than to become a party leader.

The main independent variable we are interested in is, as stated above, media occurrence. This variable is the average media occurrence for every MP, i.e. the sum of all occurrence for each MP divided by the months (s)he resided in parliament. We decided to not count several mentions in the same newspaper article but simply counted in how many articles an MP was mentioned (at least one time).

Becoming a party leader or minister is determined by numerous factors, media coverage definitely is not the only path to power. By adding control variables we account for some of these factors. A first control is gender, a dummy variable (being female = 1). Age is controlled for as well. This variable was collected by retrieving the birthdate of

the politicians from their personal site. A third control variable is seniority measured as the number of months an MP has been seating in parliament. Next, preference votes for every MP were added. We collected the election outcomes for individual politicians held in the period of 2000 until 2020 for both the national and Flemish elections. This gave a total of nine elections in the studied period. These data were collected by scraping the official governmental election site and automatically adding the preference votes to the actor database. Next, whether the MP was a caucus leader is included as well (being a caucus leader = 1). Caucus leaders are, in the Belgian political context, the most important MPs of their caucus and are the spokesperson of their parliamentary parties. Lastly, we included a measure of whether MPs were member of the party executive (being a member = 1). This data was difficult to collect because this information is not available to the public. The different parties were contacted and access to their archives was acquired in order to collect this information. Since the party executive is the beating heart of the party that meets on a weekly basis, being member of this exclusive group can have an effect on becoming minister or party leader. Members of the party executive are above average powerful politicians that codetermine the party line.

Model

We aggregated the data on the level of the individual politicians and thus took the average media occurrence for every MP for the period they were in parliament in our studied period. To estimate the influence of media occurrence on becoming a party leader or minister (binary dependent variables), logistic regressions were estimated. To test hypothesis 3, in a second model, the variable "year" was included to look at the time aspect of our data. This variable indicates for each politician when (s)he becomes MP and thus enters the dataset. We considered using alternative models, such as event history models. We are however not interested in the time it takes (*when)* MPs to become a minister/party leader but *whether* and *why* they get promoted at all. Second, the opportunities to become minster/party leader are highly constrained and limited to a few points in time. They depend on the formation of government after elections (ministers) and the stepping down of the predecessor. This makes the dynamic nature of the data of less importance and the cross-sectional variance (i.e. difference between MPs) the most important to focus on.

RESULTS

MPs were grouped based on their career path. A first group of MPs went on to become a minister, a second group became party leader and a third remained MP and never reached one of these top position. The third group, normal MPs, are by far the largest group.

Comparing the mean media occurrence of the three groups of MPs in **table 1** below, we notice that, on average, MPs who later become party leader or minister are covered more by the media than MPs who never get a top function. For MPs who become a minister,

the average occurrence per month is 4.64, while for future party leaders the average is 6.70. For normal MPs the average is with 1.58 considerably lower. The outspoken differences in mean media occurrence between the three groups suggests that MPs who later become a minister or party leader are, even before their promotion, on average covered more in the media. Media coverage thus seems to matter for promotion. In Appendix A, more information can be found about the distribution of media occurrence in the three studied groups.

Table 1. Media occurrence (# times per month) of the three studied groups of MPs (based on absolute media occurrence).

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Occ. Future ministers	38	0	81	4.64	6.94
Occ. Future party leaders	12	0	40	6.70	6.85
Occ. Normal MPs	481	0	101	1.58	3.40

We perform a logistic regression to estimate which variables have a significant effect on becoming minister or party leader. For the logistic regression we aggregate the data to the individual level for every politician for the whole period (or thus the period they were in parliament). We run two separate analyses, one for future ministers and one for future party leaders, each time comparing them with people who remained MP. **Table 2** presents the results. Occurring in the media, being a caucus leader and being a member of the party executive all have a positive effect on the odds of becoming a minister or party leader. Preference votes only matter for future ministers, not for future party leaders.

Most importantly for our study is that media occurrence has a positive, significant effect and the size of the effect is comparable for ministers and party leaders. For every single extra average media mention per month, the odds of becoming a minister or party leader increase with 17% and 15% respectively. Being a caucus leader in parliament has a substantial effect on becoming a minister or a party leader too. It more than triples the odds of becoming a minister and even increases the odds of becoming a party leader with a factor 9. Preference votes are only significant predictors for future ministers and every 1% increase in average preference votes, increases the odds of becoming a minister with 5%. Furthermore, age has a negative effect for future ministers, but no significant effect for future party leaders. Becoming older lowers the odds of becoming a minister with 5%. The dataset only consists of MPs who, prior to being in parliament, never had a higher function. These MPs are mostly new and young(er), and for them being in parliament too long decreases the odds of becoming minister. Being a member of the party executive has a large effect on becoming a party leader. It increases the chance of becoming a minister with factor 3 and increases the chance of becoming a party leader with factor 7. This, in combination with the strong effect of being a caucus leader, indicates that being popular within the party matters above all for becoming a

party leader. The caucus leader is elected by the other MPs of the party and internal elections determine who will become a member of the party executive. Regarding how party leaders are elected, this result makes sense. Party leaders are elected by the party members, while ministers are appointed by the party leader. Overall, being a caucus leader or member of the party executive seems to be less important for becoming a minister than for becoming a party leader but they are still important intermediate career steps towards becoming a top politician.

Our first hypothesis can be confirmed. Media occurrence has a significant effect on becoming a minister and on becoming a party leader. Those who appear often in the media overall stand a much better chance of getting top positions.[3] Importantly, these results hold even when we control for a whole array of other potential drivers for getting promotion. Many things matter for being promoted, but even if we take these other factors into account, media prominence stands. Based on this, hypothesis 2 needs to be rejected. The effect of media occurrence is similar for future ministers and party leaders, based on the marginal effects (see Appendix B), media seem to play a more important role for becoming a minister than for becoming a party leader.[4]

Table 2. Logistic regressions with becoming minister and party leader as the dependent variables.

Future Minister				Future Party Leader			
Predictors	Odds Ratios	CI	P	Predictors	Odds Ratios	CI	P
Intercept	0.18	0.02 − 1.35	0.098	Intercept	0.06	0.00 − 1.77	0.101
Age	0.95	0.90 − 0.99	**0.021**	Age	0.95	0.87 − 1.02	0.156
Gender	1.66	0.74 − 3.80	0.221	Gender	0.29	0.04 − 1.45	0.170
Seniority	1.00	0.99 − 1.00	0.342	Seniority	0.99	0.97 − 1.00	0.066
Media occurrence	1.17	1.05 − 1.32	**0.006**	Media occurrence	1.15	1.00 − 1.34	**0.048**
Caucus leader	3.34	1.19 − 8.99	**0.019**	Caucus leader	8.54	1.69 − 43.76	**0.008**
Party Executive	2.93	1.34 − 6.63	**0.008**	Party Executive	7.33	1.69 − 44.36	**0.013**
Preference votes	1.05	1.01 − 1.10	**0.014**	Preference votes	1.07	0.98 − 1.15	0.117
Observations	539			Observations	514		
R² Tjur	0.170			R² Tjur	0.239		

To test whether the influence of media occurrence on becoming a top politician has increased over time, we again perform a logistic regression. This time the year was added and an interaction between year and media occurrence was included. Results are presented in **table 3**.

For both future party leaders and future minister the interaction is not significant. Hypothesis 3 cannot be confirmed. This opposes our initial idea of the political logic being increasingly replaced by the media logic.

Table 3. Logistic regressions with becoming minister and party leader as the dependent variables.

Future minister			Future party leader		
Predictors	Estimate (S.E.)	p ≤	Predictors	Estimate (S.E.)	p ≤
Intercept	360.18 (103.42)	**.001**	Intercept	598.52 (229.71)	**.009**
Gender	0.51 (0.46)	.254	Gender	-2.25 (1.26)	.073
Age	-0.06 (0.03)	**.013**	Age	-0.06 (0.05)	.210
Seniority	-0.00 (0.00)	.622	Seniority	-0.02 (0.01)	**.040**
Media occurrence	13.68 (24.55)	.577	Media occurrence	7.38 (31.46)	.814
Year	-0.18 (0.05)	**.001**	Year	-0.30 (0.11)	**.009**
Caucus leader	1.56 (0.56)	**.010**	Caucus leader	3.24 (1.04)	**.002**
Party Executive	1.19 (0.44)	**.010**	Party Executive	2.17 (0.90)	**.016**
Preference Votes	0.07 (0.03)	**.010**	Preference Votes	0.13 (0.05)	**.015**
Media occurrence*Year	-0.01 (0.12)	.581	Media occurrence*Year	-0.00 (0.02)	.816
N	539		N	514	
Tjur s R²	0.273		Tjur s R²	0.373	

Conclusion and discussion

Previous research found that high-level politicians get more media attention than their lower-ranking colleagues. With power comes media attention. In this paper, we focus on the opposite relationship: does media attention also generate power? Based on data from the Belgian case, the answer to this question is "yes", media occurrence matters for becoming a top politician. Although a nuance is that a minority of MPs in our data (16%) became minister without any media attention, both for being promoted to a minister or being elected as a party leader preceding media coverage is a substantial asset. If an MP wants to enlarge his/her chances of being promoted to minister or party leader, investing in media prominence is a good bet.

Based on the difference in function and in selection method between ministers and party leaders, we expected media occurrence to matter more for party leaders than for ministers. But the data proved us wrong. Media occurrence matters more for minister-ships than for party leaderships. This diverging result with regard to party leaders is puzzling. Maybe our theoretical expectation that media prominence is more important for leaders than for ministers does not hold the track? A plausible explanation can be that ministers, these days, need to be fully equipped with all the necessary media skills while party leaders are, more than we think, internal party managers and organizers. Another explanation could be that selectors attach great importance to past media

4

performances when debating who is fit for a ministerial position. This is in line with the idea of the mediatization of politics. Strömbäck (2008) described this process of change as many little shifts eventually ending with the internalization of media logic in politics. One important structural change that Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) mention is that parties select leaders and other political candidates based on media logic and thus based on the skills potential candidates and leaders have. Past media performance is good indicator of media skills. Our findings might show that media logic dictates who will get a promotion.

Additionally, in this paper we looked at how the importance of media occurrence changed in 20 years. We found no evidence that media occurrence has increased in importance. Hence, getting into the media is beneficial for a political career but the influence of media attention did not increase. This contradicts our initial idea on the mediatization of politics. Maybe the emergence of the social media during the research period forms an explanation and has cancelled out the influence of ongoing mediatization. In the early 2000's, appearing in the traditional news outlets was crucial for a politician and the Belgian political system could have been considered mediatized to a considerable degree already . Since social media, politicians have heavily invested in social media presence as an alternative for mass media presence. Consequently, the impact of media did not increase as one would expect based on the idea of ongoing mediatization.

Our study was limited in that not all possible control variables could be included. Criteria such as expertise or party loyalty should play, and we could not measure them in this study. One way to further explore the intricacies and complexities of political career steps, and the role that is played by sheer (un)luck, is to complement quantitative research with in-depth interviews with top politicians gauging their perception as to why they made it and what role media skills played therein. Another limitation is that we only look at media occurrence in newspapers and do not consider television news. This methodological choice was made because television coverage is more narrowly focused on top candidates which made television news less suited. Adding television news would, we believe, not significantly change our results. The politicians that appear more often in newspapers are also more likely to appear in television news. Neverthe-less, a future study should include television news considering that it is often seen as main the driving force behind mediatization and personalization of politics. Lastly, this study only focused on MPs. The 30% of ministers and party leaders that was not first in parliament was not studied. Future studies should try to include these ministers/party leaders to compare how important media occurrence is for this group.

Although we only focused on Belgium, we do believe that our findings have some generic quality. The Belgian context is a rather "conservative" case when studying the influence of media on politics. Political parties are the main political actors with a lot of internal party discipline and there is not much room for individual politicians to position themselves without their party's approval. Ministers are, like in most countries, not directly chosen by the electorate but are appointed by the party leader who knows the candidates much better than just via their media appearances. This decreases the likelihood that media prominence is the main reason someone is selected. In general, the personalization of the Belgian polity seems to be limited which should decrease the impact of media skills on political careers. So, the fact that we find, in a country like Belgium, that media prominence clearly matters makes us expect that it would even matter more in other countries.

Being the first study to focus on whether media attention actually generates power instead of the other way around, our results beg for more research. Further study is needed, including more countries, parties, and maybe a longer time frame and a wider selection of media, to test the generalizability of our findings. For instance, the role of social media in reaching the highest positions could be an interesting avenue for further research too as well as focusing on extremer or populist parties (that did not enter government in Belgium in the period of study). But we think our results are promising and show that the relationship between media and politics is deeply bidirectional. Political power breeds media power, but the opposite is the case as well.

NOTES

1. We study ministers and party leaders because our data is not suited to study the Prime Minister. In the past 20 years only one Flemish politician became PM, the others were Walloon politicians. Considering that our database only contains Flem-ish politicians, studying the PM was not possible. In addition, no prime minister went directly from being an MP to being Prime Minister in our studied period. All PMs first held another senior position before they became Prime Minister. Seeing that the aim of this paper is to compare the media prominence of normal MPs before getting a top position, we decided to only focus on ministers and party leaders.

2. This was done by using the manually labelled articles to train a random forest clas-sification model using a TF-IDF vector as features. This model was then applied to the uncoded articles.

3. Our model has been rerun without the last month before the appointment to control for the effect of a potential media buzz. Similar results were found.

4. To make sure that the fluctuations in the total number of articles does not influence our results we ran our analysis after weighing the number of occurrences based on the total number of articles for every month in our study. The findings for the analysis with weighted media occurrence are very similar to the ones reported in the paper. (See Appendix C.)

APPENDIX

A.   Distribution of the data.

While the data show that future ministers and party leaders have a higher mean media occurrence score, it is not the case that those who become minister or party leader are those with the very highest absolute media occurrence score (see maximum values, **table A1**). When we look at the distribution within these groups of MPs, we see that 98% of the backbencher MPs appear between 0 to 10 times a month in the media. For MPs who will become party leader 80% appears between 0 to 10 times on average per month, for future ministers the share is 87% (see **table A1**). The standard deviation is biggest for future party leaders which indicates that, among these MPs, the media occurrence varies most; some future party leaders are covered extensively, others are not. In **table A2**, we zoom further in on this by looking at the average media occurrence per month for the individual politicians in every group. This table shows that 6 out of 38 future minister never appeared in the media before they became minister, even though they were MP at the time. For these 16% of future ministers, media coverage does not seem to matter to get promoted. The six MPs in our data that became minister without any media occurrence all have the same career pattern. They were elected as first time MPs but before they could actually start, they were picked to become minister. These are politicians that, similar to the 30%/20% of ministers and party leaders that were never first in parliament, were asked to participate in the elections because of their professional background or their legacy. For normal MPs who never get promoted, the percentage that never appears in the media is 59%. Future party leaders, all appear at least on average twice a month in the media while they are in parliament. 23% of future ministers appear on average more than 10 times a month, while only 11% of future ministers and only 1% of normal MPs are featured this much.

Table A1. Distribution of media occurrence for "normal" MPs, future ministers and future party leaders.

	Future Minister		Future Party Leader		Future MP	
Occurrence interval	*Absolute*	*Relative*	*Absolute*	*Relative*	*Absolute*	*Relative*
[0-10]	1934	86,84%	328	80,99%	31852	97,83%
[11-20]	213	9,56%	57	14,07%	553	1,70%
[21-30]	61	2,74%	15	3,70%	101	0,31%
[31-40]	11	0,49%	5	1,23%	30	0,09%
[41-50]	3	0,13%	0	0,00%	12	0,04%
[51-60]	2	0,09%	0	0,00%	3	0,01%
[61-70]	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	5	0,02%
[71-80]	1	0,04%	2	0,00%	2	0,01%
[81-90]	2	0,09%	0	0,00%	1	0,00%
[91-101]	0	0,00%	0	0,00%	1	0,00%

Table A2. Average media occurrence per month for future minister, future party leaders and "normal" MPs.

	Absolute Ministers	Relative Ministers	Absolute Party Leaders	Relative Party Leaders	Absolute MPs	Relative MPs
0	6	15,8%	0	0,0%	283	58,84%
1	7	18,4%	0	0,0%	91	18,92%
2	4	10,5%	2	16,7%	49	10,19%
3	2	5,3%	2	16,6%	22	4,57%
4	4	10,5%	1	8,3%	14	2,91%
5	3	7,9%	3	25,0%	8	1,66%
6	4	10,5%	0	0,0%	2	0,42%
7	2	5,3%	0	0,0%	4	0,83%
8	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	2	0,42%
9	2	5,3%	2	16,7%	2	0,42%
10	0	0,0%	0	0,0%	0	0,00%
10+	4	10,5%	2	16,7%	4	0,83%

The distribution of future party leaders over time is not equal. In the first years of our data there are 8 future party leaders, this later decreases to 5 and in the last years in our data only 1 or 2 future party leaders are in the data. This decline in the number of future party leaders is logical. We do not know who will become party leader in the future; there might still be party leaders in the current population of MPs but we do not know this yet. Moreover, many parties had the same party leader for longer than 5 years. The current party leader of the biggest Flemish party became, for example, party leader in 2004 and is to this day still party leader. The turnover between MPs and party leaders is thus quite low in the studied period which explains the lower number of future party leaders in our data. The distribution of future ministers is distributed more equally. There are, of course, more ministers in our data. The turnover for ministers is higher, every 4 years new ministers are appointed, which explains their higher number. In the last five years of our research period the number of future ministers is also lower with around 5 future ministers—this basically means that in the new national government that was formed in October 2020, 5 new ministers were recruited out of parliament.

4

Figure A1. Distribution of party leaders in the data (2000-2020).
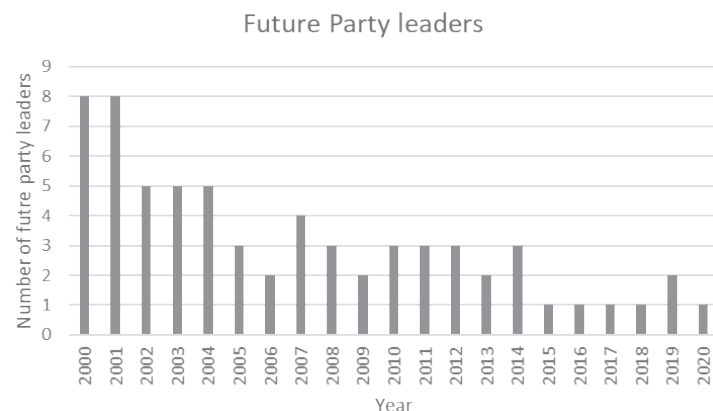
Figure A2. Distribution of future ministers in the data (2000-2020).
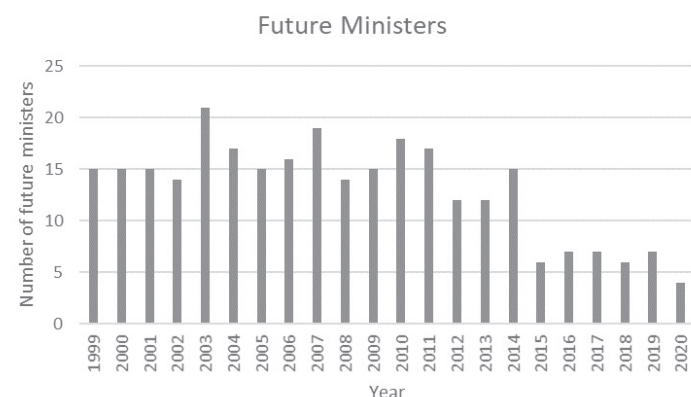
To see if there are some interesting outliers in our data, we conducted scatterplots and boxplots for both future party leaders and future ministers. For future party leaders the scatterplot seems to indicate one outlier (**figure A3**). The boxplot (**figure A4**) however shows that this point falls within the admissible range. When studying **figures A5** and **A6**, we notice that only one future minister stands out. The minister outlier is an MP that was caucus leader in parliament and was famous for his bold statements (that were not always in accordance with the party line). He is widely considered as a media skilled politician that works hard to position himself as an individual rather than as a loyal party soldier.

Figure A3. Scatterplot of average number of media occurrences per month for every future party leader.
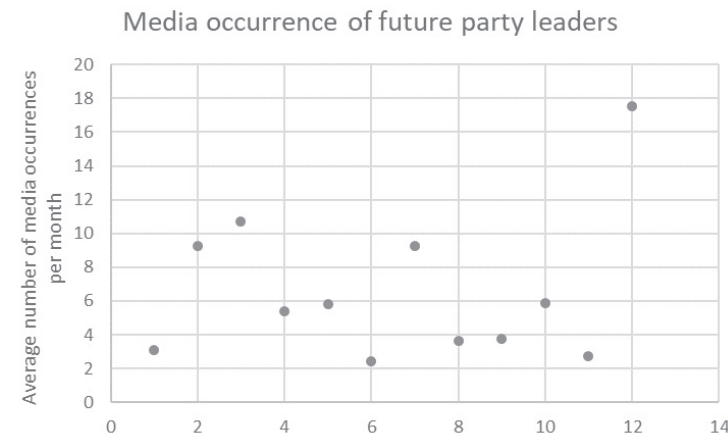
Figure A4. Boxplot of the average number of media occurrences per month for every party leader.
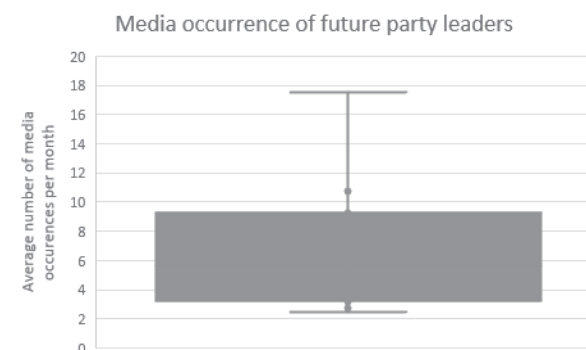
Figure A5. Scatterplot of average number of media occurrences per month for every future minister.
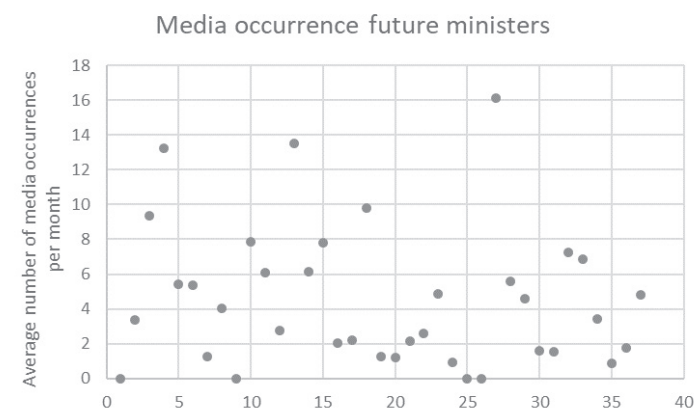
Figure A6. Boxplot of average number of media occurrences per month for every future minister.

Media occurrence future ministers
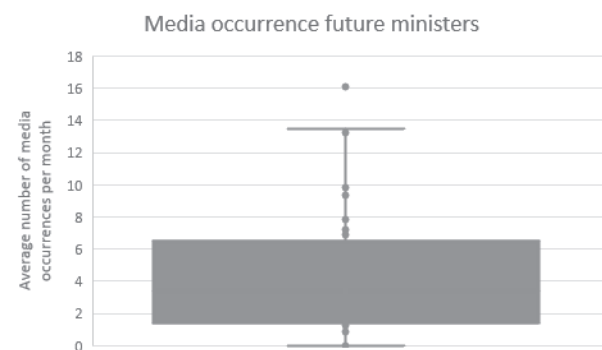
B. Average marginal effects

Because the effect of media occurrence is similar for both future ministers and party leaders, we zoom in on this by calculating the marginal effects. **Figure B1** and **B2** (below) display the predicted probabilities. The effect of media occurrence on the probability of becoming a minister seems to be stronger than the effect on becoming a party leader. When the average media occurrence of an MP exceeds 10 the probability of becoming a minister rises steadily. For party leaders the effect is less strong. When an MP has an average media occurrence of 25, the probability of becoming a minister is more than 50% in comparison to only around 20% for party leaders.

Table B1. Average marginal effects for future ministers.

Factor	AME	SE	Z	P	Lower	Upper
Age	-.0028	.0012	-2.2690	.0233	-.0052	-.0004
Caucus leader	.0629	.0271	2.3191	.0204	.0097	.1160
Gender	.0264	.0217	1.2192	.2228	-.0160	.0689
Seniority	-.0002	.0002	-.9458	.3442	-.0005	.0002
Media ocurrence	.0083	.0030	2.8065	.0050	.0025	.0141
Party Executive	.0561	.0218	2.5702	.0102	.0133	.0988
Preference votes	.0028	.0011	2.4277	.0152	.0005	.0050

Table B2. Average marginal effects for future party leader.

Factor	AME	SE	Z	P	Lower	Upper
Age	-.0009	.0007	-1.2618	.2070	-.0022	.0005
Caucus leader	.0367	.0152	2.4113	.0159	.0069	.0665
Gender	-.0213	.0160	-1.3277	.1843	-.0526	.0101
Seniority	-.0002	.0001	-1.8151	.0695	-.0005	.0000
Media ocurrence	.0024	.0012	1.9788	.0478	.0000	.0049
Party Executive	.0341	.0150	2.2709	.0232	.0047	.0635
Preference votes	.0011	.0007	1.4880	.1368	-.0003	.0026

Figure B1. Predicted probabilities of the average media occurrence per month (while serving as an MP) on becoming a minister.

Predicted probabilities of future minister

4
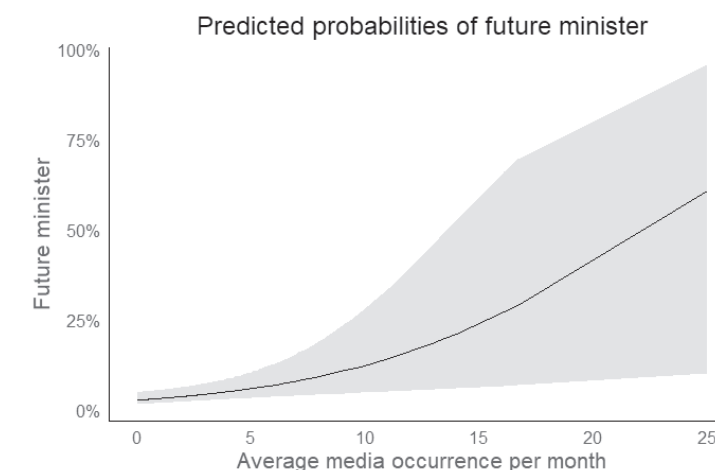
Figure B2. Predicted probabilities of the average media occurrence per month (while serving as an MP) on becoming a party leader.

Predicted probabilities of future party leader
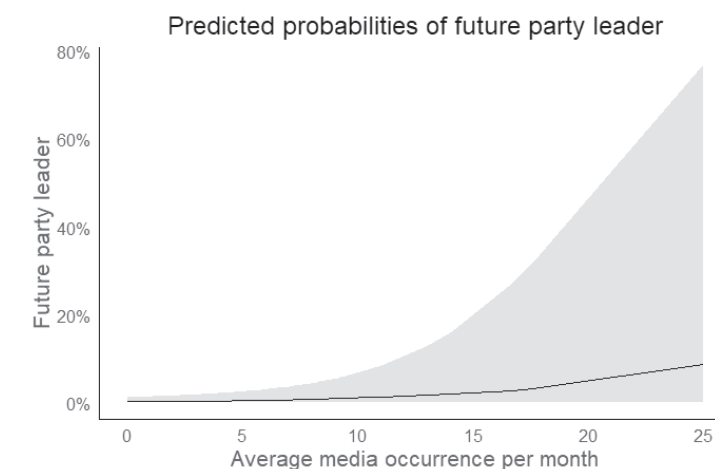
C.   Analysis with weighted data to control for total number of articles

To make sure that the fluctuations in the number of articles does not influence our results we redid our analysis after weighing the number of occurrences based on the total number of articles for every month in our study. Our findings for the analysis with weighted media occurrence is very similar to the ones reported in the paper. For future ministers, the effect of media occurrence gets slightly smaller (from 1.17 to 1.13). The other effect remains very similar. For future party leaders, the effect of media occurrence also gets a bit smaller (from 1.15 to 1.12). The effect of being a caucus leader becomes larger (from 8.54 to 8.99) and the other significant variables remain almost the same. Weighing media occurrence based on the total number of articles has thus little impact on our main findings.

Table C1. Logistic regressions with weighted media occurrence to control for total number of published news articles.

Future Minister					Future Party Leader				
Predictors	Odds Ratios	CI	P		Predictors	Odds Ratios	CI	P	
Intercept	0.16	0.02 − 1.24	0.083		Intercept	0.05	0.00 − 1.65	0.092	
Age	0.95	0.91 − 0.99	**0.025**		Age	0.95	0.88 − 1.03	0.223	
Gender	1.66	0.74 − 3.79	0.218		Gender	0.28	0.04 − 1.40	0.160	
Seniority	1.00	0.99 − 1.00	0.338		Seniority	0.99	0.97 − 1.00	**0.050**	
Media occurrence	1.13	1.04 − 1.24	**0.004**		Media occurrence	1.12	1.00 − 1.25	**0.038**	
Caucus leader	3.33	1.18 − 8.92	**0.018**		Caucus leader	8.99	1.80 − 45.65	**0.007**	
Party Executive	2.95	1.35 − 6.68	**0.008**		Party Executive	7.36	1.68 − 45.34	**0.014**	
Preference votes	1.05	1.01 − 1.10	**0.014**		Preference votes	1.07	0.98 − 1.15	0.117	
Observations	539				Observations	514			
R^2 Tjur	0.173				R^2 Tjur	0.243			

4

CHAPTER FIVE

Media Visibility and Political Power[4]

One of the main functions of news media in democracies is informing citizens on political affairs (Gans 2003). This helps citizens develop informed opinions and participate in the political process. Moreover, journalists have to hold politicians in power accountable and report critically about societal problems and the solutions politicians offer. In this regard, news media are often referred to as the "fourth estate" (McNair, 2009). However, politicians from their side also want to be covered by the media, as it makes them more recognizable to voters. For those holding political office, media visibility can create public support for legislations or help put issues on the agenda, for instance. Politicians want to have their messages sent to as large an audience as possible in order to gain publicity, mobilize supporters to their cause, and eventually gain electoral success (Wolfsfeld 2011, Hopmann et al. 2011; van Erkel et al. 2020). Hence, the competition to get access to the media is big. Because of this central role of news media in political processes, the question of who gets into the media and why is central in much academic research and societal debates. The one characteristic that seems to guarantee politicians a place in the spotlight, regardless of context or time, is political power (Vos 2014). Numerous research found that politicians with more political power find it much easier to get news coverage than their colleagues in less powerful positions and therefore are better able to get their message across. When deciding who gets news coverage, journalists often follow what is referred to as the "trail of power" (Bennett 1996).

It is in a way not surprising that powerful politicians receive more media attention, as the higher the function of politicians, the more likely it is that they will have an impact on legislation or policymaking. However, mostly including those already holding office or high political position might result in unbalanced political coverage. Tresch (2009) described the fact that news media mostly cover powerful politicians as a "self-perpetuating cycle of coverage and influence" (p. 85). By focusing on politicians already in the most powerful political positions, the news media maintain and may even enlarge power structures in society. Research has found that politicians with higher levels of media visibility are perceived as being more important and in turn are respected more by audiences than their less "visible" colleagues (Wolfsfeld 2011, Hopmann et al. 2011; van Erkel et al. 2020). This makes it easier for these politicians to implement or maintain their policies. Hence, by having easier access to the media, those in power become more powerful. This while politicians in less "powerful" positions or the opposition need the media more to put issues on the agenda, as they have less executive influence in the political process. It consequently are the political actors that really need access to the news media that are frequently denied it.

The fact that political power generates media visibility is seen as one of the rules of thumb of political communication by many researchers. However, most of the existing research focused on one point in time (Vos and Van Aelst 2018) or on one specific country. Studies in Israel (e.g., Sheafer 2001), the U.S. (e.g., Waismel-Manor and Tsfati 2011), Norway (e.g., Midtbø 2011), Belgium (e.g., De Swert and van Aelst 2009; Vos 2013), Germany (e.g., Schoenbach et al. 2001) and Switzerland (e.g., Tresch 2009) all found a relation between political power and media visibility, but only focused on one country. Different researchers have pointed out that different contextual characteristics such as political system, electoral system, and the corresponding power hierarchy in a country influence which politicians receive media coverage (Boumans et al. 2013; Kriesi 2012; Schoenbach et al. 2001). Hence, different political actors might have access to the media in different political contexts. We expect that variations in media power exist between countries.

In this paper, we revisit an old question with a new method in multiple countries to verify previous, often fragmented, findings. Using an automated content analysis, this paper takes a comparative and longitudinal approach, based on a database containing all articles from three main newspapers in Belgium, the U.K. and the Netherlands in the period 2000-2017 (N = 8,538,958). We investigate how political power influences visibility studying different political systems: a two-party system (U.K.), one federal multi-party (Belgium) and one non-federal multi-party system (The Netherlands) over a period of almost 20 years. In this time period, we focus on the difference in politicians' visibility between election and political routine periods. Up to now, many studies focused on how political actors are covered during election campaigns (e.g., Domke et al. 1997; Schoenbach et al. 2001; Hopmann et al. 2011), and less is known about routine news coverage. Because of our longitudinal and cross-systems approach, we are able to answer which forms of political power generate visibility, in different periods and political systems. This way, we investigate which findings are consistent across time and country contexts, but also how differences in power bring about differences in visibility.

THE TRAIL OF POWER

As mentioned above, extant research has established that politicians in higher positions—often those in executive office—receive the overwhelming majority of media attention (e.g., Vos and Van Aelst 2018; Sheafer 2001; Midtbø 2011; Vos 2013; Schoenbach et al. 2001; Tresch 2009). Politicians in powerful positions enact policies and legislation that directly affect citizens, making them and their actions newsworthy (Bennett, 1996). This does not mean that lower-positioned political actors never receive media coverage, but that they often have to compete harder to make it into the news.

For journalists, covering politics comes with its specific challenges. On the one hand, it is contended that news media should inform audiences on matters of public policy by presenting and debating alternatives and by giving the word to a diversity of actors and viewpoints in the news (Schultz 1998). Especially in political news, journalists would have to pay much attention to more balanced reporting in which different political viewpoints and actors are covered (Vos and Wolfgang 2018). On the other hand, it

is the task of news media to hold powerful politicians accountable and report about decisions that could influence the public. This struggle between holding those in office responsible versus providing balance is one journalists are confronted with daily.

Journalists thus decide who will be featured and mostly follow the "trail of power" (Bennett 1996). However, previous research also found that the political and media context to a large extent influence how power is distributed (Hopmann et al. 2011; Vos 2014). We expect political power to matter in all political systems, but that the politician function that is more visible in the media varies based on political system characteristics (Vos and Van Aelst 2018). Following Lijphart (2012), the many varieties in democracies can be reduced to a two-dimensional pattern: majoritarian democracies and consensus democracies. Majoritarian democracies are countries with a one-party cabinet, dominance of the executive over the legislative power and a majority (or plurality) electoral system, in which the candidate of party with the most votes wins (often irrespective of vote share). Hence, in majoritarian democracies power is more concentrated. Consensus democracies are characterized by multiparty governments, more balance of power between the executive and legislative power and a proportional representation electoral system, in which parties receive political positions based on vote share. Consequently, in consensus democracies, political power is more diffused. Another political system characteristic that can have an effect on the type of politician that gets in the media is federalization. In federal countries, separate regions have a degree of autonomy and therefore power is shared between the different levels (Deschouwer 2009). In unitary states, power is centralized and political power is less divided between different politicians (Lijphart 2012).

Overall, one would expect that in political systems where power is divided (consensus democracies and federal states), a larger variety of political actors appear in the news, while in systems where power is more concentrated (majoritarian democracies and unitary states) media visibility is more focused on a few powerful elites (head of government, cabinet and party leaders; Lijphart 2012; Vos and Van Aelst 2018). Studies found, for example, that the head of government is more visible in the news in majoritarian democracies because they have more power in these countries (Lijphart 2012). This is confirmed in comparative studies that found the head of government to be more prominent in the news in the U.S. and U.K. compared to consensus democracies such as Switzerland, Austria and Belgium. Vos and Van Aelst (2017) conducted one of the broadest multi-country studies on politicians' media visibility to date. They found that cabinet members (ministers) only receive around 10% of all news appearances of politicians in the U.S., while they received much more attention in Spain (63%), but also Belgium (43%) and the U.K. (42%). Party leaders were found to receive more attention in consensus democracies because multiple parties have a share of power and party leaders have to maintain coherence in coalition governments; although the effect was not found for all consensus democracies (i.e., Austria and Germany). Hence, in political

systems with a consensus democracy, there is less focus on the head of government and cabinet members than in majoritarian democracies, and more on party leaders. A difference between federal and unitary states was found regarding the attention for the head of government, cabinet members and party leaders, who receive less attention in federal states. These results, although an important first indication, were based on a sample collected over a period of 14 days (in 2012) during a routine news period. There is thus no way of knowing if these findings are systematic or period-specific and how elections influence these findings.

We expect that the specifications of the political system guides journalists to follow the political hierarchy, in line with the institutional framework of a country. However, we also expect that the media system affects how visible different politicians are. Following the classification of Hallin and Mancini (2004), the Netherlands and Belgium are considered democratic corporatist countries. The U.K. is labelled as a liberal media model, where commercialization of the media market is relatively strong and happened early (although it is also characterized by a strong public service broadcaster). Moreover, in the U.K. there is a stronger tabloid culture, which are often characterized by higher levels of personalization, horse-race framing, conflict and negativity than their broadsheet counterparts (Kriesi 2012; Van Aelst et al. 2012). The existence of tabloid journalism in the U.K., and the relative lack thereof in Belgium and the Netherlands, could also result in differences in focus on extreme (political) views and gossip (Zelizer et al. 2000). Although some researchers see a trend towards more tabloid journalism in democratic corporatist models (Zelizer 2009), most popular papers here still focus more on hard news topics such as politics.

Our study is the first to study how different political positions influence media visibility over time, comparing different countries. Our main overarching expectation is that those in more powerful political positions receive more media attention. However, we do believe country-specific differences exist for which political functions receive this visibility advantage.

RQ1. Which country differences exist in the different political functions that receive a media advantage?

As mentioned above, elections are expected to influence the visibility of politicians. In general, most studies find that political news coverage becomes more balanced during elections and that a larger variety of politicians gain news attention (e.g., De Swert and van Aelst 2009). There are several reasons to expect more balance in election news. Firstly, journalists seem to have some sort of heightened sense of responsibility and are aware of the influence media could have on the voting behavior of citizens (De Swert and van Aelst 2009). Moreover, specific guidelines about fairness and balance exist for election news in many countries, including the countries under study (Strömbäck and

Kaid 2009). Thirdly, researchers also point to the increasing attention for the competitive aspect of elections (Hopmann et al. 2011), with an increased focus on clashes between different parties and politicians. Because of this, the high levels of media visibility of powerful politicians are expected to be less pronounced or even completely absent during election campaigns. Empirical studies, for instance, found politicians in lower political positions or from opposition parties to receive more attention during election periods (Brandenburg 2005; Semetko and Schoenbach 1994; Domke et al. 1997). In the last decennia journalists were found to focus more on the "horse race" and the strategic side of campaigns instead of on policy issues (e.g., Green-Pedersen et al. 2017), which could lead to more attention for regular members of parliament (MPs) who are seeking office. However, although media attention might be divided more between different political actors, research finds that even during elections, the Prime Minister remains the most prominent politician in the news (e.g., Schoenbach et al. 2001).

H1: Attention between different political positions becomes more balanced in election campaign period as compared to non-election campaign periods

METHOD

Case

The studied countries in this paper were selected in order to comprise different political systems. The U.K. is a majoritarian democracy, and Belgium and The Netherlands are consensus democracies. Although Belgium and The Netherlands are in many respects quite similar, Belgium has a federal state structure with different (linguistic) regions while The Netherlands is a unitary state. By analyzing countries with different political and media systems we are able to explore which politicians are most visible and how this changes during election periods over a period of almost twenty years.

The political structures of The Netherlands and Belgium are, as mentioned above, in many ways similar. Both are monarchies with a parliamentary multi-party system with proportional representation and share the same major party families (social democrats, Christian democrats, liberals, right-conservative and greens). Both countries have proportional representation and voters are able to cast preference votes, although the procedures for these votes are different. The main difference in political system is the federal state structure of Belgium. Apart from the federal level, Belgium has different strong regions with their own regional parliaments. The U.K. has a significantly different political system. Although it is also a monarchy with a parliament, the U.K. differs from the other two countries mainly in the fact that it is a two-party system with the conservative and labor party (until 2010) alternately forming a government. It uses the first-past-the-post system with majoritarian representation. Although the political system has changed over recent years with the emergence of the Liberal Democrats and other minor parties, many characteristics of a two-party system – like the absence of

consensus and a big ideological gap between parties – remain (Quinn 2013). All three countries have a monarch with ceremonial function, a Prime Minister who is head of the national government and responsible for the general policy direction, and ministers with specific policy areas. The party leader is in all three countries an important and central figure but more so in Belgium and the U.K. than in The Netherlands. Although the Dutch "fractieleiders" are quite central they are slightly less crucial than in the other two political systems. The actual working of the political structure is moreover very different in the U.K. with a shadow cabinet, shadow ministers and a strong leader of the opposition. Important for this comparative study is that the political functions we study – Prime Minister, ministers, party leaders and regular members of parliament – are present in the three studied countries.

Data Collection and Analysis

To study the visibility of politicians, we selected three main papers for each country: one more left-leaning elite paper (De Morgen, De Volkskrant, The Guardian), one more right-leaning elite paper (De Standaard, NRC Handelsblad, Daily Telegraph) and one popular newspaper (Het Laatste Nieuws, De Telegraaf, The Sun[1]). We collected all articles for these newspapers for the period 2000 until 2017. This gave a total of more than 8,500,000 articles (BE: 1,990,444; NL: 2,025,208; U.K.: 4,523,306). The decision to focus on newspaper coverage was made because newspapers are less restricted in their coverage because of their available space and production costs (de Vreese et al. 2006). As a result, a wider variety of politicians is expected to be featured in newspaper articles, making newspapers the preferred medium for this study.

A first step in processing the news articles was creating a word embedding model to clean the data and code political actor presence in the news articles. Raw newspaper articles were used as input for the Natural Language Processing (NLP)[2]. The reason for parsing all articles using NLP was to clean the texts and reduce their complexity. Inflected forms of words are reduced to their dictionary lemma, while Universal Part-Of-Speech (UPOS) tags allow disambiguation between words that mean different things but are spelled in the same way (e.g., Green as a party name versus green as a color). In addition, NLP parsing allows for a correct identification of sentence borders.

Before coding political actors for their presence in the collected news articles, we decided to filter out "junk" articles that are not relevant for political news coverage. All articles about sports, weather forecasts, recipes and horoscopes were taken out. By removing these articles we minimized the chance of false positives when coding for political actors, as mentions of for example athletes with the same name as a politician were mostly filtered out. This was done by training student coders to manually code a sample of articles as "junk" or "no junk". When an acceptable reliability was reached (Krippendorff's alpha = 0.85) the manually labelled articles were used to train a random forest classification model using a TF-IDF (term frequency and inverse document

frequency) vector as features. This model then automatically filtered out all junk articles. This left us with 1,088,210 Belgian, 1,195,383 Dutch and 2,163,858 British articles.

Next, the remaining articles were queried for the presence of national political actors. These actors included all individual politicians that were active as either prime ministers, minister, party leader or MP. Queries for individual politicians were constructed by looking for the combination of first and last name within 5 words of each other. A larger distance between the two would have resulted in too many false positives, and a smaller distance in too many false negatives. The queries were also limited to articles published during the time the politician was in office. For ministers the queries included their formal title as an alternative for their given name (e.g., Minister Peeters and Kris Peeters are both valid hits). The result of these actor queries was a list of articles in which a given actor is present. Every individual politician also got a unique actorID and the coded politicians were subsequently linked to an actor database. For every politician our database contains information about the political actors (age, gender), their party (majority/opposition) and function (Prime Minister, Minister, Party Leader or Member of Parliament). This information was collected by consulting personal websites, party websites and Wikipedia pages.

For The Netherlands and the U.K., all members of parliament (respectively 150 and 650) were included in this study. Although the Belgian federal parliament consists of 150 members, we only included Flemish MPs (on average 95) in this study because Walloon (French speaking politicians) are hardly mentioned in the studied Flemish newspapers as Belgium consists of two separate media systems. Next, the media visibility of every political actor was calculated by counting how many times a politician was mentioned in the selected newspapers on a monthly level.

To analyze our data, we conducted negative binomial logistic regressions. This because our dependent variable "media visibility" is a skewed count variable. Most politicians in our database appear only one or two times in the media and only a few politicians appear on a regular base. We conducted separate models for each country. Our main independent variables are political function (prime minister, minister, party leader and MP with MP being the reference category), and election period (the two months before and the month of the election). We also included age, gender, number of votes of the party a politician belongs to and majority/opposition as control variables.

RESULTS

First, we compare how media visibility of politicians is distributed according to their political function in the different countries. In **Table 1** we show the average number of media appearances per function. This average is calculated based on the visibility of all politicians who were active as prime minister, minister, party leader or member of

parliament from 2000-2017, also those who never appeared in the media. This average is calculated as the average visibility per month for every political function in the three studied newspapers per country.

Firstly, the prime minister receives most media attention in all three countries. There are big differences in the exact visibility, though. In the U.K., the Prime Minister appears on average 547 times per month in the news. Although the Prime Ministers in Belgium and The Netherlands are also much more visible than other politicians, the difference between the Prime Minister and other politicians is less outspoken. Secondly, ministers and party leaders receive plenty of news coverage in all three countries. In Belgium, ministers and party leaders receive a relatively equal amount of media attention. There are, however, less party leaders (around 7) than ministers (around 15), so individual party leaders have a higher chance to be covered in the news than individual ministers. Contrarily, in The Netherlands, ministers are covered more frequently than party leaders. In the U.K., party leaders seem to have more access to the news media compared to ministers, even though there are only a few party leaders and around fifteen ministers. In all countries, MPs are the least visible political actors. Hence, the visibility of regular MPs is comparable in the three countries, while we see quite large variations in who gets media access at the higher levels. In all three countries, political power seems to lead to more media coverage given that the Prime Minister, the most powerful politician, is featured most. Note that the standard deviation is quite big for the different groups meaning that in-group variation is extensive.

Table 1. The average visibility and standard deviation (σ) of politicians with a different political function on a monthly base (2000-2017).

Country	Average visibility of the PM (σ)	Average visibility of ministers (σ)	Average visibility of party leaders (σ)	Average visibility of MP (σ)
Belgium	162.69 (81.07)	37.11 (30.12)	36.11 (42.06)	3.16 (6.43)
The Netherlands	113.40 (41.29)	24.95 (25.95)	18.63 (26.19)	3.45 (4.83)
The U.K.	547.15 (177.56)	41.25 (61.14)	84.67 (119.55)	4.72 (11.57)

To systematically explain the media visibility of politicians, we conduct a negative binomial logistic regression (see **Table 2**). To compare the effect of different variables, we display the incidence-rate ratios (IRR). The Incidence-rate ratios indicate a negative effect when below 1 and a positive effect when above 1. We take into account different control variables such as the number of votes of the political parties, being a member of the political majority, age and gender. To assess the effect of political system on the visibility of different political functions, we add variables for "political function" in which we compare regular members of parliament as reference category to the other political functions. The logistic regression is performed for every country separately. In Appendix A, an integrated model of the three countries is added as robustness check[3].

Table 2. Negative binomial logistic regression with media visibility as dependent variable.

	Incidence rate ratio's		
	BE	**NL**	**UK**
Age	1.01***	1.01***	1.00***
Gender	0.50***	0.79***	0.87***
Number of votes	0.99***	1.00*	1.01***
Majority	1.14***	0.98 (.36)	0.68***
Political Function (ref. MP)			
Prime Minister	39.32***	28.89***	130.25***
Minister	10.78***	6.71***	10.10***
Party Leader	11.02***	5.10***	16.65***
Intercept	2.61***	2.34***	3.80***
Total N	24880	21980	65688
R² Nagelkerke	0.623	0.794	0.732

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

In all three countries, the Prime Minister gets the most media coverage. This effect is largest in the U.K., where the PM receives on average 130 times the media visibility of a regular MP. In Belgium and The Netherlands, this effect is lower but still significantly higher compared to regular MPs, with the Prime Minister receiving respectively 39 and 28 times the visibility of a regular member of parliament. We find similar trends for all countries regarding the media visibility of ministers. In Belgium and The U.K., ministers receive ten times the visibility of a regular MP, in the Netherlands ministers are covered in the news almost seven times more. We do find country-differences when comparing ministers and party leaders. In Belgium and the U.K., party leaders receive more attention than ministers. In Belgium, a party leader is eleven times more visible than a regular MP, in the U.K. almost seventeen times more, and both effects are stronger than those for ministers. Although party leaders in the Netherlands are sig-nificantly more visible compared to regular members of parliament, among "powerful" politicians, they are on average the least visible in the news.

Our expectation was that in political systems where power is more divided (consensus democracy), the focus would be less on a few powerful political actors. Based on our longitudinal data, this can be confirmed. Although the Prime Minister is clearly the "primes inter pares" among elite politicians in all countries, his/her visibility is clearly most pronounced in The U.K. where the Prime Minister receives 130 times the media attention of a regular MP. We also expected Ministers to be more visible in majoritarian democracies because of the centralized one-party governments. Yet, we do not find systematic differences in the 20-year-period under study. Ministers receive more attention than regular politicians, but there are no significant differences between

majoritarian and consensus democracies. Lastly, we expected party leaders to receive more attention in consensus democracies because multiple parties have a share of power and party leaders have to maintain the coherence in coalition governments. Our study shows that the visibility of party leaders is comparable in Belgium (consensus democracy) and the U.K. (majoritarian democracy) and lower in The Netherlands (consensus democracy). Based on our findings, we cannot conclude systematic differences exist between federal (Belgium) and unitary (the U.K., the Netherlands) states.

Table 3. The average visibility and standard deviation (σ) of politicians with a different political function on a monthly base during election periods (2000-2017).

Country	Average visibility of the PM elections (σ)	Average visibility of Ministers elections (σ)	Average visibility of party leaders elections (σ)	Average visibility of MP elections (σ)
Belgium	232.50 *(67.78)*	40.85 *(26.90)*	62.07 *(67.75)*	5.83 *(10.23)*
The Netherlands	139.08 *(48.08)*	23.29 *(23.04)*	36.60 *(42.04)*	3.89 *(5.38)*
The U.K.	642.88 *(202.75)*	42.85 *(64.61)*	177.57 *(208.02)*	4.92 *(12.25)*

Next, we focus on whether the visibility of certain politicians impacted by election periods. **Table 3** first gives an overview of the average visibility of the different political functions during election periods. Compared to **Table 1**, we see that the average visibility of the PM and party leaders are in all three countries higher during election periods. Also MPs in Belgium and The Netherlands seem slightly more visible. To analyze these differences more systematically, we again perform a negative binomial logistic regression (**Table 4**) and include the variable election period. We insert an interaction in this model between function and election period. See Appendix B for a graphical representation of the significant interaction effects.

5

Table 4. Negative binomial logistic regression with media visibility as dependent variable.

	Incidence rate ratio's		
	BE	NL	UK
Age	1.01***	1.01***	1.00***
Gender	0.50***	0.79***	0.86***
Number of votes	0.99***	1.00*	1.01***
Majority	1.15***	0.98 (.40)	0.68***
Election Period	1.90***	1.14***	1.03 (.10)
Political Function (ref.: MP)			
Prime Minister	40.01***	28.61***	128.76***
Minister	11.22***	6.89***	10.11***
Party Leader	10.95***	4.51***	15.01***
Political Function (ref.: MP) * Election period			
Prime Minister * Election Period	0.78 (.55)	1.09 (.64)	1.14 (.61)
Minister * Election Period	0.60***	0.81***	1.00 (.99)
Party Leader * Election Period	0.94 (.66)	1.98***	2.33***
Intercept	2.54***	2.31	3.78***
Total N	24880	21980	65688
R² Nagelkerke	0.633	0.799	0.733

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

Overall, this graphs confirms that election periods increase the visibility of politicians in Belgium and The Netherlands. In Belgium, media visibility, as was already apparent in **Table 3**, almost doubles during elections compared to routine periods. In The Netherlands media visibility increases with 14% during elections. No significant effect was found in the U.K.. The interaction between election period and Prime Minister is not significant in any of the studied countries. In Belgium and The Netherlands the visibility of ministers decreases during elections periods compared to the visibility of MPs. It thus seems that the news becomes more balanced in election campaign periods. Party leaders, however, seem to take up a more central position in news coverage of the election campaign, at least in the Netherlands and the U.K.. Their visibility almost doubles during election periods compared to the visibility of an ordinary Member of Parliament here.

We expected that the attention between different political functions would become more balanced during election periods compared to non-election periods. Hypothesis (H1) cannot be answered unambiguously, though. We see that ministers, at least in Belgium and The Netherlands, indeed become less visible compared to MPs during elections, which could indicate more balanced reporting. It could be that journalists are more aware of their influence during election periods and consciously feature

ministers less because they represent a political period that might come to an end. Another possibility is that journalists during elections focus more on the strategic side of campaigning and less on policy issues (Green-Pedersen et al. 2017). Ministers often try to profile themselves in their policy domain during an election campaign, while the focus in election news is often more on the horse race (Strömbäck and Kaid 2009).

On the other hand, party leaders become significantly more visible compared to MPs both in The U.K. and The Netherlands. Party leaders are above all the spokespersons and the external face of their party in the media (Cross and Pilet, 2015) and are, much more than ministers, the central party soldiers who play the attack and defend game in the media arena (Thesen, 2011). They are the prime actors who confront other party leaders in the media and who spearhead their parties' electoral campaigns. It is therefore not surprising that journalists focus on them more during elections. Previous research has even argued that there is a "presidentialization" of election campaigns whereby party leaders are evolving into the sole embodiment of their party in the mass media (e.g., Mughan 2000; Balmas et al. 2014).

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Informing citizens about politics is an important function of news media in democratic societies. Politicians try hard to get access to the news, as the media have the ability to make politicians more recognizable to voters, which in turn might translate into political success (e.g., Hopmann et al. 2011; van Erkel et al. 2020). In light of the central role of political news coverage in democratic societies, we analyzed how political function influences which politicians have access to the news media across country contexts, comparing routine versus election news periods.

Overall, we find that politicians in more powerful political positions receive more media coverage compared to regular members of parliament in all three country contexts. Of these political actors, the Prime Minister is most visible. This finding is most pronounced for the U.K., which is in line with previous research that concluded that the head of government, in this case the Prime Minister, is more visible in majoritarian democracies than in consensus democracies because of their more powerful legislative position (Lijphart 2012). It might additionally be explained by the higher levels of per-sonalization in British news media (Kriesi 2012; Van Aelst et al. 2012). However, for other political actors such as ministers and party leaders, we find country-specific differences. While party leaders are more visible than ministers in Belgium and the U.K, this finding is reversed in the Netherlands. These findings go against our expectation that party leaders would receive more attention in consensus democracies because multiple parties have a share of power and party leaders have to maintain the coherence in coalition governments (Vos and Van Aelst 2018). We do not seem to find a consistent

pattern here. This could be explained by the fact that our system variables might be too broad to capture smaller differences between political systems.

We also analyzed the influence of election campaign periods on politicians' visibility. Based on previous research (Brandenburg 2005; Semetko and Schoenbach 1994; Domke et al. 1997; De Swert and Van Aelst 2009), our expectation was that during elections news coverage of political actors would become more balanced. Indeed, in all three countries, the Prime Ministers and ministers in cabinet seem to lose their visibility advantage over ordinary members of parliament during elections. Party leaders, however, seem to gain media attention during election campaigns. So, although different political actors seem to take up a more central space in the news during elections as compared to routine news periods; we cannot unambiguously conclude that news coverage becomes more balanced.

Although our longitudinal and systematic approach provides novel insights, there are also some shortcomings we need to address. The intention of this paper was to give an empirical outlook on the occurrence of politicians in three political systems. The strength of this study - working with big data - is also one of its weaknesses. Because of the amount of data, going into more detail was beyond the scope of this study. This means we only counted the visibility of politicians without going further into the content or tone of the newspaper articles. Although we are convinced that mere visibility is important for politicians, previous studies have shown that the content (such as framing or tone) of reporting also could play a role (Aaldering et al. 2018). Moreover, our study unveiled the existence of similar patterns for some politicians, but also interesting differences for others. We hope the findings of this study serve as a first step towards further, more in-depth research into politicians' visibility in various political systems in different time periods.

Another limitation is our focus on traditional newspaper coverage. To some it might seem that studying the visibility of politicians in the traditional mass media is no longer relevant given the now central position of social media. Social media give politicians an alternative route to connect with and inform voters, and the news media no longer are the sole gatekeepers. Recent research, however, showed that traditional media and social media are interconnected. Politicians that are visible in traditional media are also the ones that become more popular on social media (Van Aelst et al. 2017). Additionally, traditional media coverage of individual politicians significantly affects the extent to which these politicians receive attention on social media (Kruikemeier et al. 2018). Similarly to traditional media, social media are a medium with strong competition for audience attention. Every politician tries to get followers, retweets and likes, but only very few manage to create an online following without also being visible in the traditional media. Hence, even in the age of social media, traditional media still are powerful actors in the political process.

In all, by focusing mainly on the politicians who already hold powerful positions, the media consolidate the status quo. Because of this, politicians in office are the ones mainly setting the agenda and determine which issues are salient, forcing politicians in less prominent positions to mainly react instead of putting issues or policy proposals on the agenda themselves. Elections do seem to produce more equal media attention, though, indicating that journalists seem to feel some sort of responsibility towards more balanced news coverage here.

NOTES

1. While these newspapers could be considered left-wing or right-wing, none have direct one-on-one alignment with political parties. Papers swing back and forth in their support for a given party during U.K. general elections. This is especially true for tabloids. In this study we decided to select The Sun because it is the leading tabloid in terms of overall reach. Although it varies over time, The Sun can be considered a more right leaning paper.

2. NLP is conducted using the R package UDPipe (Straka and Straková, 2017).

3. Similar results are found for all variables in the model that includes the three countries. Separate models were preferred because they provide additional information and insight into country-differences.

APPENDIX

A.

Table A1. Negative binomial logistic regression with the three studied countries in one model.

Predictors	Incidence Rate Ratios	CI	p
(Intercept)	3.03	2.91 − 3.15	**<0.001**
Age	1.00	1.00 − 1.01	**<0.001**
Gender	0.75	0.74 − 0.76	**<0.001**
Number of Votes	1.00	1.00 − 1.00	**0.005**
Majority	0.84	0.83 − 0.86	**<0.001**
Country (ref: Belgium)			
The Netherlands	0.95	0.93 − 0.97	**<0.001**
The U.K.	1.34	1.31 − 1.38	**<0.001**
Political Function (ref: MP)			
Prime Minister	68.42	62.82 − 74.70	**<0.001**
Minister	9.40	9.20 − 9.61	**<0.001**
Party leader	9.75	9.42 − 10.10	**<0.001**
Observations	112548		
R^2 Nagelkerke	0.713		

B.

Figure B1. Interactions between election time and political function (Belgium).
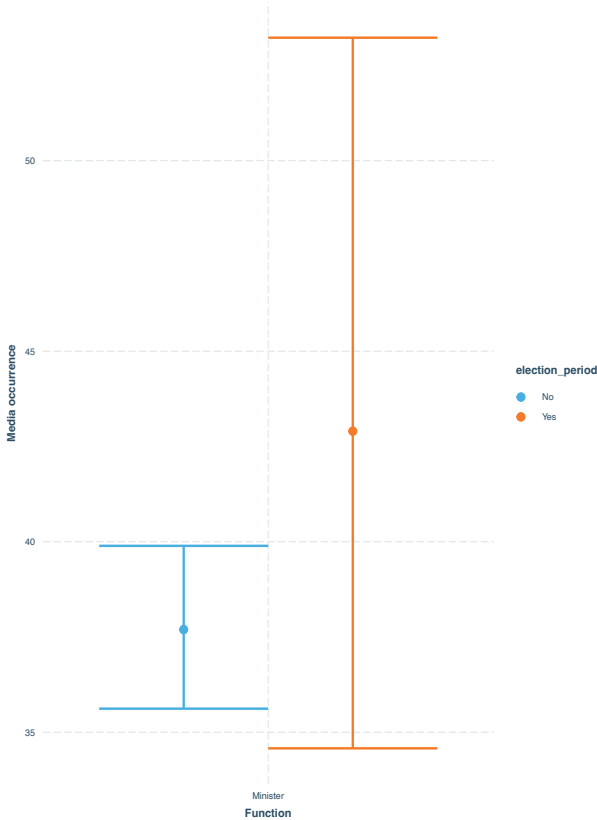
Figure B2. Interactions between election time and political function (The Netherlands).
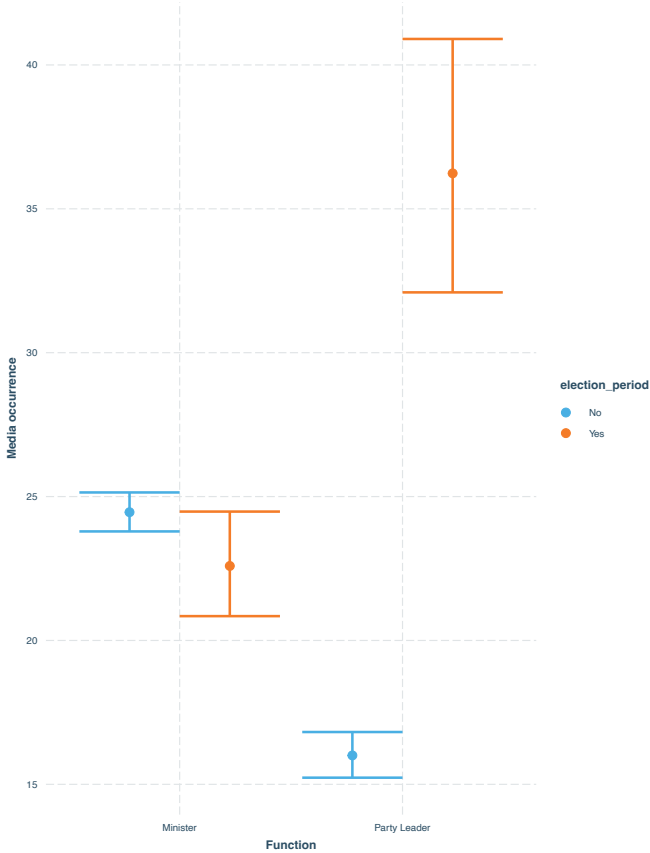
Figure B3. Interactions between election time and political function (The United Kingdom).

5
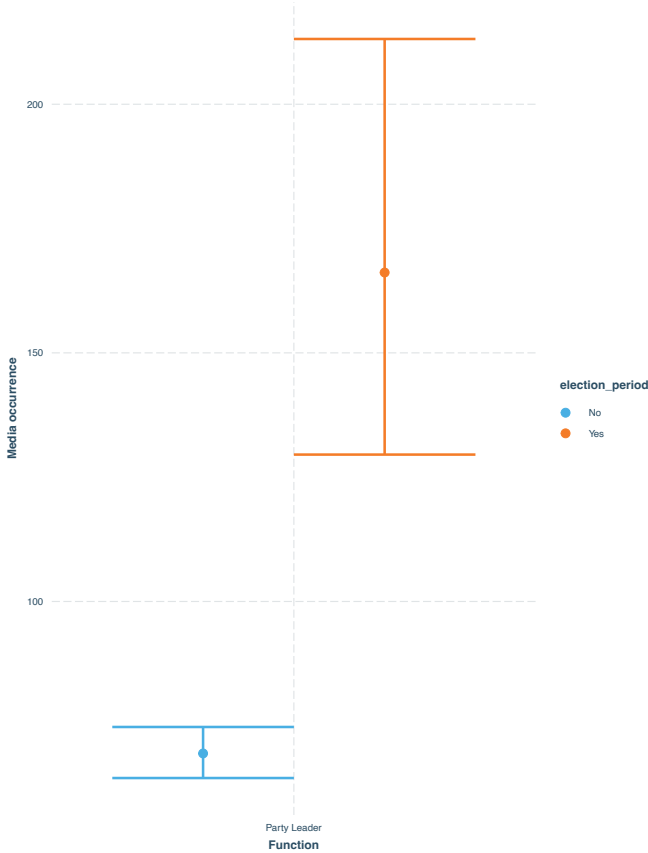
CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion and Discussion

The main research question in this dissertation was "How does mass media influence the political career success of individual politicians?" To answer this question, I first conducted three empirical studies that looked at the relation between newspaper coverage and career success. In the last chapter, the findings of previous chapters were put into perspective by studying the role of power on media attention in three different countries. The starting point of this dissertation was that getting into the media is crucial for political actors, because media coverage, and thus attention, can lead to political success. Although most political communication scholars believe in the influence of media on political success, not many empirical studies have really looked into this. Researchers have studied how media influence electoral success, but other aspects of political career success were largely overlooked. Interestingly, researchers have extensively focused on which political actors get access to the media to gain attention. Power proved to be the determining factor, which indicates that journalists largely follow the existing political power hierarchy when covering politics. This finding is closely related to the PMP principle proposed by Wolfsfeld (2004; 2011), which states that politics largely lead the tango between media and politics. If something happens in politics, media react to it, which in turn impacts politics. Vos (2015), however, found that although power is the main determinant, among less endowed politicians, media skills can offer an alternative route to media coverage, which in turn generates political success. Media can thus steer the political career of politicians who cannot rely on political power. This finding is closely related to the mediatization of politics theory in which media logic gradually changes the nature of political processes. This theory seems to be at odds with the abovementioned PMP principle, but in this dissertation, I show that these two influential theories can complement each other and that by combining them, we can obtain a better and more nuanced picture of a complex reality.

Media skills are often mentioned throughout this dissertation because they are considered a predictor of media coverage. They are, however, not studied in their own right. In this dissertation, I did not focus on the specific skills that enable politicians to get past the news gates but rather studied how. The media effect was studied by focusing on visibility and sentiment in news coverage about political actors. Political success was studied by zooming in on three important career steps. In the first chapter, the candidate selection of political parties was studied. To assess the role of media on this internal political process, interviews were conducted with elite politicians. Politicians were directly asked about how media influence this first crucial career step. How media influence popularity and promotions to a higher office (minister/ party leader) was subsequently studied in Chapters 2 and 3. Every chapter implicitly starts from the acknowledgment that political power determines most media access. This assumption is based on previous research. However, these studies are often only conducted in one specific country at one specific time. As the assumption that power leads to media attention forms the basis of the theoretical framework used in this dissertation, Chapter 4 examines the effect of power on media attention.

One of my committee members noticed that this dissertation has an "old school feeling" in the sense that I relied on newspapers to study questions that researchers were already posing 20 years ago. I fully agree with this. Nevertheless, I strongly believe that these questions are, even with the rise of social media, still relevant. It was, however, very important to me that I tackle these "old school" questions with new methods. I wanted to conduct my research based on longitudinal data and aimed to incorporate all available data instead of taking samples. To achieve this, my dissertation heavily relied on automated content analysis to measure both media visibility and media sentiment. In this concluding chapter, I first set out the key findings of the different chapters. Afterward, I put the pieces together and position my work in the bigger research field. In this way, I mainly hope to provide some nuance and bring the theories within political communication that focus heavily on political variables (e.g., the PMP principle) and those that are more media-focused (e.g., mediatization of politics) a little closer together. In addition, this dissertation is one of the first studies to offer systematic empirical research into how mediatized certain political processes are.

OVERVIEW OF KEY FINDINGS

The first chapter of this dissertation starts, fittingly, with one of the first steps in a political career: the candidate selection. After a person develops the ambition to become a politician, they need to be selected as a candidate by a political party in order to actually become a politician. For this chapter, I interviewed 24 top selectors or political elites (ministers, party leaders, and caucus leaders) who were part of the selectorate of their party. I asked these selectors what role media skills play when they select candidates for the ballot list. Based on the interviews, I concluded that the candidate selection of political parties is indeed in some ways guided by media logic. Eighteen out of the 24 interviewed politicians replied that media skills are important. However, the level of importance selectors attributed to media skills fluctuated. Some were very clear and said that media skills are the number one criterion when selecting new candidates, whereas others underlined that it is always a mix of characteristics. Expertise was, apart from media skills, the most often mentioned requirement. Interestingly, many of the selectors clarified that for the top three candidates on the list, media skills are a crucial characteristic to be selected. In addition, during the interviews, I found clear indications of an evolution in the importance of media skills. This evolution was mentioned and explained by different politicians and entails a shift in which media skills, or tools to handle the media, become the dominant requirement at the expense of expertise (i.e., a very political-oriented quality). The interviewed selectors also commented on a shift in the nature of the required media skills. In the past, being a good speaker was sufficient, but the interviewed politicians indicated that other skills, such as producing sound bites, changing one's voice or pace, etc., are more important. These findings imply that the selection of candidates is influenced and shaped by media logic and thus seem to give an indication of mediatization in one of the most internal political processes. An

important nuance is that political skills such as expertise, experience, and ideology also play an important role and that selectors, in their choice of candidates, are thus led by both media and political skills.

In the second chapter, the focus lies on how the popularity of politicians is influenced by media coverage, and more specifically by media visibility and sentiment. Previous research has extensively focused on election periods and thus on the influence of media on electoral outcome. In this chapter, I argue that politicians do not suddenly become popular in the month before an election. Their image is built in the years between, and an election campaign alone is often simply too short for candidates to establish media prominence and gain popularity. This chapter thus assesses, on the one hand, if popularity is positively influenced by more media coverage and if the way media portray politicians also affects their image. In Belgium, as in most other countries, popularity polls receive a great deal of media attention, and being polled as popular can affect political success. Not all politicians are, however, included in the popularity polls. Only 30 politicians are "short-listed." This chapter finds that media visibility has a positive impact on both getting into popularity polls and the actual popularity score. Sentiment of news coverage does not significantly impact the odds of being included in a popularity poll but does have an effect on the actual popularity score. Interestingly, an effect was found only for negative news coverage. This indicates a negativity bias in which negative news impacts the popularity of politicians, whereas positive news does not make a difference. An overall important nuance in this chapter is that the influence of media coverage differs based on political function. Higher ranking politicians (ministers and party leaders) have a much higher chance of being included in popularity polls. Political function also proved to have a positive influence on the actual popularity score. This means that media coverage is especially important for MPs because higher ranking politicians receive ample media coverage due to their function. This chapter indicates that MPs must be, on average, featured in the news more than 20 times per month, because from that point on, the possibility of being included increases rapidly. Previous research, however, indicates that this is not an easy task. Journalists generally follow the trail of power, and lower ranking politicians have a relatively small chance of getting past the news gates. Generating negative attention to gain more visibility might not be a good idea seeing that I find a negativity bias. Positive news coverage does not affect popularity, whereas negative news coverage significantly harms popularity.

The third chapter studies how media visibility influences the chance of being promoted to a higher office. Many researchers found that political power generates media attention. In this chapter, I focus on the opposite relationship, and the main question I thus pose is whether media attention also generates power. This question is studied by looking at the career path of MPs with similar experience, none of whom ever had a higher political function, and assessing if their media visibility as MP predicts if they

will become a minister or party leader. I find evidence that media visibility matters for becoming a top politician. If an MP wants to enlarge his/her chances of being promoted to minister or party leader, investing in media prominence is a good strategy. This chapter also shows that media visibility matters more for becoming a minister than for becoming a party leader, which is quite surprising because I thought that media would be a bigger part of a party leaders' job description than a minister's. A plausible explanation for this finding is that these days, ministers need to be fully equipped with all the necessary media skills, whereas party leaders are, more than we might think, internal party managers and organizers. Another explanation could be that selectors attach great importance to past media performances when debating who is fit for a ministerial position. This is in line with the idea of the mediatization of politics that describes how parties would, under the influence of the mediatization, select leaders and other political candidates based on media logic and thus based on their media skills potential (Strömbäck and Van Aelst 2013). This third chapter is thus closely related to the first chapter. Media logic has an impact on the selection of candidates and ministers/party leaders. Interestingly, I found no evidence that in the past 20 years media occurrence has increased in importance for the selection of ministers/party leaders.

In the last chapter of this dissertation, I take a step back to put the findings of the previous chapters in perspective. The fact that political power generates media visibility is, as stated above, seen as one of the basic rules of political communication research. However, most of the existing research focused on one point in time (Vos and Van Aelst 2018) or on one specific country (e.g., Sheafer 2001; Midtbø 2011; Tresch 2009). Various researchers have pointed out that different contextual characteristics such as political system, electoral system, and the corresponding power hierarchy in a country influence which politicians receive media coverage (Boumans et al. 2013; Kriesi 2012). Seeing that this dissertation starts from the idea that power is the surest way to generate media attention, it is important for the interpretation of my results that this mechanism is also present in this case in the studied period. In the fourth chapter, I thus revisit this question with the use of automated content analysis. The fourth chapter is also the only comparative one because I wanted to assess how similar (or exceptional) Belgium is compared with other countries. To do this, I compare Belgium with one country with a comparable political and media system (the Netherlands) and one country with a different political and media system (the U.K.). Chapter 4 clearly shows that every country has its particularities when it comes to which politicians appear in the news. Although the prime minister appears most in all three countries, the distribution of politicians in the news is different. In the U.K., the PM appears almost 550 times, which is very high compared with the other government members (around 40 times a month) or party leaders (around 80 times a month). In Belgium, the differences between high-ranking politicians are less defined. The PM appears 163 times, whereas ministers and party leaders both appear around 40 times a month. In the Netherlands, all high-ranking politicians appear much less in the news. The PM is featured around

6

113 times a month, whereas ministers appear 25 times and party leaders only 19 times a month. Interesting is that MPs appear on average only 3.5 times a month in the news in all studied countries. Overall, politicians in more powerful political positions thus receive more media coverage compared with regular members of parliament, but how much more media attention they receive is specific to each country's unique political system.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

The MMP-model

Power generates media attention, and powerful political elites thus receive much more attention than their less powerful colleagues. Previous research found that media attention affects the electoral success of individual politicians. Moreover, being featured in the media also enlarges the chances of policy success. Journalists are often accused of maintaining and strengthening the existing power hierarchy and thus following the trail of power (Bennett 1996). The principle of cumulative inequality, or the idea that those who need media access the most find it the most difficult to obtain, is often cited in this context (Sheafer and Wolfsfeld 2004, p. 78). It is not surprising that journalists tend to cover powerful politicians more than their lower ranking colleagues. Powerful elites are simply more newsworthy because they have the power to make real changes that have an impact on citizens. Within the bigger political arena, lower ranking politicians thus stand little chance of gaining media access if more powerful politicians are also on the playing field. MPs cannot compete with government members or party leaders, but under certain situational contexts, journalists diverge from the trail of power, and this creates opportunities.

Thinking back to my internship at Terzake (see introduction), powerful elites do not always have the desire to enter the media arena. They may withhold information to avoid the news media devoting attention to issues that could damage them or generate a competitive disadvantage (Walgrave et al. 2010). Moreover, political elites do not like to discuss unpopular policy decisions they made or give an explanation about a political fiasco (Lee 2005). Sometimes the risks of appearing in the media outweigh the advantages, so they simply opt out. It is in such situations that journalists diverge from the trail of power and search for political sources among lower ranking, less powerful, and lesser-known politicians. Although it is still not an easy task, MPs can pass the news gates when they play their cards right. Vos (2015) stated, "The success formula for ordinary politicians to make it into the news is quite simple: proactively create and maintain good personal contacts with political journalists to guarantee quick access to highlight relevant initiatives when a window of opportunity presents itself in the news media" (Vos 2015, p. 148). What happens once these lower ranking politicians get media coverage is, however, often neglected. Most research into individual politicians is focused on political leaders, government members, and other high-ranking politicians. Previous research did find that appearing in the media positively affects electoral

outcome and citizens' overall idea about politicians. Much less is known about how media can influence the careers of lower ranking politicians.

In this dissertation, I found that media can play a substantial autonomous role in the political success of less powerful politicians. This group of lower ranking politicians is quite large, and the competition within this group is enormous. In the Flemish parliament alone, 124 MPs strive to gain media attention to increase their standing, gain power, and ultimately translate their hopes and ideas into policy. Moreover, let us not forget that we already focus on the highest level. There are thousands of other hopeful politicians who do not belong to the federal parliamentary elite who also hope to get their moment in the spotlight. It is exactly for these politicians, who cannot rely on power, that media offer an alternative route for career success. The central idea of this dissertation is that the PMP model is mainly applicable to elite politicians. For lower ranking politicians, an alternative model should be used to grasp the complex reality. The PMP model gives a good description of how media and politics interact for elite politicians. Because of their political standing and **p**ower, they are featured in the **m**edia. **P**oliticians then react to the media coverage they themselves caused, which in turn influences their political communication (Sellers 2009; Wolfsfeld 2011). This model has merit and captures a substantive part of the relationship between media and politics, as it is mostly elite politicians who are covered in the media (as Chapter 4 showed). For lower ranking politicians, this model is, however, less applicable. Therefore, I proposed (see introduction) an alternative model, which I call the media-media-politics (MMP) model.

In this dissertation, I found that mere visibility, or appearing in the news, proved to have a significant effect on political career success. Media visibility positively influences the popularity of lower ranking politicians and the odds of getting promoted to a higher office (minister/party leader). For sentiment, the results were less straightforward. Positive news coverage does not have a significant effect, whereas negative sentiment was found to harm political career success. This negativity bias was also found in previous research (e.g., Soroka et al. 2019). Media coverage thus boosts the political career success of lower ranking politicians, but not when the coverage is systematically negative. This creates extra challenges seeing that lower ranking politicians should not only create media access but also avoid negative media coverage, because this actually lowers their political success. The way to get (positive) media coverage without power is by using media skills, which in this dissertation are interpreted as proposed by Sheafer (2001). Sheafer conceptualized media skills in five categories (political initiative and creativity; communication initiative and creativity; dramatic and rhetorical abilities; cooperation with politicians; cooperation with journalists). Media skills can thus vary from having a good working relationship with journalists to being able to give strong sound bites during interviews. In the MMP model, I argue that instead of power leading to media coverage, which in turn creates political career success, media skills lead to media coverage and, as the findings in this dissertation prove, career success.

6

Figure 1. Graphical display of the proposed MMP model.
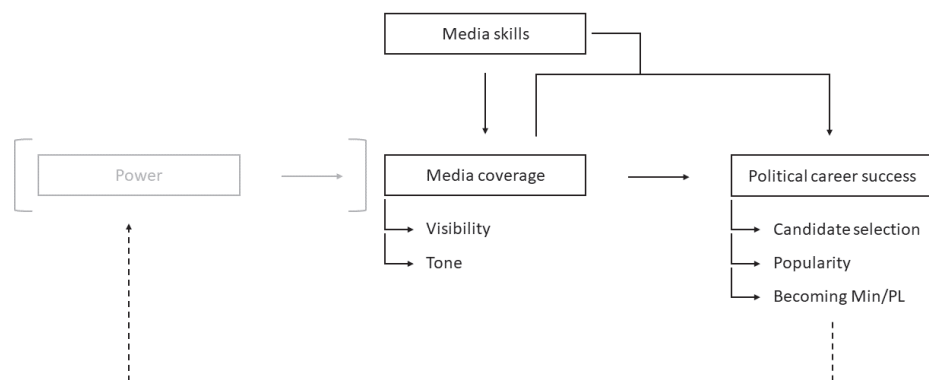
An important nuance is that this MMP model is only applicable to a small group of politicians. It is not just because an MP receives a small amount of media attention that the MMP cycle kicks in and the politician is promoted to minister in no time. In Chapter 2, I found that MPs should appear on average 20 times a month in the news in order for their popularity to rise. In Chapter 3, I saw that the effect of media on becoming a minister only kicks in when a politician is featured on average 10 times a month. This means that MPs should appear between 2.5 and 5 times a week in the news, or almost every other day. This is a high number for lower ranking politicians who have limited access to the media and have to compete with many similar politicians. Thus, only a few manage to take the alternative media route, but as this dissertation showed, over a longer period, media does systematically impact career success. In the 20 studied years, 38 MPs managed to become ministers, with media prominence as a driving force. The few lower ranking politicians who made it in the popularity polls were also aided by the media attention they received prior to the polls, and selectors openly admitted to selecting new candidates based on their potential to generate media attention. To conclude, media can determine political careers but mainly still use a political logic because they strongly favor those in power (PMP model). However, they have room under certain circumstances to maneuver and add media logic to the mix (MMP model). These two models thus coexist and should both be considered when studying the complex relationship between politics (or politicians in particular) and mass media.

Mediatization of politics

This proposed MMP model is, naturally, closely related to the mediatization of politics theory. However, as Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) point out, the evidence for such mediatization of politics is mostly unsystematic and even anecdotal. The theory of mediatization is not often assessed in empirical studies. In general, research simply describes a systematic and aggregated process of change in politics, without systematically testing it. This dissertation offers empirical evidence of the mediatization of politics in different political career steps. Mediatization is, however, as Strömbäck

(2008) describes, not a clear-cut process but rather a dynamic and constantly evolving process. Within the same country, the four different phases of mediatization can be found, and the distinctions between the phases are less clear in reality than in theory. Therefore, in this dissertation, I do not make claims about which phase of mediatization Belgium is in but rather offer insight into how media might play a role in different political processes without pushing my findings into a particular phase.

The different career steps I studied are all crucial moments in a political career, and for all of them, I found evidence of the presence of media logic. One important structural change caused by mediatization, which Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) mention, is that parties select leaders and other political candidates based on media logic and thus based on media prominence or the potential to generate media attention. This claim was never investigated in previous research and thus remained an assumption. In this dissertation, however, I found evidence that media logic plays a role in both the selection of candidates and the selection of ministers and party leaders. Within the process of candidate selection, potential politicians are selected based on media skills or, in other words, the potential to get media access. In Chapter 3, I found evidence that media prominence codetermines who will become a minister or party leader. A politicians' popularity was also found to be influenced by media coverage. It is thus clear that media logic has found its way into different political processes and codetermines how a political career will advance. What is important here is that media logic is not the all-dominant logic, as I found clear evidence of an interaction between media and political logic. The interviews with top selectors showed that media skills are indeed high on the list of priorities, but selectors are looking for someone with both media skills and expertise. To become a minister or party leader, media does play a role. However, a larger effect was found for being a member of the party bureau and being a caucus leader, two political logic variables. Additionally, for popularity, I found that it was mainly political function that best explained the popularity score.

Mediatization of politics is described as a process in which the influence of media logic is constantly increasing at the expense of political logic. As the design of this dissertation was longitudinal, several chapters looked at whether I could find an increase in the influence of media. In the first chapter, top selectors indicated that they had noticed an evolution in the importance and nature of required media skills. In the other chapters, no evidence was found of an increase in the importance of media over the past 20 years. Therefore, it could be the case that the importance of media skills has increased in candidate selection for political parties, but not for other career steps.

6

AUTOMATED CONTENT ANALYSIS

The research presented in this dissertation largely relied on automated content analysis of newspaper articles to study the effect of media in a longitudinal way. This naturally implies that certain methodological choices were made that inevitably have consequences on the course and results of the different chapters. The advantages and limitations of my chosen method deserve some elaboration.

Overall, the automated content analysis used in this dissertation has proven to be very promising for future research. In some cases, automated methods are not really an advantage because language is complex and multifaceted. For supervised methods such as the one used in this dissertation, the overall rule is that if it is so complex that human coders struggle with it, supervised automated content analysis will probably not function well (Boumans and Trilling 2016). However, for visibility and, to a lesser extent, sentiment coding, automated content analysis offers advantages. Automated methods are well suited to measure visibility. This makes it possible to analyze a large set of data with relatively few resources. For this dissertation, the pre-processing of the data was done with much care, and together with the many precautions I took, I am confident that my visibility and sentiment measures are accurate and reliable (for more information, see Chapter 2). This has opened many perspectives. First, I could revisit research questions that were previously answered in more limited and less systematic studies. In this dissertation, these research questions were studied by looking at all available data over a longer time period. Another advantage of the used method is that I could study patterns that can only be found by looking at much data in a very systematic way. Chapter 3 is the best example of this, as by studying the visibility of MPs systematically and longitudinally, I could determine how media attention influences the chance of becoming a top politician.

The flipside of working with millions of articles is that I only studied the bigger picture and was not able to analyze the articles in detail. Media visibility is a measure that counts every time a politician is in the news, but this does not account for media voice. I thus know which actors are featured but not if they were merely mentioned or actually have a voice in the news. It could be that the influence of media on political success is bigger for those politicians who manage to get many direct quotes in the news. This is closely related to politicians' agenda-setting power. Because I only know which names appear in news coverage, I do not distinguish between politicians who are able to access the media to talk about issues they are involved in and those who are merely mentioned. This is a big difference for politicians with respect to getting their ideas out there and influencing the issues that are talked about. Researching this was out of scope for this dissertation, but future automated content analysis studies could aim to make a distinction between media access and media voice. Next, there are also some limitations regarding my sentiment coding. Although I did measure the

sentiment used in the news coverage surrounding political actors, I was not able to measure if this negative or positive sentiment is voiced by the political actor or directed toward this actor. Previous research found that some politicians are more successful in steering news framing. It is mainly powerful politicians who are able to influence the way journalists write about them because they simply have more resources to negotiate their access to news media (Aelst et al. 2010; Midtbø 2011). The sentiment analysis used in this dissertation performs well compared with other models (see Chapter 2), but it remains challenging to develop a detailed and accurate automated sentiment coding. I am thus not able to make the distinction between politicians who use a negative/positive frame when talking about other political actors and the negative/positive frame used by journalists. Therefore, other interesting questions considering the negativity within political quotes cannot be answered using my method.

SOCIETAL IMPLICATIONS

What do the findings in this dissertation exactly mean for the bigger societal picture? In Chapter 4, I found that powerful politicians appear much more in the media than their lower ranking colleagues. In Belgium, over the past 20 years, the prime minister, ministers, and party leaders were at least 10 times more visible than normal MPs. Political standing guarantees media visibility and ensures more popularity (see Chapter 2). It is a reinforcing cycle that keeps those in power firmly seated, and breaking this cycle has proven to be quite difficult. For journalists, deciding which political actors to cover is challenging. News media should inform audiences on matters of public policy by presenting and debating alternatives and by giving voice to a diversity of actors and viewpoints in the news (Schultz 1998). Especially in political news, journalists have to pay much attention to more balanced reporting in which different political viewpoints and actors are covered (Vos and Wolfgang 2018). Additionally, it is the task of news media to hold powerful politicians accountable and report on decisions that could influence the public. Of course, newsworthiness must also be considered. Politicians in powerful positions enact policies and legislation that directly affect citizens (Bennett 1996). Overall, however, it seems that journalists mainly focus on those in power, and this might create a very closed off media system in which lower ranking politicians rarely get a voice.

The (presumed) influence of media might also create a hyperfocus on media among lower ranking politicians. Because politicians know that media can promote career success and thus lead to power, media logic can begin to dominate political logic, and this is exactly what mediatization scholars warn against. Too much focus of politicians on the media might interfere with their prime task within democracy of producing good public policy and representing citizens. Media logic can, in these cases, replace political logic, with a reduced quality of political processes as a result. The fact that media attention can generate success might lead to politicians acting controversially

6

or performing political stunts with the sole purpose of getting into the media. The fear of mediatization scholars is that the obsession with media logic might then spill over to other political processes, until politics is completely dominated by media. However, as this dissertation showed, the influence of media on political processes should not be overestimated and is not (yet) necessarily problematic. Politicians take the media into account, but not without losing sight of their political values.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

Naturally, this dissertation has limitations that must be addressed. The three most important limitations will be discussed because they allow for speculation about findings that might have occurred when examined differently and provide input for further research.

First, this dissertation is almost entirely based on newspaper data. To some, it might seem that studying the visibility of politicians in traditional mass media alone is outdated and no longer relevant. Social media give politicians an alternative route to connect with and inform voters. They can record their own videos, share their ideas directly to their followers, and thus seem to be able to bypass the traditional gatekeepers completely. Social media use demands few resources; Facebook and Twitter are free to use, and sending out Tweets or Facebook messages requires little technical knowledge or time (Vergeer 2013). This has sparked the idea that social media create a more equal playing field where more politicians get their share of the attention. Lesser-known or lower ranking politicians can compensate for their lack of traditional media attention by being more present online (Lilleker et al. 2011). In this way, backbenchers can strengthen their position in the party, and traditional media visibility might be less of a prerequisite to become a top politician. Recent research, however, has shown that traditional media coverage is linked to which politicians become popular on social media (Van Aelst et al. 2017). Additionally, it was found that traditional media coverage of individual politicians significantly affects the extent to which these politicians receive attention on social media (Kruikemeier et al. 2018). The problem with social media for politicians is, similar to the problem of traditional media, again the strong competition. Every politician tries to get followers, retweets, and likes, but only very few manage to create an online following without political power or visibility in the traditional media. A recent study by the Reuters Institute (Picone 2021) showed that traditional media are still a very important source of political information for citizens. Although in 2021, print is only used by 32% of Belgian citizens as a news source, television news is still used by 64% of citizens. Online news is the main source, with 78%, and interestingly, it is mainly the online versions of the big traditional newspapers that are now the main source of news. Social media are used by 38% of Belgian citizens as a news source. Traditional mass media thus still seems to be the dominant source of information. Social media

might, however, influence political career success in other ways, so further research should consider social media.

Next, the causality between media and political career success should be discussed. The measure I used to study the impact of media is flawed in the sense that I was not able to study a direct effect of media on political careers. This makes talking about causality quite tricky, and although in the preceding chapters I controlled for the most important variables that might also have an impact on career success, I was not able to completely isolate the direct effect of media on success. The relationship between politics and media is complex, ever changing, and dependent on different contextual and situational variables, which makes it extremely difficult to grasp every aspect of this relationship. In this dissertation, the effect of media on political career success was systematically found for different career steps. Nevertheless, the interviews in Chapter 1 are the only direct indication we have of media influence. Next to empirical analysis, theoretical argumentation thus remains critical. In this way, the findings in this dissertation are supported by work about the mediatization of politics. Future research efforts could strive to develop a more direct measure for media effect. Developing a way to directly measure the media skills of individual politicians could make research into the media effect more direct. Sheafer (2001) measured MPs' media skills by relying on information from people who knew the politicians personally. This method demands extensive resources, and as my research design was longitudinal, this was not feasible. Other methods that do not rely on specialist information should be developed to measure media skills for longer periods and in different contexts. In this way, the step prior to media coverage could be included, strengthening the causal claim. Developing this was beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, such a conceptualization is an important avenue for future research.

Lastly, it is important to reflect on the generalizability of the findings in this dissertation. The focus is mainly on Belgium, which inevitably limits to what extent larger general conclusions can be drawn. Belgium is in many respects comparable to other Western European countries. The Belgian media system has been categorized as democratic-corporatist, implying strong professionalization of the journalistic profession and a considerable level of state intervention to protect press freedom; it is comparable to the systems of Scandinavian and other Western European countries (Hallin and Mancini 2011). The political system of Belgium is a federal state with a monarchy and a federal parliamentary democracy with a bicameral parliament composed of a senate and a chamber of representatives. Important for the findings presented in this dissertation is that personalization of politics is relatively low in Belgium. Therefore, it might well be that I make a somewhat conservative estimation of media effects here. Belgian candidates are selected by an exclusive selectorate. The same is true for the selection of ministers and, to a lesser extent, party leaders. This, naturally, might affect my results. Previous research found that media skills also matter when the candidate

selection is inclusive (Sheafer and Tzionit 2006). Sheafer and Tzionit's study in Israel, however, did not find an effect of media skills for exclusive selectorates. Without further research, it is difficult to estimate how my findings can be translated to other contexts. The same is true for the effect of media on becoming a minister or party leader. Due to the lack of previous research in other contexts, it is difficult to make hard claims. However, Belgium is, as stated above, a rather "conservative" case when studying the influence of media on politics. Political parties are the main political actors with a lot of internal party discipline, and there is not much room for individual politicians to position themselves without their party's approval. This decreases the likelihood that media prominence is the main reason for someone to be selected or successful. Therefore, the fact that I found, in a country like Belgium, that media attention clearly affects political career success makes me expect that it would have an even greater impact in other countries.

FINAL WORDS

Appearing in the media generates political success, but media access is paradoxically reserved for powerful politicians who are already quite high on the career ladder. Political power is, luckily for the less endowed politicians, also dependent on other situational factors. Previous research (Vos 2015) found that, although it is not an easy task, lower ranking politicians can pass the news gates by investing heavily in media skills. This can range from proactively creating and maintaining good personal contacts with political journalists to practicing sound bites. In this way, they hope to optimally profit when a window of opportunity presents itself in the news media. This dissertation showed that investing in media skills might be a bet that pays off. It increases, in a very early stage, the chance of being selected as a candidate for the ballot list. Later on, media attention positively affects the overall popularity of individual politicians and can ultimately significantly increase the chance of being promoted or elected as a minister/party leader. Overall, MPs cannot compete with government members. They can, however, try to distinguish themselves among other MPs, which leads to media access that can put them on the pathway toward a successful political career.

6

REFERENCES

Aalberg, Toril, and Jesper Strömbäck. 2011. Media-Driven Men and Media-Critical Women? An Empirical Study of Gender and MPs Relationships with the Media in Norway and Sweden. *International Political Science Review* 32(2): 167–87.

Aaldering, Loes, Tom van der Meer, and Wouter Van der Brug. 2018. "Mediated Leader Effects: The Impact of Newspapers' Portrayal of Party Leadership on Electoral Support." *The international journal of press/politics* 23(1): 70–94.

Allport, F.H. 1924. *Social Psychology*. Boston: Houghton-Miffin.

Althaus, Scott L., and Young Mie Kim. 2006. "Priming Effects in Complex Information Environments: Reassessing the Impact of News Discourse on Presidential Approval." *The Journal of Politics* 68(4): 960–76.

Altheide, David L. 2004. "Media Logic and Political Communication." *Political Communication,* 21(3): 293–96.

Anderson, Norman H. 1965. "Averaging versus Adding as a Stimulus-Combination Rule in Impression Formation." *Journal of experimental psychology* 70(4): 394.

André, Audrey, Sam Depauw, Matthew S. Shugart, and Roman Chytilek. 2017. Party Nomination Strategies in Flexible-List Systems: Do Preference Votes Matter?" *Party Politics* 23(5): 589–600.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, and Shanto Iyengar. 1994. "Riding the Wave and Claiming Ownership over Issues: The Joint Effects of Advertising and News Coverage in Campaigns." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 58(3): 335–57.

Antonakis, John, Marika Fenley, and Sue Liechti. 2011. "Can Charisma Be Taught? Tests of Two Interventions." *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 10(3): 374–96.

Anwar, Muhammad. 2001. "The Participation of Ethnic Minorities in British Politics." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 27(3): 533–49.

Arnold, R. Douglas. 2004. *Congress, the Press, and Political Accountability.* Princeton University Press.

Asher, Herb. 2016. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Cq Press.

Balmas, Meital, Gideon Rahat, Tamir Sheafer, and Shaul R Shenhav. 2014. "Two Routes to Personalized Politics: Centralized and Decentralized Personalization." *Party Politics* 20(1): 37–51.

Balmas, Meital, and Tamir Sheafer. 2010. "Candidate Image in Election Campaigns: Attribute Agenda Setting, Affective Priming, and Voting Intentions." *International journal of public opinion research* 22(2): 204–29.

Baumeister, Roy F., Karen Dale, and Kristin L. Sommer. 1998. "Freudian Defense Mechanisms and Empirical Findings in Modern Social Psychology: Reaction Formation, Projection, Displacement, Undoing, Isolation, Sublimation, and Denial." *Journal of Personality* 66(6): 1081–1124.

Beigel, Astrid. 1973. "Resistance to Change: Differential Effects of Favourable and Unfavourable Initial Communications." *British Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 12(2): 153–58.

Bennett, W. Lance. 1990. "Toward a Theory of Press-State." *Journal of communication* 40(2): 103–27.

Bennett, W. Lance. 1996. "An Introduction to Journalism Norms and Representations of Politics."

Bennett, W. Lance, and Robert M. Entman. 2001. "Democracy and the Public Sphere." *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*: 2.

Benoit, William L. 2014. "Content Analysis in Political Communication." In *Sourcebook for Political Communication Research*, Routledge, 290–302.

Binning, John F., Mel A. Goldstein, Mario F. Garcia, and Julie H. Scattaregia. 1988. "Effects of Pre-interview Impressions on Questioning Strategies in Same-and Opposite-Sex Employment Interviews." *Journal of applied Psychology* 73(1): 30.

Bird, Karen. 2003. "Who Are the Women? Where Are the Women? And What Difference Can They Make? Effects of Gender Parity in French Municipal Elections." *French Politics* 1(1): 5–38.

Blumenthal, Sidney. 1980. *The Permanent Campaign: Inside the World of Elite Political Operatives*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Blumler, Jay G. 2015. "Core Theories of Political Communication: Foundational and Freshly Minted." *Communication Theory* 25(4): 426–38.

Bochel, John, and David Denver. 1983. "Candidate Selection in the Labour Party: What the Selectors Seek." *British Journal of Political Science* 13(1): 45–69.

Boomgaarden, Hajo G., Rens Vliegenthart, and Claes H. de Vreese. 2012. "A Worldwide Presidential Election: The Impact of the Media on Candidate and Campaign Evaluations." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 24(1): 42–61.

Bos, Linda. 2012. *Public Images of Right-Wing Populist Leaders: The Role of the Media*. Universiteit van Amsterdam [Host].

Boumans, Jelle W., Hajo G. Boomgaarden, and Rens Vliegenthart. 2013. "Media Personalisation in Context: A Cross-National Comparison between the UK and the Netherlands, 1992–2007." *Political Studies* 61: 198–216.

Boumans, Jelle W., and Damian Trilling. 2016. "Taking Stock of the Toolkit: An Overview of Relevant Automated Content Analysis Approaches and Techniques for Digital Journalism Scholars." *Digital journalism* 4(1): 8–23.

Brandenburg, Heinz. 2005. "Political Bias in the Irish Media: A Quantitative Study of Campaign Coverage during the 2002 General Election." *Irish Political Studies* 20(3): 297–322.

Brändström, Annika. 2015. Crisis Accountability: Ministerial Resignations in Sweden: Crisis Accountability. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 38(3): 301–20.

Brettschneider, Frank. 2002. "The Nonpersonalization of Voting Behavior in Germany."

Brettschneider, Frank. 2008. "The News Media's Use of Opinion Polls." *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research, London: Sage*: 479–86.

Brouard, Sylvain, Elisa Deiss-Helbig, and Mirjam Dageförde. 2018. Do Candidates Ethnic Background and Gender Matter? An Experimental Approach." In *Political Representation in France and Germany*, Springer, 309–39.

Carroll, Susan J. 1994. *Women as Candidates in American Politics*. Indiana University Press.

Celis, Karen, Mona Lena Krook, and Petra Meier. 2011. "The Rise of Gender Quota Laws: Expanding the Spectrum of Determinants for Electoral Reform." *West European Politics* 34(3): 514–30.

CIM. 2020. *Resultaten Persbereik*. Centrum voor Informatie over de Media. https://www.cim.be/nl/pers/resultaten-persbereik.

Cobb, Roger W., and Charles D. Elder. 1971. "The Politics of Agenda-Building: An Alternative Perspective for Modern Democratic Theory." *The Journal of Politics* 33(4): 892–915.

Cohen, Jonathan, Yariv Tsfati, and Tamir Sheafer. 2008. "The Influence of Presumed Media In-fluence in Politics: Do Politicians' Perceptions of Media Power Matter?" *Public opinion quarterly* 72(2): 331–44.

Cook, Fay Lomax et al. 1983. "Media and Agenda Setting: Effects on the Public, Interest Group Leaders, Policy Makers, and Policy." *Public opinion quarterly* 47(1): 16–35.

Cook, Timothy E. 1986. "House Members as Newsmakers: The Effects of Televising Congress." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*: 203–26.

Corbin, Juliet M., and Anselm Strauss. 1990. "Grounded Theory Research: Procedures, Canons, and Evaluative Criteria." *Qualitative sociology* 13(1): 3–21.

Dalton, Russell J., Paul A. Beck, and Robert Huckfeldt. 1998. "Partisan Cues and the Media: Infor-mation Flows in the 1992 Presidential Election." *American Political Science Review*: 111–26.

Davis, Aeron. 2007. *The Mediation of Power: A Critical Introduction*. Routledge.

De Bens, Elsa, and Karin Raeymaeckers. 2007. *De Pers in België. Het Verhaal van de Belgische Dagbladpers. Gisteren, Vandaag En Morgen*. Lannoo.

De Swert, Knut, and Peter Van Aelst. 2009. "Politics in the News: Do Campaigns Matter? A Com-parison of Political News during Election Periods and Routine Periods in Flanders."

De Winter, Lieven. 1991. "Parliamentary and Party Pathways to the Cabinet." In *The Profession of Government Minister in Western Europe*, Springer, 44–69.

De Winter, Lieven, Patrick Dumont, and Arco Timmermans. 2000. "Coalition Formation and Gov-ernance in Belgium: Of Government Gospels, Evangelist, Followers and Traitors." https://dial.uclouvain.be/pr/boreal/object/boreal:162663 (March 20, 2020).

Depauw, Sam. 2003. "Part 2: Discipline: Government Party Discipline in Parliamentary Democ-racies: The Cases of Belgium, France and the United Kingdom in the 1990s." *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 9(4): 130–46.

Depauw, Sam, and Shane Martin. 2009. "Legislative Party Discipline and Cohesion in Comparative Perspective." *Intra-party politics and coalition governments* 103120: 103–20.

Deschouwer, Kris. 2009. "Coalition Formation and Congruence in a Multi-Layered Setting: Belgium 1995–2008." *Regional & Federal Studies* 19(1): 13–35.

Deschouwer, Kris. 2012. *The Politics of Belgium*. Springer.

Dewachter, Wilfried, and Erwin Das. 1991. *Politiek in België: Geprofileerde Machtsverhoudingen*. Acco.

Domke, David et al. 1997. "News Media, Candidates and Issues, and Public Opinion in the 1996 Presidential Campaign." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 74(4): 718–37.

Donges, Patrick, and Otfried Jarren. 2014. "Mediatization of Political Organizations: Changing Parties and Interest Groups?" In *Mediatization of Politics*, Springer, 181–99.

Dowding, Keith, and Patrick Dumont. 2008. *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*. 1st ed. Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9780203886908 (December 12, 2019).

Dowding, Keith, and Patrick Dumont. 2014. *The Selection of Ministers around the World*. 1st ed. Routledge. https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781315757865 (December 12, 2019).

Dozier, David M., and J. E. Gruning. 1992. *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management (Vol. 194). JE Grunig*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Driessens, Olivier, Karin Raeymaeckers, Hans Verstraeten, and Sarah Vandenbussche. 2010. "Personalization According to Politicians: A Practice Theoretical Analysis of Mediatization." *Communications* 35(3): 309–26.

Dumont, Patrick, Stefaan Fiers, and Régis Dandoy. 2008. Ups and Downs of Ministerial Careers in a Partitocratic Federal State. *The Selection of Ministers in Europe: Hiring and Firing*: 125–46.

Dumont, Patrick, Stefaan Fiers, and Régis Dandoy. 2009. Ups and Downs of Ministerial Careers in a Partitocratic Federal State. In *The Selection of Ministers in Europe*, London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 125–46.

Dunning, David, and Andrew F. Hayes. 1996. "Evidence for Egocentric Comparison in Social Judg-ment." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 71(2): 213.

Edwards III, George C., William Mitchell, and Reed Welch. 1995. "Explaining Presidential Approval: The Significance of Issue Salience." *American Journal of Political Science*: 108–34.

Elmelund-Præstekær, Christian, and Charlotte Wien. 2008. What s the Fuss about? The Interplay of Media Hypes and Politics. *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13(3): 247–66.

van Erkel, Patrick F. A., Peter Van Aelst, and Peter Thijssen. 2020. "Does Media Attention Lead to Personal Electoral Success? Differences in Long and Short Campaign Media Effects for Top and Ordinary Political Candidates." *Acta Politica* 55(2): 156–74.

Esser, F., and J. Strömbäck. 2014. *Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies*. Springer.

Evans, Elizabeth. 2012. "Selecting the 'Right Sort': Patterns of Political Recruitment in British by-Elections." *Parliamentary Affairs* 65(1): 195–213.

Everitt, Joanna. 2003. "Media in the Maritimes: Do Female Candidates Face a Bias?" *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice* 27(2): 90–98.

Faas, Thorsten, Christian Mackenrodt, and Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck. 2008. Polls That Mattered: Effects of Media Polls on Voters Coalition Expectations and Party Preferences in the 2005 German Parliamentary Election." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 20(3): 299–325.

Festinger, Leon. 1954. "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes." *Human relations* 7(2): 117–40.

Flaounas, Ilias et al. 2013. "Research Methods in the Age of Digital Journalism: Massive-Scale Auto-mated Analysis of News-Content—Topics, Style and Gender." *Digital journalism* 1(1): 102–16.

Fogarty, Brian J. 2008. "The Strategy of the Story: Media Monitoring Legislative Activity." *Legis-lative Studies Quarterly* 33(3): 445–69.

Fogarty, Brian J. 2012. "Local Newspapers, House Members, and Source Usage." *The Social Science Journal* 49(3): 275–83.

Fogel-Dror, Yair, Shaul R. Shenhav, Tamir Sheafer, and Wouter Van Atteveldt. 2019. "Role-Based Association of Verbs, Actions, and Sentiments with Entities in Political Discourse." *Com-munication Methods and Measures* 13(2): 69–82.

Fox, Richard L., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2003. "Gender Stereotyping in State Executive Elections: Can-didate Selection and Success." *The Journal of Politics* 65(3): 833–50.

Frank, Linda L., and J. Richard Hackman. 1975. "Effects of Interviewer-Interviewee Similarity on Inter-viewer Objectivity in College Admissions Interviews." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 60(3): 356.

Frankovic, Kathleen A. 1998. "How Polling Becomes News: Communicating the Counting of Public Opinion." *Political Communication* 15(sup1): 1–17.

Frech, Elena. 2016. "Re-Electing MEPs: The Factors Determining Re-Election Probabilities." *European Union Politics* 17(1): 69–90.

Freeman, Jo. 2002. *A Room at a Time: How Women Entered Party Politics*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Gallois, Cynthia, Victor J. Callan, and Julie-Anne McKenzie Palmer. 1992. "The Influence of Applicant Communication Style and Interviewer Characteristics on Hiring Decisions 1." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 22(13): 1041–60.

Gans, Herbert J. 2003. *Democracy and the News*. Oxford University Press.

Geiß, Stefan, and Svenja Schäfer. 2017. Any Publicity or Good Publicity? A Competitive Test of Visibility-and Tonality-Based Media Effects on Voting Behavior." *Political Communication* 34(3): 444–67.

Gershon, Sarah Allen. 2012a. "Press Secretaries, Journalists, and Editors: Shaping Local Congressional News Coverage." *Political Communication* 29(2): 160–83.

Gershon, Sarah Allen. 2012b. "When Race, Gender, and the Media Intersect: Campaign News Coverage of Minority Congresswomen." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 33(2): 105–25.

Golan, Guy. 2006. "Inter-Media Agenda Setting and Global News Coverage: Assessing the Influence of the New York Times on Three Network Television Evening News Programs." *Journalism studies* 7(2): 323–33.

Graber, Doris A. 2004. "Methodological Developments in Political Communication Research." *Handbook of political communication research*: 45–67.

Graves, Laura M., and Gary N. Powell. 1988. "An Investigation of Sex Discrimination in Recruiters' Evaluations of Actual Applicants." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 73(1): 20.

Graves, Laura M., and Gary N. Powell. 1995. "The Effect of Sex Similarity on Recruiters' Evaluations of Actual Applicants: A Test of the Similarity-Attraction Paradigm." *Personnel Psychology* 48(1): 85–98.

Green-Pedersen, Christoffer, Peter B. Mortensen, and Gunnar Thesen. 2017. "The Incumbency Bonus Revisited: Causes and Consequences of Media Dominance." *British Journal of Political Science* 47(1): 131–48.

Green-Pedersen, Christoffer, and Rune Stubager. 2010. "The Political Conditionality of Mass Media Influence: When Do Parties Follow Mass Media Attention?" *British Journal of Political Science*: 663–77.

Gunther, Albert C., and J. Douglas Storey. 2003. "The Influence of Presumed Influence." *Journal of Communication* 53(2): 199–215.

Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini. 1984. "Speaking of the President." *Theory and Society* 13(6): 829–50.

Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini. 2004. *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge university press.

Hallin, Daniel C., and Paolo Mancini. 2011. *Comparing Media Systems beyond the Western World*. Cambridge University Press.

Hamilton, David L., and Mark P. Zanna. 1972. "Differential Weighting of Favorable and Unfavorable Attributes in Impressions of Personality."

Hardmeier, Sibylle. 2008. "The Effects of Published Polls on Citizens." *The SAGE handbook of public opinion research*: 504–13.

Hazan, Reuven Y., and Gideon Rahat. 2010. *Democracy within Parties: Candidate Selection Methods and Their Political Consequences*. Oxford University Press.

Holmes, David S. 1968. "Dimensions of Projection." *Psychological bulletin* 69(4): 248.

Holtz-Bacha, Christina, Ana Ines Langer, and Susanne Merkle. 2014. "The Personalization of Politics in Comparative Perspective: Campaign Coverage in Germany and the United Kingdom." *European Journal of Communication* 29(2): 153–70.

Hopmann, David Nicolas, Rens Vliegenthart, Claes de Vreese, and Erik Albæk. 2010. Effects of Election News Coverage: How Visibility and Tone Influence Party Choice. *Political communication* 27(4): 389–405.

Hopmann, David Nicolas, Claes H. de Vreese, and Erik Albæk. 2011. Incumbency Bonus in Election News Coverage Explained: The Logics of Political Power and the Media Market." *Journal of Communication* 61(2): 264–82.

Howard, Jack L., and Gerald R. Ferris. 1996. "The Employment Interview Context: Social and Situational Influences on Interviewer Decisions 1." *Journal of applied social psychology* 26(2): 112–36.

Iyengar, Shanto, and Jennifer McGrady. 2007. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. WW Norton New York.

Iyengar, Shanto, Helmut Norpoth, and Kyu S. Hahn. 2004. "Consumer Demand for Election News: The Horserace Sells." *The Journal of Politics* 66(1): 157–75.

Johnson, Tyler, and Caitlin O'Grady. 2013. "Speakers and the Spotlight: Explaining Media Coverage of Leadership in the House of Representatives." *American Politics Research* 41(3): 498–532.

Jungherr, Andreas. 2014. "The Logic of Political Coverage on Twitter: Temporal Dynamics and Content." *Journal of communication* 64(2): 239–59.

Kam, Christopher, William T. Bianco, Itai Sened, and Regina Smyth. 2010. "Ministerial Selection and Intraparty Organization in the Contemporary British Parliament." *American Political Science Review*: 289–306.

Katz, Richard S. 2001. "The Problem of Candidate Selection and Models of Party Democracy." *Party politics* 7(3): 277–96.

Kernell, Samuel. 2006. *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*. Cq Press.

Ketelaars, Pauline, and Peter Van Aelst. "An Actor Approach to Mediatization: Linking Politicians' Media Perceptions, Communication Behaviour and Appearances in the News."

Kingdon, John W. 1989. *Congressmen's Voting Decisions*. University of Michigan Press.

Kleinnijenhuis, Jan, Anita MJ Van Hoof, Dirk Oegema, and Jan A. De Ridder. 2007. "A Test of Rivaling Approaches to Explain News Effects: News on Issue Positions of Parties, Real-World Developments, Support and Criticism, and Success and Failure." *Journal of Communication* 57(2): 366–84.

Koenigs, R. J. 1974. "The Relative Influence of Positive and Negative Trait Adjectives on Impression Formation and Persistence." *Dissertation Abstracts International* 34: 8A.

Kriesi, Hanspeter. 2012. "Personalization of National Election Campaigns." *Party Politics* 18(6): 825–44.

Krueger, Joachim I., Mark D. Alicke, and David A. Dunning. 2005. "Self as Source and Constraint of Social Knowledge."

Kruikemeier, Sanne, Katjana Gattermann, and Rens Vliegenthart. 2018. "Understanding the Dynamics of Politicians' Visibility in Traditional and Social Media." *The Information Society* 34(4): 215–28.

Kumar, Martha Joynt. 2007. "The Contemporary Presidency: The Carter White House Communications Operation: Lessons for His Successors." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37(4): 717–36.

Kunelius, Risto, and Esa Reunanen. 2012. "Media in Political Power: A Parsonian View on the Differentiated Mediatization of Finnish Decision Makers." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 17(1): 56–75.

Larsen, Erik Gahner, and Zoltán Fazekas. 2020. Transforming Stability into Change: How the Media Select and Report Opinion Polls." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 25(1): 115–34.

Lau, Richard R. 1982. "Negativity in Political Perception." *Political behavior* 4(4): 353–77.

Lavrakas, Paul J., Jack K. Holley, and Peter V. Miller. 1991. *Public Reactions to Polling News during the 1988 Presidential Election Campaign*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Lawless, Jennifer L., and Richard L. Fox. 2010. *It Still Takes a Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office*. Cambridge University Press.

Lee, A. 2005. "A Good Day for Bad News? Can Public Relations Practitioners Minimize the Damaging Impact of Negative News by Choosing the Date It Is Released?" *Hall Institute of Public Policy*.

Lengauer, Günther, Patrick Donges, and Fritz Plasser. 2014. "Media Power in Politics." In *Political Communication Cultures in Europe: Attitudes of Political Actors and Journalists in Nine Countries*, ed. Barbara Pfetsch. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 171–95. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137314284_9 (April 20, 2020).

Lijphart, Arend. 2012. *Patterns of Democracy*. Yale university press.

Lilleker, Darren G. et al. 2011. "Informing, Engaging, Mobilizing or Interacting: Searching for a European Model of Web Campaigning." *European Journal of Communication* 26(3): 195–213.

Lin, Thung-Rung, Gregory H. Dobbins, and Jiing-Lih Farh. 1992. "A Field Study of Race and Age Similarity Effects on Interview Ratings in Conventional and Situational Interviews." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 77(3): 363.

Lodge, Milton, Marco R. Steenbergen, and Shawn Brau. 1995. "The Responsive Voter: Campaign Information and the Dynamics of Candidate Evaluation." *American political science review*: 309–26.

Maddens, Bart, Bram Wauters, Jo Noppe, and Stefaan Fiers. 2006. "Effects of Campaign Spending in an Open List PR System: The 2003 Legislative Elections in Flanders/Belgium." *West European Politics* 29(1): 161–68.

Marsh, Catherine. 1985. "Back on the Bandwagon: The Effect of Opinion Polls on Public Opinion." *British Journal of Political Science* 15(1): 51–74.

Mazzoleni, Gianpietro. 2008. "Mediatization of Society." *The international encyclopedia of communication.*

McLeod, Douglas M., Gerald M. Kosicki, and Jack M. MeLeod. 2002. "Resurveying the Boundaries of Political Communication Effects."

Melenhorst, Lotte. 2015. "The Media's Role in Lawmaking: A Case Study Analysis." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 20(3): 297–316.

Melenhorst, Lotte, and Peter Van Aelst. 2017. "Why Do Politicians Use the Media When Making Laws? A Study on the Functional Use of Mass Media during Legislative Processes." In *How Political Actors Use the Media*, Springer, 227–43.

Midtbø, Tor. 2011. Explaining Media Attention for Norwegian MPs: A New Modelling Approach. *Scandinavian Political Studies* 34(3): 226–49.

Mondak, Jeffery J. 1995. "Competence, Integrity, and the Electoral Success of Congressional Incumbents." *The Journal of Politics* 57(4): 1043–69.

Moy, Patricia, and Eike Mark Rinke. 2012. "Attitudinal and Behavioral Consequences of Published Opinion Polls." In *Opinion Polls and the Media*, Springer, 225–45.

Mughan, Anthony. 2000. *Media and the Presidentialization of Parliamentary Elections*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK. http://link.springer.com/10.1057/9781403920126 (December 12, 2019).

Mutz, Diana C. 1998. *Impersonal Influence: How Perceptions of Mass Collectives Affect Political Attitudes*. Cambridge University Press.

Nadeau, Richard, Edouard Cloutier, and J.-H. Guay. 1993. "New Evidence about the Existence of a Bandwagon Effect in the Opinion Formation Process." *International Political Science Review* 14(2): 203–13.

Negrine, Ralph, and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos. 2010. "The Transformation of Political Communication: Ralph Negrine and Stylianos Papathanassopoulos." In *Media Perspectives for the 21st Century*, Routledge.

Nimmo, Dan, and J. Combs. 1983. "Political Communication." *Nova Iorque: Longman.*

Niven, David. 2006. "Throwing Your Hat out of the Ring: Negative Recruitment and the Gender Imbalance in State Legislative Candidacy." *Politics & Gender* 2(4): 473–89.

Norris, Pippa. 1997. *Passages to Power: Legislative Recruitment in Advanced Democracies*. Cambridge University Press.

Norris, Pippa et al. 1999. *On Message: Communicating the Campaign*. Sage.

Norris, Pippa, and Joni Lovenduski. 1995. *Political Recruitment: Gender, Race and Class in the British Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.

Oegema, D., and J. Kleinnijenhuis. 2000. "A Transactional Model of the Effects of Text and Footage of TV." In *Television News Research; Recent European Approaches and Findings*, Quintensens, 295–310.

Olof, Petersson et al. 2006. "Media and Elections in Sweden: Report from the Democratic Audit of Sweden 2006."

Pan, Zhongdang, and Gerald M. Kosicki. 1997. "Priming and Media Impact on the Evaluations of the President's Performance." *Communication Research* 24(1): 3–30.

Payne, James L. 1980. "Show Horses & Work Horses in the United States House of Representatives." *Polity* 12(3): 428–56.

Picone, Ike. 2021. *Digital News Report Belgium*. Reuters Institute. https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/digital-news-report/2021/belgium.

Pilet, Jean-Benoît, and William Cross. 2014. *The Selection of Political Party Leaders in Contemporary Parliamentary Democracies: A Comparative Study*. Routledge.

Pilet, Jean-Benoit, and William Cross. 2015. "Uncovering the Politics of Party Leadership. A Cross National Perspective." In *The Politics of Party Leadership. A Cross-National Perspective*, London & New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2–11.

Powell, Gary N. 1987. "The Effects of Sex and Gender on Recruitment." *Academy of Management Review* 12(4): 731–43.

Preiss, Raymond G. et al. 2007. *Mass Media Effects Research: Advances through Meta-Analysis*. Psychology Press.

Quinn, Thomas. 2013. "From Two-Partism to Alternating Predominance: The Changing UK Party System, 1950–2010." *Political Studies* 61(2): 378–400.

Rahat, Gideon, and Reuven Y. Hazan. 2001. "Candidate Selection Methods: An Analytical Framework." *Party politics* 7(3): 297–322.

Rasmussen, Jorgen. 1983. "The Electoral Costs of Being a Woman in the 1979 British General Election." *Comparative Politics* 15(4): 461–75.

Rheault, Ludovic, Kaspar Beelen, Christopher Cochrane, and Graeme Hirst. 2016. "Measuring Emotion in Parliamentary Debates with Automated Textual Analysis." *PloS one* 11(12): e0168843.

Richey, Marjorie H., Lucille McClelland, and Algimantas M. Shimkunas. 1967. "Relative Influence of Positive and Negative Information in Impression Formation and Persistence." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 6(3): 322.

Ryan, Michelle K., S. Alexander Haslam, and Clara Kulich. 2010. "Politics and the Glass Cliff: Evidence That Women Are Preferentially Selected to Contest Hard-to-Win Seats." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 34(1): 56–64.

Sanbonmatsu, Kira. 2006. "Do Parties Know That 'Women Win'? Party Leader Beliefs about Women's Electoral Chances." *Politics & Gender* 2(4): 431–50.

Scheufele, Dietram A. 2000. "Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing Revisited: Another Look at Cognitive Effects of Political Communication." *Mass communication & society* 3(2–3): 297–316.

Schmitt, Neal. 1976. "Social and Situational Determinants of Interview Decisions: Implications for the Employment Interview 1." *Personnel psychology* 29(1): 79–101.

Schmitt-Beck, Rüdiger. 1996. Mass Media, the Electorate, and the Bandwagon. A Study of Communication Effects on Vote Choice in Germany." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 8(3): 266–91.

Schmitt-Beck, Rüdiger. 2003. Mass Communication, Personal Communication and Vote Choice: The Filter Hypothesis of Media Influence in Comparative Perspective." *British Journal of Political Science*: 233–59.

Schoenbach, Klaus, Jan De Ridder, and Edmund Lauf. 2001. "Politicians on TV News: Getting Attention in Dutch and German Election Campaigns." *European Journal of Political Research* 39(4): 519–31.

Schudson, Michael. 1995. *The Power of News*. Harvard University Press.

Schultz, Julianne. 1998. *Reviving the Fourth Estate: Democracy, Accountability and the Media*. Cambridge University Press.

Schulz, Winfried. 1994. "Wird Die Wahl Im Fernsehen Entschieden? Der „getarnte Elefant "im Lichte Der Neueren Forschung." *Media Perspektiven* 7(94): 318–27.

Sellers, Patrick. 2009. *Cycles of Spin: Strategic Communication in the US Congress*. Cambridge University Press.

Sellers, Patrick J., and Brian F. Schaffner. 2007. "Winning Coverage in the US Senate." *Political Communication* 24(4): 377–91.

Semetko, Holli A., and Klaus Schoenbach. 1994. *Germany's Unity Election: Voters and the Media*. Hampton Press.

Sevenans, Julie. 2018. "One Concept, Many Interpretations: The Media's Causal Roles in Political Agenda-Setting Processes." *European Political Science Review* 10(2): 245–65.

Sevenans, Julie, Stefaan Walgrave, and Gwendolyn Joanna Epping. 2016. "How Political Elites Process Information from the News: The Cognitive Mechanisms behind Behavioral Political Agenda-Setting Effects." *Political Communication* 33(4): 605–27.

Sheafer, Tamir. 2001. "Charismatic Skill and Media Legitimacy: An Actor-Centered Approach to Understanding the Political Communication Competition." *Communication Research* 28(6): 711–36.

Sheafer, Tamir. 2008. "Charismatic Communication Skill, Media Legitimacy, and Electoral Success." *Journal of Political Marketing* 7(1): 1–24.

Sheafer, Tamir, and Shaul Tzionit. 2006. "Media-Political Skills, Candidate Selection Methods and Electoral Success." *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 12(2): 179–97.

Sheafer, Tamir, and Gadi Wolfsfeld. 2004. "Production Assets, News Opportunities, and Publicity for Legislators: A Study of Israeli Knesset Members." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 29(4): 611–30.

Shomer, Yael. 2009. "Candidate Selection Procedures, Seniority, and Vote-Seeking Behavior." *Comparative Political Studies* 42(7): 945–70.

Smith, Daniel M., and Shane Martin. 2017. "Political Dynasties and the Selection of Cabinet Ministers." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 42(1): 131–65.

Sonck, Nathalie, and Geert Loosveldt. 2010. "Impact of Poll Results on Personal Opinions and Perceptions of Collective Opinion." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 22(2): 230–55.

Soroka, Stuart, Patrick Fournier, and Lilach Nir. 2019. "Cross-National Evidence of a Negativity Bias in Psychophysiological Reactions to News." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116(38): 18888–92.

Soroka, Stuart Neil. 2002. *Agenda-Setting Dynamics in Canada*. UBC press.

Sparks, G. C. 2010. "Media Effects Research: A Basic Overview Boston: Wadsworth."

Strøm, Kaare, and Wolfgang C. Müller. 1999. Political Parties and Hard Choices. *Policy, office, or votes*: 1–35.

Strömbäck, Jesper. 2008. Four Phases of Mediatization: An Analysis of the Mediatization of Politics." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 13(3): 228–46.

Strömbäck, Jesper. 2011. Mediatization and Perceptions of the Media s Political Influence. *Journalism studies* 12(4): 423–39.

Strömbäck, Jesper. 2012. The Media and Their Use of Opinion Polls: Reflecting and Shaping Public Opinion." In *Opinion Polls and the Media*, Springer, 1–22.

Strömbäck, Jesper, and Daniela V. Dimitrova. 2011. Mediatization and Media Interventionism: A Comparative Analysis of Sweden and the United States." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 16(1): 30–49.

Strömbäck, Jesper, and Lynda Lee Kaid. 2009. *The Handbook of Election News Coverage around the World*. Routledge.

Strömbäck, Jesper, and Peter Van Aelst. 2013. Why Political Parties Adapt to the Media: Exploring the Fourth Dimension of Mediatization." *International Communication Gazette* 75(4): 341–58.

Tal-Or, Nurit, Yariv Tsfati, and Albert C. Gunther. 2009. "The Influence of Presumed Media Influence." *The Sage handbook of media processes and effects*: 99–112.

Tenscher, Jens. 2004. "'Bridging the Differences': Political Communication Experts in Germany." *German politics* 13(3): 516–40.

Thesen, Gunnar. 2011. "Attack and Defend. Explaining Party Responses to News." Politica.

Thesen, Gunnar. 2013. "When Good News Is Scarce and Bad News Is Good: Government Responsibilities and Opposition Possibilities in Political Agenda-Setting." *European Journal of Political Research* 52(3): 364–89.

Tresch, Anke. 2009. "Politicians in the Media: Determinants of Legislators' Presence and Prominence in Swiss Newspapers." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 14(1): 67–90.

Tsfati, Yariv, Dana Markowitz Elfassi, and Israel Waismel-Manor. 2010. "Exploring the Association between Israeli Legislators' Physical Attractiveness and Their Television News Coverage." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 15(2): 175–92.

Turner-Zwinkels, Tomas, and Melinda C. Mills. 2020. "Pathways to Power: The Role of Preparliamentary Careers and Political Human Capital in the Obtainment of Cabinet Positions." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 45(2): 207–52.

Udris, Linards, and Jens Lucht. 2014. "Mediatization at the Structural Level: Independence from Politics, Dependence on the Market." In *Mediatization of Politics*, Springer, 114–36.

Vallance, Elizabeth M. 1979. *Women in the House: A Study of Women Members of Parliament.* Burns & Oates.

Van Aelst, Peter, Kees Brants, et al. 2008. "The Fourth Estate as Superpower?" *Journalism Studies* 9(4): 494–511.

Van Aelst, Peter, Patrick van Erkel, Evelien D'heer, and Raymond A. Harder. 2017. "Who Is Leading the Campaign Charts? Comparing Individual Popularity on Old and New Media." *Information, communication & society* 20(5): 715–32.

Van Aelst, Peter, Bart Maddens, Jo Noppe, and Stefaan Fiers. 2008. "Politicians in the News: Media or Party Logic? Media Attention and Electoral Success in the Belgian Election Campaign of 2003." *European Journal of Communication* 23(2): 193–210.

Van Aelst, Peter, Adam Sehata, and Arjen van Dalen. 2010. "Members of Parliament: Equal Competitors for Media Attention? An Analysis of Personal Contacts between MPs and Political Journalists in Five European Countries." *Political communication* 27(3): 310–25.

Van Aelst, Peter, Tamir Sheafer, and James Stanyer. 2012. "The Personalization of Mediated Political Communication: A Review of Concepts, Operationalizations and Key Findings." *Journalism* 13(2): 203–20.

Van Aelst, Peter, and Stefaan Walgrave. 2016. "Information and Arena: The Dual Function of the News Media for Political Elites." *Journal of Communication* 66(3): 496–518.

Vandeleene, Audrey, Lieven De Winter, Conrad Meulewaeter, and Pierre Baudewyns. 2013. "Candidate Selection: Explorations beyond the Secret Garden of Politics–The Case of Belgium." In *12th Dutch-Belgian Political Science Conference*, , 30–31.

Vandeleene, Audrey, Jérémy Dodeigne, and Lieven De Winter. 2016. What Do Selectorates Seek? A Comparative Analysis of Belgian Federal and Regional Candidate Selection Processes in 2014. *American Behavioral Scientist* 60(7): 889–908.

Vergeer, Maurice. 2013. "Politics, Elections and Online Campaigning: Past, Present... and a Peek into the Future." *New media & society* 15(1): 9–17.

Vliegenthart, Rens, and Stefaan Walgrave. 2008. "The Contingency of Intermedia Agenda Setting: A Longitudinal Study in Belgium." *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 85(4): 860–77.

Vliegenthart, Rens, and Stefaan Walgrave. 2011. "When the Media Matter for Politics: Partisan Moderators of the Mass Media's Agenda-Setting Influence on Parliament in Belgium." *Party Politics* 17(3): 321–42.

Vos, Debby. 2013. *The Vertical Glass Ceiling: Explaining Female Politicians' Underrepresentation in Television News*. De Gruyter.

Vos, Debby. 2014. "Which Politicians Pass the News Gates and Why? Explaining Inconsistencies in Research on News Coverage of Individual Politicians." *International Journal of Communication* 8: 24.

Vos, Debby. 2015. "Beyond Political Power."

Vos, Debby, and Peter Van Aelst. 2018. "Does the Political System Determine Media Visibility of Politicians? A Comparative Analysis of Political Functions in the News in Sixteen Countries." *Political Communication* 35(3): 371–92.

Vos, Tim P., and J. David Wolfgang. 2018. "Journalists' Normative Constructions of Political Viewpoint Diversity." *Journalism Studies* 19(6): 764–81.

de Vreese, Claes H., Susan A. Banducci, Holli A. Semetko, and Hajo G. Boomgaarden. 2006. "The News Coverage of the 2004 European Parliamentary Election Campaign in 25 Countries." *European Union Politics* 7(4): 477–504.

Waismel-Manor, Israel, and Yariv Tsfati. 2011. "Why Do Better-Looking Members of Congress Receive More Television Coverage?" *Political Communication* 28(4): 440–63.

Walgrave, Stefaan, and Knut De Swert. 2004. "The Making of the (Issues of the) Vlaams Blok." *Political Communication* 21(4): 479–500.

Walgrave, Stefaan, Stuart Soroka, and Michiel Nuytemans. 2008. "The Mass Media's Political Agenda-Setting Power: A Longitudinal Analysis of Media, Parliament, and Government in Belgium (1993 to 2000)." *Comparative Political Studies* 41(6): 814–36.

Walgrave, Stefaan, and Peter Van Aelst. 2006. "The Contingency of the Mass Media's Political Agenda Setting Power: Toward a Preliminary Theory." *Journal of communication* 56(1): 88–109.

Walgrave, Stefaan, Peter Van Aelst, and Lance Bennett. 2010. "Beyond Agenda-Setting. Towards a Broader Theory of Agenda Interactions between Political Actors and the Mass Media." In *APSA Annual Meeting, Washington*,.

Walgrave, Stefaan, Frédéric Varone, and Patrick Dumont. 2006. Policy with or without Parties? A Comparative Analysis of Policy Priorities and Policy Change in Belgium, 1991 to 2000. *Journal of European Public Policy* 13(7): 1021–38.

Walker, Jack L. 1977. "Setting the Agenda in the US Senate: A Theory of Problem Selection." *British Journal of Political Science* 7(4): 423–45.

Wauters, Bram, Gideon Rahat, and Ofer Kenig. 2015. "Democratizing Party Leadership Selection in Belgium and Israel." In *Party Primaries in Comparative Perspective*, Ashgate, 85–103.

Weaver, David, Maxwell McCombs, and Donald L. Shaw. 2004. "Agenda-Setting Research: Issues, Attributes, and Influences." *Handbook of political communication research* 257: 257–80.

Wiley, Mary Glenn, and Arlene Eskilson. 1985. "Speech Style, Gender Stereotypes, and Corporate Success: What If Women Talk More like Men?" *Sex Roles* 12(9–10): 993–1007.

Wilson, Sven E., and Daniel M. Butler. 2007. "A Lot More to Do: The Sensitivity of Time-Series Cross-Section Analyses to Simple Alternative Specifications." *Political Analysis*: 101–23.

de Winter, Lieven. 1991. "Parliamentary and Party Pathways to the Cabinet." In *The Profession of Government Minister in Western Europe*, eds. Jean Blondel and Jean-Louis Thiébault. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 44–69. http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-1-349-11395-8_5 (December 12, 2019).

Wolfsfeld, Gadi. 2004. *Media and the Path to Peace*. Cambridge University Press.

Wolfsfeld, Gadi. 2011. *Making Sense of Media and Politics: Five Principles in Political Communication.* Taylor & Francis.

Wolfsfeld, Gadi. 2013. *The Politics-Media-Politics Principle: Towards a More Comprehensive Approach to Political Communication*. Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. SSRN Scholarly Paper. https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2301135 (June 8, 2021).

Wolfsfeld, Gadi, and Tamir Sheafer. 2006. "Competing Actors and the Construction of Political News: The Contest over Waves in Israel." *Political Communication* 23(3): 333–54.

Zaller, John. 1996. "The Myth of Massive Media Impact Revived: New Support for a Discredited Idea." *Political persuasion and attitude change* 17: 17–78.

Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge university press.

Zelizer, Barbie et al. 2000. *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates over Media Standards*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Zelizer, Barbie. 2009. *The Changing Faces of Journalism: Tabloidization, Technology and Truthiness*. Routledge.

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Providing information is one of the main functions of mass media in healthy democracies. Media, however, do not merely act as an information relay. They also exert considerable influence on their audiences. Many voters are not politically interested and form their ideas and opinions based on who or what they see in the media. This makes getting into the media crucial for political actors and by extension their political success. Although most political communication scholars believe in this media influence, not many empirical studies have really looked into this. Political career success is often reduced to electoral success. Furthermore, studies have focused on how media coverage influences the electoral outcome for individual politicians, but almost completely neglected how media can influence other career stages.

Interestingly, researchers have extensively focused on which political actors get access to the media. Power proved to be the determining factor, which indicates that journalists largely follow the existing political power hierarchy when covering politics. Research, however, found that although power is the main determinant, among less endowed politicians, media skills can offer an alternative route to media coverage, which in turn generates political success. Media can thus steer the political career of politicians who cannot rely on political power. In this dissertation, I propose a media-media-politics (MMP) logic. Media skills can generate media coverage, which in turn can lead to political career success. The impact of media on political careers is twofold. First, media coverage, both in terms of visibility and tone, generates name recognition and positive evaluations by voters, which in turn might lead to more popularity and political influence. Second, political parties are very aware of the effect of media coverage on political success, and therefore favor candidates or politicians who demonstrate potential in media skills or make decisions based on past media performance.

My research focuses on the impact of media on three important career stages. I started from the idea that the ultimate goal of politicians is to alter or make policy. To do this, they must take different career steps. First, potential politicians need to be selected as a candidate. Next, politicians need to gain popularity in order to be considered an asset to their party and, in time, generate electoral success. Finally, politicians need to be promoted or elected into higher office. The influence of media on these career steps is studied by conducting elite interviews on the one hand, and by analyzing news coverage in terms of visibility and tone on the other hand. Newspaper articles for a period of almost 20 years (2000-2019) were collected and analyzed using automated content analysis. This dissertation shows that media do indeed have an effect on political career success. It increases, in a very early stage, the probability of being selected as a candidate for the ballot list. Later on, media attention positively affects the overall popularity of individual politicians and can, ultimately, significantly increase the probability of being promoted or being elected as a minister/party leader. Overall,

members of parliament cannot compete with government members. They can, however, try to distinguish themselves from other MPs, which leads to media access that can put them on the pathway towards a successful political career.

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Burgers informeren is één van de belangrijkste functies van de traditionele media in gezonde democratieën. De media fungeren echter niet alleen als doorgeefluik van informatie, ze oefenen ook aanzienlijke invloed uit op hun publiek. Veel kiezers vormen hun ideeën en politieke meningen op basis van wie of wat zij in de media zien. Dit maakt de toegang tot de media cruciaal voor politieke actoren, met name voor hun politieke succes. Hoewel de meeste politieke communicatiewetenschappers geloven in de invloed van media op politiek succes, zijn er niet veel empirische studies die dit echt hebben onderzocht. Politiek carrièresucces wordt vaak gereduceerd tot electoraal succes, en studies hebben zich voornamelijk geconcentreerd op hoe media-aandacht de electorale uitkomst voor individuele politici beïnvloedt. Andere carrièrestadia worden grotendeels genegeerd.

In eerder onderzoek werd wel uitgebreid aandacht besteed aan welke politieke actoren toegang krijgen tot de media. Macht bleek de bepalende factor te zijn, wat erop wijst dat journalisten grotendeels de bestaande politieke machtshiërarchie volgen. Onderzoek heeft echter uitgewezen dat, hoewel macht de belangrijkste bepalende factor is, bij minder vooraanstaande politici mediavaardigheden een alternatieve route naar media-aandacht kunnen bieden, die op zijn beurt politiek succes genereert. Media kunnen dus de politieke carrière sturen van politici die niet op politieke macht kunnen rekenen.

In deze dissertatie stel ik een media-media-politiek (MMP) logica voor. Mediavaardigheden kunnen media-aandacht genereren, wat op zijn beurt kan leiden tot succes in de politieke carrière. De invloed van media op politieke carrières is tweeledig. Ten eerste genereert media-aandacht naamsbekendheid (zichtbaarheid) en potentiële positieve evaluaties (toon) door kiezers, wat op zijn beurt kan leiden tot meer populariteit en politieke invloed. Ten tweede zijn politieke partijen zich zeer bewust van het effect van media-aandacht op politiek succes. Daarom zullen partijen kandidaten of politici bevoordelen die blijk geven van potentiële mediavaardigheid of zullen ze hun beslissingen nemen op basis van eerdere mediaprestaties.

Mijn onderzoek richt zich op het effect van media op drie belangrijke carrièrestadia. Ik ga uit van het idee dat het uiteindelijke doel van alle politici is om beleid te beïnvloeden en te maken. Om dit te doen, moeten ze verschillende stappen zetten in hun loopbaan. Eerst moeten potentiële politici worden geselecteerd als kandidaat. Vervolgens moeten politici populariteit verwerven om als een aanwinst voor hun partij te worden beschouwd en, na verloop van tijd, electoraal succes te boeken. Ten slotte wanneer ze een hogere functie willen, moeten politici promotie maken of worden gekozen voor een hogere functie.

Ik bestudeer de invloed van de media op deze carrièrestappen door enerzijds elite interviews en anderzijds berichtgeving in kranten te analyseren in termen van zichtbaarheid en toonzetting. Krantenartikels werden verzameld voor een periode van bijna 20 jaar (2000-2019) en geanalyseerd met behulp van geautomatiseerde inhoudsanalyse.

Deze dissertatie toont aan dat media inderdaad een effect uitoefenen op het succes van een politieke carrière. Het verhoogt, in een zeer vroeg stadium, de kans om geselecteerd te worden als kandidaat voor de kieslijst. Later heeft media-aandacht een positief effect op de algemene populariteit van individuele politici en kan het uiteindelijk de kans op promotie of verkiezing tot minister/partijleider aanzienlijk vergroten. In het algemeen kunnen parlementsleden niet concurreren met machtige regeringsleden. Zij kunnen echter wel proberen zich te onderscheiden van andere parlementsleden, wat leidt tot toegang tot de media, wat hen dan weer op weg kan zetten naar een succesvolle politieke carrière.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Chapter Two: How mediatized is the Candidate Selection of Political Parties?

Annelien Van Remoortere (single author)

Chapter Three: The influence of Mass Media on the Popularity of Politicians.

Annelien Van Remoortere (first author): conception of the study (50%); data collection (100%); data analysis and interpretation (50%); writing of research paper (80%).

Rens Vliegenthart (co-author): conception of the study (50%); data analysis and interpretation (50%); writing of research paper (20%).

Chapter Four: Mass Media Occurrence as a Political Career Maker.

Annelien Van Remoortere (first author): conception of the study (40%); data collection (100%); data analysis and interpretation (80%); writing of research paper (50%).

Stefaan Walgrave (co-author): conception of the study (40%); writing of research paper (50%).

Rens Vliegenthart (co-author): conception of the study (20%); data analysis and interpretation (20%).

Chapter Five: Media Visibility and Political Power

Annelien Van Remoortere (first author): conception of the study (80%); data collection (100%); data analysis and interpretation (60%); writing of research paper (50%).

Kathleen Beckers (co-author): conception of the study (20%); data analysis and interpretation (40%); writing of research paper (50%).

Bomma, bedankt voor alles. Ik weet hoe fier bompa geweest zou zijn op een doctor in de familie. Bedankt ook aan mijn **schoonfamilie** om mij al 12 jaar te staan aanmoedigen langs de zijlijn.

Last but definitely not least, **Yannick**, mijn rots. Het woord bedankt voelt in jouw geval niet echt toereikend. Tijdens mijn doctoraat was je mijn editor, klankbord en analyse-adviseur. Je moedigde mij aan in moeilijke momenten, relativeerde mijn stress en probeerde het op te nemen tegen mijn onzekerheden. Jij maakt alles zoveel beter en ik ben ongelooflijk fier dat ik uw vrouw ben. Bedankt voor alles, ik zie u graag.