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Beyond Political Power

Which Politicians Pass the News Gates and Why?

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Voorwoord

"*Heb je geen zin om een FWO-beurs aan te vragen om een doctoraat te maken?*" Dit vroeg Stefaan mij in januari 2011 op een doordeweekse bespreking over mijn master thesis. Toen had ik nog geen benul wat een FWO dan wel zou moeten zijn en ook geen enige intentie om een doctoraat te maken; nu schrijf ik vier jaar later dit voorwoord van mijn afgewerkt doctoraat. Deze dissertatie is het sluitstuk van vier onverwachte, maar ongelooflijk leuke jaren met een heleboel fijne collega's, interessante discussies en onvergetelijke trips. Hoog tijd dus om enkele sleutelfiguren tijdens deze periode enorm te bedanken.

Nadat Stefaan mij eerst warm maakte om aan een doctoraat te beginnen, vertrok hij al even snel met de noorderzon naar de US, een heel jaar lang… Gelukkig was er mail, Skype, en Peter voor de nodige ondersteuning! En zo evolueerden we stilaan naar een duo-promotorschap, waarbij Stefaan en Peter mij elk op hun eigen(zinnige) manier begeleidden. Stefaan was niet alleen de persoon die me ertoe aanzette om wetenschappelijk onderzoek te doen, maar ook mijn mecenas. Toen ik een FWO-beurs aan mijn neus voorbij zag gaan, haalde Stefaan zijn ERC-geldbeurs boven en bood mij de kans om nog drie jaar op het InfoPol-project te werken en in de tussentijd mijn doctoraat af te werken. Maar daarbuiten was Stefaan natuurlijk ook bereid om inhoudelijke feedback te leveren. Snel, accuraat, uitgebreid, constructief. Via eender welk kanaal of op eender welk vervoersmiddel. Stefaan, bedankt voor de vrijheid, het vertrouwen, alle tijd en moeite, het enthousiasme, en het geld!

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Ik kan me geen betere onderzoeksgroep dan M²P voorstellen om 'gesocialiseerd' te worden in de onderzoekswereld. De heersende ambitie om kwaliteitsvol werk af te leveren, maar toch de vrijheid om flagrante fouten te maken. Professionele staffs met kritische commentaren, maar toch achteraf amusante gesprekken tijdens een pint. Onvergetelijke M²P-weekends met serieuze discussies, presentaties en besprekingen, maar toch ook voldoende tijd voor een quiz, schnaps, ludieke spelletjes en natuurlijk voetbal. Ik wil zeker ook de M²P-girls van het eerste uur bedanken. Anne, Julie en Pauline, bedankt voor de vele lachpartijen, etentjes, luisterende oren, pré-M²P-weekends, slaapplaatsen, en de zalige Puerto Rico trip!

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Hoewel deze personen binnen de academische wereld cruciaal zijn geweest om dit doctoraat tot een goed einde te brengen, zijn er zeker ook niet-nerds die ik even wil bedanken. Eerst en vooral mijn ouders. Ik heb in het begin van dit voorwoord gelogen: Stefaan was niet de eerste die de aanzet heeft gegeven tot het maken – en afronden – van dit doctoraat, eigenlijk zijn mijn ouders hiervoor verantwoordelijk. Mama en papa, jullie hebben me steeds aangemoedigd en geholpen om het beste van mezelf te geven, zowel op school als op vele andere vlakken. Bedankt om me de kans te geven om vijf jaar te studeren en op kot te gaan, want ik weet dat dit niet evident was. En voor de open blik op de wereld die jullie me hebben bijgebracht. Kortom, jullie zijn de basis voor wie ik nu ben als persoon en als onderzoeker.

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En ten slotte is er natuurlijk nog Fré. Kersverse hubbie. Maar gedurende al vele jaren ook luisterend oor, stevige schouder, klankbord en redder in nood. Bedankt voor je enthousiasme bij de kleine overwinningen, je oppeppende woorden bij de frustraties, je codeerhulp wanneer ik echt in tijdsnood zat, en al de jaren dat je er gewoon was. Dat we in het laatste jaar van mijn doctoraat zowel een huis kochten, verhuisden en een zalige huwelijksdag planden, maakte de stress er niet zeker minder op, maar ik zou het voor geen geld van de wereld willen missen hebben met jou. Fré, bedankt voor de onvoorwaardelijk steun en trots!

Dus ik kan alleen maar afsluiten met: iedereen, ne dikke merci!

Antwerpen

3 juli 2015

Introduction

When looking at Flemish television news in the course of 2013, it appears that the party leader of CD&V Wouter Beke showed up no less than 80 times in the news, whereas the party leader of Open VLD Gwendolyn Rutten appeared 'merely' 54 times during the same period of time. Going further down the media hierarchy, Liesbeth Homans, who was a member of the Flemish parliament at that time, appeared 10 times in the television news whereas Danielle Godderis-T'Jonck, also a member of the Flemish parliament, was never visible in television news, as was the case for many other members of parliament. Although both pairs of politicians occupy exactly the same political function – and thus have a similar amount of power in the political system – Beke and Homans clearly make it into the news more frequently.

This clear-cut example highlights the large variation in news coverage of politicians: a happy few receive the bulk of news media attention while many others remain strangers to the mass public. The political power of politicians determines to a large degree whether they are visible in the news – in this case party leaders are more powerful than MPs and consequently also more visible – but even then, variation in news coverage remains. The main goal of this PhD dissertation is to unravel this pattern and to answer the following question: *which politicians make it into the news and why?* In short, this dissertation deals with news coverage of individual politicians. To explain news coverage of politicians, I look first at *the contingent effect of power* and next *beyond the effect of power*.

In this introduction, I start with clarifying why political news coverage is crucial in contemporary mediatized society for both citizens and politicians, followed by a short overview of how news coverage of politicians has been studied until now. Next, I explain the ways in which the dissertation

contributes to the research field and how it fills existing gaps. Finally, an overview of the chapters in this dissertation is provided.

Political News Coverage

The news media are crucial for democracy and the relation between both can be regarded as being a social contract. Democracy guarantees the media independency from the state as well as freedom of speech. At the same time, the media offer democracy a forum for public debate, they ensure a free flow of information and they act as an independent watchdog. More precisely, Strömbäck (2005, p. 332) lists four essential roles the news media need to fulfill in democracy: they need to offer an arena for public discussion, act as a watchdog against abuse of power in society, supply the government with the necessary information in order to make decisions in the common interest of the citizenry, and provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing. Asp (2007) on his turn distinguishes between two main normative functions of the news media: informing the citizenry and scrutinizing those who govern.

The news media as the main source of political information for citizens (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014) designates the societal relevance of this dissertation. As citizens hardly ever have direct personal contacts with politicians, the news media are essential intermediaries between political actors and citizens. Mediated politics implies that the mass media have become the most important channel for information exchange between the people and political actors (Strömback, 2008). Citizens rely on information from the news media to understand the workings of politics and to gain inp ut on societal processes. Moreover, citizens need to be aware of elected officials' activities and policy ideas to be able to make informed choices during elections and to hold representatives accountable for their performance (Gershon, 2012; Johnson & O'Grady, 2013; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007). Which politicians appear in the news can thus have a substantial impact on their political knowledge, their political attitudes and eventually their voting behavior (Hopmann, Van Aelst, & Legnante, 2011).

The impact of political news coverage on citizens and the society as a whole implies that news coverage is crucial for political actors as well. Politicians are aware of the ever growing significance of the news media in modern societies and recognize that being visible in the news is key to their political success (Van Aelst, Van Praag, de Vreese, Nuytemans, & van Dalen, 2008). They realize that they can utilize the news media to achieve their political goals, to get reelected, to make good public policy and to extend their power (Fenno, 1973). First, politicians need the news media to connect to

voters and to get their message across. By means of media coverage, they can gain name recognition among the electorate and show that they are caring and active about salient issues in society. This in turn can lead to additional votes (Van Aelst, Shehata, & van Dalen, 2010; Bowler, 2010; Sheafer, 2008). Second, generating news coverage can be a means for lower ranked politicians to impress the party elite and increase their standing within the party. In turn, they can benefit from their higher standing during election periods, for example by obtaining a higher place on the electoral list in upcoming elections (Van Aelst et al., 2010; Davis, 2010). Third, political actors employ the news media also to influence their peers during policy processes. Even though legislative processes usually happen behind closed doors, 'going public' can be a powerful strategy to impinge on legislators or political leaders. For example, politicians can try to push legislation by generating positive news content and speaking directly to citizens to gain public support. They thus apply media coverage as an indirect path to exert pressure in the policy-making process and swing momentum to their side (Domke, Graham, Coe, John, & Coopman, 2006; Kedrowski, 1996; Tresch, 2009).

Politicians try to gain news coverage in order to achieve these goals, mainly because they are convinced that the news media have (too) much power in contemporary society and can have a severe impact on citizens and fellow politicians. Whether the news media are indeed an almighty player in politics is still subject of discussion, but either way politicians perceive the news media to be an important actor and they act accordingly (Van Aelst, Van Praag et al., 2008; Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheafer, 2008). Applying this 'influence of presumed influence' (Gunther & Storey, 2003) to the media sphere indicates that "*people act upon their perceptions of media influence regardless whether or not these perceptions are accurate*" (Cohen et al., 2008, p. 2). The presumed influence of the news media as perceived by politicians is considered to have even grown due to the process of 'mediatization of politics'.

'Mediatization' in general describes how the influence of the mass media has increased in various aspects of society. In their work on 'the third age' of political communication, Blumler and Kavanagh (1999, p. 211) define the process of mediatization as "*the media moving toward the center of the social process"*. Over the past decades, the mass media have evolved into an autonomous entity with its own institutional logic and increasingly more influence on several spheres of social life. Scholars mention the rise of a 'mediacracy' (Meyer, 2002), a 'media society' (Mazzoleni, 2008) or a 'mediarchy' (Asp, 2014) as the (temporary) end result of this process of mediatization. In the same vein, the mass media have also invaded – or even 'colonized' (Meyer, 2002) – the political sphere, as discussed by literature on the 'mediatization of politics'. Mazzoleni and Schulz (1999, p. 250) provide

a basic definition of mediatized politics as "*politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central function on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media*". During the past decades, the mass media have thus become an autonomous and essential player in politics. Central in this process is the concept of media logic, first coined by Altheide and Snow (1979), which can be described as "*the news values and storytelling techniques the media make use of to take advantage of their own media and its format, and to be competitive in the ongoing struggle to capture people's attention*" (Strömback, 2008, p. 233). Both politicians and the news media are guided by this media logic, which in turn has changed political news content. First, political actors have adapted to – or even adopted – media logic to attract the attention of journalists and to gain media visibility. News management (Brown, 2011) and self-presentation of politics (Esser, 2013) illustrate the efforts of political actors to shape how politics is reported on. This is surely not a new phenomenon but the techniques and strategies politicians use for self-representation have grown considerably over recent decades. To promote themselves and their goals, politicians have internalized the news values, production routines and format requirements of the mass media (Strömback, 2008).

Second, political journalism has undergone a shift from a descriptive reporting style, in which the news media mainly follow the political logic imposed by political actors, to a more interpretative reporting style in which journalists not merely report on political facts but shine their own light on those facts. This way, the media have the power to define who and what is politically relevant enough to cover (Brants & Van Praag, 2006). In practice, this has resulted in news coverage focusing more on conflict and political strategy, more horse-race coverage, increasingly negative and cynical reporting, dramatization and personalization (Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Hopmann, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2011; Takens, Atteveldt, van Hoof, & Kleinnijenhuis, 2013; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, & Boumans, 2011). This PhD dissertation adds to research on the growing amount of personalized political news coverage.

In general, political personalization implies that in politics the weight of the group has declined whereas the weight of individual political actors has increased. Two connected factors are thought to have instigated this process: the weakening of traditional ties between citizens and political parties on the one hand, and the changing media environment – with mainly the growing role of television and media logic – on the other. Personalization can influence the behavior of citizens, who base their votes on candidates rather than on political parties, the behavior of politicians, who act more as autonomous persons detached from their party, and the behavior of the mass media, who represent

politics as a game between individuals rather than between institutions (Van Aelst, Sheafer, & Stanyer, 2011; Kriesi, 2012).

Rahat and Sheafer (2007) make a clear conceptualization of the personalization of politics. They distinguish between three sub-concepts of personalization: (1) institutional personalization, (2) media personalization and (3) behavioral personalization. The first sub-concept relates to the adoption of institutional rules and mechanisms that grant more power to individuals at the expense of political groups and parties, whereas the third sub-concept indicates politicians' focus on their own personal political career instead of the success of their party. Media personalization – the second sub-concept – is the main interest in this dissertation and implies a change in the presentation of politics in which the media increasingly emphasize individual politicians and focus less on political parties and institutions. Media personalization in turn can be divided in two subcategories. Some authors have focused on the share of news coverage of political parties versus the share of news coverage of individual politicians – or 'individualization' – whereas others examined more precisely which individuals appear in personalized news content (Van Aelst et al., 2011). My research supplements the latter research domain: which individual politicians appear in the news and why?

News Coverage of Individual Politicians

Concerning news coverage of politicians, one can distinguish between centralized and decentralized media personalization (Balmas, Rahat, Sheafer, & Shenhav, 2014), which are both dealt with in this PhD dissertation.

First, centralized media personalization implies that the news media increasingly cover political leaders such as prime ministers and party leaders, at the expense of collectives such as cabinets and parties. It thus concerns 'concentrated' visibility in which the mass media mainly focus on a select group of powerful politicians, with little attention for the remaining 'ordinary' politicians (Van Aelst et al., 2011; Balmas et al., 2014). Research on the 'presidentialization' of politics for instance fits under this umbrella and refers to the growing role of the prime minister in parliamentary systems (Poguntke & Webb, 2005). The greater part of studies on news coverage of politicians analyze this type of concentrated visibility (Balmas et al., 2014) and show that institutional power is indeed the key for individual politicians to open the news gates. Several studies across Western countries, such as the U.S, the U.K., the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium and Norway confirm that high-standing

politicians such as presidents, prime ministers and cabinet members can be sure of their large share of media attention (e.g. Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers, 2008; Boumans, Boomgaarden, & Vliegenthart, 2013; Midtbø, 2011; Negrine, 1999; Schoenbach, Ridder, & Lauf, 2001; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011).

In this respect, the news media are blamed for maintaining the political status quo, with little opportunity for oppositional voices to be heard. They are said to bolster the 'principle of cumulative inequality': those who need media access the most find it the most difficult to obtain it (Wolfsfeld, 2004, p. 78). This relates to the 'Matthew effect', first coined by Merton (1968) with respect to the scientific world. In the political media sphere, this concept applies as well: the position of already powerful politicians is enhanced because they receive plenty of news coverage whereas the power of less influential politicians even gets reduced because they are invisible in the news.

In general, the news media thus follow 'the trail of power' (Althaus, 2003; Bennett, 1996) and "*political power can usually be translated into power over the news media"* (Wolfsfeld, 2011, p. 9). However, as the word 'usually' implies, journalists might diverge from the trail of power in certain circumstances. For example, while evidence exists that presidentialization and the increasing focus on political leaders occurs during election campaigns, only a limited number of studies have addressed this phenomenon during nonelection periods (Boumans et al., 2013). Moreover, authors who compared news coverage of political leaders in two countries conclude that the impact of power on media visibility differs across countries (Boumans et al., 2013; Kriesi, 2012; Schoenbach et al., 2001). An encompassing analysis of the conditional effect of political power on news coverage is still lacking however.

The second type of media personalization is decentralized media personalization, which has received less scholarly attention (Balmas et al., 2014). When political journalists indeed diverge from 'the trail of power', less powerful actors, such as elected officials in parliament, have a chance to make it into the news. To be sure, it still concerns media coverage of politicians from an *elite* group in this case, not so much rank-and-file members of parties or local politicians (Balmas et al., 2014). This trend implies that less powerful politicians are nevertheless able to make it into the news. Next to their – lack of – political standing, 'ordinary' politicians such as members of parliament may have other assets which can guide them through the news gates, for instance their legislative work in parliament (Gershon, 2012; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011), their communication skills (Sheafer, 2001, 2008) and their efforts to reach journalists (Cohen et al., 2008; Fogarty, 2012; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007). However, studies examining which MPs are visible in the news yield contradictory results. The main

reason for these inconsistencies is the rather narrow focus on one particular aspect of politicians' assets in each of these studies, without controlling for important confounding factors which has been labelled as the 'omitted variable bias' (Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Midtbø, 2011). For example, the political position of politicians needs to be controlled for in an accurate way to avoid finding spurious relations.

Goal and Contributions

The dominance of political power for politicians to get covered is the point of departure in this PhD dissertation, but I take it to the next level. The main goal of this work is twofold: (1) look at *the contingent effect of power* and (2) look *beyond the effect of power*, in order to construct an encompassing and nuanced picture of news coverage of individual politicians.

The Contingent Effect of Power

First, it is necessary to put the effect of political power in perspective. In this study, I test the validity of existing findings on the impact of power on news coverage by analyzing it across various news outlets and countries. This way, I aim to unravel if and when journalists diverge from the trail of power. This first goal adds to studies on centralized media personalization by conducting a large-scale comparative analysis across many countries. The type of media system and political system impacts political news in general and more specifically also the selection of political news sources, as shown in research on political media systems (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2009; Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2006) and journalistic news cultures (Deuze, 2002; Esser, 2008; Pfetsch, 2001). Some West-European case studies have shown that different types of politicians appear in the news across the few countries investigated (Boumans et al., 2013; Holtz-Bacha, Langer, & Merkle, 2014; Kriesi, 2012; Negrine, 1999; Schoenbach et al., 2001). For example, German news media focus mainly on the head of government whereas in the Netherlands access to the news media is more equally divided with also cabinet members and party leaders getting a substantial amount of attention (Schoenbach et al., 2001).

However, a systematic transnational comparison is still missing. To discern structural effects of country characteristics on the visibility of politicians in the news, research should *"include a larger number of case studies, so enabling us to better isolate and test the different variables at play"* (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014, p. 168). This dissertation fills that gap by examining the impact of political

power on news coverage of politicians across newspapers, television news and online news in sixteen Western countries.

Beyond The Effect of Power

The second objective complements the first one concerning the contingent impact of political power: when holding power constant, which features of politicians then matter to make it into the news? This question relates to decentralized personalized news coverage and deals with less powerful politicians getting news coverage. To this end, I look beyond the effect of political power and focus on 'ordinary' politicians with similar political standing, such as members of parliament, to scrutinize which features are important to increase their media visibility. To answer this question, several characteristics and activities of individual politicians are studied meticulously in one country, namely in Belgium, while at the same time taking into account political power as a control variable to rule out spurious relations.

With both contributions, I avoid the "*omitted variable bias*" (Midtbø, 2011, p. 227) which is a consequence of not controlling for obvious confounding factors (Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992). Several features of individual politicians are included simultaneously, while at the same time accounting for different features of the news media. This way, many characteristics and activities of politicians can be put to a rigid test to discern their impact on getting covered. Moreover, this research takes into account interaction effects to provide a more encompassing picture of news coverage of politicians. To illustrate this more clearly, I aim to answer questions such as: do female politicians get covered more by female journalists than by male journalists? Do members of parliament have a better shot at appearing in newspapers compared to television news? Are cabinet members more visible in the news in countries with a coalition cabinet as opposed to countries with majority cabinets? It is necessary to consider these combinations as they shed a more nuanced light on news coverage of politicians.

Research Design

In order to answer the twofold research question in which I look at both (1) the *contingent effect of power* and (2) *beyond the effect of power*, I employ a research design which is innovative in three distinct ways. First, the study is based upon a detailed three-level model that allows for incorporating interaction effects. Second, several methods are used throughout this dissertation, thereby

combining the strengths of each of them and encountering their weaknesses. Third, I include new media in two distinct ways, as an addition to examining traditional mass media as previous research has done. Before explaining these innovations more clearly, I elaborate on the conceptualization of news coverage, which is the dependent variable in this dissertation, and the conceptualization of political power, which is the central independent variable to start from.

Concerning news coverage, one can differentiate between competition over media access and competition over media framing. The former indicates the extent to which politicians obtain media exposure whereas the latter concerns politicians' control over the presentation of political reality in the news media (Sheafer, 2001). This dissertation is confined to the first aspect: the dependent variable I aim to explain is the *amount of news coverage* of individual politicians. The amount of news coverage encompasses *media visibility* on the one hand and *media voice* on the other. Media visibility implies mere appearances in the news when politicians are addressed by another actor or when their actions provoke reactions, which is seen as positive or negative resonance (Koopmans, 2004). Media voice on the contrary suggests that politicians can actually speak up in the news, giving them the opportunity to express their policy goals or address their preferred issues. Both types of media access will be analyzed across the chapters in this dissertation.

The impact of political power on news coverage is the point of departure in this dissertation, both for analyzing the conditionality of the effect of power and for scrutinizing what else matters for news coverage beyond the effect of power. However, power is a broad concept and difficult to define. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to elaborate on what power exactly means, but I do need to address how political power is measured throughout the research. Political power is considered here as *formal power*. It thus concerns institutional power resulting from politicians' *institutional position* within politics. In a declining degree of formal power, these institutional positions generally consist of the prime minister or president, cabinet members, party leaders, parliamentary leaders and members of parliament. The political standing of politicians is thus considered to be based upon their formal power position, and both concepts will be used as synonyms throughout this dissertation.

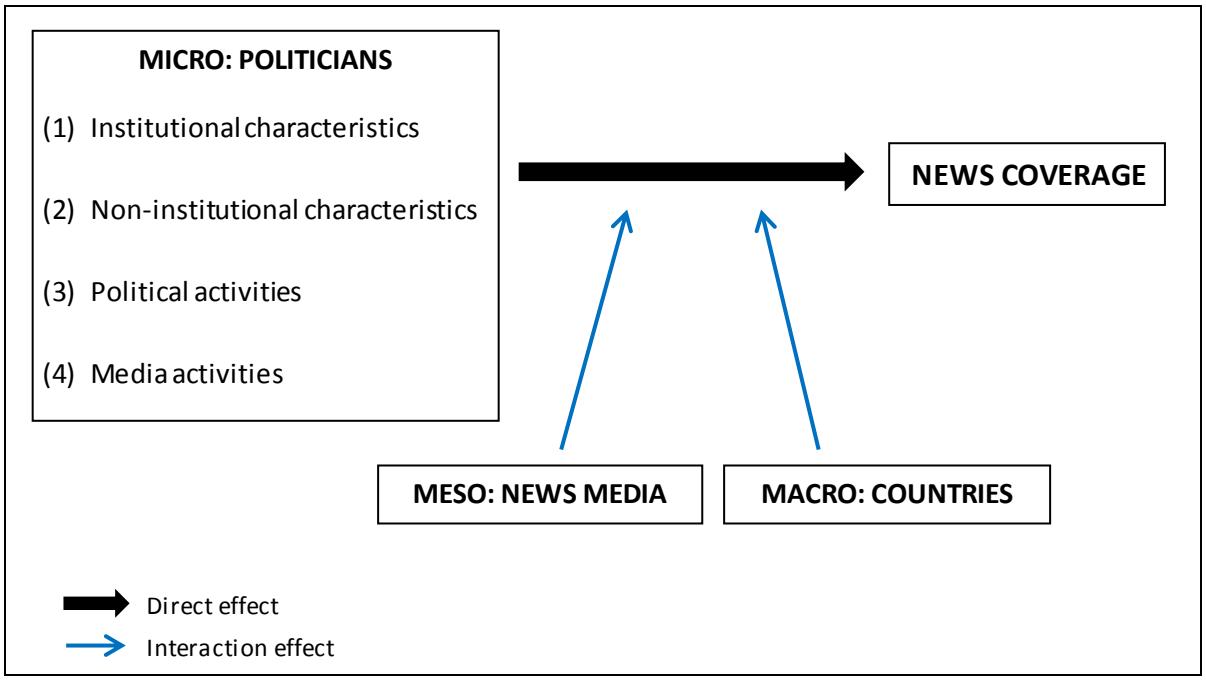
Within political science literature it is common to utilize formal power when analyzing politics and political processes. In terms of Weber and his classical work on legitimacy and authority (1947, 1961), this conceptualization of formal power refers to 'legal authority', in which legitimacy is acquired from a legal order in society. Also French and Raven (1959) distinguish this type of institutional power in their often-cited power taxonomy as being 'legitimate power': one derives legitimate authority from his place in the social structure, which ultimately involves a hierarchy of authority. This is not to say

that other - more informal - forms of power do not matter for politicians to enhance their news coverage. For example, 'charismatic authority' (Weber, 1947) or 'expert power' (French & Raven, 1959) might be other forms of power which can guide politicians through the media gates. The impact of other types of power are not directly analyzed in this dissertation, but are nevertheless touched upon where applicable. In the discussion, I return to the conceptualization of power as being formal power and elaborate on how more informal types of power might relate to the findings of this research as well.

Multi-level Approach

This dissertation is based upon a multi-level approach consisting of the micro-level of politicians, the meso-level of the news media and the macro-level of countries (see figure 1). The direct effects of politicians' characteristics and activities on the amount of news coverage they receive are the main focus. On top of that, I investigate how news media features and country features interact with these direct relations between politicians and their news coverage.

Figure 0.1. Multi-level Model of News Coverage of Politicians



As already has been made clear throughout the introduction, this dissertation deals with individual politicians and their visibility in the news media, which constitutes the basic micro-level. I am first and mainly concerned with the characteristics and activities of politicians that can guide them through the news gates and turn them into news sources. In chapter one, I develop a typology of individual features of politicians that might matter to get covered, which then are scrutinized empirically in the subsequent chapters. In short, I distinguish between four groups of individual features of politicians: (1) institutional characteristics, such as political function, party and seniority, (2) non-institutional characteristics, such as gender and age, (3) activities happening within political institutions, such as parliamentary questions and bill proposals, and (4) activities occurring outside institutions that are aimed at obtaining publicity, such as contacts with journalists and sending press releases and Tweets.

The four groups of features of politicians include both push and pull factors within the political news making process. Politicians themselves can actively engage in attracting the attention of journalists in order to gain news coverage. The impact of these 'push' efforts on news coverage is analyzed when scrutinizing various activities that politicians undertake. On the other hand, politicians possess certain fixed characteristics, such as their political position, party affiliation and gender, which automatically might pull journalists' attention. This distinction corresponds to the game of supply and demand: politicians present themselves as being reliable news sources whereas journalists indeed search for interesting news sources (Gans, 1979). Across the chapters in this dissertation, I analyze both aspects to dissect which is most important to pass the news gates: who a politician is or what a politician does.

Besides the micro-level of politicians, I also take into account the news media and their news workers which are considered as an intermediary or meso-level. When analyzing news coverage of politicians, it is insufficient to focus merely on politicians themselves, without acknowledging the significance of the news media who select and cover these politicians in the first place. Political actors indeed provide the initial input for political news content, but in the end, it are the journalists and editors who decide what and whom are newsworthy enough to cover. This means that "*the construction of political news is always a co-production in which both newsmakers and journalists play important roles in constructing the final story*" (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006, p. 334). I thus argue that it is necessary to integrate both groups of actors when explaining news coverage of politicians.

Several gatekeeping models have theorized how different aspects of the news media have an impact on the construction of (political) news. Bennett (2004) distinguishes between four news gates: (1)

journalists' personal and professional news judgment values, (2) organizational news gathering routines that establish the working relations between journalists and sources, (3) economic constraints on news production and (4) information and communication technologies that define the limits of space and time in news gathering. Shoemaker and Vos (2009) on their part propose five levels of influence: (1) individual journalists and editors, (2) communication routines, (3) media organizations, (4) social institutions and (5) social systems. Taking together, the three primary news gates are individuals, news organizations, and the routines these individuals employ within the news organizations. In addition, systemic level factors also determine news content. This dissertation includes all these factors to explain which politicians appear in the news.

Some previous studies indeed incorporated some of these news media features; mainly the differences between media organizations (Van Aelst, Maddens et al., 2008; Cook, 1986; Fogarty, 2012; Haynes & Murray, 1998; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Squire, 1988; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011) and to a lesser extent also working routines (e.g. Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009; Gershon, 2012; Kahn, 1991; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2004). The selection of politicians by individual journalists however remains a gap in the literature, which I fill by analyzing source selection of politicians by individual journalists. Moreover, I also take into account their working routines and several features of news media organizations.

The third level in the model is the macro-level of countries, which includes both media systems and political systems to explain which politicians make it into the news. More precisely, taking into account this macro-level enables me to scrutinize how political power impacts news coverage across countries. In general, political journalists across Western democracies are guided by 'the trail of power'. The development of a transnational news culture has led to similarities in professional routines in many newsrooms across the globe. Journalistic standards and values have diffused cross-nationally which has led journalists in modern democracies to apply a similar transnational news logic (Esser, 2008; Hanitzsch, 2007). However, political power is diverted differently across democracies. This country-specific power hierarchy results in an equivalent media hierarchy with certain political positions being more visible in the news media than others (Hopmann, de Vreese et al., 2011). Yet, a systematic analysis of how exactly news coverage of politicians differs across countries is lacking. I fill this gap by comparing and clarifying media visibility of politicians in sixteen Western countries.

Multi-method Approach

The clear majority of studies on the content of political communication messages are – rather obviously – content analyses (Benoit, 2011; Graber, 2004, 2005). The method of content analysis is extremely important for research in political communication and is "*a means of measuring or quantifying dimensions of the content of messages*" (Benoit, 2011, p. 268). In this work I indeed apply content analyses as a means to quantify the media visibility of politicians and to explain actual news coverage of politicians. This is however only the end product of the news making process. Based on McManus (1994), we can differentiate between news discovery, news selection and news production. In the discovery phase, several events and persons potentially interesting to report on are brought to the attention of the journalist. In a next step – the selection phase – journalists and editors decide upon which of these events and persons are newsworthy enough to be considered as news. In a final stage, the actual production of the news happens. More fully understanding the whole news gatekeeping process is best accomplished by combining content analyses with other research methods, such as surveys, interviews and experiments (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009, p. 81).

I aim to reach a fuller understanding of political news content and its sources by combining news content research with an online experimental survey conducted with political journalists. With the former, I focus on the final stage of the news making process whereas the latter examines the previous stage leading up to the actual coverage of politicians: the selection of political news sources by journalists. Internet experiments are a rather novel addition to the political communication field. Experiments enable researchers to rigorously control the stimuli to which research subjects are exposed and to draw more reliable causal interferences (Graber, 2004). Moreover, experiments are an appropriate means to investigate unconscious processes that are hard to observe or to explain verbally. News selection is such a process that occurs in a routinized and rather automatic manner.

In addition, I start this dissertation with a systematic, theoretical review of seminal studies in the research field. The review provides a detailed overview of which media have been investigated, in which country, with which research designs and what the main findings were. By combining three distinctive research methods – a theoretical review, content analyses and an experimental survey –, I rely on traditional, established methods within political communication research as well as innovative methods to provide a robust test and see whether relationships between politicians and news coverage hold across methods.

Including New Media

To complement previous work on politicians in the news, I examine both old media and new media. With the proliferation of the Internet, audiences for television news as well as newspapers are shrinking. Whereas newspapers and especially television news for a long time constituted the primary source for citizens to be informed about politics, the Internet is gradually occupying their place. Moreover, younger people represent the larger part of new media audiences implying that this development will accelerate over time (Gurevitch, Coleman, & Blumler, 2009). This trend is mainly apparent in the U.S, where online news media already rank second among citizens' sources of daily news consumption. Television news is still their main source for acquiring political news, but online media have displaced newspapers and radio news as being the second most important information source. In other countries, the shift to increasingly more consumption of online news media happens more slowly, but they are surely catching up (Schulz, 2014).

We thus cannot ignore the Internet and online news media as a news source next to newspapers and television news when studying contemporary political news content. I include new media in two ways in this dissertation. In the first place, online news content is examined as a dependent variable, by comparing traditional news media such as newspapers and television news with online news media and examining whether different politicians are visible across these types of news media. As the Internet is gradually becoming citizens' main information source, politicians can benefit considerably – and even more among youngsters – from appearing in online news media.

Second, politicians are aware of the growing consumption and impact of online news on audiences. They are thus eager to employ the additional functions and services the new media offer and accommodate to the changing media environment in order to use it strategically to their own benefit (Schulz, 2014). Accordingly, they have adapted their communication channels to fit citizens' new media use and try to connect to them directly through new media channels such as blogs, Twitter and Facebook. This way they try to circumvent traditional news gates to communicate directly with the public (Gurevitch et al., 2009; Lipinski & Neddenriep, 2004; Peterson, 2010). What's more, political actors do not use new and social media solely as a direct communication tool to the public, but also as an indirect manner to reach traditional news media. By providing quick and accessible content online, politicians try to draw the attention of journalists in order to get covered. For journalists as well the Internet can be a valuable tool. As journalists work under sever time pressure, scanning the Web for political news can be a quick and cost-effective way to gather essential information. They regularly draw on the Internet and social media as an additional information source (Lipinski & Neddenriep, 2004; Schulz, 2014). Therefore, I also investigate whether politicians'

use of new media channels enhances their chances of coverage in the traditional news media, thereby including new media as an independent variable.

Structure of Dissertation

This dissertation contains five chapters. Each of the chapters highlights a specific aspect of news coverage of politicians and contributes to existing research in its own particular way. At the same time, I control each time for important additional features to rule out spurious findings, which is one of the main contributions of this PhD research. Table 0.1. contains an overview of the five chapters, with each its own specific focus, research method, levels examined and scope. In general, chapter one is theoretical and concerns both the questions of the contingent effect of power and beyond the effect of power. The subsequent chapters present empirical work. Chapter two focuses specifically on the contingent effect of power, whereas chapter three, four and five analyze which characteristics and activities of politicians beyond power influence the amount of coverage they receive.

Table 0.1. Overview of Chapters

Chapter	Focus	Method	Level	Scope
1	***The contingent effect of power & Beyond the effect of power***	Theoretical review	Micro Meso Macro	Comparative
2	***The contingent effect of power***	Content analysis TV - Newspapers - Online	Micro Meso Macro	Comparative
3	***Beyond the effect of power*** Activities MPs	Content analysis Newspapers	Micro	Belgium
4	***Beyond the effect of power*** Gender	Content analysis Television news	Micro Meso	Belgium
5	***Beyond the effect of power*** Newsworthiness MPs	Factorial survey with political journalists	Micro Meso	Belgium

The first chapter lays down the basic premises for the remaining chapters. It concerns a theoretical review of previous work on news coverage of politics to define the state of the art and uncover the gaps and inconsistencies in the research field. The review is comparative as it discusses empirical work across several countries and incorporates variables on all three levels. Consistent with figure 1, chapter one deals first with a classification of possible influences of the micro-level variables of

politicians on their news coverage, and analyzes next which of these features of politicians have indeed an impact on their media visibility. When reviewing previous work, plenty of contradictions emerge. As a consequence, I speculate about explanations for these inconsistencies by looking at the meso- and the macro-level. And indeed, variations in the type of medium, the time period and the country analyzed lead to different findings.

Chapter two is the first empirical analysis in this dissertation and looks in a comparative manner at *the contingent effect of power*. The impact of political power is studied in detail by means of a comparative content analysis of newspapers, television news and online news media in sixteen Western democracies. I first examine how news coverage of politicians is distributed across these countries. This initial analysis indeed shows that other politicians are visible in the news from one country to another. The political hierarchy in a country thus determines to a large extent the media hierarchy. For example, cabinet members are highly visible in Spain, Portugal, Belgium and the UK, whereas in Italy and Greece party leaders are prominent news sources. Next, I examine whether this effect of institutional power is contingent upon aspects of media logic or rather political logic. I explain variation in news coverage across countries by systematically looking into technological aspects of media logic such as the format of the medium, commercial aspects of media logic such as the degree of commercialization of the media market, and polity aspects of political logic, such as the degree of federalism. The findings show that mainly television news focuses on top politicians as well as news media in countries with highly competitive media markets. In consensus democracies – where political power is more dispersed across several actors – on the other hand, the news media concentrate less on political leaders solely, with 'ordinary' politicians having a better shot at making it into the news.

In chapter three, Belgian MPs and their features are central to examine how ordinary, less powerful parliamentarians can make it into newspapers anyway. This is thus a first empirical study *beyond the effect of power*. Many personal features of politicians – from each of the four groups at the micro-level – are scrutinized with a main focus on their activities inside as well as outside parliament. We thus investigate whether members of parliament, who in general have a hard time appearing in the news, can actively increase their media visibility by engaging in meaningful political and media activities. In short: does it matters what they do, next to who they are? To this end, I measure politicians' activities as well as their newspaper coverage in a very meticulous manner. The results show that both their media work and their political work matter, but that differentiation between specific activities is necessary. For example, frequently having personal contacts with political journalists does enhance news coverage whereas sending them press releases does not.

Chapter four analyses both the micro-level of politicians and the meso-level of the news media, as well as their interaction effect on news coverage of politicians. More specifically, it focuses on the gender bias in Belgian television news, while controlling for other structural features of politicians – with political function being the most important one – and for news media features. This chapter provides an answer to the question whether female politicians appear less in the news because the news media simply select less women or rather because female politicians have lower political functions in general. Thus: does the gender bias result from a political bias or from a media bias? In addition, I link news coverage of female politicians to news media features such as public broadcast versus private broadcast, and male journalists versus female journalists, to analyze whether it influence when female politicians get a voice in television news. The findings indicate that mainly lower political positions cause the gender bias in the news, but that the news media themselves also take part in the underrepresentation of female politicians. For instance, the gap between the media visibility of men and women disappears during election times, as journalists pay more attention to fair and balanced reporting during election campaigns.

Chapter five also analyzes both micro- and the meso-level features but this time with an experimental design instead of a content analysis. The focus thus shifts from the end product of the news making process – the actual news output – to the first stage where journalists make a prior selection whether an event or source is newsworthy enough to construct a news item. By means of an online factorial survey with Belgian journalists of print media, television news and online news media, I first unravel which features of Belgian rank-and-file members of parliament can guide them through the initial news gates and second whether journalists differ in their selection decisions according to their own background and personal beliefs. Findings indicate that mainly MPs affiliated with large parties and MPs who communicate accurately about their bill proposals get selected more often as a news source. Furthermore, personal characteristics of political journalists do not influence which politicians they select; they do this regardless of their gender, age, education or ideological preferences.

All in all, the chapters together provide an encompassing answer on the research question of *which politicians make it into the news and why*. The effect of political power on news coverage is indeed contingent upon situational factors such as the news outlet and the political systems. Moreover, when controlling for the clear – but contingent – impact of power on news coverage, it becomes apparent that also other features of politicians matter to pass the news gates. For instance, members of parliament who take relevant initiatives in parliament and make sure they communicate about them at appropriate times, can indeed make it into the news. In the conclusion, I scrutinize in detail

the impact of each variable tested and do this by looking across all chapters. For example, gender constitutes the main explanatory variable in chapter four, but it is also included in some other chapters. By taken the insights across all chapters together, it is possible to provide a more nuanced picture of how exactly gender plays a role in explaining news coverage of politicians. The same goes for other variables and the interactions between them. In the end, this enables me to conclude how the impact of power on news coverage depends on the specific situational context and which elements explain news coverage when looking beyond the clear impact of power.

Chapter One

Which Politicians Pass the News Gates and Why?
Explaining Inconsistencies in Research on News Coverage of Individual Politicians.

This chapter is published as an article in a peer-reviewed journal:

Vos, D. (2014). Which politicians pass the news gates and why? Explaining inconsistencies in research on news coverage of individual politicians. *International Journal of Communication 8*, 2438-2461.

Which Politicians Pass the News Gates and Why?
Explaining Inconsistencies in Research on News Coverage of Individual Politicians.

Introduction

Which politicians make it into the news and why? This is the central question in this article and a relevant question in modern politics, where the news media play an increasingly central role. The mass media have moved to the center of political processes with a shift from a party democracy to an audience democracy characterized by a more central role of personae (Brants, de Vreese, Möller, & van Praag, 2010). This trend of candidate-centered politics has influenced political news content: the focus has shifted from parties to politicians and leaders (e.g. McAllister, 2007; Rahat & Sheafer, 2007). Individual politicians appear more in the news, which is important for their political success. The news media play a crucial role in connecting voters to political actors, because citizens often rely only on news media for information about their representatives. Moreover, media coverage might be advantageous during policy-making processes. Legislators use the news media to gain public support and influence their counterparts to get legislation passed (Fogarty, 2008; Kedrowski, 1996).

Although coverage of individual politicians has increased, it still remains a highly selective procedure. Politicians must vie for the attention of reporters, editors, and audiences in a highly competitive news environment (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Scholars have examined which politicians get covered, but these studies have not led to comparable conclusions, because they have been conducted with different research designs and little comparative work. Surprisingly, these mixed outcomes have not instigated a real scholarly debate. The basic question of who gets into the news and why still lacks a clear answer.

Some authors touch upon the problem of contradictory findings. At the beginning of the 1990s, Kuklinski and Sigelman (1992) mentioned divergent conclusions and weaknesses. A first problem is "*a failure in many studies to control for even the most obvious potentially confounding factors*" (p. 812). Midtbø (2011, p. 227) labels this lack of control variables the 'omitted variable bias'. Kuklinski and Sigelman (1992) also noted the short and different time periods studied, which makes it hard to find changing relationships over time. They argue for thinking in terms of patterns of coverage rather than drawing conclusions within a short time frame. A third complication is the focus on politicians' attributes as explanatory variables. The relationship between politicians and journalists is both

intertwined and symbiotic, and thus media features cannot be ignored when analyzing news coverage of politicians (Midtbø, 2011, p. 227).

This study examines which politicians pass the news gates and, more specifically, investigates contradictions found in the research. An international perspective is employed to analyze studies around the world and focus on a diverse group of politicians to answer following research question:

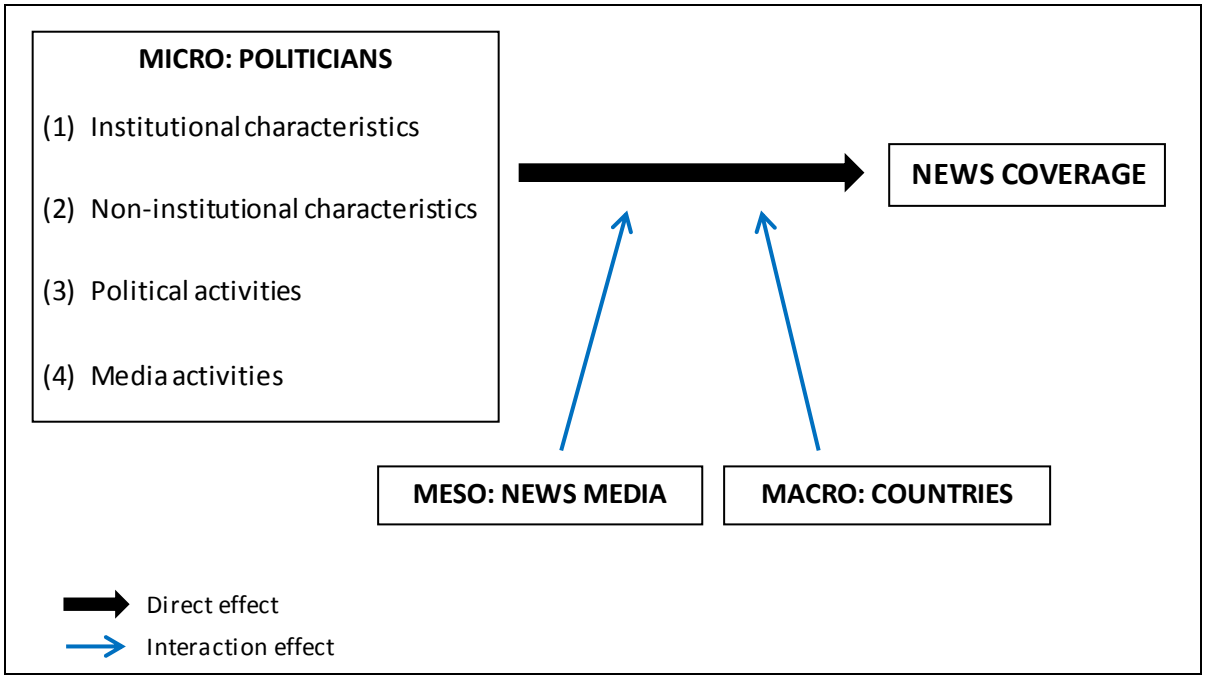
> *RQ: Why do previous studies on news coverage of individual politicians display inconsistencies concerning the determinants of getting covered?*

To answer this question, three successive steps are conducted. First, determinants of news coverage of politicians are classified to bring some structure to the overwhelming group of possibly influential factors. The typology consists of three levels: the micro-level of politicians, the meso-level of the news media, and the macro-level of countries. Second, a literature review is conducted based on a systematic selection of 25 relevant studies, and the variables in the typology are tested for their effect and inconsistencies. Third, we speculate about explanations for the contradictory findings by comparing research designs, and we examine the various theoretical frameworks. This third step takes into account the flaws discussed earlier: (1) We include a wide range of possible determinants to rule out confounding factors; (2) the selected studies were conducted between 1980 and 2012, which allows to find effects over a longer time span; and (3) we examine characteristics of politicians as well as journalistic features, thus taking into account their intertwined relation.

Typology

The vast number of determinants examined are classified in a meaningful way by distinguishing three levels: (1) characteristics of individual politicians, (2) news media characteristics, and (3) country characteristics. First of all, we focus on the micro-level of politicians themselves. Each politician has specific traits and qualities, leading to more or less coverage. The basic level of the model contains these direct effects of politicians' characteristics and activities on their news coverage. Second, we take media organizations and news events (meso-level) and political systems (macro-level) into account to examine interaction effects and explain contradictory findings (figure 1.1.). Of course, correlations within a level might occur as well as direct effects from the meso- and macro-levels on news coverage. But the main focus is to determine direct effects of politicians' traits on their coverage and subsequently explore interactions with meso- and macro-level variables.

Figure 1.1. Multi-level Typology of Determinants of News Coverage



Selection of Studies

To test the typology, we conduct a review of studies on news coverage of politicians. The identification of relevant studies is crucial and followed a strict procedure[1]. To be included, the studies had to meet the following criteria:

- Dependent variable is the amount of news coverage of individual politicians. Studies with coverage of government versus opposition, men and women, and so on as the dependent variable were excluded.
- Type of media is traditional mass media (radio news, newspapers, and television news).
- Time period is between 1980 and 2012.
- Language is English.

The search resulted in 25 prominent studies. This selection is not exhaustive. There might be research in other languages as well as unpublished work on news coverage of individual politicians that is not included. However, the selected studies encompass prominent studies regarding the topic at hand and suffice to put the proposed model to a first test. Table 1.1. presents a chronological overview of the studies and shows that the analysis of news coverage of politicians is an expanding

research field. In general, most studies focus on the micro-level solely or on a combination of micro- and meso-level variables. Only Schoenbach and colleagues (2001) examined all three levels.

Table 1.1. Overview of Selected Studies

Study	Country	Medium	Period	Level
Payne (1980)	United States	NP	Nonelections	Micro
Veblen (1981)	United States	NP	Nonelections	Micro
Cook (1986)	United States	NP TV	Nonelections Elections	Micro Meso
Squire (1988)	United States	NP TV	Nonelections Elections	Micro Meso
Kahn (1991)	United States	NP	Elections	Micro Meso
Kuklinski & Sigelman (1992)	United States	TV	Nonelections Elections	Micro Meso
Haynes & Murray (1998)	United States	Local NP National NP TV	Elections	Micro Meso
Negrine (1999)	Britain Germany	NP TV	Nonelections	Micro Macro
Schoenbach, De Ridder & Lauf (2001)	The Netherlands Germany	TV	Elections	Micro Meso Macro
Sheafer (2001)	Israel	NP TV	Nonelections	Micro
Schaffner & Sellers (2003)	United States	Local NP National NP	Nonelections	Micro Meso
Arnold (2004)	United States	Local NP	Elections Nonelections	Micro Meso
Sheafer & Wolfsfeld (2004)	Israel	Radio	Elections Nonelections	Micro Meso
Wolfsfeld & Sheafer (2006)	Israel	NP	Nonelections	Micro Meso

Study	Country	Medium	Period	Level
Sellers & Schaffner (2007)	United States	TV	Nonelections Elections	Micro Meso
Cohen, Tsfati & Sheafer (2008)	Israel	TV	Nonelections	Micro
Fogarty (2008)	United States	Local NP	Nonelections	Micro Meso
Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe & Fiers (2008)	Belgium	NP TV	Elections	Micro Meso
Tresch (2009)	Switzerland	NP	Nonelections	Micro Meso
Van Aelst & De Swert (2009)	Belgium	TV	Nonelections Elections	Micro Meso
Tsfati, Elfassi & Waismel-Manor (2010)	Israel	TV	Nonelections	Micro
Midtbø (2011)	Norway	NP	Nonelections Elections	Micro Meso
Waismel-Manor & Tsfati (2011)	United States	NP TV Radio	Nonelections	Micro Meso
Fogarty (2012)	United States	Local NP	Nonelections	Micro Meso
Gershon (2012)	United States	Local NP	Elections	Micro Meso

Note. NP = newspapers; TV = television news.

Literature Review

This review identifies and examines in a comparative perspective the various characteristics of politicians that have been analyzed frequently over the years. Table 1.2. presents an overview of the variables investigated in each of the included studies.

Table 1.2. Micro-level Variables and their Effects in the Selected Studies

	Micro									
	Position	**Seniority**	**Centrality**	**Party**	**Majority**	**Gender**	**Age**	**Attractiveness**	**Political work**	**Media work**
Payne (1980)			✓	✓					x	
Veblen (1981)			✓			✓	✓			
Cook (1986)	✓	✓	✓		x	x	x		x	
Squire (1988)	✓	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	
Kahn (1991)		✓								
Kuklinski & Sigelman (1992)	✓	✓	✓	x	x					
Haynes & Murray (1998)										
Negrine (1999)	✓									
Schoenbach, De Ridder, & Lauf (2001)	✓									
Sheafer (2001)	✓		✓						x	✓
Schaffner & Sellers (2003)	(✓)				x					
Arnold (2004)	x	x	x	x		x			✓	
Sheafer & Wolfsfeld (2004)	✓									✓
Wolfsfeld & Sheafer (2006)	✓	✓								✓
Sellers & Schaffner (2007)	✓	✓								✓
Cohen, Tsfati & Sheafer (2008)	✓	x	x		x	x				✓

	Position	Seniority	Centrality	Party	Majority	Gender	Age	Attractiveness	Political work	Media work
Fogarty (2008)		x		x					x	x
Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers (2008)	✓			✓	x	✓				
Tresch (2009)	✓	x		✓		x			✓	
Van Aelst & De Swert (2009)						✓				
Tsfati, Elfassi, & Waismel-Manor (2010)	✓	✓	x	x		x	x	✓	✓	
Midtbø (2011)	✓	✓		x	x	✓	✓		✓	✓
Waismel-Manor & Tsfati (2011)	✓	(✓)	(✓)	x		x		✓	(✓)	x
Fogarty (2012)									x	✓
Gershon (2012)	(✓)	(✓)		x	x	x			✓	✓

Note: ✓ = included in the study and effect; x = included in the study and no effect; an empty cell = not included in the study. Symbols in parentheses indicate very small or contradictory effects.

Table 1.3. Meso- and Macro-level Variables and their Effects in the Selected Studies

	Meso					Macro
	NP-TV	Local-National	Commercial	Type of event	Election period	Political system
Payne (1980)						
Veblen (1981)						
Cook (1986)	x					
Squire (1988)	✓				✓	

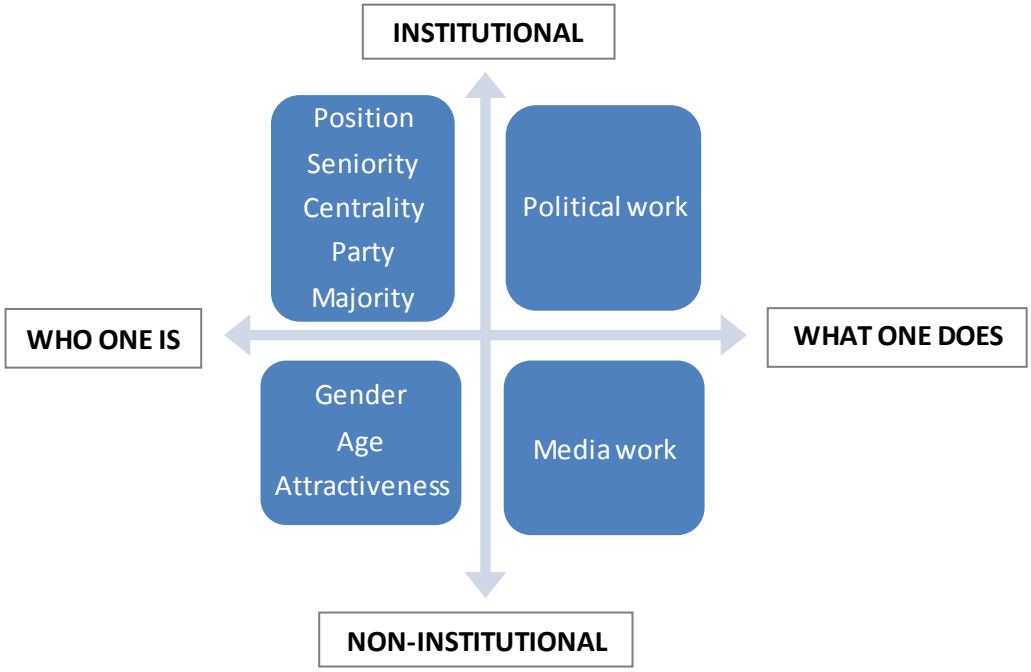
	NP-TV	Local-National	Commercial	Type of event	Election period	Political system
Kahn (1991)					✓	
Kuklinski & Sigelman (1992)					✓	
Haynes & Murray (1998)		x			✓	
Negrine (1999)						✓
Schoenbach, De Ridder, & Lauf (2001)			x		✓	✓
Sheafer (2001)						
Schaffner & Sellers (2003)		✓	✓			
Arnold (2004)					✓	
Sheafer & Wolfsfeld (2004)					✓	
Wolfsfeld & Sheafer (2006)				✓		
Sellers & Schaffner (2007)				✓		
Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheafer (2008)						
Fogarty (2008)						
Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers (2008)	✓					
Tresch (2009)						
Van Aelst & De Swert (2009)					✓	
Tsfati, Elfassi, & Waismel-Manor (2010)						

	NP-TV	Local-National	Commercial	Type of Event	Election period	Political system
Midtbø (2011)		✓	✓			
Waismel-Manor & Tsfati (2011)	✓					
Fogarty (2012)		x	x			
Gershon (2012)			x		✓	

Note: ✓ = included in the study and effect; x = included in the study and no effect; an empty cell = not included in the study. Symbols in parentheses indicate very small or contradictory effects.

Scholars have examined several characteristics and activities of politicians to explain their news coverage. We can distinguish between characteristics that define 'who a politician is' and 'what a politician does'. This distinction corresponds with earlier discussions about the importance of both groups of variables. Early scholars concluded that "*what one does in office seems less important for attracting coverage than who one is*" (Cook, 1986, p. 221). More recent studies, however, emphasize the importance of activities and argue for a shifting focus "*from who they are to what they do*" (Midtbø, 2011, p. 230). Tresch (2009, p. 86) argues that both components must be taken into account: "*Some parliamentarians have a competitive advantage derived from their official positions […] What a parliamentarian is doing and how he or she is doing it might also drive news coverage*". Within these two categories, we can differentiate between 'institutional' and 'non-institutional' aspects. The institutional attributes are considered to be naturally important for successful politics. Who a politician is politically should have the greatest impact on the amount of coverage. Consequently, the effect of political characteristics has been studied frequently and throughout the whole research period. However, who a politician is personally is increasingly becoming related to electoral success and getting covered. Non-political traits such as attractiveness are of growing importance (Rosar, Klein, & Beckers, 2008).

Figure 1.2. Typology of Micro-level of Politicians



Who a Politician Is

***Institutional Characteristics*.** The first and clearly most studied variable is political position. Eighteen studies tested the effect of political standing on the amount of coverage, and seventeen of them find a significant effect (see table 1.2. for an overview of each variable discussed). This effect has been found in early and contemporary studies; during elections and routine periods; in television, newspapers, and radio coverage; and in different countries such as the United States, Israel, Germany, Norway, Britain, The Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland. Generally, this variable is measured by looking at politicians' function. Cabinet members, party leaders, and committee chairs have a higher political position and therefore receive additional coverage. Smaller differences in standing, such as the salience of the committee, also matter for getting covered (Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Squire, 1988; Tresch, 2009; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011). In many of these studies, political position yields the largest significant effect regardless of other control variables (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008; Midtbø, 2011; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Squire, 1988; Tresch, 2009; Tsfati, Elfassi, & Waismel-Manor, 2010), and including political position in multiple regression analyses generates high levels of explained variance of .50 or more (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008; Arnold, 2004; Cohen et al., 2008; Schoenbach et al., 2001; Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2004; Sheafer, 2001; Tsfati et al., 2010). However, some authors find a rather small effect of political position. Schaffner and Sellers (2003) conclude that political position has a clear effect concerning national newspapers, whereas it yields

no significant effect for local newspapers. Gershon (2012) also examines local newspapers and comes to the same conclusion. Local newspapers thus focus more on local politicians from their own region or state instead of on politicians with high standing. Arnold (2004) finds a positive and significant effect of being a party leader, but this effect disappears when including the political work of members of Congress.

Another well-investigated variable is seniority. It seems reasonable that politicians with more political experience have more authority and therefore pass the media gates more often. However, the effect of seniority is not straightforward. Nine studies do find a positive effect of longer tenure, but five studies do not. After closer examination, it appears that seniority can have a positive effect on coverage, but mainly during election periods. Studies examining the effect of seniority solely during routine periods do not find a significant effect on coverage (Cohen et al., 2008; Fogarty, 2008; Tresch, 2009). Thus, seniority can be a determinant for getting covered during election periods, but it is of secondary importance during regular periods. This can be explained by electoral positions: senior politicians are expected to get better positions on electoral lists because they are recognizable by the electorate, leading to additional coverage.

Political centrality has been investigated in ten studies, all conducted in the United States and Israel. In the United States, the general trend is that more extreme politicians, who stand further from the symbolic center in society, receive additional news coverage. Extreme members might be favored for reasons of colorfulness and balance (Cook, 1986). Two U.S. studies (Arnold, 2004; Squire, 1988) however, do not find a significant effect for extremism, which can be explained by the operationalization of extremism. Squire (1988) uses squares of ADA (Americans for Democratic Action) scores in his model, whereas others use a score of 50 minus the ADA score (Payne, 1980; Veblen, 1981) or an ACA (Americans for Constitutional Action) score (Cook, 1986; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992). In Israel, political extremism has a smaller effect. Sheafer (2001) concludes that extreme Knesset members get covered more, but Cohen et al. (2008) and Tsfati and Waismel-Manor (2010) do not find such an effect. They include more independent variables such as party and seniority, thereby limiting the remaining effect of extremism.

The effect of party attachment has also been analyzed. Media attention for parties is expected to be proportional to their score in the previous election. Being a member of a party with a great vote share thus could enhance news coverage (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008). Furthermore, situational factors of the party might matter. Being involved in a scandal or having elections for a new party leader generates more media attention for the party as a whole, and individual members can benefit

from it. Yet no clear pattern was found. Payne (1980), Tresch (2009), and Van Aelst and colleagues (2008) conclude that party attachment has an effect, but many researchers contradict their results. It could be that this effect is only small because other features related to party affiliation have a larger effect. For example, centrality and incumbency are linked to political parties, and since these characteristics show a more clear-cut effect, they might reduce the effect of party attachment.

One political characteristic clearly does not enhance news coverage: belonging to a majority party. Politicians of majority parties do not receive additional coverage, and this pattern remains consistent over earlier studies and more recent studies. Some researchers even find opposite results: members of minority parties receive more coverage (Van Aelst, Maddens et al., 2008; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003) than their counterparts of majority parties. There should be an 'incumbency bonus' for members of majority parties, but research shows that this bonus is exclusively for members who already hold a high function, such as cabinet members, and not for ordinary politicians, such as members of parliament (De Swert & Walgrave, 2002).

***Non-institutional Characteristics*.** Socio-demographic variables such as gender and age were included as control variables in some studies. Concerning gender, eight studies do not find a significant effect, but four do. This inconsistency might be explained by the measurement of political standing. Midtbø (2011), Van Aelst et al. (2008), and Veblen (1981) employed a limited measure of political standing by including a dummy variable of solely one high office function, and Van Aelst and De Swert (2009) do not include political standing in their analyses. Precisely these researchers conclude that women politicians receive less coverage than their male colleagues. The remaining studies included a more elaborate operationalization of political standing and do not find a significant effect of gender. This implies a spurious effect of gender on news coverage, because gender is associated with political standing. When including an exact measurement of political function, women politicians receive approximately the same amount of news coverage. Over time, the novelty of women politicians has waned and the number of women officials has increased. Women have the ability to break through alleged coverage biases, because gender has become only one of many considerations that might influence political news content (Hayes & Lawless, 2013).

Concerning age, Midtbø (2011) and Veblen (1981) conclude that younger politicians receive more coverage, but three other studies did not find an effect. Both studies that find significant effects investigated newspapers coverage, whereas the others examined television news. Surprisingly, being young seems to be an important personal characteristic for making it into newspapers but not for

appearing on television news. All studies also included political tenure in their analyses; thus, effects of age cannot be explained by seniority.

Some recent research has investigated the physical attractiveness of politicians. Being judged as physically attractive is associated with having other socially desirable qualities: Attractive people are considered to be sociable, intelligent, self-assured, and competent (Rosar et al., 2008). These presumed qualities might have a positive effect on getting covered. Tsfati et al. (2010) developed a measurement to gauge physical attractiveness of politicians and found a substantial effect: Good-looking politicians receive more coverage, even when controlling for political standing. Waismel-Manor and Tsfati (2011) replicated these findings in the United States. However, these are two very recent studies, which makes it difficult to decide whether it concerns an enduring robust effect over time.

What a Politician Does

Not only structural features of politicians explain their amount of coverage; their activities might matter as well. Payne (1980) classifies Congress members as either show horses or work horses and finds that politicians who are media savvy and try to get publicity attain more coverage, whereas more committee attendance does not enhance news coverage. According to Payne (1980), variations in personalities explain the differences in their behavior. Show horses tend to be status types who are oriented toward prestige and enjoy public speaking. Work horses are program types; they are preoccupied with substantive policy questions and enjoy participation in the policy-making process.

Political Work. Since media are the main channels through which citizens are informed about the accomplishments of their elected officials, we expect the news media to monitor their institutional work. News coverage should provide the electorate with essential information to hold elected politicians responsible for their political actions or lack thereof (Sheafer, 2008). For that reason, the political work of politicians should matter for news coverage: the more active one is, the more one gets covered. But the seminal work of Payne (1980) suggests that politically very active politicians receive less media attention. Cook (1986) and Squire (1988) replicate Payne's findings and conclude that sponsoring bills and taking trips to districts do not get a politician rewarded with additional coverage. More recent studies do not find a positive effect of parliamentary activity either (Fogarty, 2008, 2012). On the contrary, some find negative effects, with politicians who are politically very active receiving less coverage (Sheafer, 2001; Tsfati et al., 2010). However, five recent studies (Arnold, 2004; Gershon, 2012; Midtbø, 2011; Tresch, 2009; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011) do find a

significant and positive effect of parliamentary activity, although the effect is rather weak. Contrary to studies conducted in the 1980s, most recent studies conclude that political work can matter for coverage. As such, the effect of being a work horse seems to be growing over time, but still remains modest.

Media Work. Studies examining the effect of politicians' media work on news coverage are quite recent and do not allow us to examine changing dynamics over time. This corresponds to the growing impact of media logic, whereby news coverage of politics is increasingly autonomously determined by the media and their criteria (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008). Politicians adapt their activities to media criteria to gain coverage, which has been analyzed only since the beginning of the 21st century.

Media work is a broad term encompassing various aspects of politicians' effort to grab journalists' attention. This is reflected in the studies that include different measures of media work. Most authors focus on press releases and letters sent to journalists (Fogarty, 2012; Gershon, 2012; Midtbø, 2011), but media motivation (Cohen et al., 2008; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007) and charismatic communication skills (e.g. Sheafer, 2001; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006) are also explored. Sheafer (2001) measured charismatic communication skills on several dimensions such as communication innovation and creativity, willingness and ability to cooperate with journalists, and the ability to adjust to the format requirements of specific media.

For the most part, these studies find that politicians who specifically make an effort to get covered do indeed receive more coverage. Politicians who set up interesting pseudo-events, have good contacts with journalists, and send press releases to newsrooms gain additional coverage. Two studies disagree, however (Fogarty, 2008; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011). Both are U.S. studies examining the effect of press releases during nonelection periods. This might indicate that sending press releases does not suffice (anymore), but more thorough media investments such as personal contacts are necessary to get reporters' attention.

Explanations for Inconsistent Findings

The literature review indicates that research concerning news coverage of politicians has been conducted with differing designs, leading to contradictory results and making comparisons difficult.

To account for inconsistencies, we discuss the main variations in research designs and their consequences for the results.

Medium

A first distinction can be made concerning the type of medium. Newspaper coverage differs from television news; they have different formats, goals, and audiences. Television air time is a limited resource, so television news has more constraints than newspapers for covering a large number of politicians (de Vreese, Banducci, Semetko, & Boomgaarden, 2006). Moreover, television is a highly visual medium, and television journalists search for news with good visual resources (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001). Consequently, the appearance and eloquence of politicians might be valued more for television news. Some studies indeed find different results according to the type of medium: politicians from bigger states (Squire, 1988), women politicians (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008), and attractive politicians (Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011) gain more coverage on television news than they do in newspapers.

Second, local media outlets might cover different politicians than national media outlets. Local media workers can follow news content of national newspapers and television stations. But more likely, they follow divergent news routines to select news sources. Their decisions about coverage might hinge less on politicians' political standing and more on their closeness and availability. Furthermore, politicians can maintain closer relations with local reporters from their district, leading to more access and more attention. The relationship is even more symbiotic, because local journalists have fewer political contacts than national journalists and politicians need visibility in their home region to obtain votes (Larson, 1992). Meyrowitz (1994) discusses in this respect two different logics. On the one hand, there is a national journalistic logic that is rather restrictive in covering a narrow set of major politicians. The local journalistic logic, on the other hand, is more open for less-known politicians. Haynes and Murray (1998) and Fogarty (2012) conclude that local and national newspapers have a comparable political content. Midtbø (2011) and Schaffner and Sellers (2003), however, find that local newspapers focus less on politicians with high standing and more on local politicians.

Event

Wolfsfeld and Sheafer (2006) discuss which types of political waves provide opportunities for which political actors. Political waves begin with a triggering event and result in extensive media coverage,

with political actors trying to ride the wave. In closed waves, with more cultural conflict and less news space, individuals closely linked to the story and its conflicts are more likely to get covered. This relates to the concept of 'thematic relevance'—or the extent to which a political actor's position can be linked to the event (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006, p. 339). Journalists thus tend to choose well-established politicians who are knowledgeable about the theme at hand. In more open waves, however, associated with little ideological or cultural conflict, good communication skills and media work can enhance politicians' chances to receive coverage. Open waves thus allow more general access to the news media, with a broader group of politicians making it into the news.

Furthermore, journalistic gatekeeping practices might change when news is event-driven. Event-driven news reports on activities that are not managed by officials in institutional settings, but rather originate spontaneously. Consequently, journalists will rely less on officials for selecting political news content when these unplanned actions occur (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). Event-driven news contrasts with pseudo-events, which are not spontaneous but carefully planned to appeal to journalists. Press conferences are such events staged by officials to facilitate news production routines and deadlines (Livingston & Bennett, 2003). In pseudo-events, political actors with greater political standing will be the main news sources, because they are the principal players concerning the event at hand. However, a trade-off might exist between carefully planning an event and the newsworthiness of the event. During press conferences, officials want to transmit the desired message and attempt to set the topic, but their lengthy and scripted statements are less likely to produce unexpected information or good sound bites. Politicians—especially the less powerful ones—thus should consider the type of event they participate in when trying to get attention. By reducing their control over the content of an event, they enhance the newsworthiness and the freedom of journalists. Less-controlled types of press events are studio interviews or stakeouts when leaving parliamentary hearings (Sellers & Schaffner, 2007).

Election Period

News content is different in election periods compared to routine periods. Political actors are more active to win additional coverage, and the media devote more attention to politics, opening opportunity windows for politicians. Journalists also pay more attention to rules on balance and objectivity (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006), which should lead to a more equal distribution of political news sources during elections. Indeed, during election campaigns, the news media cover more women politicians, more politicians from ethnic minorities, and fewer political leaders (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992).

Moreover, during election periods, other factors come to play, such as campaign spending, the intensity of political campaigns, and election polls (Arnold, 2004). For example, the competitiveness of the race can influence which politicians get covered. Contested races generate more media coverage and show different actors. Representatives who run unopposed receive less coverage than representatives who face a challenger (Arnold, 2004). When they do face a challenger, incumbent candidates generally receive more coverage than their challengers, but in competitive races, the press treats incumbents and challengers as equals (Gershon, 2012; Kahn, 1991). Also candidate performances in polls matter during election campaigns, with most attention going to front-runners (Haynes & Murray, 1998).

Country

Concerning news coverage of individual politicians, only two comparative studies have been conducted. They examined interaction effects between political standing and the political system in a country. Schoenbach and colleagues (2001) compared the Netherlands and Germany and identified two possible influences of the political system: political culture and the amount of parties. The Netherlands has a 'consensus culture' of decision making, because Dutch governments traditionally consist of several ideologically different parties. Related to this, more parties are represented in the Dutch parliament than in the German parliament. The results show that political function is a smaller determinant of news coverage in the Netherlands than in Germany. In Germany, the head of government—the chancellor—and party leaders get almost all coverage, whereas Dutch cabinet members and leaders of Dutch parliamentary party groups also receive a fair amount of coverage. The authors state that the Netherlands has a more equal access approach and Germany has a rather presidential approach.

Negrine (1999) studied Germany and Britain. In Britain, party leaders—especially those of government parties—are becoming increasingly visible in television news. For Germany, he concludes that the chancellor gains most coverage by far. However, he finds that a selection of cabinet members—not party leaders, as Schoenbach et al. (2001) had concluded—come in second place. A possible explanation is the period under investigation: Schoenbach et al. (2001) analyzed election weeks, when party leaders become more prominent, whereas Negrine (1999) examined a routine period. Overall, it appears that certain political functions gain additional coverage according to a country's political system.

In the literature review, 14 U.S. studies and 5 Israeli studies are included, making a comparison within and between these countries possible. Although studies conducted in one single country also apply other research designs, some general conclusions can be made. In both countries, political standing is the most influential variable; being a member of a majority party and gender do not increase coverage in the United States nor in Israel. A more interesting finding concerns the importance of parliamentary work on the one hand and media work on the other. In Israel, media work seems to be more crucial than parliamentary work for getting covered, whereas the reversed pattern occurs in the United States. A plausible explanation can be found in the medium investigated: U.S. studies focus mainly on (local) newspapers, whereas Israeli studies analyze television news more. As mentioned earlier, television is a highly visual medium (Shoemaker et al., 2001), making communication skills and rhetoric more central. Politicians with appealing messages are more likely to become television news sources. Newspapers, on the other hand, have more space to cover substantial policy decisions and therefore write more elaborately about politicians' political accomplishments.

Theoretical Foundations

The literature review reveals much diversity in research designs. Likewise, authors build on various theoretical frameworks, although three main theories come across: (1) news values and news routines, (2) media logic, and (3) media economy.

Most studies (e.g., Cook, 1986; Midtbø, 2011; Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2004; Tresch, 2009) build their theory and hypotheses upon the traditional paradigm of news values and news routines (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Gans, 1979; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Generally, news values determine whether information is worthy of news space, whereas news routines provide procedural shortcuts that reinforce news values and enable news outlets to make timely decisions about newsworthiness (van Dalen, 2012). Galtung and Ruge's (1965) question about how events become news can be applied to our main question: how do political actors become news? The authors listed twelve news values peculiar to how journalists and editors select news. The news value of an event or person is a result of its specific properties, such as elite character, negativity, and unexpectedness.

Not all politicians are equally newsworthy: the more news values a politician displays, the greater his or her newsworthiness. The strong effect of political standing illustrates this. Politicians with high political standing become news sources frequently, which is compatible with four news values. In

selecting news sources, journalists seek officials who occupy authoritative positions in decision-making processes—that is, *elite people*. These powerful politicians have more interesting information to deliver and have the authority to act upon it, which can affect many citizens, making them and their actions *meaningful* (Bennett, 1996). Furthermore, they contribute to the *continuity* of news, because they have been news sources before and their appearance is *consonant* with preexisting ideas of the audience about political processes.

In addition to relying on news values, journalists and editors follow some journalistic routines when covering news, such as rules on fairness, balance, and impartiality (Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009). These rules might change over time, making certain news values more important than others. Changing political and news environments can lead to slightly adjusted selection patterns of political news sources. For example, the threshold for newsworthiness tends to rise when the legislature is in recess, which advantages those who are high in the political hierarchy. During election periods, however, politicians have a more equal chance of getting covered because reporters pay more attention to balanced reporting (Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2004).

News value theory has been criticized for its notion of passive media that automatically respond to external and presumably objective properties of events. Media organizations act not passively, but their news decisions reflect the media's own working mechanisms, preferences, and interests (Tresch, 2009), as media logic theories as well as media market theories assert.

The second theory is media logic. Altheide and Snow (1979, p. 10) introduced the concept of 'media logic' which determines "*how material is organized, the style in which it is presented . . . and the grammar of media communication*". Events, actors, and media frames need to fit the medium and lead to good stories. The structure of a good story highlights colorful events, fiction-like storylines, strategy, and personalities (Sheafer, 2001). Studies building on media logic (e.g., Cohen et al., 2008; Sheafer, 2001; Van Aelst et al., 2008) assume that politicians who attend to production needs and requirements of media organizations have a better chance of getting covered. This is in line with our finding that media work matters for gaining publicity.

A third approach in studies of news coverage of politicians concerns media economy and the media market. News organizations are seen as rational economic actors who balance two elements: the cost of attaining information on the actor and the benefit from reporting this information to the public. They have limited time, space, and resources and select news to serve their own purposes and market interests. In an ever more competitive media market, news organizations try to respond

to the preferences of the audience to attract their attention (Fogarty, 2008; Tresch, 2009). One way of doing so is to turn to legislators from their own market district. Studies show that parliamentarians may win more coverage when their districts are highly congruent with the media market of a news organization (Fogarty, 2008; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003).

Conclusion and Discussion

By conducting a literature review and explaining inconsistencies, this article contributes to the discussion about which politicians pass the news gates. In this conclusion, we put forth what we currently know, discuss what is still missing, and suggest how to resolve these issues.

Overall, journalists follow 'the trail of power' (Bennett, 1996). Politicians with prominent political positions can be guaranteed a firm place in the news spotlight. When selecting political news sources, the news media are thus rather passive channels of information distribution that follow and reinforce existing hierarchical structures. This process ultimately leads to "*a self-perpetuating cycle of coverage and influence*" (Tresch, 2009, p. 85). However, political power is not always equally important. Depending on the type of medium, the type of event, and the time period, journalists may diverge from the trail of power. This emphasizes the necessity to pay attention to interactions between politicians and the characteristics of the news media. Politicians who cannot rely on high political standing can adapt to media logic as a compensation mechanism for their lower news value. Media logic plays a role in dividing attention between political actors, but only as an additional mechanism when political power does not suffice. Political actors have come to understand media logic, and they adjust their actions and decisions to it—a tactic often labeled as 'mediatization' of politics (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999).

Despite these general findings, the studies also display contradictive results. We analyzed which inconsistencies are present, how to explain them, and what is still missing. We conclude that four features of research designs account for inconsistent results: the medium, the type of event, the period, and the country. Depending on these features, some determinants of news coverage become more important, whereas the effect of others declines. This finding emphasizes the significance of interaction effects between micro-, meso-, and macro-level elements. However, interactive patterns between features of politicians have been ignored so far. Likewise, authors mainly test linear effects while neglecting the possible existence of nonlinear effects on news coverage. Both patterns can be relevant, though, and connect to the theory of news values. The presence, absence, or combination

of certain news values can modify news source selection. As Galtung and Ruge (1965, p. 71) state: "*These twelve factors are not independent of each other: there are interesting inter-relations between them*".

In addition to the need for a focus on interactive and nonlinear patterns, some other recommendations for future research can be made. First, researchers must incorporate political function in their designs to rule out spurious relations. Political standing influences news coverage and thus needs to be controlled when analyzing other determinants of coverage of politicians.

Second, much research has been done on the micro-level of individual politicians. However, how politicians can use new and social media to gain news coverage has not been analyzed yet and thus should be incorporated in future studies. Political actors can apply new media such as websites to attract coverage in traditional media (Lipinski & Neddenriep, 2004). Today, journalists and politicians are increasingly communicating through online social platforms such as Twitter, which might change media access and coverage patterns. After all, the majority of tweets from politicians appear to be mini press releases including links with further descriptions on the topic (Golbeck, Grimes, & Rogers, 2010).

Third, and concerning the meso-level, academics need to focus on journalists in addition to organizational factors. In general, journalists base their decisions of newsworthiness on implicitly shared news norms. These news values are not binding, however, and reporters' subjective beliefs might influence their judgments. Their predispositions can lead to selective attention, selective perception, and selective retention (Donsbach, 2004). News events consistent with journalists' own opinions are attributed a higher news value (Kepplinger, Brosius, & Staab, 1991), and applied to news sources, we can expect that journalists and editors more often select political actors who share their opinions. Socio-demographics also might influence professional decisions. New journalists have diverse beliefs and priorities consistent with their gender, age, and ethnicity, which can lead to a different socialization into the workplace. For example, news from women reporters consists of a more women sources (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Wagner, 2010).

Finally, more comparative research is needed. Countries have specific news content according to their political system, political culture, and media system. The research of Balmas and Sheafer (2013) on political personalization reveals the growing importance of individuals in contemporary political institutions as well as in news coverage. They argue for an international perspective on news coverage of political leaders, where different news values and country features have a combined

influence on the construction of political news. Research in related domains indicates political system features worthwhile to investigate concerning news coverage of politicians, such as the number of seats in parliament, the strength of parliament (van Dalen, 2012; Vliegenthart, Boomgaarden, Van Aelst, & de Vreese, 2010), and the strength of parties.

To conclude, we remark that this study explains news coverage of politicians by means of a literature review. We attempt to decipher why factors are significant in some studies and not in others by comparing studies, but we do not include additional data collection or hypothesis testing. The study is thus speculative in nature. However, the literature review and speculations are valuable as a relevant starting point for further hypothesis testing to explain inconsistencies in the research on news coverage of politicians.

Endnotes

[1] Seven keywords were identified: *news, media, coverage, attention, politician, candidate,* and *political actor*. Several combinations of these keywords were entered into search engines of suitable databases: Communication Abstracts, Communication & Mass Media Complete, and Web of Science. This resulted in a first group of seven articles. Then each citation and all references in these seven articles were scanned. Other articles of the found authors were checked to verify whether they qualified for inclusion. This search resulted in additional articles, which in turn were scanned for citations, references, and similar work by the author(s). A last additional search was conducted by entering the keywords in Google Scholar.

Chapter Two

How Media Logic and Political Logic Determine Media Visibility of Politicians.
A Comparative Study of Politicians in the News in Sixteen Countries.

This chapter is accepted as a conference paper:

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How Media Logic and Political Logic Determine Media Visibility of Politicians.

A Comparative Study of Politicians in the News in Sixteen Countries.

Introduction

News media connect political actors and citizens. By appearing in the mass media a politician can reach such a large audience at once, and therefore it is an important way to complement traditional meetings and direct contact. Besides for electoral advantages, politicians utilize news coverage for multiple reasons ranging from influencing peers during legislative processes, over publically damaging political opponents, to enhancing their position within the party (Van Aelst et al., 2010; Meyer, 2002). Therefore political actors are eager to get their fair share of media exposure. However, few things in life are so unequally distributed as media attention: a small amount of politicians gets the bulk of attention, while the large majority gets little or nothing (Wolfsfeld, 2011). The driving force behind this inequality is political power: those politicians that have a lot of power also dominate the news coverage. As a general rule, we can say that "*political power can usually be translated into power over the news media*" (Wolfsfeld, 2011, p. 9). High-standing officials have better media access and get plenty of news coverage, which then again can raise their power in the political system. This ultimately results in a self-perpetuating cycle of political influence and news coverage (Tresch, 2009).

Political power and media access are clearly closely related to one another, which has been confirmed in several Western countries. Studies in the U.S (e.g. Cook, 1986; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011), Israel (e.g. Cohen et al., 2008; Sheafer, 2001; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006), Germany (Schoenbach et al., 2001), Belgium (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008), Switzerland (Tresch, 2009) and Norway (Midtbø, 2011) indicate that political journalists across Western democracies are guided by 'the trail of power'. However, political power is diverted differently within different countries. The country-specific power hierarchy results in an equivalent media hierarchy with certain political positions being more visible in the news media than others (Hopmann, de Vreese, et al., 2011; De Swert & Walgrave, 2002). For example, German news media focus mainly on the head of government whereas in the Netherlands also cabinet members and party leaders get a substantial amount of attention. The consensus culture in the Netherlands results in a more equal distribution of power within the political system and consequently a more

equal access approach by the news media (Schoenbach et al., 2001). Some other studies as well conclude that the political system, the electoral system and the corresponding power hierarchy in a country determine the media visibility of politicians (Boumans et al., 2013; Hallin & Mancini, 1984; Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014; Kriesi, 2012; Negrine, 1999).

These comparative studies indicate the relevance of comparing media attention of politicians with various positions - each with their own political relevance in a country - across countries. However, all studies are two-country case studies – except for Kriesi (2012) who compared six Western democracies – that remain largely descriptive. They speculate about aspects of the political and the media system that can explain differences found between the two countries, but they do not test their expectations systematically. To actually explain the influence of system characteristics on news coverage it is necessary "*to include a larger number of case studies, so enabling us to better isolate and test the different variables at play*" (Holtz-Bacha et al., 2014, p. 168). This is exactly the goal of this study: first, to examine how news coverage is distributed among politicians with different political positions across many countries and second, to investigate systematically how we can explain this cross-national variation in news coverage. We use the concepts of media logic and political logic to clarify how news media across countries follow 'the trail of power'. By employing the conceptualization of media logic by Esser (2013), we analyze whether technological aspects – such as the format of the medium – and commercial aspects – such as commercialization of the media market – influence the professional aspects guiding journalists, in this case the news value of power. In the same vein for political logic, we scrutinize whether the polity dimension, which concerns a country's institutional framework, influences which politicians get covered.

This study adds to previous comparative studies by analyzing an existing dataset of sixteen countries – fourteen European countries as well as Israel and the U.S. We examine the news coverage of four groups of politicians according to their political position in a country: the head of government, cabinet members, party leaders and 'ordinary' politicians such as members of parliament and members of established parties. These four positions are apparent in all sixteen democracies and thus allow for a thorough comparative analysis of their news coverage.

Explaining Media Visibility across Countries

Political function is the main determinant when explaining the distribution of news coverage of politicians (see Vos, 2014 for overview). This results in a highly skewed distribution of news media

coverage: powerful politicians – being the head of government and the cabinet members – receive the bulk of attention whereas the large group of other politicians have to compete against each other to get covered in the news. Journalists' preference for covering high-standing officials can largely be explained by news value theory (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Important news values such as power elite, relevance and impact on the country raise the newsworthiness of political news sources. Journalists presume – correctly – that what politicians in leading positions say and do is more newsworthy than the words and actions of average political actors. Powerful politicians have an "inherent' news value and better media access because they are highly relevant in society: their decisions and actions are consequential for citizens and the country as a whole (van Dalen, 2012; Schoenbach et al., 2001). As a result, they have *habitual access* to the news media. Weaker politicians however lack this habitual access and have to rely on *disruptive access* to the news media. They need to convince journalists of their newsworthiness by doing something outrageous or challenging those in power (Molotch & Lester, 1974; Wolfsfeld, 2011).

However, looking in a comparative manner at news coverage of politicians indicates that media attention is more skewed in some countries than others (Boumans et al., 2013; Kriesi, 2012; Schoenbach et al., 2001). We employ the concepts of both media logic and political logic to explain differences in the amount of news coverage across countries. First, media attention of politicians might be more equally distributed when news media are guided less by media logic and the news value of power. Media outlet and media system characteristics can determine the extent to which the news value of power is dominant in news content. Second, journalists might follow 'the trail of power', but do this according to a more balanced distribution of political power in a country, which is determined by political logic. When political power is more equally distributed across several political actors, less powerful politicians have a better shot at making it into the news.

Media Logic

Media logic refers to the use of news values and storytelling techniques by the news media when selecting and presenting political news content. The media take advantage of their own medium and format in order to be competitive in the ongoing struggle for people's attention, which for example leads to more personalized coverage, horse race coverage and negative coverage of politics (Strömback, 2008). Media logic can be seen as a hybrid concept that combines three sub-concepts: professional aspects, technological aspects and commercial aspects (Esser, 2013). Our focus on the news value of political power relates to the professional aspects as they indicate media's growing autonomy from outside influences and reliance on a distinct set of professional norms such as news

values. However, we assume that the significance of media logic – and thus the importance of the news value of power – is contingent upon the two other aspects of media logic: technological aspects and commercial aspects. The former signifies the medium-specific technological conditions of the news media whereas the latter relates to their economic motivations.

The technological aspects relate to communication technologies that shape news production processes and the eventual news content. The physical nature of the information technology of print, television and internet media translates political reality into specific story formats. For example, television formats are more visual, more affective and less cognitively complex (Esser, 2013), which is supposed to lead to a greater focus on political leaders. Moreover, newspapers generally have more political news than does television news as they have fewer constraints in terms of available space and production costs (de Vreese et al., 2006). As a result, newspapers reporters are able to include a wide variety of political news sources in their articles which ultimately benefits less powerful politicians. Television news is more limited in time and thus more restrictive. We also consider online news as a third type of media outlet. Audiences for newspapers and television news are on a downwards trend as citizens are increasingly relying on the Internet for political news (Gurevitch et al., 2009). Compared to traditional mass media, online news websites are thought to be less selective. The rise of different types of online news media is expected to result in a growing diversity in news reporting (Barnhurst, 2010; Humprecht & Büchel, 2013). We therefore assume that also online news websites will provide a public forum for ordinary politicians more than television broadcasts do.

> *H1a: Media visibility of politicians is more equally distributed in newspapers compared to television news.*

> *H1b: Media visibility of politicians is more equally distributed in online news websites compared to television news.*

Next to the professional and the technological aspects, commercial aspects are a third sub-concept of media logic. Whereas Western media systems have become more detached from the political system, they have lost autonomy to the market. Commercialization and competitive market pressures lead to a shift from social responsibility-oriented concerns to profit-maximizing goals, which has several consequences for political news content such as dramatization, infotainment and personalization. One way of maximizing audiences and profits is to put greater focus on individual politicians and mostly on the limited number of powerful elite politicians. Commercial news media

try to explain political institutions to their audience by concentrating on the central role of leading politicians. For the audience the news is more 'familiar', more easy to relate to as it can be linked to politicians they already know (Karvonen, 2010). This higher degree of identification might be in particular relevant for citizens with a lower degree of political knowledge and political interest (Strömbäck, 2010).

Competitive market pressures are thus expected to narrow the range of political voices presented in the news. We analyze the effect of media competition on the (meso) level of media outlets, and on the (macro) level of media systems. First, the ownership structure of media outlets defines their degree of commercialization to a certain extent. Public broadcasts are thought to be less commercialized compared to private television broadcasts and newspapers which are more steered by profit-making goals. Although public broadcasts as well need to maximize audiences in the increasingly competitive media market, they also have public service obligations of impartial, high-quality coverage (de Vreese, 2001). We expect public broadcast services to focus less on political leaders solely, but to provide a public forum for ordinary politicians and oppositional voices as well to obtain balanced reporting. Second, the overall degree of competition in the media system might influence which politicians appears in the news. When media competition is more apparent in a country, all media outlets – both public and private – will be inclined to cover even more top leaders to attract a larger audience within the highly competitive media market. In literature on the 'presidentialization' trend for example, the emergence and proliferation of multiple television channels is often cited as one of the main causes of the greater focus on political leaders (Poguntke & Webb, 2005)

> *H2a: Media visibility of politicians is more equally distributed in public broadcast services than in commercial media outlets.*

> *H2b: Media visibility of politicians is more equally distributed in less competitive media systems.*

Political Logic

The political world is governed by a political logic shaping the processes of distributing political power and decision making. Just as media logic, the concept of political logic can be broken down into three sub-concepts (Esser, 2013). First, there are policy aspects that constitute the 'production' side of politics such as legislation output. The second sub-concept deals with politics aspects which

are more power-oriented and refer to the 'self-presentational' side of politics. This sub-concept thus relates to the power hierarchy in a country. Lastly – and overarching both previous aspects – there are polity aspects: the institutional framework that molds policy and politics. If institutional rules contribute to a higher degree of power sharing across multiple actors and institutions, we expect media attention of politicians with different position to be more equally divided as well.

Power sharing is at the heart of Lijpharts seminal work on consensus democracies. The distribution of political power is the primary issue in his classification of majoritarian democracies and consensus democracies. Majoritarian democracies are characterized by a one-party cabinet, the dominance of the executive over the legislative, a plurality or majority electoral system and a unitary state structure, which ultimately results in the concentration of power. In consensus democracies on the other hand power is more diffused due to the multi-party government, balance of power between the executive and legislative, a proportional electoral system and a federal structure (Lijphart, 2012). To explain the distribution of media visibility of politicians across countries, we take into account three main indicators of consensus democracies: coalition cabinets, federalism and proportional election systems.

Lijphart (2012) regards the difference between one-party majority governments and broad multiparty coalitions as the most typical variable in the majoritarian – consensus distinction. The distinction exemplifies the contrast between the majoritarian principle of concentrating power in the hands of the majority and the consensus principle of power-sharing. Moreover, when several ideologically different parties are obliged to collaborate, the necessity of compromise and the degree of pluralism increases (Schoenbach et al., 2001). Having a majoritarian cabinet or a coalition cabinet also impacts the power of the head of government in particular: they are more powerful in countries with a majoritarian government (Lijphart, 2012). For this reason, we expect that the head of government will be highly visible in democracies with a majoritarian cabinet such as the U.S. On the contrary, in countries with large coalition governments such as Belgium and Switzerland there will be less focus on the head of government with other politicians being more visible in the news media as well.

> *H3: Media visibility of politicians is more equally distributed in countries with a coalition government.*

Decentralization of a country is another typical method of dividing power as it results in power sharing between various levels of government. In countries with a federal structure such as Germany

and Switzerland, all distinctive population groups are included and autonomous to a certain degree. This segmental autonomy implies that each segment can organize its life and working according to their own principles (Deschouwer, 2009). More practically, federalism implies that a substantial portion of power will be exercised at the regional level next to the national level (Lijphart, 2012). As the degree of federalism is a major indicator of power sharing in the political system, we expect that media attention will be more equally divided across several types of politicians and is not concentrated on the head of government and the government members.

> *H4: Media visibility of politicians is more equally distributed in countries with a higher degree of federalism.*

The last indicator of power sharing democracies relates to the distinction between majority or mixed electoral systems on the one hand and proportional representation systems on the other. Majority and plurality methods fit perfectly the majoritarian philosophy of power concentration: "*the winner takes it all*". On the contrary, the basic goal of proportional representation is to translate votes into seats proportionally to ensure that both majorities and minorities in society are sufficiently represented (Lijphart, 1999).

> *H5: Media visibility of politicians is more equally distributed in countries with a proportional election system.*

Data and Method

Our analyses are based on an international dataset provided by the Network of Political Communication Scholars (NEPOCS). This network worked closely together to study the content of political news in sixteen Western democracies. We will briefly explain the process of data gathering with a clear focus on the data of individual politicians that are central in this paper.

Sampling

NEPOCS conducted a large scale news media content analysis in sixteen Western democracies: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US[1]. For each of these countries, three newspapers and two television news broadcasters were sampled, together with their respective

news websites. Regarding the newspapers, the two most popular broadsheet newspapers in each country were selected; one politically left-of-centre and one politically right-of-centre. Most European countries have a long tradition of broadsheets being connected to a specific political leaning, although this has diminished over the last decades. Additionally, the main tabloid newspaper from each country was included. Regarding television news, from each country the most widely watched public service broadcast and commercial news broadcast were selected. Finally, also the online news sites of all these established newspapers and television broadcasters were sampled. This makes ten media outlets for each of the countries, adding up to 160 sampled media outlets in total [2]. The selected outlets were content analyzed during routine times and more specifically during a constructed period of 14 days in total, stretching from 15 April to 15 July 2012. This way, special events occurring in only one or a few countries do not distort the sample. There were three exceptions regarding the sampling period: France, Greece and the Netherlands. In these three cases, elections were held in the above-mentioned period and therefore, the sampling took place in the period of 15 September to 15 December 2012.

Content Analysis

The unit of analysis for the content analysis is the news item. News items are easy to define in newspapers: each article is a separate news item. For television, news items were distinguished based upon their topic: if the topic changes, a new news item begins. However, when 'packages' of news items deal with the same topic, a new news items starts if the format changes, for example from an interview by the reporter to a studio debate. Concerning websites, we treated news items as consisting of text, text with a visual or text with a video. For each of these outlets, a news item was included for analysis when it contained at least one domestic political actor (also including political parties and political institutions). This means that international political news was only included if a domestic political actor was present. When more than five (three for websites) news items with a domestic political actor were identified in a specific outlet on a specific day, a random draw of five (three for websites) news items was chosen amongst all qualified news items. For each news item, up to five actors, including ordinary citizens, societal groups etc. were coded. In total, more than 7,500 news items were coded in which more than 28,000 sources appeared.

Inter-coder Reliability

As it is a major challenge to guarantee inter-coder reliability in comparative research, in particular given the many different languages covered by this study, several steps have been taken to ensure

inter-coder reliability. In a first step, the codebook was tested on English-language material to ensure a common understanding of how to apply the codebook across countries. Second, local coders were recruited and trained. The coders were native speakers, but mostly had sufficient English knowledge to use the codebook in English. In some counties the codebook was translated to the language of the country under study. To ensure a common understanding of concepts across countries, the coder training began with one English-language set of testing material used in all countries. In the subsequent third step, the local coders performed the coding of the sampled news items[3]. In a final step, we tested the inter-coder reliability based on English-language material after the country-specific coding had been completed. Using five news examples, this test was performed by the coders who had completed the country-specific content analyses. Overall, the inter-coder reliability is sufficient in each country with Fretwurst's *lotus* ranging from 0.73 to 0.88 and a country average of 0.83. The inter-coder reliability of the actors is 0.94 across countries.

Data

For this study, we use the domestic individual politicians from all 28,000 coded actors. There were 10,022 individual politicians coded. These sources were categorized according to their political function. The first category contains the main political leader of each country. In 13 countries this is the prime minister. In France, Switzerland and the US the president is the head of government. The second category are national cabinet members, which includes all ministers and state secretaries except the head of government. In the Belgian case, we also included Flemish cabinet members in this category[4]. The third category comprises all party leaders in the sixteen countries[5]. In case a party leader holds a double mandate – some party leaders are also prime minister or a cabinet member – we choose to categorize him or her according to the highest political function. This applied to some party leaders in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK. A consequence of this decision might be an under-representation of party leaders. Yet, we argue that these politicians acquire their political relevance – and their newsworthiness – mainly from being the head of government or a cabinet member, which justifies our decision. Lastly, there is the category of ordinary politicians which include members of parliament, members of established national parties, leaders of parliament, etc. The dependent variable in the analysis consists of the sum of news appearances of all politicians in each of the four categories, and this for each type of medium.

Some of the independent variables need some further explanation. We operationalized the degree of competition of the media system by including the number of nation-wide available television

channels, as measured by the European Audiovisual Observatory, and corrected it for the amount of citizens within the country. The type of government cabinet was operationalized by including the amount of parties in the government. The degree of federalism in a country was measured by means of Lijphart's (1999) *Federalism Index,* ranging from low (1) to high degree of federalism (5). Finally, for the type of electoral system, we distinguish between majority or mixed electoral systems on the one hand and proportional electoral systems on the other. The US, the UK, France and Germany belong to the first category, whereas the remaining twelve countries reside in the second category of proportional systems. Table 2.1. below shows the descriptives of the dependent and independent variables.

Table 2.1. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable		Mean	SD	Min	Max
Dependent variable					
Media visibility		15.66	12.43	0	83
Independent variables					
Television competition		7.42	4.73	2.3	22.7
Federalism		2.82	1.44	1	5
Coalition parties		2.94	1.79	0	7
Variable	**Category**	**%**			
Media outlet	Television news	20			
	Newspapers	30			
	News websites	50			
Type of broadcast	Public	50			
	Commercial	50			
Electoral system	Majority/Mixed	25			
	Proportional	75			

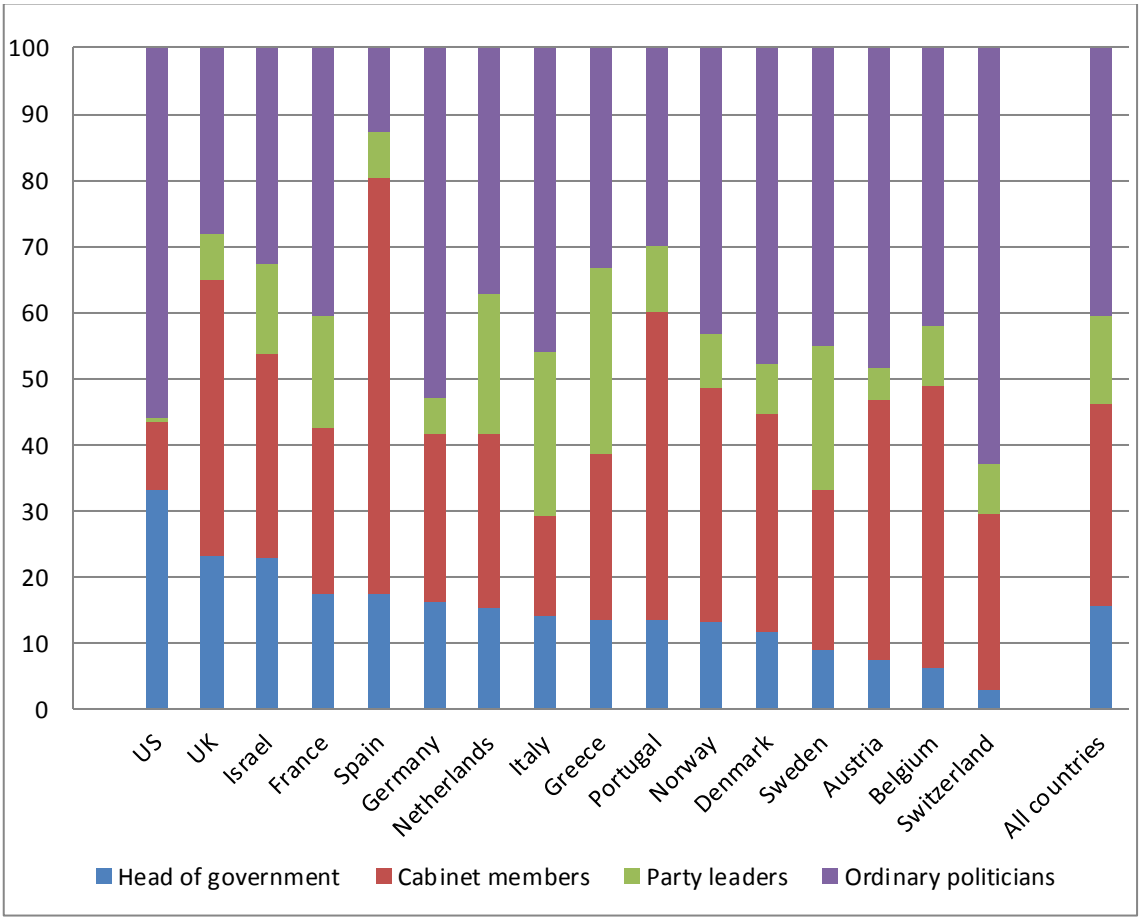
Analysis

Because of the multi-layered structure of our data (politicians are nested within media outlets which are nested within countries) and a skewed dependent variable (range: 0 – 83; mean: 15.7; SD: 12.4), we employ multilevel mixed-effects Poisson regressions for estimating our model. The dependent variable is a count variable for each of the four groups of politicians (head of government, cabinet members, party leaders and ordinary politicians) in each of the 160 media outlets, which results in an N of 640. The Log Likelihood of the 'empty' model and the 'full' model are reported as well as the remaining variance on the level of media outlets and countries.

Results

In a first step we compare cross-nationally how media visibility of politicians is distributed according to their political function. Figure 2.1. shows per country the relative appearance of each function compared to all other functions and offers a first impression of differences across countries.

Figure 2.1. Media Visibility of Politicians by Function and Country (in %)



On the whole, the head of government occupies more than 15 per cent of the total coverage of individual politicians. This means that sixteen persons – one head of government for each country – accounted for no less than 1,500 out of the approximately 10,000 media appearances by politicians. However, the media visibility of the head of government differs greatly across countries. While the president in Switzerland (3%) and the prime minister of Belgium[6] (6%), Austria (7%) and Sweden (9%) appear not that often in the news media, the prime minister in the U.K (23%) and Israel (23%) and in particular the U.S. president (33%) are very prominent actors in the news. Figure 2.1. shows that also cabinet members gain plenty of coverage: almost one out of three (31%) political news sources is a

cabinet member. Here as well, there is a wide variation across countries. In the U.S., cabinet members take up 'merely' 10 per cent of the news appearances of politicians, and in Italy it is only slightly higher with 15 per cent. In Spain on the other hand, cabinet members dominate the news with more than six out of ten (63%) politicians in the news being a member of the government. Also in Portugal (47%), Belgium (43%) and the U.K. (42%) cabinet members are strong news sources. Next, we see that party leaders occupy 13 per cent of all mentions of politicians, which is fairly high given that this is a group of around eight politicians – on average - for each country. Party leaders are most prominent in Greece (28%) and Italy (25%) and clearly the least prominent in the U.S. (1%) where they almost never appear as a news source. Also in Austria (5%) and Germany[7] (6%), party leaders are less visible compared to their counterparts in other Western countries. The remaining group of ordinary politicians makes up 40 per cent of all politicians mentioned in the news. This large share should of course be related to the size of this group. Put differently: the government leader and the cabinet members together (46%) appear more often in the news than all ordinary politicians (40%), which includes a much larger group of politicians. Ordinary politicians are least visible in Spain (13%) whereas Swiss media show ordinary politician most often (63%) which fits with Switzerland still being a prototype of a strong consensus democracy (Vatter & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2013). Ordinary politicians are also highly visible in the US (56%). Because of the country's two-party system, US media balance their coverage between the president and government on the one hand and their opposition in parliament on the other (Hopmann, et al., 2014). US congress members also have more freedom and opportunities to block government policy than most of the European parliamentarians.

Overall, figure 2.1. indicates that each country has its own specific media hierarchy with certain positions being more prominent than others. To come to a more systematic explanation of these differences in the media prominence of politicians, we take into account several indicators of media and political logic. Table 2.2. shows the results of the multilevel Poisson regression. To compare the effect of various variables, we display the incidence-rate ratios (IRR) which indicate a negative effect when below 1 and a positive effect when above 1. The model includes both direct effects and interaction effects, but only the interaction effects are displayed as they provide answers to our hypotheses and it enhances the clarity of the table.

Table 2.2. Explaining Media Visibility of Politicians across Countries

	IRR	SE
MEDIA LOGIC		
Function * Media outlet (Ref.: HoS - television)		
Cabinet member * Newspapers	1.20	0.12
Cabinet member * News websites	1.15	0.10
Party leader * Newspapers	0.99	0.12
Party leader * News websites	1.06	0.11
Ordinary politician * Newspapers	1.38 ***	0.13
Ordinary politician * News websites	1.42 ***	0.13
Function * Public broadcast (Ref.: HoS)		
Cabinet members	1.30 **	0.12
Party leaders	1.16	0.13
Ordinary politicians	1.09	0.10
Function * Television competition (Ref.: HoS)		
Cabinet members	0.93 ***	0.01
Party leaders	0.95 ***	0.01
Ordinary politicians	0.93 ***	0.01
POLITICAL LOGIC		
Function * Coalition cabinet (Ref.: HoS)		
Cabinet members	1.17 ***	0.03
Party leaders	1.13 ***	0.03
Ordinary politicians	1.13 ***	0.02
Function * Federalism (Ref.: HoS)		
Cabinet members	0.95 *	0.02
Party leaders	0.71 ***	0.02
Ordinary politicians	1.07 **	0.02
Function * Proportional system (Ref.: HoS)		
Cabinet members	2.21 ***	0.15
Party leaders	2.95 ***	0.26
Ordinary politicians	1.84 ***	0.12
Constant	19.91 ***	4.15
Log Likelihood (empty model: -3690.64)	-2336.22	
Variance		
Country level (empty model: 0.07)	0.04	
Outlet level (empty model: 0.11)	0.06	

Note: Multilevel mixed-effects Poisson Regression of media visibility per media outlet and per function. N(actors) = 640; N(media outlets) = 160; N(Countries) = 16. * p< .05; ** p< .01; *** p< .001.

Note: We tested for multicollinearity for the three independent variables concerning the political system, but no problems arise (VIF < 1.3). We also ran models with less independent variables, but no big changes occur.

The analytical model above includes the interaction effects between the independent variables which allows to test our hypotheses. We hypothesized that two indicators of media logic would decrease the impact of the news value of power which leads to a more equal distribution of media visibility among different political functions: the type of media and the degree of competition. Our first hypothesis concerning the type of media outlet is confirmed: ordinary politicians have a better shot at making it into newspapers (H1a) or online news (H1b) compared to television news. More precisely, the IRR coefficient indicates that their chances to appear in the news raise with respectively 30 per cent and 36 per cent when it comes to newspapers and news websites. The results only partly support our second expectation concerning the degree of commercialization of news outlets and the degree of competition in the media system. When it comes to the distinction between public broadcasts and privately owned media outlets (H2a), the effect does not go in the expected direction. Whereas it was hypothesized that public broadcast services would focus less on top political leaders such as cabinet members and thereby granting more space to ordinary politicians, this is not confirmed in the analysis. What's more, they cover cabinet members even more frequently than other media outlets do. In the discussion we elaborate on this unexpected finding. What is confirmed is hypothesis 2b: when the media system is highly competitive the news media focus to a greater extent on the head of government and show significantly less the other political functions. It thus appears that media visibility is less equally distributed when media systems are more competitive.

Opposite to media logic aspects, a strong political logic can lead to a more equal media visibility distribution. We hypothesized that when power within a democracy is more equally distributed this will be reflected in the distribution of media visibility of politicians. A first indicator of power sharing is the distinction between majoritarian cabinets and large coalition cabinets. Our expectation (H3) that news media in countries with a larger number of government parties will have a more equal access approach gets confirmed. Cabinet members, party leaders and ordinary politicians are all more visible in the news media compared to the head of government when the country has a larger coalition cabinet. A second variable characterizing consensus democracies is the degree of federalism and decentralization. The results are only partly consistent with hypothesis four: ordinary politicians are indeed more visible in the news media in federalized countries where power is shared across various government levels, but this does not apply to cabinet members and party leaders who get significantly less news coverage in those democracies. Consistent with our last hypothesis (H5), media visibility of politicians is differently distributed in countries with a proportional election system compared to majority systems. In majoritarian systems power is concentrated in the hands of the head of government, resulting in additional coverage of this person. In proportional systems on the

other hand, power is shared among several political functions and this is mirrored in news coverage: cabinet members, party leaders and ordinary politicians are more visible in countries with a proportional election system than with a majoritarian system. Although all three types of politicians get significant more coverage, the coefficient for party leaders is the highest. This might indicate that in proportional election system, with more fragmented party systems, in particular party leaders play a more central role compared to majoritarian systems.

Conclusion and Discussion

The central idea in this study is that journalists across modern democracies all apply the universal news value of political power when selecting political news sources which ultimately results in a highly unequal distribution of media visibility: a few powerful politicians receive the bulk of media attention whereas a large remaining group of politicians hardly make it into the news. However, some recent two-country comparisons have shown that news outlets in certain democracies have a more equal access when covering politicians compared to other countries. In this study, we employ a large-scale content analysis of television news, newspapers and online news websites in sixteen countries to examine media visibility of politicians with different institutional functions across Western democracies. Our goal was twofold: first look into variation in media visibility across countries and next explain this variation systematically. We speculated that aspects of both media logic and political logic influence the distribution of politicians in the news. When journalists are less guided by media logic and thus the news value of power, we expected that they would focus less on the most powerful politicians. On the other hand, if they do follow 'the trail of power', we need to look at the concept of political logic and power sharing: if political power is distributed more equally in a country, media coverage will probably be as well.

First, media visibility of politicians might be explained by the type of news media. As expected, newspapers and online news websites offer more space to ordinary politicians compared to television news. Because these types of medium are less restricted in space, they can show a greater variety of news sources which benefits less powerful political actors. A second clear result is the media dominance of the head of government in countries with a highly competitive television market, such as the US and the UK, which of course implies that other politicians in these countries encounter difficulties in making it into the news. Whereas commercialization and competitiveness indeed raise the dominance of media logic when looking at the media system as a whole, this does not apply at the level of media outlet. Public broadcasts, in general being less guided by commercial

goals, do not show a broader spectrum of politicians than private media outlets do and even cover more cabinet members compared to private outlets. Two explanations might clarify this finding. First, some studies indicate a growing convergence between public and private broadcasts. To maintain their market share, public broadcasts adapt to the market pressures and take over the strategies commercial outlets employ to enlarge their audiences (Hopmann, de Vreese, et al., 2011; Schoenbach et al., 2001). In our case, this means that they also rely more on the news value of power and thus cover well-known politicians the audience can relate to. Second, it appears that public broadcasts do still differ from commercial outlets in one respect; news coverage of cabinet members. It could be that public broadcast services are still less autonomous from government which leads to additional coverage of government members. Public broadcasts are often labeled as being agenda-senders who communicate the political agenda of the government to the audience. Commercial media outlets on the other hand are thought to be agenda-setters as they act more pragmatically and cover what they judge as being newsworthy for the audience (Semetko & Canel, 1997).

Next, we take into account how the polity aspects of political logic determine the degree of power sharing in a country and analyze three indicators. As expected, coalition cabinets and proportional election systems lead to a more equally distributed media visibility with more attention for party leaders and also ordinary politicians, such as parliamentarians. Decentralization on the other hand does not entirely fit our expectations. Ordinary politicians indeed make it more into the news in countries with a federal structure, but cabinet members and especially party leaders cannot benefit from it.

This study adds to earlier research on news coverage of politicians by analyzing sixteen Western democracies. Whereas previous research was based mainly on the comparisons of a few cases, we were able to examine structural effects of media and political systems across countries. As our results indicate it is worthwhile including country characteristics as they contribute to explain the variation in media visibility of domestic politicians. However, we only looked at a snapshot in time. It would be valuable for future research to analyze longitudinal trends cross-nationally and detect and clarify changes over time. Moreover, we probably would have drawn other conclusions if we would have analyzed election periods instead of routine times. During election campaigns the news media devote more attention to politics thereby offering more opportunities for politicians with a message. Additionally, journalists put a greater focus on creating balanced news, giving more politicians a fair amount of attention (Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009). On the other hand elections offer a clear competition between a few players for the highest power positions. Horse-race coverage often prefers to focus on a limited amount of leading actors (Zeh & Hopmann, 2013). In sum, it would be

relevant to study how the distribution of media attention for different types of politicians changes between campaign periods and routine periods across countries.

We thus conclude that taking into account both media logic and political logic contributes to our understanding of news coverage of politicians across countries. Literature on the 'mediatization' of politics mentions the gradual takeover of media logic as the guiding principal in political communication at the expense of political logic (Esser, 2013; Meyer, 2002). This study however shows that in addition to the growing dominance of media logic, political logic still guides journalists and editors in their selection of politicians. In general, the country-specific political power hierarchy is largely reflected in the media hierarchy in the same country.

Endnotes

[1] For Belgium only Flemish parties and news outlets are included in the analyses. Similarly, for Switzerland only German-language media outlets are included.

[2] See appendix for a detailed overview of the sampled media outlets.

[3] The content analyses of the US data was conducted by native English speakers residing in the UK.

[4] Belgium is a strongly federalized state with large competences at the regional level such as education, environment and foreign trade. The regions manage more than half of the total government's budget and the Flemish parliament deals with more than half of the Belgian population (Deschouwer, 2009; Swenden, Brans, & De Winter, 2006). Flemish cabinet members are thus very relevant actors who also appear frequently in Flemish news media that are analysed in this study.

[5] In the Netherlands, the leader of the parliamentary party group was coded as the leader of the party as he is considered as the executive leader of the party rather than the administrative chair of the party.

[6] The low score for Belgium might be a consequence of the French-speaking prime minister at the time of data gathering and coding, as French-speaking politicians appear less in Flemish media.

[7] Note that in Germany Angela Merkel is also party leader of the CDU, but that she was always coded in her higher function of prime minister. This was also done in some other countries such as the Netherlands, Spain and Belgium

Appendix

Table 2.3. Selection of News Outlets by Country and by Type of Media Outlet

	Newspaper			Television		Websites				
	Upmarket					Upmarket				
Country	Left-of-centre	Right-of-centre	Mass-market	Public-service	Commercial	Left-of-centre	Right-of-centre	Mass-market	Public-service	Commercial
Austria	Der Standard	Die Presse	Kronenzeitung	ORF1, ZiB	ATV, Aktuell	derstandard.at	diepress.com	krone.at	news.orf.at	kurier.at, *see note A*
Belgium	De Morgen	De Standaard	Het Laatste Nieuws	VRT, Het Journaal	VTM, Het Nieuws	demorgen.be	standaard.be	hln.be	deredactie.be	nieuws.vtm.be
Denmark	Politiken	Jyllands-Posten	Ekstra Bladet	DR, TV-Avisen	TV2, Nyhederne	politiken.dk	jp.dk	ekstrabladet.dk	dr.dk/nyhederne	nyhederne.tv2.dk
France	Le Monde	Le Figaro	Le Parisien	France 2, Journal de 20h	TF1, Journal de 20h	lemonde.fr	lefigaro.fr	leparisien.fr	info.france2.fr	lei.tf1.fr
Germany	Süddeutsche Zeitung	Frankfurter Allg. Zeitung	Bild	ARD, Tagesschau	RTL, Aktuell	sueddeutsche.de	faz.net	bild.de	tagesschau.de	rtl.de/rtlaktuell
Greece	Tanea	Kathimerini	Espresso	NET, News	Mega, News	tanea.gr	kathimerini.gr	espressonews.gr	ert.gr	megatv.vom
Israel	Haaretz	Ydiot Aharonot *see note B*	Israel Hayom	Channel 1, Evening News	Channel 2, Evening News	haaretz.co.il	Ydiot Aharonot, *see note C*	israelhayom.com	ynet.co.il, *see note C*	mako.co.il
Italy	La Repubblica	Il Giornale	Altri Mondi *See note D*	RAI1, TG1	Canale5, TG5	repubblica.it	ilgiornale.it	quotidiano.net	tg1.rai.it	tgcom24.mediaset.it
Netherlands	De Volkskrant	NRC Handelsblad	De Telegraaf	NOS, Journaal	RTL, Nieuws	volkskrant.nl	nrc.nl	telegraaf.nl	nos.nl	rtlnieuws.nl
Norway	Dagsavisen	Aftenposten	VG	NRK, Dagsrevyen	TV2, Nyhetene	aftenposten.no	dagsavisen.no	vg.no	nrk.no	tv2.no/nyheter
Portugal *see note H*	Jornal de Noticias	Público	Correio da Manhã	RTP1, Tele Jornal	TV2, Jornal das Oito	publico.pt	jo.pt	cmjornal.xl.pt	rtp.pt	tvi.iol.pt
Spain	El País	El Mundo	20Minutos	TVE, Telediario de la Noche	Tele5, Informativos	elpais.com	elmundo.es	20minutos.es	rtve.es/telediario	telecinco.es/informativos
Sweden	Dagens Nyheter *see note E*	Svenska Dagbladet	Aftonbladet	SVT, Rapport	TV2, Nyheterna	dn.se	svd.se	aftonbladet.se	svt.se	tv2.se/nyheter
Switzerland	Tages-Anzeiger	Neue Zürcher Zeitung	Blick	SF, Tagesschau	TeleZüri, ZüriNews	nzz.ch	tagesanzeiger.ch	blick.ch	tagesschau.sf.tv	radio24.ch, *see note F*
United Kingdom	Guardian	Daily Telegraph	The Sun	BBC, News at Ten	ITV, News at Ten	telegraph.co.uk	guardian.co.uk	thesun.co.uk	bbc.co.uk/news	itv.com/news
United States	New York Times	Los Angeles Times	USA Today	NBC, Nightly News	PBS, News Hour	nytimes.com	latimes.com	usatoday.com	msnbc.msn.com	npr.org, *see note G*

Notes:
A: Kurier was taken because the private broadcaster does not offer an online news website.
B: Yediot Aharonot is considered a popular newspaper and its ideology is rather centre-based.
C: Radio was taken since the website of the Israeli public television provides only video and not text. Reshet Bet's news is part of the Israeli Public Broadcast Authority, as is Israeli Public Television.
D: Given the absence of a mass vs. upmarket distinction in Italy, we took the Altri Mondi ("Other Worlds") section of the sport newspaper La Gazzetta Dello Sport:, which reports to its mass audience the news of the day and the main political news. This section hasn't a news website, thus we took the website of quotidiano.net, the national network of locally relevant mass newspapers.
E: In Sweden there is no major left-of-center upmarket newspaper on the national level. Dagens Nyheter is considered as liberal and slightly right-of-centre, but compared to Svenska Dagbladet it is more to the centre.
F: Website of Radio 24 was taken because TeleZüri does not have a news website.
G: NPR was taken because it is a fairer comparison to the much used MSNBC website.
H: For Portugal, we chose the largest news outlets, but the categorization into "left-of-centre" or "right-of-centre" does not apply here.

Chapter Three

It's Worth the Action.

An Analysis of the Effect of MPs' Activities on their News Coverage.

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This chapter is submitted to *Legislative Studies Quarterly* and currently under review.

It's Worth the Action.
An Analysis of the Effect of MPs' Activities on their News Coverage.

Introduction

The mass media are central within modern politics, for citizens as well as for political actors. They play a crucial role in connecting voters to politicians since citizens often rely only on the news media to get informed about their representatives. Politicians are aware of this connection between media and voters and most of them recognize that being visible in the news media is essential for political success[1]. First of all, news coverage can have important electoral consequences. Opportunities to directly interact with voters are scarce, so media access is important to reach them (Tresch, 2009). Second, media performance can be a vital criterion in the recruitment policies and electoral strategies of political parties. Politicians who succeed at passing the media gates can be rewarded by means of better positions on the electoral list (Midtbø, 2011; Van Aelst et al., 2008). Third, getting covered might be advantageous during policy-making processes. Legislators can use the news media to gain public support and influence their counterparts in order to pass legislation (Fogarty, 2008).

Since media coverage has become crucial for political actors, they are eager to pass the media gates. However, some of them succeed better at this goal than others do. Several scholars have investigated the determinants of news coverage of individual politicians (e.g. Midtbø, 2011; Sheafer, 2001; Tresch, 2009; Van Aelst et al., 2008). One constant finding is the large effect of political standing. High-ranked officials such as party leaders and cabinet members receive most media attention because they can deliver interesting information and their actions have the potential to influence political outcomes. Journalists seek officials who occupy authoritative positions in decision-making processes (Bennett, 1996). This research wants to surpass this 'trail of power' and look at what politicians do rather than who they are. Therefore, we examine news coverage of members of parliament who all have a similar political position and focus on activities of MPs to answer this research question*: which activities of members of parliament increase their news coverage?*

MPs can undertake a whole range of activities within their elected office. We differentiate between parliamentary actions on the one hand and publicity-seeking actions on the other. The first category refers to activities within the institution of parliament: bill proposals, interpellations, parliamentary questions, etc. The second category contains the actions aimed at gaining publicity for themselves and their institutional activities: press releases, phone calls with journalists, use of social media, etc.

We investigate the effect of various activities of MPs on their newspaper coverage in Belgium. Both activities and news coverage have been measured in a conscientious manner. Previous research on news coverage has already examined some activities, for example sending press releases or proposing bills (Fogarty, 2008; Gershon, 2012; Waismel-Manor and Tsfati, 2011), but none of them – to our knowledge – combined as many parliamentary and publicity-seeking activities as we do. Moreover, we employ a precise measurement of MP coverage by taking into account only those newspaper articles where an MP appears related to his mandate as a legislator instead of taking all their news coverage as a whole. A last contribution is our analysis of smaller power differences between politicians with the *same* political position opposed to the frequently used approach of analyzing variance in news coverage of politicians with *different* positions.

We conducted a document analysis, an MP survey and an extensive content analysis of newspaper articles over a period of almost three years. The results show that small power differences matter for getting covered but that parliamentary activities and media-seeking activities also enhance news coverage.

Why Activities Matter

The mass media are in the center of contemporary politics and recently there has been a shift from a party democracy to an audience democracy. This trend is characterized by a declining importance of political parties and a more central role of personae (Brants et al., 2010). Such an audience democracy has influenced political news content: the focus of news coverage has shifted from parties to individual politicians and leaders (McAllister, 2007; Rahat and Sheafer, 2007). Consequently, individual politicians appear more and more in the news media, but not in an equal manner. Most politicians are eager to win media attention for their goals and performances, but they must vie for the attention of reporters, editors and audiences in a highly competitive news environment (Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999). Due to time and resource constraints, the news media can report only about a small fraction of political activities. This selection does not happen randomly, but instead journalists make conscious decisions based on norms that have developed over time about what is newsworthy (Graber, 2010).

Gans (1979) enumerates four interrelated factors that determine how news sources can make themselves available and who will be successful in getting access to journalists. First of all, sources

need to be eager to provide information either because they benefit from the legitimated publicity the news media supply or because they need the news media to carry out their duties. Second, sources must be able to supply suitable news which requires certain resources and skills. Sources can create media events that exist mainly to be covered in the news media. Third, access to the news media reflects the hierarchies of society, with powerful sources using their authority to pass the media gates and create suitable news. Sources with less power can generally gain access only by supplying remarkably dramatic stories. Lastly, sources need to be geographically as well as socially close to the journalist.

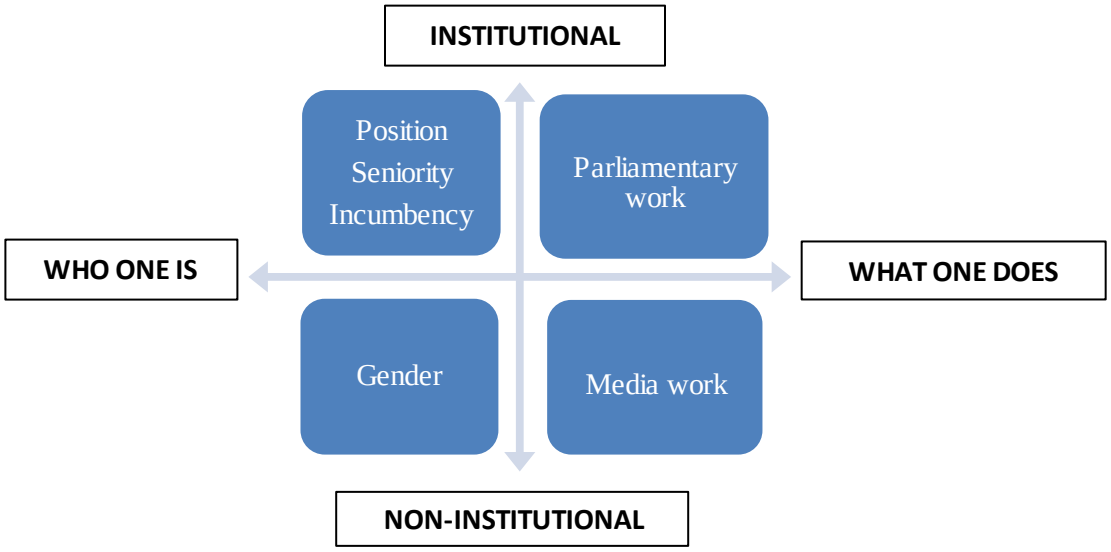
We can apply these four factors to research concerning the newsworthiness of political actors in particular. Not all politicians are equally newsworthy and scholars have raised the question who makes it into the news. Several features of politicians have been investigated, which we can divide in two groups. On the one hand, activities such as press releases and parliamentary questions might enhance news coverage but on the other, more structural characteristics such as political position and gender might matter for coverage. Activities of political actors relate to Gans' (1979) two former factors – being eager to provide information and supply suitable news. The two latter factors – power and closeness to journalists – are connected with more structural characteristics of politicians.

The effect of both groups on politicians' coverage has been subject of an ongoing debate. Early scholars concluded that "*what one does in office seems less important for attracting coverage than who one is*" (Cook, 1986, 221). More recent studies however emphasize the importance of activities and argue for a shifting focus "*from who they are to what they do*" (Midtbø, 2011, 230). Next to the distinction between who one is and what one does, we differentiate between institutional and non-institutional aspects. The institutional attributes are related to official political institutions, are role-relevant and considered to be 'naturally' important for successful politics. These institutional aspects are supposed to have the greatest impact on news coverage. However, who a politician is outside institutions, is increasingly becoming related to electoral success and getting covered (Rosar et al., 2008).

This two-fold distinction leads to figure 3.1: four groups of features of politicians that might influence their news coverage. The left side of the figure contains the structural characteristics that define who a politician is. These variables have been investigated thoroughly and one constant result is the importance of political position: high-ranked politicians such as cabinet members and party leaders get covered more (e.g. Cook, 1986; Sheafer and Wolfsfeld, 2009). In the study at hand, we want to go beyond this 'trail of power' (Bennett, 1996) political journalists seem to follow by studying 'ordinary'

members of parliament. These politicians cannot rely on the inherent news value that high-ranked politicians possess but instead have to provide the news media with suitable and interesting news in order to gain access. Our main focus therefore is the right side of the figure: *which activities of MPs, within political institutions as well as outside political institutions, influence their news coverage?* We want to examine the effect of activities of MPs on top of the effect of political position: we analyze news coverage of MPs and look at both their parliamentary work and their media work, while controlling for subtle power differences and some other structural characteristics as shown in figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1. Characteristics of MPs



Concerning MPs' activities, we can assume that political journalists are mainly attentive to activities occurring within parliament. Representative democracy entails a chain of delegation where citizens are principals that designate others to make political decisions in their name. This chain of delegation is mirrored by a corresponding chain of accountability to ensure that delegation serves the interests of the principals (Strøm, 2000). To be able to hold elected officials accountable for their performances, citizens need to be informed sufficiently about political processes. The news media are expected to monitor the work of elected politicians, since they are the main channels by which the electorate is informed about the accomplishments of their elected officials (Sheafer, 2008). The media should give an accurate account of relevant actions and procedures within the institutionalized arenas of the political system. In this perspective, media are regarded as a mirror of

political reality where legislators are covered proportionally to their degree of parliamentary activity (McQuail, 1992; Tresch, 2009).

Likewise, media-seeking activities are also supposed to enhance coverage. Theories about 'mediatization' of politics state that media logic determines ever more political communication: to be relevant and gain coverage, politicians must adapt their performances to the values, routines and formats of the news media. Journalists select those political actors who follow media logic by sending out information tailored to news values and media deadlines, by enhancing their communication skills and by maintaining good contacts with journalists (Brants and Van Praag, 2006; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Yet, not all politicians are inclined to adapt to media logic. Some play along in order to gain coverage or even use media logic systematically to their own advantage while others are more critical and try to make the media more open to the needs of political actors (Aalberg and Strömbäck, 2010).

The frequency of undertaking these two types of activities varies between MPs, since they pursue different goals such as reelection, making good public policy, personal gain, etc. In general, the reelection goal has a high priority among most legislators and can be seen as an overarching goal (Fenno, 1973; Mayhew, 1974), whereas the rank order of the other goals varies between legislators. Aiming at particular goals determines the degree of parliamentary and media activity of an MP. Some legislators are cautious with their contributions to policy work, focusing their attention instead on constituency service and public appearances, whereas others see active involvement in a wide range of policy and organizational activities as their most important task (Burke & Garand, 2005).

This corresponds to the classic distinction of legislators as either being a 'work horse' or a 'show horse' (Clapp, 1963; Payne, 1980). Payne (1980) states that 'work horses' are program types: they are preoccupied with substantive policy questions and enjoy participation in the policy-making process. They place high value on making good public policy and are expected to engage mainly in activities within the institution of parliament. 'Show horses' on the contrary tend to be status types who are oriented towards prestige and who engage more in efforts outside the institution of parliament to gain publicity. This 'work horse'-'show horse' distinction assumes that legislative work and seeking publicity are mutually exclusive: an MP does one or the other, or maybe neither (Langbein & Sigelman, 1989). However, in contemporary politics, this distinction might have become an artificial one, since getting publicity has become central to the legislative process. 'Going public' can be a powerful strategy for influencing parliament and political leaders. A political actor can try to build public support for policies by generating positive news content, which in turn can pressure the

parliament to accept a proposed policy (Domke et al., 2006). Kedrowski (1996) talks in this respect about media entrepreneurs; a new type of legislator that isn't a 'work' nor a 'show horse', but combines both parliamentary and media activities to enhance his political career. We are interested in both types of activities and especially in their influence on news coverage of MPs.

Parliamentary Work

A first and basic task of elected legislators is to be present during plenary sessions and committee meetings. By attending, MPs are informed about what is going on in parliament, are able to participate actively during debates and can vote. Moreover, when an MP is present in parliament, he is physically available for journalists who seek sources for a reaction on current issues in parliament.

Another central aspect of activity within parliament is sponsoring and passing bills. Most MPs are concerned with making good public policy and passing bills through legislation helps them to realize their policy goals. The choice of bill proposals is a strong indicator of the issues an MP wants to be associated with and the reputation he wants to acquire among colleagues (Anderson, Box-Steffensmeier, & Sinclair-Chapman, 2003). Moreover, bills can also be targeted to an audience outside of parliament: the electorate. Mayhew (1974) coined the term 'electoral connection' to connect the legislative behavior of representatives with their electoral considerations. Bill proposals can be a means to demonstrate that one is active and caring about salient issues. Moreover, legislators can gain media coverage and name recognition based upon their legislative actions (Bowler, 2010).

Besides voting and making law, parliament has an important control function within representative democracies. The main parliamentary tool for government control are parliamentary questions (PQs), which are increasingly used in most countries (Wiberg, 1995; De Winter & Dumont, 2006). Although parliamentary questions have limited political consequences, they are crucial instruments for legislators to voice their concerns, control government, prepare legislative acts and gain visibility (Bailer, 2011; Wiberg, 1995). MPs' questions might thus also be inspired by publicity-seeking motives, hoping that their questions will get picked up by journalists and result in news coverage (Midtbø, 2011). This idea is supported by the fact that MPs often ask questions about issues that recently have been covered by media. The news media generate issues that the public cares about and MPs utilize these issues in their work to 'ride the wave of attention' (Vliegenthart & Walgrave, 2011).

We distinguish between oral questions and written questions. In Belgian parliament, legislators can, next to oral questions, write questions addressed to specific members of cabinet. Both means of asking questions are frequently applied (De Winter and Dumont, 2006). Written questions are a useful mechanism for achieving informatory accountability and their efficacy depends on the type and topic of the information asked. Yet MPs are powerless to force a full account from the executive when they receive inadequate replies. Oral questions, however, are asked during plenary sessions and committee meetings where executives are forced to pay immediate attention to key issues of parliamentary concern (Flinders, 2001). Consequently, these PQs are highly visible among fellow parliamentarians and attending journalists.

We expect that MPs who pursue more often these four activities within parliament – attending, proposing bills, and asking oral and written questions - will gain more news coverage:

H1: More parliamentary work leads to more news coverage

Media Work

MPs can use a variety of means to gain media attention and they differ in their media-seeking strategies dependent on their general efforts to court the media (Gershon, 2012). Firstly, legislators can send press releases to inform journalists about their work. Press releases are the most commonly used means to solicit news coverage as they are easy and rapid to set up. They are a quick manner to communicate actions and policy stances to journalists (Fogarty, 2008). Press releases need to be drafted according to standards of newsworthiness, contain usable quotes and be easily applicable by journalists, as they have severe time constraints. By including prevailing news routines, they are more likely to get covered (Flowers, Haynes, & Crespin, 2003).

Whereas press releases can be considered as the classic and established way to reach journalists, new and social media are becoming increasingly important to attract attention. Political actors have embraced the power of the Internet to carry out their goals of constituents contact, campaigning and publicity seeking (Peterson, 2010). New and social media, such as websites, Facebook and Twitter, have four main advantages: they are timely, easy to use, cost effective and have the ability to reach a large audience (Gulati & Williams, 2010). These new media are used in the first place to communicate directly with citizens, thereby bypassing traditional media channels. In a second place, Internet channels may not only be used to circumvent gatekeeping of journalists, but also to reach these journalists and raise visibility in old media channels. As journalists work under severe

deadlines, the Internet can be a convenient and cost-effective way for them to obtain information quickly (Lipinski and Neddenriep, 2004; Peterson, 2010). That way, newsworthy tweets or recent posts on personal websites might be picked up by traditional media. Moreover, it appears that MPs often use Twitter to share the same type of information they communicate through traditional means: the majority of tweets from politicians are mini-press releases including links to more elaborated information (Golbeck et al., 2010).

Lastly, MPs can boost their media profile by building and maintaining good relationships with political journalists. The idea of a tango in which both partners try to take the lead is often used to describe the relationship between politicians and journalists. Top politicians succeed in taking the lead most of the time whereas backbenchers have to work hard to get the upper hand (Van Aelst et al. 2010). Accomplishing good contacts can have several advantages. First, journalists might be a good source to provide crucial political information, since they wander around between various politicians of all parties and pick up useful information. Established reporters can be viewed as experts within the political arena with valuable opinions and knowledge (Davis 2009). Second, politicians can use their contacts with journalists to influence peers. Within their own party, they can impress the party top in order to get a higher position on the electoral list (Van Aelst et al. 2008) whereas outside their party, they can 'go public' to convince their colleagues during policy processes (Van Aelst et al. 2010). Third, and most crucial within this research, good and frequent contacts with journalists might enhance their media visibility.

We expect that MPs who engage more often in these media-seeking activities - sending press releases, maintaining a personal Web site, sending Tweets and contacting journalists - will gain more news coverage:

H2: More media work leads to more news coverage

Data and Method

To measure the impact of parliamentary work and media work on Belgian MPs' news coverage, a considerable amount of data has been gathered in various ways, i.e. a rigorous content analysis, a document analysis and an MP survey. This resulted in an unprecedented dataset containing an integral overview of *all* newspaper coverage MPs received over a period over several years and numerous indicators of their activities.

Dependent Variable: Newspaper Coverage of Flemish MPs

We study news coverage of Members of the Flemish parliament in Belgium. The Flemish parliament can be considered as a first-order parliament in Belgium. Belgium is a strongly federalized state with large competences at the regional level (Swenden, Brans, & De Winter, 2006) such as education, environment and foreign trade. In Belgium, the regions manage more than half of the total government's budget and the Flemish parliament deals with more than half of the Belgian population. Since Flemish and Francophone parties do not compete with each other but each in their own region, the Flemish parliament very much looks like a state-wide, national parliament (Deschouwer, 2009). Furthermore, we rule out the strong effect of political function by studying MPs. These politicians do not appear in news because they have a high-ranked function, but rather because of their parliamentary and media work, which is our main focus. We can however control for more subtle differences in political standing within parliament such as being a leader of a parliamentary party group or being a committee chair.

News coverage of each MP was analyzed by conducting an extensive content analysis of newspapers[2]. For each MP, we measured the total number of newspaper articles where (s)he was mentioned. An important aspect when coding Flemish MPs is the context in which they are mentioned, since they can hold multiple political offices. One of the traditions of Belgian parliamentary behavior is the *cumul local*: holding a local elected office together with a seat in parliament (De Winter and Dumont, 2006). Indeed, 78% of the MPs in our analysis also held a local mandate during their legislative office in Flemish parliament. Therefore, we coded very first the type of office by which the politician was mentioned and only those articles referring to the politician as an MP were included in the analysis. This is also the main reason why manual coding was applied: the whole context of the article needs to be taken into account when deciding upon the specific type of office. Take for instance an article that reports on a big event in a city and that contains a quote of the mayor. If the mayor is also an MP, journalists often mention this, even though the article does not relate to his activities as an MP. Such an article got coded as related solely to the local mandate.

The research period runs from 30/06/2009, the beginning of the latest legislature of the Flemish parliament, until 31/12/2012. We employed the *Mediargus* database that collects and archives newspapers digitally, which then can be searched by entering keywords, in this case the name of the MP. They archive seven Flemish newspapers, of which *all* articles within the research period in which one of the 80 MPs was mentioned have been scanned (N = 24 156). In a next step, the articles in which the politician got mentioned related to his office as a Flemish MP were then included (N = 6 728). It appears that MPs on average get mentioned as an MP in only one article out of four, with the

other articles mentioning them related to their local mandate, party politics or personal affairs. Coding was done by the author and a team of five trained student coders. To test intercoder reliability, 779 newspaper articles (12% of all fully coded articles) were coded by all coders. Krippendorff's alpha for the amount of newspaper articles in which the politician was mentioned as an MP is 0.87, indicating sufficient reliability.

Independent Variables

Our main independent variables are parliamentary work and media work, which both are measured by several indicators (see table 3.1.).

Parliamentary Work. We include four indicators to measure parliamentary activity: 1) attendance rate at parliamentary sessions and committee meetings, 2) total number of bill proposals, 3) total amount of written questions and 4) total amount of oral questions. These measurements were gathered through a document analysis of the website of the Flemish parliament[3], which archives all actions of MPs since 1995 onwards.

Media Work. We investigate four indicators of media work: 1) press releases, 2) personal website, 3) use of Twitter and 4) personal contacts with political journalists. The intensity of sending out press releases, having personal contacts and tweeting was measured by means of a survey with Flemish MPs held on 15th of May 2013 (see appendix 1). The response rate was 75 per cent which is high for elite research[4]. However, we analyze only those MPs who served as a legislator since the beginning of the latest legislature, i.e. 30/06/2009, to keep their news coverage comparable throughout the research period. As a result, 80 MPs are included in the analysis, which equals 64,5 per cent of the population of Flemish MPs.

Status Variables. Besides activities of MPs, research has shown that also other factors determine news coverage. The most influential determinant - political function - is already taken care of by analyzing 'ordinary' MPs. Nevertheless, smaller power differences within parliament can be taking into account: 1) being a committee chair, 2) being the leader of a parliamentary party group, 3) being a community senator and 4) previously have been a cabinet member or a party leader.

Control variables. We include three control variables that can influence both the amount of news coverage and the activities of MPs. Firstly, gender might matter. Female politicians in general receive less media attention compared to their male colleagues (Adcock, 2010; Vos, 2013). Moreover, men

and women differ in their attitudes towards media and media logic. Aalberg & Strömbäck (2010) conclude that male MPs have adjusted more to media logic and have more, and more informal, contacts with journalists than female MPs. Secondly, an 'incumbency bonus' exists: majority parties and their members receive additional coverage compared to opposition parties. However, research has shown that this media bonus is mainly for executive politicians of the party and less for MPs, where opposition members are more likely to get covered (Elmelund-Præstekær, Hopmann, & Nørgaard, 2011). Also the number of parliamentary questions differs between majority and opposition members. Opposition members' main task is to control the government, so they use more often PQs to raise issues the government is forced to react on (Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011). Thirdly, we control for seniority. Earlier studies have shown that senior MPs have better and more frequent contacts with journalists than less experienced MPs (Davis 2009; Van Aelst et al. 2010) and that seniority influences legislative effectiveness (Anderson et al. 2003).

Table 3.1. Operationalization of Variables

Dependent variable	**Description**
News coverage	
Newspaper articles	Sum of articles in which the MP is mentioned as a MP
Independent variables	**Description**
Controls	
Gender	1 if women, 0 if man
Majority party	1 if majority party, 0 if not
Seniority	Years since first year of election to parliament (Federal/regional)
Status	
Chairman committee	1 if chairmen of a committee, 0 if not
Leader parliamentary party group	1 if leader of ppg, 0 if not
Community senator	1 if community senator, 0 if not
Previous higher office	1 if higher office (cabinet member/party leader), 0 if not
Parliamentary work	
Attendances	Mean of attendance rates in plenary and committee meetings (%)
Bill proposals	Sum of decrees, resolutions and amendments
Written questions	Total amount of written questions
Oral questions	Sum of oral questions in plenary and committee meetings
Media work	
Press releases	Scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (daily)
Personal website	0 if no website, 1 if page on party website, 2 if website
Tweets	Scale ranging from 1 (no Twitter account) to 8 (few times a day)
Contacts with journalists	Scale ranging from 1 (never) to 6 (daily)

Analysis

We ran a multiple regression with four groups of independent variables: 1) control variables, 2) status variables, 3) variables indicating MPs' parliamentary work and 4) variables indicating their media work (see table 3.2 for descriptives).

Table 3.2. Descriptive Statistics of Independent Variables

Variable		Mean	SD	Min	Max
Controls					
Seniority		5	5.63	0	20
Parliamentary work					
Attendances		79	11.75	45	97
Bill proposals		80	50.70	1	203
Written questions		151	187.18	0	1176
Oral questions		60	33.36	1	150
Media work					
Press releases		2.7	1.12	1	6
Personal website		1.6	0.75	0	2
Tweets		2.6	2.26	1	8
Contacts with journalists		2.3	1.25	1	6
Variable	**Category**	**%**			
Controls					
Gender	Men	56			
	Women	44			
Status party	Majority	45			
	Opposition	55			
Status					
Chairman committee		14			
Leader ppg		8			
Community senator		11			
Previous higher office		8			

Since we want to look at the effect of activities on top of the effects of political position, we first ran model 1 with only the status indicators and the control variables. Afterwards we added parliamentary work in model 2 and separately media work in model 3 to analyze their respective effect on coverage. Model 4 includes all four groups at once[5]. The distribution of the dependent variable, i.e. the amount of newspaper articles for each MP, is highly skewed (range: 2 – 532, W = 0.763, p = 0.00). We computed a natural log of the dependent variable to make the positively skewed distribution more normal and used it for all models of the analysis.

Results

The first model in our regression analysis (table 3.3.) contains the control variables and status variables as independent variables and confirms our general expectation that power matters e ven within the rather homogeneous group of MPs. Chairmen of committees, leaders of parliamentary party groups, community senators and MPs who previously occupied a higher function get significantly more newspaper coverage than 'regular' MPs. Concerning the control variables, gender ($p = 0.19$) and incumbency ($p = 0.30$) do not influence news coverage significantly, whereas less experienced MPs surprisingly get significantly more newspaper coverage.

With model 2, we examine the additional effect of parliamentary work. Taking action in parliament clearly matters for getting covered: the amount of explained variance raises from 28 per cent to 54 per cent. But not all parliamentary activities have the same positive effect. As expected, submitting more bill proposals, asking more written questions and asking more oral questions enhance news coverage significantly. More attendances at plenary sessions and committee meetings on the other hand lead to less news coverage but this effect is insignificant ($p = 0.076$). The effect of the status variables and the control variables remain similar, except for experience where the significant negative effect disappears ($p = 0.17$).

Model 3 adds media work to the control and status variables. Here again, including media work increases the explained variance substantively from 28 per cent to 59 per cent, indicating that taking into account media-seeking actions of MPs contributes to explaining which MPs become a news source. When looking more into detail, it turns out that having an up-to-date personal website and frequently having contacts with political journalists have a positive and significant effect. Sending more press releases or tweeting more often also have a positive effect on news coverage, but they are not significant (both $p = 0.13$). The status indicators still have strong and positive effects, except for community senators who do not get significantly more coverage anymore ($p = 0.15$). Gender, incumbency and seniority don't have significant effects ($p = 0.84$, $p = 0.91$, $p = 0.12$).

Model 4 finally, contains all four groups of independent variables and allows us to examine which of them matter for getting covered when taking them all at once into account. First of all, the explained variance is 0.70, which is fairly high: 70 per cent of the variation in news coverage of MPs can be clarified by looking at their status, their activities and three structural characteristics. Second, the status indicators have once again strong and positive effects, indicating that even subtle power differences between MPs matter for their amount of coverage. The control variables however do not

yield significant effects: being male or female, belonging to government or opposition, or having more parliamentary experience do not effect news coverage. Third, the activities MPs undertake have a substantial effect on top of the strong effect of political status. It is however important to differentiate between activities, since not all have a similar positive effect. When taking all independent variables together, two parliamentary activities and two media-seeking activities enhance MPs' news coverage considerably: asking more written and more oral questions on the one hand and having a personal website and contacting journalists more often on the other. Interestingly, the positive effect of bill proposals disappears (p = 0.11) in this model. Apparently, some media-seeking activities matter more for getting covered than proposing bills, which turns the effect insignificant.

Table 3.3. Explaining News Coverage of MPs

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Controls				
Gender	0.13	0.10	-0.02	-0.02
Majority party	0.10	0.11	0.01	0.03
Seniority	-0.35**	-0.13	-0.15	-0.08
Status				
Chairman committee	0.22*	0.25 **	0.21 **	0.24 ***
Leader ppg	0.31 **	0.28 ***	0.20 *	0.24 ***
Community senator	0.21 *	0.25 **	0.11	0.17 *
Previous higher office	0.43 ***	0.32 ***	0.31 ***	0.26 ***
Parliamentary work				
Attendances		-0.18		-0.10
Bill proposals		0.21 *		0.12
Written questions		0.29 ***		0.26 ***
Oral questions		0.30 ***		0.17 *
Media work				
Press releases			0.14	0.06
Personal website			0.39 ***	0.29 ***
Tweets			0.13	0.04
Contacts with journalists			0.21 *	0.21 **
Constant	3.55	3.49	1.77	2.19
Adjusted R^2	0.28	0.54	0.59	0.70
N	80	80	79	79

Note: Multiple regression analysis with log transformation of amount of newspaper articles as dependent variable. Coefficients in table are standardized β coefficients. * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Considering the large effect of status indicators, one might suspect that MPs with a higher status take more or different activities which in turn leads to additional coverage for those MPs. Therefore, we tested whether MPs with a higher status differ from other MPs by conducting independent samples t-test for each activity. None of these t-tests were significant. Moreover, when looking at all activities analyzed, the occurrence of some interaction effects seems plausible. For instance, bill proposals might only be effective when MPs also communicate about them by means of press releases, which corresponds to the idea of 'going public'. We ran separate regression analyses for each possible interaction effect (table 3.4.) and three interactions yield significant results: bill proposals and contacts with journalists, written questions and press releases, and written questions and a personal Web site. However, these significant interaction effects are negative: MPs who have few contacts, send less press releases and don't have an up-to-date Web site benefit more from proposing bills and asking written questions. Combining parliamentary actions and media actions does not result in additional news coverage.

Table 3.4. Explaining News Coverage of MPs with Interaction Effects

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Status			
Chairman committee	0.24***	0.23***	0.26***
Leader ppg	0.22***	0.23***	0.25***
Community senator	0.21**	0.17**	0.17**
Previous higher office	0.21***	0.26***	0.20***
Parliamentary work			
Attendances	-0.10	-0.12	-0.13
Bill proposals	0.40**	0.17*	0.14*
Written questions	0.27***	0.88**	1.55***
Oral questions	0.17*	0.11	0.15*
Media work			
Press releases	0.09	0.20	0.02
Personal website	0.29***	0.30***	0.54***
Tweets	0.07	0.06	0.06
Contacts with journalists	0.39***	0.19**	0.17**
Interactions			
Bill proposals*Contacts	-0.38*		
Written questions*Press releases		-0.65*	
Written questions*Website			-1.34***
Constant	1.62	1.93	1.85
Adjusted R^2	0.72	0.72	0.76
N	79	79	79

Note: Multiple regression analysis with log transformation of amount of newspaper articles as dependent variable. Coefficients in table are standardized β coefficients. * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; *** $p \leq 0.001$.

Conclusion and Discussion

Media attention is important for politicians, but difficult to obtain for members of parliament since they only occupy a modest place in the political hierarchy and thus have less newsworthiness compared to high-standing politicians. In this study, we examined how MPs' activities can enhance news coverage and focused on activities inside the institution of parliament as well as extra-institutional activities to promote themselves and their work. To rule out spurious relations, we controlled for subtle status differences between MPs and some control variables that might matter concerning news coverage. Analysis shows that the status indicators are crucial for explaining news coverage of legislators. Committee chairs, leaders of a parliamentary party group, community senators and MPs who have occupied a higher office before gain significantly more coverage. Even within the rather homogenous group of legislators, political journalists are led by the 'trail of power' (Bennett 1996). Nonetheless, 'regular' MPs can strengthen their media profile by carefully selecting the activities they engage in. Both parliamentary and media work lead to additional coverage, even when status variables and control variables are taken into account. However, we need to discuss the various activities more into detail since they have different effects, caused by distinctive mechanisms.

Attendances do not enhance news coverage. The lack of a positive effect indicates that mere attending does not suffice: MPs need to actively engage in legislative work - making bills, asking questions, etc. - if they want to reach journalists and pass the media gates. Proposing more bills has a substantive positive influence on news coverage but turns insignificant when taking all activities into account, which corresponds to some earlier studies (Fogarty, 2008; Waismel-Manor and Tsfati, 2011). This might be caused by the dominance of the executive in legislative processes in Belgium. A large majority of successful bills are initiated by the government rather than by individual MPs (De Winter and Dumont, 2006; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011). Private member's bills have little policy importance and consequently journalists may regard them as less newsworthy. However, we measured only the quantity of bill proposals, not their quality. Journalists may pay attention to some MP proposals, but only those that are relevant and have the potential to turn into legislation.

Two parliamentary actions clearly enhance MPs' news coverage: written and oral questions. As expected, parliamentary questions provide MPs with the opportunity to draw attention to themselves and to improve their public image (Bailer, 2011). Remarkably, oral questions yield a smaller effect than written questions, although they are more directly observable. A possible explanation is the type of news coverage we examine, i.e. newspapers. Written questions better fit

the format of newspapers as they easily can be turned into a newspaper article, whereas oral questions provide visual material which is crucial for television news. Accordingly, we assume to find bigger effects for oral questions when investigating television news coverage.

Concerning press releases, earlier research shows contradictory results with some finding a significant positive effect (Gershon, 2012; Midtbø, 2011) and others finding no effect (Fogarty, 2008; Waismel-Manor and Tsfati, 2011). Our study adds to the latter conclusion: sending more press releases does not increase ones news coverage. Also tweeting on a regular basis does not have the expected effect, whereas MPs with good relations with political journalist and MPs that provide journalists with an up-to-date personal website do become a news source more often. This result might be an indication of a two-step flow communication between MPs and journalists. In a first step, a press release or an interesting tweet attracts the attention of journalists, who then in a second step search for additional information by scanning MPs' website or contacting them personally. Only when this search or contact indicates that the event and actor are newsworthy, they turn it into a news story. This evokes an image of journalists as actively seeking interesting news sources, where new media can facilitate the work of journalists of old media (Lipinski and Neddenriep, 2004).

These results indicate that 'work horses' as well as 'show horses' gain publicity by being active. However, combining both aspects as a media entrepreneur (Kedrowski, 1996) does not seem to be beneficial. MPs who don't send press releases regularly, for instance, can compensate by means of asking more parliamentary questions. When it comes to getting covered in the news, legislators should focus on either their parliamentary work or their publicity-seeking activities, instead of combining a little bit of both.

We can draw this overall conclusion because we examined many activities of MPs in a detailed manner and employed a meticulous measurement of news coverage as well as several status indicators. All these considerations have led to a comprehensive analysis of news coverage of MPs which explains no less than 70 per cent of the variation in coverage. What may account for the remaining unexplained variance is the physical appearance and charisma of MPs. Being judged as physically attractive is associated with having other socially desirable qualities such as being intelligent, self-assured and competent (Rosar et al., 2008). These presumed qualities might have a positive effect on getting covered, which has been confirmed in two studies (Tsfati et al., 2010; Waismel-Manor et al., 2011). Likewise, 'charismatic communication skills' (Sheafer, 2001: 727) can enhance news coverage: MPs who communicate more effectively can generate more media

attention. Furthermore, we need to address the fact that we examined the amount of news coverage and not its content or tone. Being visible in the news media is an important asset for getting name recognition among the electorate. Yet, this does not mean that the coverage gained is necessarily favorable. Analyzing the content, the tone and the frame of news coverage of MPs would be a valuable contribution to the existing literature.

At last, we want to elaborate on the consequences of our findings in Belgium for other Western democracies. Research has shown that media attention for political actors varies cross-nationally and is contingent upon differences in political systems. For example, the dominance of the government over parliament in a country determines their relative visibility in the news (van Dalen, 2012). We expect that the power of parliaments in European democracies also influences how *individual* MPs are covered and the effect of MPs' activities thereon. The Belgian parliament is rather weak compared to the executive branch and their bill proposals are little influential (De Winter and Dumont, 2006; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011). Indeed, initiating bills does not enhance Belgian MPs' coverage, but we assume that bill proposals might have a significant positive effect in countries where parliamentarians are more powerful, for example as in Denmark. Furthermore, members of a weak parliament have less contacts with journalists (Van Aelst et al., 2010), which explains the clear effect of contacting journalists in our study of Belgian MPs. In general, few Belgian parliamentarians have frequent contacts, but those who do have good and regular contacts, succeed in becoming a news source more often. In strong parliaments, where MPs in general have better contacts with journalists, it seems plausible that we would find no or only a minor effect of these contacts, since the variation between MPs will be less outspoken.

We also expect diverse effects of questioning in parliament. Parliamentary questions are ubiquitous in European parliaments, but they proceed in rather different ways (Russo & Wiberg, 2010). For instance, Belgium has a powerful type of oral questioning - questions submitted in advance and followed by motions and debate - that is present in only a few European countries (Russo & Wiberg, 2010, p. 222). Consequently, journalists might judge them highly newsworthy and thereby cover those MPs who engage more in asking oral questions. In countries with other types of oral questioning, this effect might be lacking.

Endnotes

1. This conclusion was drawn by Van Aelst, Nuytemans & Walgrave based upon their MedPol survey (2006), conducted with politicians and political journalists.

2. We decided to study newspapers instead of television news because Flemish MPs hardly appear in television news (N = 395 television news items during the research period for all 80 MPs).

3. See www.vlaamsparlement.be

4. There was no selection bias. Of the 31 MPs that did not participate, 16 were abroad on the 15th of May and could not complete the survey. Respondents do not significantly differ from non-respondents in terms of gender, age, years of experience in parliament, standing and party.

5. We tested the independent variables for multicollinearity. The highest correlation is 0.41. The Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) range between 1.16 and 1.82, which is fairly below the threshold of 5.

Appendix

1. **How often do you or your staffer sent a press release about your parliamentary activities (questions, interpellations, bill proposals, etc.)?**

   [1] Daily

   [2] Few times a week

   [3] Few times a month

   [4] Monthly

   [5] Few times a year

   [6] Never

2. **How often do you or your staffer tweet about your parliamentary activities (questions, interpellations, bill proposals, etc.)?**

   [1] Few times a day

   [2] Daily

   [3] Few times a week

   [4] Few times a month

   [5] Monthly

   [6] Few times a year

   [7] Never

   [8] I don't have a Twitter account

3. **How often do you have personal contact with political journalists?**

   [1] Daily

   [2] Few times a week

   [3] Few times a month

   [4] Monthly

   [5] Few times a year

   [6] Never

Chapter Four

The Vertical Glass Ceiling.
Explaining Female Politicians' Underrepresentation in Television News.

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The Vertical Glass Ceiling.
Explaining Female Politicians' Underrepresentation in Television News.

Introduction

Women have always been underrepresented in parliaments all over the world, although there has been some improvement. While 11 per cent of the national parliament in 1997 consisted of women, this percentage has increased to 20 per cent today (Union, 2012). Thus female representation is still low, but growing. Besides having to struggle in the political world, female politicians also have to aim for news coverage in order to gain name recognition and (re)election. After all, modern politics is mediated politics and it is crucial for politicians to be visible in the news media (Aalberg & Strömbäck, 2010). Some argue that the limited amount and nature of media coverage of female politicians is a major obstacle to their electoral success (Everitt, 2003; Kahn, 1994). Research indeed verifies a gender bias in the news media: Women politicians receive less coverage (e.g. Adcock, 2010; Kahn, 1994; Niven, 2005) and different coverage (e.g. Aday & Devitt, 2001; Banwart, Bystrom, & Robertson, 2003; Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008). News content does not accurately reflect politics and its (female) actors. The main question remains: *why*? We examine why female politicians receive *less* coverage. Do the news media disadvantage female politicians or do other factors cause bias?

This study does not simply identify a gender bias, but searches for explanations, which can be divided into two groups: (1) characteristics of politicians and (2) news features. This division corresponds to the model of supply and demand, with politicians as the supply of news sources and journalists on the demand side searching for interesting sources. Male and female politicians have diverse political characteristics determining their newsworthiness as a news source. In politics – as in many other domains – women do still not have the same standing as men: they are to a lesser extent presidents, prime ministers, party leaders and cabinet members. This might lead to a lower newsworthiness and thus less coverage. We need to take into account these political differences and investigate whether a *political bias* causes the gender bias. In addition, there might be an actual *media bias* at play on the demand side, where journalists and editors (unconsciously) are inclined to select male politicians, despite criteria of newsworthiness. Elements from both domains might simultaneously cause a gender bias, because the relationship between politics and journalism is an interdependent one (Ross, 2004).

We systematically and simultaneously investigate real-world differences between male and female politicians as well as news features to clarify the limited news coverage of female politicians. A content analysis of Flemish television news in the period 2003-2010 shows that the gender bias is not an illusion due to political gender differences but rather an inconvenient truth. Although the political position mainly determines the amount of coverage a politician receives, the gender of the politician still has an effect: the news media are biased towards male politicians. It appears that women politicians do not only face a horizontal glass ceiling impeding their path to attaining senior positions but also a vertical glass ceiling curtailing their media representation: the television screen.

Gender bias: Female Politicians Get Less and Different Coverage

Feminist criticisms of news mention two main problems. First, women are rather absent in most serious news content. Such invisibility reinforces women's marginality, which Tuchmann (1973) calls the 'symbolic annihilation of women'. This relates to the concept of voice: "*The means and ability to speak and to have one's speech heard and be taken into account in social and political life*" (Rakow & Wackwitz, 2004, p. 95). If women have no voice, their issues cannot be heard. Second, there is a problem of representation: when women are visible, the news media often misrepresent them (Byerly, 2004). These problems also occur in the study of female politicians in the news media, where a double gender bias exists: (1) women politicians receive less coverage, which lowers their voice, and (2) they get covered differently.

The study of women and politics in the news is a relatively young subfield (Larson, 2001). Kim Fridkin Kahn was one of the first to systematically examine the gender bias and concludes that female candidates in the US receive less coverage than their male contenders (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991; Kahn, 1994). More recent studies validate her findings (Adcock, 2010; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2005; Niven, 2005; Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007). However, other researchers do not find a gender bias in terms of quantity of coverage (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Atkeson & Krebs, 2008; Banwart et al., 2003; Everitt, 2003; Jalalzai, 2006; Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008).

The contradictory results might be a consequence of different research methods and political and cultural contexts in these studies. Most studies have been conducted in the US and examined newspaper coverage of female candidates during election campaigns. Other studies have been conducted in Canada, the UK, Germany and Belgium, but only a few have focused on television news coverage (except for Gidengil & Everitt, 2003; Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007; Spee & De Swert,

2005) or coverage outside election campaigns (except for Niven, 2005; Spee & De Swert, 2005). We contribute to this ongoing debate by examining television news coverage during election periods as well as nonelection periods, while controlling for other contextual factors, such as women's political experience and their electoral position.

Whereas some controversy exists regarding the amount of coverage which female politicians receive, most researchers agree that the coverage they receive is different from that of men. First of all, the news media emphasize more often the personal characteristics of women politicians and portray them along traditional gender stereotypes. The frequent mention of their gender (Banwart et al., 2003; Heldman et al., 2005), their role as mother and wife (Everitt, 2003; Niven, 2005) and their appearance (Heldman et al., 2005; Niven, 2005) suggests their 'other'-status in the male-dominated world of politics. Ross (2004, p. 66) states that "*a woman politician is always described as a* woman *politician in the media, her sex is always on display, always the primary descriptor. She is defined by what she is not, that is, she is not a 'typical' politician […]*". Second, female candidates receive less issue coverage (Aday & Devitt, 2001) and more horse race coverage (Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007; Smith, 1997). The emphasis on horse race aspects in political campaigns makes the candidates' viability more salient to voters and influences overall evaluations of candidates (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). These findings suggest that female candidates are disadvantaged by their news coverage for winning elections. Furthermore, female candidates are more likely to be described with negative and aggressive words as journalists feel the need to interpret their behavior. As a result, women's status as novelties in elections is highlighted and voters are expected to form a more negative impression of women candidates (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003). Finally, women politicians are more likely to appear in news about traditional 'feminine' issues such as education and health care, than in news about 'masculine' issues such as the economy (Banwart et al., 2003; Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008).

Explaining Gender Bias

Most of the studies above are descriptive and focus on identifying a gender bias, rather than on detecting causes and consequences (Larson, 2001). Nevertheless, some studies touch upon explanations which are situated in the political and media sphere: characteristics of female politicians – standing, incumbency and age – and news features – gender of the journalist, media outlet and period.

An important influential factor for the limited news coverage of women might be their overall lower standing in politics. Politicians with more political power are more relevant: they possess exclusive information and their decisions have important consequences for citizens. As a result, reporters tend to choose powerful politicians such as party leaders and ministers as a news source (Midtbø, 2011). Yet, women still belong to a lesser extent to this political elite. Because most leaders are men, women in general might be underrepresented in news coverage, which supports the impression that women are less active in politics (Everitt, 2003). Semetko and Boomgaarden (2007) conclude that during the German election in 2005, Angela Merkel and Gerhard Schröder were rather equal in terms of media visibility. Perhaps, women receive as much coverage as men when both aim for, or already have, the same political position.

News coverage also might be higher if the female politician is an incumbent. Incumbency is an advantage in terms of coverage during election campaigns (Smith, 1997) and incumbents may receive additional coverage just by carrying out their official duties (Jalalzai, 2006). Atkeson and Krebs (2008) and Jalalzai (2006) include incumbency as a control variable in their analyses and do not find any substantial gender bias in newspaper coverage. Smith (1997) concludes that, despite controlling for incumbency, female politicians still receive more horse race coverage. (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008) find mixed results: when controlling for incumbency, female politicians do not receive less television coverage anymore, but they still receive less newspaper coverage.

A third characteristic of female politicians which might explain the gender bias is their age. Since female politicians are rather 'novelties' in the political world, they might be younger and less experienced than men, which in turn might cause their underrepresentation in the news. Spee and De Swert (2005) confirm this assumption: older female politicians get longer quotes compared to younger female politicians. On the other hand, young female politicians might receive additional coverage since reporters focus on the age and appearance of women. Furthermore, young politicians might benefit from a 'popularity bonus' if the news media give extra attention to novel politicians (Midtbø, 2011).

Concerning news features, the gender of the journalist and editor might explain when female politicians appear in the news, although disagreement exists concerning its impact. Some authors propose a 'gender model', while others suggest a 'job model'. The gender model contends that men and women socialize differently in the workplace, because they have diverse beliefs and priorities. Female reporters, then, are expected to bring different values to the newsroom, resulting in a wider variety of news sources and thus more female sources. The job model, on the other hand, asserts

that socialization is a function of the work environment. Women and men incorporate the prevailing rules and structures of the newsroom and develop similar working routines (Rodgers & Thorson, 2003). Research does not provide any decisive answer. Smith (1997) claims that the gender of the author does not influence the amount of coverage of female politicians, whereas Aday and Devitt (2001) conclude that female reporters are more likely to give issue coverage and longer quotes to women politicians.

News coverage of female politicians might also vary between media outlets, shaped by their own ideological agendas and the role conceptions of reporters and editors. Adcock (2010) finds that female candidates received less coverage in the tabloids *The Mirror* and *The Sun* compared to the quality newspapers *The Guardian* and *The Times* and the midmarket paper *The Daily Mail*. Two studies (Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007; Spee & De Swert, 2005) analyze public versus commercial broadcasts, and both conclude that commercial broadcasts cover female politicians slightly more than public broadcasters do. An explanation for their findings might be thematic differences, with commercial broadcasts covering soft, 'feminine' themes more often.

A last influential news factor concerns the period in which news appears, and more specifically, the distinction between election and nonelection periods. An election campaign changes the behavior and interactions of the three main players: political actors, political journalists and the electorate. Political actors are more active in order to win additional coverage, journalists pay more attention to rules concerning balance, and citizens become more attentive to politics (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). Due to reporters' fixation on balance as well as female politicians' efforts to obtain coverage, women politicians might appear more often during elections campaigns. Van Aelst and De Swert (2009) confirm this assumption: female politicians appear more often in Flemish television news during local and national campaigns. Since most studies analyze election periods, when women are less underrepresented, researchers might even underestimate the extent of the gender bias.

Each of the factors above seems to influence news coverage of female politicians, although their effects are not always straightforward. It is important to take into account these confounding factors when studying gender bias as they may produce bias when not adequately tested in research (Atkeson & Krebs, 2008). Whereas previous research controls only for one or a few factors, this study combines many explanatory variables to simultaneously test their effects on the news coverage of female politicians. We examine whether a genuine gender bias remains present in news even when controlled for ten influential factors. This innovative study will determine whether women politicians still face lower visibility when we take several political characteristics into account. In this study, we

focus on the amount of speaking time female politicians receive in television news. Whereas researchers largely agree upon the different coverage that female politicians receive, controversy exists as to whether women politicians receive less coverage. As such, we test the next research question:

> *Research question 1: Does the effect of gender on the amount of television news coverage disappear when taking into account other characteristics of politicians?*

If this question is supported by the data, the gender bias in news is not a consequence of discrimination of female politicians by journalists and editors, but rather a consequence of persistent gender differences in the political world; thus, a result of a *political* bias. On the other hand, news features might enforce the gender bias, thereby implying a *media* bias. In addition to controlling for characteristics of politicians, we examine the effect of news features on television news coverage of female politicians.

> *Research question 2: Which news features determine the amount of television news coverage of female politicians?*

Data and Method

In this study, we analyze various influential factors of news coverage of female politicians. Furthermore, we present an original case study by not concentrating on election newspaper coverage of female candidates in the US as most of previous research does. Instead, we examine the amount of television news coverage of Belgian female politicians for a seven-year period, including election and nonelection periods. Compared to the US, Belgium has a relatively high percentage (38%) of female representatives (Interparliamentary Union, 2012), mainly due to the electoral system and electoral gender quotas. Belgium has a proportional representation system that is better at ensuring women's representation than majority systems. In addition, the Smet-Tobback law of 1994 prescribes an electoral list with a maximum two thirds of the candidates of the same gender. Since 2002, electoral lists have to be composed of the same number of male and female candidates and the first two places must contain a man and a woman. These quotas and the recent expansion of the electoral districts have advanced Belgian female candidates' chances of getting elected (Sliwa, Meier, & Thijssen, 2011).

The research period spans seven years and includes nonelection and election periods to compare news coverage of female politicians during those two periods. As mentioned before, we expect women politicians to receive additional coverage during election campaigns, especially in Belgium because of the electoral gender quota. We include two control factors that might have an effect on television news coverage during election campaigns. First, the news media focus most on candidates occupying the first two places on the list, as they are most likely to be elected and thus more relevant. The candidate at the bottom of the list also receives additional attention. Second, candidates for the Senate are supposed to generate more television coverage since the electoral districts for Senate elections are larger than those for Chamber elections. Consequently, the nationwide campaign of Senate candidates should receive more coverage on national news broadcasts. Moreover, these two elements can be influential outside election campaigns. Reporters might use them as indicators of which politicians are important and powerful, which in turn leads to additional attention in nonelection periods (Van Aelst et al., 2008).

We employ the *Electronic News Archive* (ENA), an extensive and complete dataset of Flemish television news that codes all 7pm-news broadcasts from VTM (commercial broadcast) and VRT (public broadcast) from 2003 onwards. The coding of items (length, subject, gender of the journalist, etc.) and news sources (name, gender, speaking time, etc.) was performed by a team of professional encoders trained and controlled by the academic staff of the ENA. Inter-encoder reliability was tested regularly and the mean Cohen's Kappa values vary from 0.79 to 0.96. Using the ENA database, an exact calculation of total speaking time of each politician is possible. So, the analysis is not based on a sample of news items but on *all* items between 2003 and 2010 (n = 108 000).

Between 2003 and 2010, Belgium has had two federal legislatures (05/06/2003-05/05/2007 and 28/06/2007-13/06/2010) and we examine news coverage of all Dutch-speaking politicians with a federal mandate during these legislatures. We have selected the federal level because it receives more television coverage than regional levels (Depauw & Van den Bulck, 2007, p. 175). Additionally, all Flemish ministers and party leaders during this period are included, in order to obtain sufficient numbers of politicians with high positions to test its effect. They are important political actors in Belgian politics and receive plenty of television news coverage (Walgrave & De Swert, 2005). This leads to 233 male and 127 female politicians (35% women), which equals the proportion of Belgian female representatives. For each of these politicians the total sum of speaking time during one legislature (2003-2007 and/or 2007-2010) is calculated. Besides speaking time, the relevant characteristics for each politician (age, position, etc.) at the beginning of the mandate are added.

Politicians with a federal mandate during both legislatures are included twice, with the appropriate speaking time and characteristics for each mandate.

Table 4.1. Operationalization of Variables

Variable	Operationalization
Dependent variables	
News coverage	Sum of speaking time in seconds
News coverage by theme	Sum of speaking time in seconds by male, female or neutral theme
News coverage by type of broadcast	Sum of speaking time in seconds on VRT or VTM
News coverage by gender of the journalist	Sum of speaking time in seconds by male or female journalist
News coverage by period	Sum of speaking time in seconds in election and nonelection period. The election period consists of the last six weeks before election day, which equals the official campaign period. For the federal elections of 2007, the election period runs from May 2 until June 10 and in 2010, from May 7 until June 13.
Independent variables	
Gender	Man = 1, Woman = 2
Age	Age in years (at the beginning of the legislature)
Incumbency	Opposition = 1, Government = 2
Political position*	Federal Prime Minister = 1, Flemish Minister-President = 2, Federal Vice Prime Minister = 3, Flemish Vice Minister-President = 4, Party leader (big party) = 5, Federal minister = 6, Flemish minister = 7, Federal State Secretary = 8, European governor = 9, Chairman Flemish parliament = 10, Chairman Chamber = 11, Party leader (small party) = 12, Leader party in Chamber = 13, Leader party in Flemish parliament = 14, Chairman Senate = 15, Mayor of big town = 16, Member of parliament = 17, Leader party in Senate = 18, Senator = 19
Political experience	Experience in years (at the beginning of the legislature) of experience at the federal level, regardless whether as incumbent or as opposition member.
Position on electoral list	Top position (first place, second place or last place) = 1, Not a top position = 2
Candidacy for the Senate	On the list for the Senate = 1, Not on the list for the Senate = 2

Note: The classification of political positions is based upon Walgrave & De Swert (2005).

The dependent variable is the sum of speaking time a politician gets during a legislature. Eleven independent variables are tested at the same time (for operationalization see table 4.1.), with gender as the main independent variable: (1) gender, (2) age, (3) incumbency, (4) political position[1], (5) political experience, (6) position on the electoral list, (7) candidacy for the senate, (8) theme of the news item, (9) (non)election period, (10) gender of the journalist and (11) public or commercial broadcast. Table 4.2. shows how the issues in the news items were classified into male, female or neutral themes.

The first seven variables are characteristics of politicians (RQ1) whereas the last four are news features (RQ2). These two groups of independent variables comprise two different levels. At a first level, the 360 politicians are the units of analysis, which are embedded in the news items at a second level. This implies two different analyses: an OLS regression analysis to examine the characteristics of politicians and afterwards a multilevel regression analysis to test the news features and the characteristics altogether.

Table 4.2. Categorization of Themes

Male theme	Female theme	Neutral theme
Political organization	Family affairs	Elections and referenda
Law, justice and crime policy	Youth policy	Rights and liberties
Finances	Health care	Migration and integration
Economy	Social security	Consumer policy
Defense and guns	Patrimony	Employment
War and peace	Education	Demography
International relations		Mobility and traffic
		Environment and nature
		Energy
		Agriculture
		Science
		Space policy
		Tourism
		Religion
		Media and telecommunication
		International organizations
		Europe
		Disasters
		Sports

Note: The *Electronic News Archive* is coded according to these general themes. The classification into male and female themes is based upon the classification of Van Zoonen (1998) and Hooghe and De Swert (2009).

Results

A first descriptive analysis shows a gender bias in Flemish television news. Female politicians speak on average five minutes during their mandate whereas male politicians receive on average 17 minutes of speaking time. These numbers correspond to 86 per cent of all speaking time for politicians for men and only 14 per cent for women[2]. However, the main goal of this study is to go beyond descriptions and search for explanations. We first analyze the impact of characteristics of politicians on their speaking time (RQ1) and then the effect of news features (RQ2).

Characteristics of Politicians

To begin with, an OLS regression analysis was executed with the sum of speaking time for each politician as dependent variable and the characteristics of politicians as independent variables (see table 4.3.). It was built stepwise, with the first model only measuring the main effect of gender on speaking time, and the second model containing two personal characteristics (gender and age) and the third model comprising all characteristics, including the political characteristics[3].

Model 1 confirms the gender bias in Flemish television news. Female politicians receive 18 per cent ($\beta = -0.18$), or 12 minutes, less speaking time during a legislature compared to their male colleagues; this is a significant effect ($p = 0.001$). However, the gender of a politician explains merely 3 per cent of the variance in speaking time. In model 2, the effect of gender on speaking time still remains significant ($p = 0.006$) and strong ($\beta = -0.17$). The age of a politician does not affect the amount of speaking time ($p = 0.3$), nor does it alter the effect of gender. Model 3 contains all characteristics and explains 46 per cent of the variance in speaking time for politicians, which is fairly satisfactory. The position of a politician clearly has the largest impact ($\beta = -0.61$) on speaking time ($p = 0.00$). When a politician moves up one step in the 19-position hierarchy, he receives four minutes additional speaking time. The position on the electoral list ($p = 0.011$) and candidacy for the senate ($p = 0.005$) have a significant effect on speaking time as well, with 9 minutes and 10 minutes extra speaking time respectively. But most importantly and in spite of the large effect of position, gender still has a significant ($p = 0.03$) and quite strong effect ($\beta = -0.10$) on the speaking time of a politician. Thus, a female politician still receives 8 minutes less speaking time in Flemish television news, even when controlled for her position and other characteristics. Apparently, the lower positions of female politicians do not offer a complete explanation for the gender bias.

Table 4.3. Explaining Speaking Time with Characteristics of Politicians as Independent Variables

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Gender	-0.18 (0.08)**	-0.17 (0.08)**	-0.10 (0.07)*
Age		0.06 (0.01)	0.07 (0.01)
Incumbency			0.07 (0.07)
Position			-0.61 (0.01)***
Experience			0.01 (0.01)
Position on electoral list			0.12 (0.07)*
Candidacy for the Senate			0.13 (0.08)**
Constant	0.37 (0.05)***	0.18 (0.19)	0.71 (0.30)*
Adjusted R^2	0.03	0.03	0.456

Note: The coefficients represent standardized betas in an OLS regression analysis predicting the speaking time of politicians (N=360). The numbers in parentheses are standard errors.*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

Features of News Items

The four news features under investigation are each tested by a separate multilevel regression analysis. The dependent variable still consists of the sum of speaking time during a legislature, but the speaking time is calculated each time according to the key independent variable tested in the analysis at hand. For example, in the multilevel regression analysis with period as key independent variable, the dependent variable consists of the speaking time received during election periods and the speaking time received during nonelection periods. Once again, the analyses comprise three models. Model 1 tests the main effect of gender on speaking time, model 2 also includes the key news feature and the interaction variable of gender and that feature, and model 3 additionally contains the seven characteristics of politicians. With model 3, we test simultaneously the effect of the key news feature and the seven variables of politicians, since we aim to include different possible explanations for the modest visibility of women politicians at the same time. For clarity, however, we only show and discuss models 1 and 2. After all, the effect of gender, the news feature and their interaction are the three independent variables of importance in these analyses and the addition of the characteristics of politicians hardly changes their effects. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the position of a politician still has the largest, significant effect on speaking time in all analyses.

First of all, the theme of a news item seems to influence the amount of seconds female politicians speak in television news (see table 4.4.). Women politicians receive five times less speaking time concerning 'male' themes and 'merely' three times less concerning 'female' themes. However, the

dataset shows an overrepresentation of news items with male themes, and since female politicians are more underrepresented in those items with 'male themes', we expect that a control for the theme of the items will enlarge the gender bias. The results in table 4.4. confirm this assumption: the effect of gender on speaking time is stronger in model 2 (β = -0.13) than in model 1 (β = -0.09). The interaction variable is positive (β = 0.02), which indicates that female politicians indeed receive more speaking time in items with a 'female' theme, but the effect is not significant (p = 0.15).

Table 4.4. Explaining Speaking Time with Theme of the Item as Key Independent Variable

	Model 1	**Model 2**
Gender	-0.09 (0.03)***	-0.13 (0.04)**
Theme		-0.01 (0.01)
Gender * Theme		0.02 (0.02)
Constant	0.12 (0.02)***	0.15 (0.03)***
Variance	-0.23	-0.22
Log Likelihood	4854.33	4839.22
Chi^2		0.0021

Note: The coefficients represent standardized betas in a multilevel regression analysis predicting the speaking time of politicians by theme (N=1080). The numbers in parentheses are standard errors. *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

The results for the gender of the journalist resemble the results for the theme of news items (table 4.5.). The data show that male journalists give less speaking time to female politicians than female journalists do, indicating an interaction effect between gender of politicians and gender of journalists. But since approximately two thirds of the political journalists in the dataset are male, controlling for the gender of the journalist probably increases the gender bias, which is indeed validated by the multilevel analysis. By adding the gender of the journalist as an independent variable, the effect of the gender of the politician on speaking time becomes even larger (β = -0.29), thus female politicians receive even less speaking time when controlling for the gender of the journalist. The interaction effect between gender of the journalist and gender of the politician, however, is not significant. The positive coefficient (β = 0.02) indicates that women journalists are more inclined to give a voice to female politicians, but these differences between male and female journalists seem to be small, since they are not significant. Apparently, women and men do not differ substantially when it comes to selecting female and male politicians as news sources.

Table 4.5. Explaining Speaking Time with Gender of the Journalist as Key Independent Variable

	Model 1	Model 2
Gender	-0.26 (0.07)***	-0.29 (0.08)***
Journalist		-0.01 (0.02)
Gender *Journalist		0.02 (0.03)
Constant	0.37 (0.04)***	0.38 (0.05)***
Variance	0.93	0.93
Log Likelihood	2930.9	2915.9
Chi 2		0.0036

Note: The coefficients represent standardized betas in a multilevel regression analysis predicting the speaking time of politicians by gender of the journalist (N=720). The numbers in parentheses are standard errors . *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

The comparison between the nonelection and election periods (see table 4.6.) shows that female politicians are less underrepresented in the television news during the last six weeks before election day. During these weeks, men speak 55 seconds on average and women 30 seconds on average. In nonelection periods, the gap in speaking time between men and women is much larger, 975 and 270 seconds, respectively. The gender bias thus decreases during election periods, which is consistent with the negative coefficient ($\beta = -0.12$) of the interaction variable in table 4.6. The interaction effect is, however, not significant ($p = 0.16$). Remarkably, the significant effect of the gender of a politician on speaking time disappears: When controlling for the period in which the news items are broadcast, the underrepresentation of female politicians does not longer hold.

Table 4.6. Explaining Speaking Time with Election Period as Key Independent Variable

	Model 1	Model 2
Gender	-0.22 (0.08)**	-0.05 (0.15)
Period		0.04 (0.05)
Gender * Period		-0.12 (0.08)
Constant	0.36 (0.05)***	0.30 (0.09)***
Variance	0.4	0.4
Log Likelihood	2484. 31	2472.19
Chi^2		0.033

Note: The coefficients represent standardized betas in a multilevel regression analysis predicting the speaking time of politicians by period (N=720). The numbers in parentheses are standard errors. *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

Lastly, there seems to be a small difference in coverage of female politicians on VRT and VTM (table 4.7.), with female politicians having a little more speaking time on the VRT news than on the VTM news. The interaction effect between gender of the politician and broadcast is negative (β = -0.02), though not significant (p = 0.40). The gender of the politician still has a significant (p = 0.003) and strong (β = -0.24) effect on the speaking time a politician receives. Thus, VRT and VTM are comparable in giving a voice to female politicians, and differences between the public and the commercial broadcast do not provide an explanation for the gender bias.

Table 4.7. Explaining Speaking Time with Type of Broadcast as Key Independent Variable

	Model 1	**Model 2**
Gender	-0.27 (0.08)***	-0.24 (0.08)**
Broadcast		0.01 (0.01)
Gender * Broadcast		-0.02 (0.02)
Constant	0.37 (0.05)***	0.37 (0.05)***
Variance	0.96	0.96
Log Likelihood	3005.92	2990.45
Chi 2		0.046

Note: The coefficients represent standardized betas in a multilevel regression analysis predicting the speaking time of politicians by type of broadcast (N=720). The numbers in parentheses are standard errors *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001.

Conclusion and Discussion

The results uncover a gender bias in Flemish television news coverage. Merely 14 per cent of the total speaking time of politicians goes to women, although a third of the political representatives in Belgium is female. The main goal was to determine how this gender bias can be explained. We investigated whether a real *media* bias exists by which journalists and editors are less inclined to select female politicians as news sources or whether political differences between men and women simply result in unequal coverage, suggesting that a *political* bias is to blame.

With research question one, we tested whether the gender bias would disappear once controlling for the characteristics of politicians. But unfortunately and rather surprisingly, being a woman still has a significant negative effect on the amount of speaking time. In general, journalists rely on the political position when deciding whom to cover and quote. In all analyses, position has the largest impact on the amount of speaking time, since more powerful politicians are more newsworthy. The fact that

women in general occupy less important positions clarifies a substantial part of their limited news coverage. However, taking the positions of women and other characteristics into account, female politicians still receive on average eight minutes less speaking time. This means that women are less visible in the news than men, even when they have a similar political status.

We also tested four news features in order to determine when female politicians receive more or less speaking time (RQ 2). A comparable number of female politicians appear on the public broadcaster VRT and the commercial broadcaster VTM. It appears that women on the whole are underrepresented on screen, irrespective of the type of broadcast. Furthermore, female journalists are more inclined than their male colleagues to quote female politicians, and female politicians get more speaking time in news items with a 'feminine' theme. However, neither effect was significant, and differences in reporting between women and men are thus small. The only news feature that has a significant impact on the news coverage of female politicians is the period in which the news item is broadcast. News during election campaigns contains more quotes of female politicians compared to nonelection periods. During the final weeks before election day, the gender bias disappears and thus the negative effect of being a woman on news coverage fades away. This is probably caused by three interrelated elements: the electoral gender quota, the active campaigning of female candidates, and journalists' interest in balanced news. Journalists are aware of their influential role during election periods, thereby aiming for unbiased coverage of politics (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006).

The results above raise some concerns, as they imply disadvantages female politicians currently face due to structural problems in the political world and the media sphere. The quantity of news coverage can influence recognition rates, which are important criteria for voter choice. Hence, gender differences in the amount of television news coverage can have important electoral consequences, especially concerning national elections (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008; Kropf & Boiney, 2001). Furthermore, these coverage patterns may shape the ways in which the electorate looks at political life. A central part of the media's role in a democracy is to accurately represent all social groups, but if women receive unfair treatment, then the democratic process is ill-served. If media articulate the political sphere within the public sphere, then unfair media representation might be a factor in delaying fair political representation (Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008; Ross & Sreberny, 2000).

The news media play an increasingly important role in modern politics, and this trend towards 'mediatization' of politics is characterized by an "*increasing intrusion of the media in the political*

process" (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p. 248). Both spheres are intertwined and rely on the other to survive: politicians need publicity and the news media need good stories. The construction of political news is a co-production between political actors and political journalists (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). Both politics and journalism are however male-dominated domains which leads to an underrepresentation of female politicians in political news. Men's long standing place in journalism and traditional alignment with more masculine issues results in male journalists offering a more masculinized coverage. This traditional gender-congruent link between men and masculine topics still persists in contemporary news (Meeks, 2013). This study indicates how structural problems in the political and the media world reinforce each other and lead to a gender bias in political news.

In the political world, Belgian female representatives still struggle with a glass ceiling. Belgium – as many other Western democracies – still waits for its first female Prime Minister. Few women make it to the political elite, which offers a partial explanation for their limited coverage. If the political standing of men and women become more equal, the gender bias will probably become less prominent, as journalists select high-standing politicians more often. Moreover, the prominence of female politicians in news items with feminine themes might also be explained by structural political differences. If female politicians are assigned more often to policy domains such as education and social security, it is reasonable that journalists select women when searching for sources concerning these topics. This is the principle of thematic relevance: when a political actor's position can be linked to a public issue, he/she is more relevant and therefore a more interesting source (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006, p. 339). Women are indeed overrepresented in committees associated with 'feminine' issues, which implies that they are less assigned to 'prestige committees' (for instance, the economy), which are formally more influential (Diaz, 2005). However, one must keep in mind that women might have a special interest in policies that impact women and then pursue committee assignments that are consistent with those policy interests. Gender differences in committee assignments could be explained by 'choice' or 'self-selection' (Frisch & Kelly, 2003).

Nevertheless, the political imbalance between men and women does not provide a sufficient explanation and needs to be considered together with journalism cultures. In addition to a horizontal glass ceiling, women politicians have to face a vertical glass ceiling: the television screen. This study shows that the gender bias is also a consequence of how media work: journalists and editors simply quote male politicians more often. Remarkably, however, journalists working for public broadcasting do not give significantly more voice to female politicians compared to commercial broadcasting. In their management contract, the public broadcaster is to strive for a 33 per cent representation of women on screen. This diversity charter should lead to more women (politicians) on screen,

especially in comparison with commercial broadcasters. The public broadcaster has a public duty of equally representing and reaching different groups in society (http://www.vrt.be/opdracht/de-beheersovereenkomst).

The composition of newsrooms and the content of political news contributes also to the gender bias. While female reporters cover women politicians slightly more often than male reporters do, only about a third of political journalists in Belgium are women (Raeymaeckers, Paulussen, & De Keyser, 2012). As Vavrus (2002, p. 14) puts it well: "*The news [has] long been considered a male domain from production to reception. (…) Public women and women's issues were, and often still are, considered not worthy of hard news space*". Journalism – as well as politics – has long been considered a "masculinized" domain with a lack of female access and representation. Although the number of women in journalism has grown remarkably, they are still outnumbered in 'serious' news beats and senior positions (Hanitzsch & Hanusch, 2012). Most newsrooms are still characterized by a gendered division between 'hard' news reporters who tend to be men and 'features' reporters who are more likely to be women (Allan, 2011).

Other factors not included in this study might be at play as well. We focused on the socio-political background of politicians, but characteristics such as communicative competences and political activities might also differ between men and women, which in turn can lead to different coverage patterns. As Midtbø (2011, p. 230) claims: "*A voluntaristic perspective […] relates media attention to what politicians say and do rather than who they are and what they represent*". Political actors can attract journalists' attention in several ways. Sheafer (2001, p. 727) mentions 'charismatic communication skills': politicians who communicate more effectively appear more in the news and have more control over the framing. Perhaps, women politicians communicate less and differently, resulting in less coverage. Kahn (1994) examined candidates' own campaign messages and concludes that gender differences in issue coverage do not reflect the candidates' own campaign communications and that women are even more likely than men to talk about issues. A decennium later, Banwart (2004) and Niven (2005) examined the official websites of politicians. Women and men mention about the same number of issues, and women dedicate less space to discussing their personal life, although they receive more personal coverage. Second, more active politicians are supposed to gain additional news coverage (Tresch, 2009). So far, no study has investigated the impact of the political activity of men vis-à-vis women. Third, politicians' relations with political journalists might affect their news coverage. Male politicians have more and more informal contacts with reporters (Aalberg & Strömbäck, 2010), which might explain their extra coverage. The

overrepresentation of male political sources might then be seen as reflecting the personal networks of male journalists (Van Zoonen, 1998).

Only a few studies (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003; Semetko & Boomgaarden, 2007; Spee & De Swert, 2005; Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009) investigated television news coverage of female politicians instead of newspaper coverage and they show that women politicians are underrepresented. This study contributes to the limited research into television news coverage. We assume that the results can be replicated in West European countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark, as they have a similar share of female representatives (Interparliamentary Union, 2012) and a comparable media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Challenges for further research are comparative studies clarifying which country-specific features explain the amount of news coverage of women politicians. Cross-national studies might offer explanations about the divergent and sometimes contradictory conclusions of previous research.

Endnotes

[1] The variable 'political position' is measured according to a distinct hierarchy of 19 positions, with the federal Prime Minister at the top and a senator at the bottom, based on Dewachter and Das (1991) and Walgrave and De Swert (2005). This variable is an ordinal and not a metric variable, but nevertheless a clear-cut scaled variable. Because of the intelligibility of the variable and the precise measurement of 19 positions, the variable is included in the OLS as an independent variable. To be sure, an extra OLS was executed with four dummy variables that measure the effect of the position (Prime Minister/Minister-President, federal minister, Flemish minister and party leader) instead of the hierarchy of 19 positions. The results match the results of the initial OLS, and therefore, we maintain the proposed hierarchy.

[2] The distribution of speaking time for politicians is highly skewed, with a range from 0 to 20875 seconds and a standard error of 1949 seconds. In order to eliminate possible interferences with the analyses and results, the distribution was normalized by means of a box-cox transformation. The main results do not change, and hence, the original analyses and their results are maintained.

[3] Multicollinearity was controlled for, especially between age and experience. With a threshold of 60 per cent as the maximum amount of variance of an independent variable that can be explained by all other independent variables, none of the independent variables exceeded the threshold.

Chapter Five

How Ordinary Politicians Can Make it into the News.

A Factorial Survey Experiment with Political Journalists to Explain MPs' Newsworthiness.

This chapter is submitted to *Journalism* and currently in the process of revise and resubmit.

How Ordinary Politicians Can Make it into the News.

A Factorial Survey Experiment with Political Journalists to Explain MPs' Newsworthiness.

Introduction

The news media are essential for political actors to reach out to citizens and colleagues. Politicians need the news media to connect to citizens who often rely only on the mass media to get informed about politics and their elected representatives. Besides electoral advantages, news coverage can also help politicians to influence peers during legislative processes, to damage political opponents or to enhance their position within the party. Politicians thus have a crucial interest in gaining favorable news coverage (Van Aelst et al., 2010; Tresch, 2009). Accordingly, they have professionalized their communication strategies to attract journalists' attention and become news sources. However, journalists and editors do not simply transmit all messages from politicians, but decide themselves who and what is newsworthy enough to report on (Althaus, 2003).

The question of which politicians make it into the news and why has increasingly been asked by political communication scholars. Researchers have examined several features of politicians to explain their newsworthiness (for an overview see Vos, 2014) and one obvious conclusion is that political power is the single most important determinant for getting covered. High-standing politicians such as presidents, cabinet members and party leaders can be certain about a firm place in the news spotlights (e.g. Cook, 1986; Midtbø, 2011; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007). Less powerful backbenchers in parliament however have to compete against each other to attract the attention of journalists, editors and audiences. They need to be visible in the news media to obtain name recognition amongst the electorate (Bowler, 2010). This ultimately leads to the 'principle of cumulative inequality': those that need media access the most find it the most difficult to obtain it (Wolfsfeld, 2004, 78).

This study looks beyond the 'trail of power' journalists follow (Althaus, 2003; Bennett, 1996) by focusing on the newsworthiness of rank-and-file members of parliament. We investigate which MPs are more likely to become news sources by incorporating news value research. Parliamentarians' characteristics can be considered as news factors that raise their newsworthiness if they fit prevalent news values of journalists. Moreover, we take an innovative methodological approach by employing

a factorial survey experiment with political journalists. We presented them fictional press releases within which several characteristics of MPs were manipulated. This way we contribute to earlier studies on the newsworthiness of politicians in two ways.

First, we complement findings from content analyses, which are the most widely used method in political communication research (Graber, 2004). The dominance of content analysis (for exceptions see Helfer & Van Aelst, forthcoming; Hudson, 1992; Kerrick, Anderson, & Swales, 1964; Patterson & Donsbach, 1996) implies that the end result of journalistic selection processes has been analyzed instead of actual selection routines. Yet, explaining selection decisions is best done by surveying journalists of various types of media outlets (Kepplinger & Ehmig, 2006). Moreover, content analyses should be combined with other methods such as surveys, observations and experiments to get a better understanding of the news gatekeeping process (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). To this end, we employ a survey embedded experiment in order to explain which MPs can pass the news gates. Second, a factorial survey experiment enables us to analyze politicians and journalists at the same time. After all, the construction of news is the result of a coproduction between sources and journalists. News coverage of politicians cannot be understood by merely examining politicians' characteristics, but media features need to be taken into account as well (Midtbø, 2011). Whereas some content analyses draw conclusions about news organizations in general (e.g. Fogarty, 2012; Midtbø, 2011), we incorporate journalists on an individual level to find out first how journalists judge the newsworthiness of parliamentarians and second whether they do this regardless of their own socio-economic background and ideological leaning.

To answer these questions we conducted a factorial survey experiment with 73 political journalists in Belgium. Each journalist judged eight fictional press releases of an MP criticizing the government in which we carefully manipulated four characteristics of the MP sending it: party affiliation, issue specialization, media reactivity and political action. The results show that MPs from larger parties get selected more often as a news source, as well as MPs who react on mediatized issues and who communicate about their bill proposals. The journalists' gender, age, level of education or political ideology do not affect their judgment of MPs' newsworthiness.

News Coverage of Politicians

News value research has been the most prominent approach to study news selection. Traditionally, it tries to answer the question of 'which events become news'. Events have certain features – so called

news factors – that relate to selection criteria of journalists – the so called *news values* – and which together determine the newsworthiness of the event. The more news values an events appeals to, the more likely it will become news (Eilders, 2006; Kepplinger & Ehmig, 2006). The seminal study of Galtung & Ruge (1965) and subsequent studies of among others Gans (1979) and Harcup and O'Neill (2001) provided us with taxonomies of news values that journalists rely on for taking news selection decisions. We apply news value theory as a common framework to explain which politicians become news. Journalists can apply news values in the same way when considering characteristics of politicians – being their news factors – to judge their newsworthiness.

Over the years, several characteristics of politicians have been studied to explain their news coverage, such as political standing, gender, physical attractiveness, legislative actions and press releases (for an overview see Vos, 2014). One common finding is the clear effect of political position: powerful officials such as presidents, cabinet members, party leaders and parliamentary leaders receive most media attention (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008; Cook, 1986; Midtbø, 2011; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Tresch, 2009; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). This study focuses on newsworthiness of politicians beyond their political standing by analyzing characteristics of rank-and-file members of parliament who all have a similar political standing. We expect that certain MP characteristics can raise their newsworthiness as they act as news factors. When MPs' news factors relate to prevalent news values of journalists they have a better shot at becoming news sources. We incorporate four characteristics that are typical attributes of MPs and correspond to at least one of the following six news values: *power elite*, *relevance*, *surprise*, *consonance*, *continuity* and *magnitude*.

When analyzing MPs' news factors, we cannot ignore the people who judge their newsworthiness in the first place; political journalists. They decide each day which sources to include in their news stories based upon shared news values. Just as we study characteristics of individual politicians, we want to examine how journalist characteristics might influence their judgment of the newsworthiness of MPs. We explain our expectations concerning MPs' news factors and journalists' selection decisions in the next paragraphs.

News Factors of Members of Parliament

Party Affiliation. Literature on the 'partisan media bias' suggests that certain political parties and its members are favored in news coverage (Hopmann, Van Aelst et al., 2011). The strength of a party can influence the amount of news coverage its members receive. This relates to the news values *power elite* and *relevance*: stories concerning powerful individuals or institutions are more likely to

become news as their actions and decisions are more relevant for the broad audience (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Parties' strength can be derived from both their electoral strength and the party's position in the political system, and MPs in turn can derive power from their party's strength.

First of all, media attention allocated to politicians might be proportional to the electoral strength of their party. To secure balanced reporting, journalists can rely on the number of seats a party has gained in parliament, with politicians from larger parties receiving more coverage (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008). Second, government and opposition parties attract different media attention. Journalists are inclined to favor politicians from government parties – the 'incumbency bonus' – because their decisions and actions are more consequential and thus more *relevant*. Government politicians can actually do something while opposition members can only talk and criticize (Midtbø, 2011). Moreover, in our case of MPs criticizing the government in a press release we can expect that government MPs will be considered even more newsworthy because of the *surprise* value (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Parliamentarians of the majority are supposed to support the government coalition and approve government actions unconditionally (De Winter & Dumont, 2006), so when a majority MP challenges the government it adds to the unexpectedness of the story.

H1a: MPs from larger parties are more newsworthy.

H1b: MPs from government parties are more newsworthy.

Issue Specialization. Parties are often associated with a particular issue they 'own'. Consistent attention and policy action on specific issues by parties makes citizens come to view the party as competent at handling those issues, thereby creating a stable and long-term issue-ownership (Petrocik, 1996). Hayes (2008, p. 380) suggests that journalists as well are guided by partisan heuristics when reporting about politics: "*[…] party expectations influence journalists' choices of which candidate statements to report and which to ignore*". We apply this issue-ownership mechanism to individual politicians. Most elected MPs specialize in one or a few policy domains and become experts on it. That way, they create their personal issue-ownership. We expect that political journalist are driven by MPs' specialization, in the same way they follow issue-ownership heuristics. Politicians talking about their field of expertise are *relevant* sources for the topic at hand and are *consonant* with journalists' mental 'pre-images' (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). This also relates to the concept of thematic relevance: members of parliament have issue-specific relevance which grants them media access only in their particular field of competence (Tresch, 2009; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006).

H2: MPs communicating about the issue they are specialized in are more newsworthy.

Media Reactivity. Besides the issues MPs communicate about, they also need to consider their timing of communication. The modern political process can be perceived of as a series of cycles – or political waves – in which political actors, publics and the mass media concentrate on a small number of public issues for a limited period of time. Politicians can either create waves to get initial control over the story line or they can exploit existing waves to their own advantage. However, the ability to initiate waves depends once again on political power. Powerful actors are in a better place to introduce waves while less influential politicians often have to wait for appropriate waves to get involved in (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). For MPs the best strategy is thus to 'surf' the current wave of attention by responding to ongoing mediatized debates. This way, they add to the *continuity* of the news. Once a story has become news, it remains in the media spotlight for a while because it has become familiar to the audience and is easier to interpret (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). By reacting to newsworthy stories MPs offer journalists with easy, accessible material that can provide a new angle to the story or be used to fill up space (Flowers et al., 2003).

H3: MPs reacting on an ongoing debate are more newsworthy.

Political Action. Lastly, MPs have a wide scope of actions they can communicate about. First, politicians can try to set the political agenda by pronouncing their personal point of view. Second, they can employ parliamentary questions to voice their concerns, control government and prepare legislative acts. Third, politicians can try to pass bills to realize their policy goals. Even when bill proposals do not become laws, they are a means for MPs to show that they are acting on salient issues and they can help to acquire a good reputation amongst colleague politicians. These different actions are often inspired by publicity-seeking motives in order to gain visibility and name recognition, but not all might be judged equally newsworthy by journalists (Bailer, 2011; Midtbø, 2011).

We differentiate between actions meant to influence the substantial policy agenda on the one hand, such as bill proposals, and actions directed at the symbolic political agenda on the other, such as asking parliamentary questions (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). We expect that journalists are mainly interested in substantial actions, as Helfer & Van Aelst (forthcoming) have found in their recent study on the newsworthiness of political messages. Actions directed at the substantial political agenda may have more impact on society and are consequently more pertinent to cover. They have thus a bigger

magnitude compared to symbolic actions (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Moreover, drawing up bill proposals requires more time investment, commitment and knowledge (Schiller, 1995) and stands out from the abundance of questions asked in parliament (De Winter & Dumont, 2006), which adds to the *surprise* element of the news (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001).

H4: MPs who undertake a substantial action are more newsworthy.

Selection Decisions of Journalists

For politicians to become news sources, they need to pass several news gates on different levels: individuals, routine practices, organizations, social institutions and societies (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). In this study, we are interested in journalists assessing which MPs are newsworthy so we examine the first two levels of the gatekeeping process: individual journalists and the selection routines they apply during their daily work.

On the individual level, journalists' subjective attitudes and personal background can guide their selection decisions. Their predispositions can lead to selective attention, selective perception and selective retention of information. Some authors suggest that journalists' backgrounds and ideas are related to what is reported in the various news media around the world (Donsbach, 2004; Weaver & Wu, 1998). For instance, news decisions can reflect the journalists' political beliefs, known as the partisan bias: right-wing journalists might select right-wing politicians more often and vice versa (D'Alessio & Allen, 2000). Also socio-demographics might influence professional decisions. Journalists have diverse beliefs and priorities consistent with their gender, age and education, which then can lead to different reporting styles (Peiser, 2000). For example, male and female reporters might socialize differently into the workplace and subsequently female journalists are thought to select more often female news sources (e.g. Armstrong, 2004; Rodgers & Thorson, 2003).

But even though news content is produced by many different individuals with divergent backgrounds, it tends to be homogenous within and across news outlets. Journalists are socialized into the newsroom and closely follow a generalized set of news values and working routines developed over time rather than being influenced by personal preferences. They share basic definitions of newsworthiness, although these rules are not consciously acknowledged or written down (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). The theory of news values is a clear example of how ground rules of newsworthiness operate during the daily news production. These news values transcend the opinions of a single journalist. In general, collective routines and news criteria grounded in an

organizational context are considered as having more influence on news content than individual journalists (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Therefore, we expect that journalists work along shared conceptions of newsworthiness when selecting political news sources and select the same MPs rather than being influenced by their socio-demographic background and ideological leaning.

> *H5: Journalists' socio-demographic characteristics and political leaning do not influence their judgment of MPs' newsworthiness.*

Data and Method

The Factorial Survey Method

The factorial survey is a method to determine the underlying principles behind human judgments of social objects (Wallander, 2009). The main component are vignettes: short, carefully constructed descriptions of a person or a situation that contain a systematic combination of characteristics. Respondents typically judge multiple vignettes to measure their opinion or intended behavior concerning each presented vignette. The vignettes consist of various dimensions which in turn all have several levels. The total vignette population is obtained by a full factorial combination of all levels (Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010). By letting each of the dimensions vary independently with respect to its levels, factor orthogonality is obtained across dimensions so respondents only need to judge a sample of the vignette universe to disentangle the unique effect of dimensions that are normally highly correlated. Still, it is also important to exclude implausible combinations and pay attention to the degree of realism of the vignettes (Wallander, 2009). In our case, no implausible combinations are present and we ask a control question to measure the degree of realism of the vignettes.

Operationalization of Dimensions

Based upon our theoretical expectations and gender as a control variable, we included five dimensions in our vignettes, each with two or four levels (see table 5.1). We take gender into account because previous research has indicated the existence of a gender bias in political news: female politicians get less media coverage (e.g. Adcock, 2010; Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008; Niven, 2005). This way, we can also control whether female journalists are more inclined to report on female news sources.

Table 5.1. Operationalization of Dimensions in Vignettes

Dimension	Levels
Gender [2 levels]	Male - Female
Party [4 levels]	Green - Socialist - Liberal - Flemish Nationalists
Issue [4 levels]	Defense - Fiscality - Judiciary - Immigration
Reactivity [2 levels]	Initiate - React
Political action [4 levels]	Standpoint - Oral question - Written question - Bill proposal

We choose to include real Dutch-speaking members of Belgian federal parliament in the vignettes. This advances the degree of realism and thus increases the ecological validity. The choice for which MPs to include[1] was firstly based upon their gender and party: we selected one male and one female MP of four parties, resulting in eight MPs appearing each in one of the eight vignettes randomly presented to respondents. Moreover, four of the selected MPs have a clear specialization on one of the four issues in the vignettes whereas the other four are rather generalists[2]. To control for an effect of using real MPs – with some being more newsworthy to begin with – we measured their actual media access by asking respondents: "*How often do the following actors succeed in making it into the news?*" For this question, respondents had to judge eight politicians - randomly chosen from a group of 50 Belgian politicians amongst which also our eight MPs - on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always). The mean scores range between 2,7 (Mathias De Clercq) and 3,9 (Theo Francken), so all of them are well-known by political journalists and appear regularly – but not always – in the news. We include this measure as a control variable in our analyses.

Secondly, we included one left government party (Socialists), one right government party (Liberals), one left opposition party (Greens) and one right opposition party (Flemish Nationalists). This way, we can easily test hypotheses 2a and 2b. The electoral strength of the parties is based upon their amount of seats in federal parliament after the 2010 federal elections (N-VA: 27, sp.a: 13, Open VLD: 13, Groen: 5). Furthermore, we selected four issues: national defense (removal of nuclear bombs on Belgian ground), fiscality (regulation of salaries and bonuses of bank managers), judiciary (replacement of outdated prisons), and asylum and migration (residence permits for under aged asylum seekers). None of these topics are clearly owned by one of the four parties, but four of the selected MPs have a clear specialization concerning one of these issues. This way, we are able to focus on the effect of issue specialization and rule out the influence of issue-ownership by parties. Concerning the timing of communication, initiating is operationalized by MPs who "*want to reopen the debate on*", whereas MPs who react say that they "*want to react to the recent news about*".

Lastly, we manipulated intended action. They could "*advocate for*" (personal standpoint), "*ask an oral question during the next plenary session*" (oral question), "*draw up a written question*" (written question) or "*submit a law proposal*" (bill proposal). For analyses, the first three categories were collapsed as being symbolic actions whereas the last category was considered as a substantial action. Next to the five manipulated dimensions, we consciously held certain dimensions constant as experimental designs allow only a few manipulations to be incorporated. First of all, the vignette scenarios were presented as press releases coming from one federal MP. Press releases are still commonly used by MPs to solicit news coverage as they are easy to set up and a quick manner to communicate policy stances and actions to journalists (Fogarty, 2012). Second, every press release was rather short, contained a clear quote and was negatively framed. This way, the press releases were realistic and already had a basic degree of newsworthiness (Flowers et al., 2003). An example of a fictional press release is shown below (a man of the Greens reacts on a defense issue and will ask a written question):

> "*The B61-nucleair bombs do not need to be modernized, but rather destroyed*", responds Green Member of Parliament Wouter Devriendt on the recent news about the modernization of the nuclear weapons stored in Kleine Brogel. "*Nuclear weapons are dangerous and useless. Moreover, the modernization, the storage, the maintenance and the surveillance of the nuclear bombs are extremely expensive. The government needs to undertake action to commence and finish a complete nuclear disarmament.*" Devriendt wants to gain clarity about the measures concerning nuclear weapons in Belgium by asking a written question to the authorized cabinet member.

Multiplying all levels (2 x 4 x 4 x 2 x 4) resulted in a vignette universe of 256 vignettes. We drew a half fraction factorial sample which resulted in an orthogonal and balanced sample of 128 vignettes. The use of this sample allows for statistically efficient estimations of all direct effects and first and second order interactions.

Survey and Respondents

A typical vignette study consists of two components: 1) a vignette experiment as the core element, and 2) a traditional survey to measure additional respondent-specific characteristics (Atzmüller & Steiner, 2010). Each respondent first got a set of eight vignettes randomly drawn from the sample of 128 vignettes. The reason to opt for eight vignettes per respondent was twofold. First, we made sure that each respondent had to rate each of the eight MPs at least and only once. Second, eight

vignettes per respondent was high enough to guarantee a sufficient level of statistical power and low enough to avoid respondent fatigue at the same time. The respondents judged the newsworthiness of the vignettes on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = definitely not, 7 = definitely) based upon the question: "*Would you make a news story based upon this information?*"

Afterwards, some follow-up questions were asked. First, the respondents judged the degree of realism of the vignettes on a 10-point Likert scale (1 = totally unrealistic, 10 = totally realistic). Overall, respondents assess the press releases as being rather realistic (mean = 5,9; SD = 1,86). To be sure, we include this measurement as a control variable in the analyses. Second, we asked which parties they associate with certain political issues and how often they report on politics. To end, we measured the respondents' socio-economic background and political beliefs.

The survey was applied as an online survey. Our target group consists of political journalists, although it is not straightforward to define who those journalists exactly are. In a first step, we consulted the 'journalistendatabank' (http://www.avbb.be), which gathers information on more than 5000 journalists in Belgium, and selected Dutch speaking editorial journalists specialized in politics (so 'technical' news workers such as photographers and cameramen were excluded). In a second step, we checked the websites of news organizations as well as actual newspapers and news broadcasts to find additional political journalists.

Eventually, 293 journalists were contacted in March and April 2014 by a first e-mail, two reminder e-mails and phone calls. Of those, 167 journalists did not enter the survey (57%), 26 journalists indicated that they were currently not working as a journalist or that they never report on politics (9%), 25 journalists entered the survey, but did not finish it (8%). 75 journalists did fill in the entire survey (26%), however, the follow-up questions indicated that two journalists never report on political actors, so we excluded them from analyses. This leaves us with a total of 73 respondents. Our sample of political journalists (see table 5.2.) corresponds to a large extent to the sample of journalists in the large-scale Belgian journalist survey of Raeymaeckers et al. (2013). Sex (44% women) and age (on average 44 years) of both samples are identical, but the political journalists are higher educated compared to journalists in general, often having an academic degree in political science or law.

Table 5.2. Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

Variable	Measurement	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age	In years	65	43,6	11,5	24	66
Experience	In years	68	17,5	11	1	43
Ideology	0 = totally left, 10 = totally right	60	4,2	1	0	7
Political specialization	Amount of news stories with political actor on 10 last news stories	59	6,5	3	1	10
Variable	**Category**	**N**	**%**			
Sex	Man	50	68.5			
	Woman	23	31.5			
Media outlet	Print	39	53.4			
	Audiovisual	28	38.4			
	Online	6	8.2			
Education	High school	2	2.8			
	Professional bachelor	7	9.7			
	Academic bachelor	5	6.9			
	Academic master	57	79.2			
	PhD	1	1.4			

Note: Total N of respondents is 73. However, for education, age, journalistic experience, ideology and political specialization, some data are missing as not all respondent completed the whole survey.

Analysis

The observations in our dataset are not independent from each other as each of the 73 respondents rated eight vignettes, which adds up to 584 vignette judgments. We account for this clustering by employing multilevel regression models, with 584 vignette judgments nested within 73 respondents. The dependent variable is journalists' judgment (N = 584) about the newsworthiness of the press release and is normally distributed (range = 1 – 7; mean = 3,9; SD = 1,71). Our independent variables reside on two levels. The first level comprises the characteristics of MPs that were experimentally manipulated in the vignettes. The second level contains journalists' characteristics, which were gathered by means of the follow-up questions in the survey.

Results

By including several characteristics of MPs in one single experimental design we can measure the influence of the factors in isolation, while controlling for the presence of all other variables included. Model one in table 5.3. shows the direct effects of MPs' characteristics on the judgments of newsworthiness by the journalists.

To begin with, we examine whether party affiliation raises MPs' newsworthiness, which is indeed the case. Both hypotheses 1a and 1b get confirmed: MPs from parties with a larger faction in parliament and MPs from government parties are judged as being more newsworthy. Members of parliament thus benefit from belonging to a strong party. Our second hypothesis concerns issue specialization. We expected that MPs who communicate about the issue they are specialized in will be considered as being more relevant. This expectation is however not supported ($p = 0.581$)[3]. With hypothesis 3, we gauge the effect of the timing of MPs' communication. Literature suggests that MPs who try to ride the current wave of attention are more likely to become a news source because they add to the continuity of the news agenda. The analysis indeed supports this expectation: reacting on a mediatized debate yields a significant positive effect. Our last hypothesis focuses on political actions of MPs. Consistent with our expectation, introducing a bill to influence the substantial political agenda has a strong and significant positive effect on journalists' selection decisions compared to symbolic actions. In addition to the direct effects of politicians' features on their newsworthiness, we also checked for interaction effects between their characteristics (not in table). Yet, none of them are significant[4]. To conclude, we look at three control variables that might influence MPs' newsworthiness to rule out spurious effects: gender, their 'real-world' media access and the issue they communicate about. The gender of the MP does not affect the judgments of the journalists ($p = 0.81$), whereas the issue does. Stories about judiciary issues are deemed significantly less newsworthy compared to the other topics. The insignificant effect of MPs' media access ($p = 0.51$) indicates that the effects found are not caused by the eight real MPs included in the vignettes, but are due to our experimental manipulations.

Secondly, we want to examine whether all journalists judge newsworthiness of MPs in the same manner or whether their personal characteristics influence their selection decisions. Model 2 shows the direct effect of journalists' features on their newsworthiness judgments. The results confirm hypothesis 5: journalists do not differ amongst each other when it comes to news selection of politicians[5]. They select the same MPs regardless whether they are female ($p = 0.89$), older ($p = 0.48$), higher educated ($p = 0.72$) or more right-leaning ($p = 0.58$). To be sure, we also tested for interaction effects between MPs' characteristics and journalists' characteristics (not in table). For example, female journalist might judge female MPs as being more newsworthy or right-leaning journalist might prefer right-wing politicians. However, none of the interactions yield a significant effect[6]. Lastly, we point to the disappearance of the significant effect of being a government member ($p = 0.30$). When adding the personal characteristics of the journalists, government MPs are no longer judged more newsworthy than opposition MPs, so as a result we have to reject H1b.

Table 5.3. Explaining Newsworthiness of MPs as Judged by Political Journalists

	Model 1	Model 2
Level 1 (MP)		
Size party	0.02 (0.01)*	0.02 (0.01)**
Government party	0.32 (0.16)*	0.20 (0.20)
Issue specialization	-0.10 (0.18)	-0.13 (0.21)
Media reactivity	0.21 (0.11)*	0.27 (0.13)*
Substantial action	0.57 (0.12)***	0.56 (0.15)***
Level 2 (journalist)		
Gender		-0.11 (0.37)
Age		0.01 (0.01)
Education		0.10 (0.19)
Ideology		-0.04 (0.12)
Controls		
Gender MP	0.03 (0.14)	0.04 (0.17)
Media access MP	-0.10 (0.27)	-0.25 (0.33)
Issue *(Ref. = National defense)*		
Fiscality	-0.27 (0.15)	-0.18 (0.18)
Judiciary	-0.75 (0.15)***	-0.79 (0.18)***
Asylum & migration	-0.25 (0.15)	-0.34 (0.18)
Intercept	3.26***	3.45*
N		
Journalists	73	57
Vignettes	584	456
Residual variance		
Level journalists	1.07	1.09
Level MP	1.27	1.34
Rho	0.42	0.40

Note: Multilevel Linear Regression (random effects) with newsworthiness judgements by journalists as dependent variable. Standard errors in parentheses. * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$. Model 2 is based upon the judgments of 57 journalists instead of 73 because some respondents did not answer all follow-up questions regarding their socio-demographics and ideological preference.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study examined the newsworthiness of members of parliament to explain how they can make it into the news despite their lack of political power. More specifically, we considered their characteristics as being news factors that journalists employ for assessing MPs' newsworthiness and analyzed this by means of an experimental design. Based upon a factorial survey experiment with 73 political journalists in Belgium, we conclude that several characteristics of MPs can increase – or

decrease when lacking – their newsworthiness. Although it is difficult for less powerful politicians to obtain news coverage, there are clearly ways how they can succeed at it.

First of all, party attachment matters. MPs belonging to larger parties (H1a) are in a better position to get their message across to journalists. This relates to the idea of political power translating into power over the news media (Wolfsfeld, 2011). It appears that news values as *power* and *relevance* also apply to ordinary politicians but that they are derived from the party they belong to rather than from their own institutional position. Surprisingly, this reasoning does not hold for government MPs (H1b). Although they also can be considered as more *powerful* and *relevant* than opposition MPs and in addition provide an element of *surprise* by criticizing a cabinet member, they are not judged as being more newsworthy. The news value of *composition* (Galtung & Ruge, 1965) might be at play here: to secure balanced reporting between government and opposition, journalists might select opposition MPs to contrast the prominent presence of cabinet members in the news.

Next, the results show that MPs proactively can raise their newsworthiness by taking care of their communication strategies. When reaching out to journalists, they need to take into account the recent news agenda. MPs who connect to an ongoing mediatized debate have more chances to 'surf' the current wave of attention and become a news source (H3). For parliamentarians, the best strategy is to react on 'hot topics' to add to the *continuity* of the news agenda. Also the type of activity MPs communicate about determines their chances of getting covered, with activities aimed at the substantial policy agenda being most effective (H4). Bill proposals seem to attract journalists' attention as they show the time investment and commitment by the politician (Schiller, 1995), and stand out from the increasing number of parliamentary questions (De Winter & Dumont, 2006). In this case, the *surprise* value does apply.

Hypothesis two concerning issue specialization was not confirmed: journalists do not judge politicians communicating about their own field of expertise as a more relevant news source, as we expected based upon the news value of *consonance* and thematic relevance. It might be that the journalists did not recognize the issue specialization of MPs[7]. With an ever faster news cycle, most journalists themselves have become generalists rather than specialists. Moreover, if journalists did identify MPs' specialization issue, they might suppose that it is not worthwhile reporting on because their readers and viewers do not have any knowledge about parliamentarians' field of expertise. Besides, politicians communicating about an unexpected issue can be considered surprising and thus more newsworthy (Helfer & Van Aelst, forthcoming). The negative effect of issue specialization

indicates that in this particular case the news value of *surprise* might be more influential than that of *consonance*.

Overall, we can conclude that news value theory can add to our understanding of news coverage of MPs, beyond the strong news value of power. By considering politicians' features as news factors that relate to one or more news values, we can explain why some of them make it more into the news than others. However, it is necessary to look at specific combinations of applicable news values, as they lead to differential effects. For example, *surprise* is the leading news value guiding selection of MPs concerning the topic they communicate about and the political actions they take, whereas it is of less importance in the government-opposition structure where keeping a balanced *composition* prevails. To be sure, we need to interpret these findings in the light of the negativity bias we implemented in the experiment. We held the news value of negative news constant (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001) with all MPs criticizing the government. Further research might indicate whether the news value approach also holds in the context of government support.

Next to the news factors of MPs, we examined whether journalists' selection routines are influenced by their socio-demographic characteristics and political leaning. We conclude that journalists do not differ from each other in their judgments of MPs' newsworthiness, regardless of their gender, age, education or political beliefs. Neither does congruence between politicians' characteristics and journalists' characteristics change their selection decisions. These results support the notion of a similar socialization in the newsroom regardless of one's socio-economic background. Political journalists seem to be a homogenous group of highly professionalized workers whose news decisions are primarily based on the professional news norms of journalism and media routines (Cassidy, 2008; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). We need to note however that we only focused on journalists' personal characteristics and not their professional role conceptions. Whereas selection routines and newsroom socialization seem to rule out influences from their socio-demographic background, professional roles might indeed shape news content (Van Dalen, 2012; Peiser, 2000). Especially the impartial-partisan dimension might be relevant in our case. Journalists can have an impartial approach to politics and seek to give a balanced report of events or they can adhere to a more partisan approach by expressing the political line of the medium they work for (Van Dalen, 2012). This way, incorporating journalists' role conceptions could have clarified why *composition* overrules the *surprise* effect when government and opposition MPs criticize government.

Whereas most research on news coverage of politicians is based upon content analyses of the news product, we have focused on selection decisions of journalists. However, we do acknowledge that

journalists are only one of many actors contributing to the news making process, next to editors, news managers, media organization owners and audiences. But they are nonetheless important actors in the early stages of the news making process as they provide the news input for editors and news managers (McManus, 1994). Looking at selection decisions by journalists tells us more about the process leading up to the actual end product. Furthermore, our experimental design implies a so-called 'news vacuum'. Respondents had to judge only one press release at a time, without competing politicians or events. As with any experiment, we need to be cautious with its external and ecological validity. Even so, our results yielded some clear and convincing results which correspond to our theoretical expectations.

To end, we would like to address the generalizability of our findings. With respect to the development of a transnational news culture, we could expect our findings to hold for other Western democracies as well. In many newsrooms across the globe one can find similarities in professional routines and socialization processes as well as a collective sharing of the traditional ideals of objectivity and impartiality. Journalistic standards and values have diffused cross-nationally which has led journalists in modern democracies to apply a transnational news logic (Esser, 2008; Hanitzsch, 2007). However, this thesis of converging journalistic cultures is contested and empirical evidence is rather mixed (Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Van Dalen, 2012). Dependent on the media system and the political system, journalists might emphasize different news values and work along other routines. For example, countries with a polarized pluralist media system such as France and Spain have a more passive, non-interventionist approach whereas democratic-corporatist countries such as Belgium take an autonomous position towards politicians and are free from political pressures (Van Dalen & Van Aelst, 2012). As a result journalists in polarized pluralist countries might give more media attention to government MPs due to influences from politicians in power. Additional comparative research is essential to scrutinize cross-national differences in the news coverage of politicians.

Endnotes

1. The MPs are: Wouter Devriendt and Meyrem Almaci (Greens), Renaat Landuyt and Caroline Gennez (Socialists), Mathias De Clercq and Carina Van Cauter (Liberals), Theo Francken and Sarah Smeyers (Flemish Nationalists).

2. The determination of specialization was based upon interviews with federal MPs where they were asked in which issues they are specialized, with the support of the European Research Council (Advanced Grant 'INFOPOL', N° 295735) and of the Research Fund of the University of Antwerp (Grant N° 26827). We selected four MPs with a clear distinctive specialization and four generalist MPs. This resulted in the following specializations: Devriendt – defense, Almaci – fiscality, Landuyt – judiciary, Francken – migration & defense.

3. In the follow-up questions, we also asked journalists which parties they link to certain issues. The results show that they indeed connect some parties to the issues in the vignettes. Consequently, we tested whether the non-significant effect of specialization could be explained by their perceptions of issue-ownership. This appears to be not the case, since the effect of issue-ownership on selection is insignificant ($B = 0.14$, $SD = 0.18$, $p = 0.449$).

4. The lack of interaction effects might be caused by the rather small cell sizes.

5. Next to individual features of journalists, we also looked at the level of the news organization to examine whether journalists working for other media outlets select differently. Similar to the personal features, they do not yield a significant result ($B = -0.31$, $SD = 0.27$, $p = 0.26$).

6. Once again, this might be due to the rather small cell sizes.

7. Unfortunately, we did not validate respondents' knowledge about the issue specialization of MPs, so we cannot control for it.

Conclusion

The subject of this PhD dissertation was news coverage of individual politicians. I departed from a detailed study of the state of the art to lay bare the gaps existing in the research field and from there on, I set goals for subsequent empirical studies. The starting point from the beginning was political power. Power is a precious resource for politicians to attract media attention, which in turn can enhance their political career in several ways. Numerous studies have indeed shown that news coverage is biased towards powerful politicians, with little coverage left for the less fortunate. In this dissertation, I took it a step further and looked first at *the contingent effect of power* in a comparative manner across countries and next *beyond the effect of power* in a detailed manner in Belgian politics. Both ways of examining news coverage fill gaps in the research field, as most previous studies only deal with some individual features of politicians without controlling for crucial confounding factors or incorporating interactions, and are conducted in one single country.

In order to achieve this twofold goal, I constructed a three-level model of influences on news coverage of politicians. The micro-level encompasses features of politicians which can have a direct effect on the amount of news coverage they receive. The meso-level of the news media and the macro-level of countries are expected to interact with these direct effects of politicians on news coverage. Taking into account all these various elements enabled me to counter the 'omitted variable bias' and examine important interaction effects to shine a brighter light on politicians' news coverage. Moreover, I consciously decided to combine research methods by employing a theoretical review, content analyses and an experimental survey with political journalists. In the same way as this dissertation started with a critical review of previous studies on news coverage of politicians, it is important now to look with a critical eye to my own empirical work. In this conclusion, I first touch

upon the key findings for each empirical chapter and afterwards I put the pieces together to construct a more complete and nuanced picture of politicians appearing in the news.

Overview of Key Findings

The first empirical part in this dissertation was presented in chapter two in which I looked specifically at the relationship between power and news coverage by means of a comparative content analysis of newspapers, television news and online news websites across sixteen Western countries. Political power is a crucial factor in explaining which politicians appear in the news media, but might not be equally determining across media outlets and countries as previous research indicated. And indeed, the descriptive analysis shows that each country has its own specific media hierarchy with some political positions being more prominently present in the news compared to others. In some countries, such as Spain and the UK, power is a very strong determinant for news coverage, with the head of the government and government members taking up more than 65 per cent of all mentions. In countries such as Sweden and the Netherlands on the other hand, news coverage is more equally divided across politicians with different power positions. The results indicate that media attention for politicians is more equally distributed in newspapers and online news compared to television news, in media systems that are less commercialized, and in consensus democracies where power is shared amongst a greater variety of political actors. In these occasions, less powerful politicians such as members of parliament have a better shot at passing the news gates. The subsequent chapters then analyze into detail which features and activities of politicians matter next to power.

The third chapter sketched the first study beyond the effect of power. I focused meticulously and simultaneously on many features of ordinary MPs who by definition are on the lower end in the political hierarchy and thus also in the media hierarchy. MPs share a similar political standing and have to compete against each other to get publicity. The main interest in chapter 3 was thus to examine how MPs can make it into the newspapers anyway by actively engaging in political and media work, while at the same time controlling for personal characteristics such as gender and seniority. Moreover, I checked for effects of more subtle power differences amongst the rather homogeneous group of parliamentarians, for example when an MP is a committee chair or the leader of a parliamentary party group. The results show that even small differences in political standing result in diverse coverage but more importantly, that MPs can indeed enhance their media visibility regardless of their lower power position. By asking parliamentary questions and taking care of their

communication strategies and personal relations with journalists, they can attract the attention of journalists and editors and make it into the news more often.

Chapter four included next to micro-level variables of politicians also news media features on the meso-level. Here again, I looked beyond the effect of power and analyzed whether female politicians still receive less television news coverage even when taking into account their lower political standing. The inconvenient truth is: yes, they do. Although their political position – once again – yields the biggest significant effect, it appears that women nevertheless receive less speaking time in television news. Concerning journalists and the news media, I only found a substantial difference according to the time period in which politics is reported on: during election campaigns the news is more equally distributed across politicians which results in female politicians receiving more media attention compared to routine periods. News coverage of female politicians did not differ between the public broadcast and the commercial broadcast, and only slightly between female and male journalists, and feminine and masculine themes. All in all, both a political bias and a media bias cause the gender bias in Belgian television news.

Similar to chapter four, the last empirical chapter examined micro- and meso-level variables beyond the effect of power, but employed an innovative research method to investigate them. By means of an experimental survey with political journalists of newspapers, television news and online news media, I studied the newsworthiness of ordinary MPs and how they can pass the news gates. In this chapter, the focus shifted from actual news content to the first phase in the news making process: journalists making selection decisions and judging which political news sources to include in their news stories. It appears that journalists as a professional group assess the newsworthiness of politicians in a similar way, regardless their gender, age, education or ideological leaning. They select MPs who derive power from belonging to a large party, and those who actively communicate about their bill proposals and who employ windows of opportunities by reacting on current news waves.

Putting the Pieces Together

Table 6.1. gives an overview of all variables tested on the micro-, meso- and macro-level across the chapters. Based on this integrating table, each variable will be discussed separately to clarify what I have found and to explain contradictions where necessary. Overall, I found consistent results for most variables investigated, across my own empirical work as well as according to previous research. This implies that the impact of these variables on news coverage are robust regardless the research

design employed and the additional variables analyzed simultaneously. When inconsistencies are apparent however, they can be clarified by looking at other variables and other levels, as was the goal of including the three-level model and interaction effects. To this end, some additional analyses were executed to clarify what can account for contradictory results. While discussing the different variables, the pieces of the news coverage puzzle come together to provide an answer on the main research questions concerning *the contingent effect of power* and what matters for news coverage *beyond the effect of power*. This way, I provide a general mechanism across all variables and levels that can explain *which politicians make it into the news and why*.

Table 6.1. Overview of Findings across Chapters

	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	The puzzle
MICRO					
Political power	✓	✓	✓	(control)	✓✓
Seniority		x	x		xx
Party					
Majority party		x	x	x	xx
Size party				✓	✓
Gender		x	✓	x	?
Age			x		x
Political work					
Attendances		x			x
PQs		✓		x	?
Bill proposals		x		✓	?
Specialization				x	x
Media work					
Press releases		x			x
Contacts journalists		✓			✓
Website		✓			✓
Twitter		x			x
Reactivity				✓	✓
MESO					
Journalists			x	x	xx
Medium					
Type	✓				✓
Commercial - public	✓		x		?
Issue			x	✓	?
Election period			✓		✓
MACRO					
Media system	✓				✓
Political system	✓				✓

✓✓ A clear significant effect
✓ Significant effect but only one measurement
xx A clear non-significant effect
x Non-significant effect but only one measurement
? Mixed evidence

The Contingent Effect of Power

First of all, political power is indeed the driving force behind the skewed distribution of news coverage of politicians: the higher the political function someone has, the more one is visible in the news. In each empirical chapter, power is the largest determinant of media visibility and explains the variance in news coverage to a large extent. It is thus clear that the political hierarchy is reflected in an equivalent media hierarchy. However, political power yields smaller effects in some conditions compared to others and, moreover, some variance in news coverage distribution is still left besides the clear impact of power. This proves first that the relationship between power and news coverage is indeed contingent and that it is crucial to take into account situational factors when analyzing news coverage. Second, other assets of politicians – when holding their political power constant – matter as well when it comes to getting covered.

To tease out *the contingent effect of power*, it is necessary to look at interactions between power and other micro-variables of individual politicians on the one hand and between power and variables on the meso- and macro-level on the other. First, political standing can be related to the activities politicians undertake within political institutions as well as outside. The actions of more powerful politicians are perceived as being more relevant for society (van Dalen, 2012; Schoenbach et al., 2001) and as a result politicians with more political standing might even increase their media visibility by being very active. However, it appears that ordinary members of parliament and parliamentary leaders engage in similar activities within parliament and that they are also comparable regarding the communication channels they apply to reach citizens and journalists. Moreover, neither their political work nor their media work grants them additional media access (chapter three).

Next, factors on the meso-level of news media might interact with the strong relationship between power of politicians and their news coverage. Whereas the effect of power is not contingent on the individual journalist that selects politicians as news sources or on the issue that is covered, the type of medium in which the news appears does matter. Television news follows the trail of power conscientious and this is even more true for public broadcasts who focus highly on government members. Newspapers and online news on the contrary are more inclined to diverge from the trail of power, thereby diminishing the main focus on top leaders. Newspapers generally have more political news than television news has as they have fewer constraints in terms of available space and production costs (de Vreese et al., 2006). As a result, newspaper reporters are able to include a wider variety of political news sources in their articles which ultimately benefits less powerful politicians. Online news websites as well are thought to be less selective. The rising of different types of online news media is expected to result in a growing diversity in news reporting (Barnhurst, 2010;

Humprecht & Büchel, 2013). This way, they can provide a public forum for ordinary politicians more than television broadcasts do.

The conditionality of power is most apparent concerning the macro-level of countries: whether powerful politicians are covered intensively and which of them exactly differs across media systems and politicians systems. Mediatization processes are often linked to the rise of television and its importance as political news source for citizens to be informed on political processes. More specifically, presidentialization of politics is considered to be a consequence of the growing prominence of television, amongst other factors such as individualization trends and the decline of party identification (Van Aelst et al., 2011). And indeed, media systems that are characterized by a highly competitive television news market, such as the U.S. and the U.K., display more presidentialized news content: presidents and prime-ministers are even more visible in the news than they already are in general.

Also the political system explains the contingency of power. When institutional power is more equally dispersed across several political actors, power differences are less prominent in the country and the news media are less guided by power differences as well. This applies to democracies with a proportional election system and multi-party coalition governments as well as to countries with a federal organization. These country characteristics lead to a more equal distribution in power amongst multiple parties, between government and opposition, and across several levels of governance. As a consequence, this results in a more equal access approach by the news media and a more diverse palette of politicians in the news without a major focus on cabinet members.

When combining the results of both media systems and political systems, the conditional impact of power can be linked to the well-known typology of Hallin and Mancini (2004) on political media systems. This way, my findings on the contingent effect of power on news coverage add to established research. For example, the degree of political parallelism – one of the dimensions to classify countries into political media systems – might influence how power relates to news coverage. In particular, the aspect the authors label as *media content* (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28) applies as it concerns the extent to which news media reflect distinct political orientation in their reporting. Polarized plural democracies are characterized by a high degree of political parallelism and thus can be expected to report more often according to party lines and their ideologies. As a result, I suggest that the news media in these democracies are more inclined to focus on party leaders compared to other institutional positions within the country. To test this suggestion, I ran an additional analysis based upon the analysis in chapter two: function is still the main micro variable and the type of

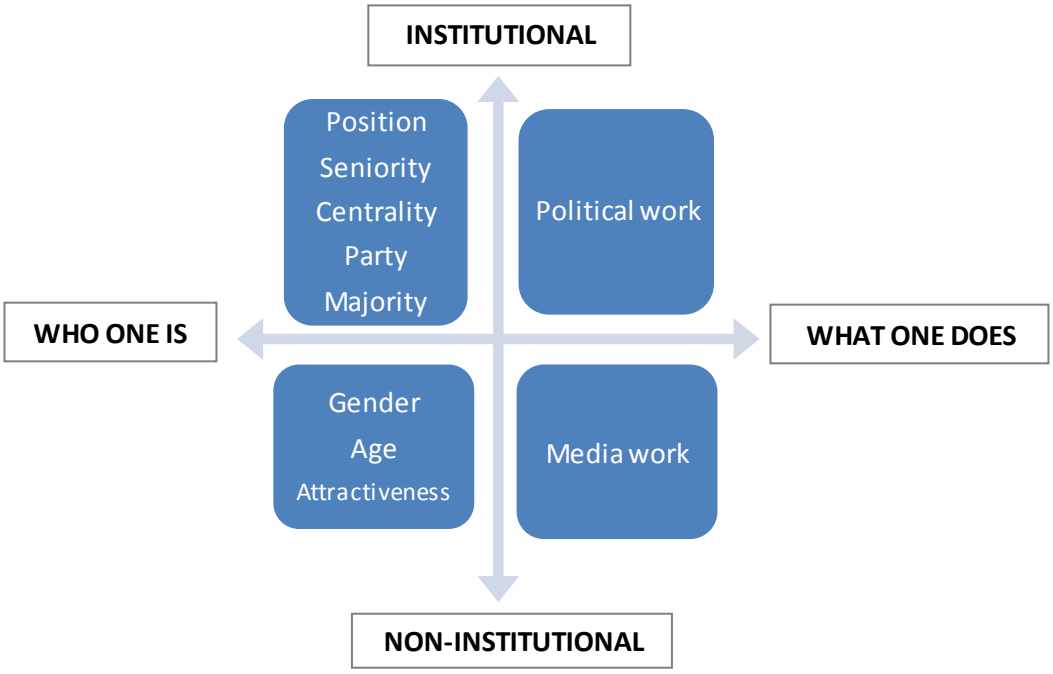
medium and public broadcasts are controlled for at the meso-level, but the indicators of the political and the media system are replaced by the three political media categories provided by Hallin and Mancini. Indeed, party leaders are significantly more visible in polarized plural countries such as Greece and Italy (IRR = 1.90, $p < 0.001$).

Another example arising from the additional analysis on political media systems concerns news coverage of the head of state, who is considered the most powerful politician within the country. These political leaders are clearly more prominent in liberal systems such as the U.S. and the U.K. compared to polarized plural countries or democratic-corporatist countries (IRR = 2.61, $p<0.001$). According to Hallin and Mancini (2004), liberal systems are characterized by both a high degree of journalistic professionalization and a highly competitive media market. Both aspects feed the dominance of media logic and thus the importance of the news value of power, resulting in news media that focus mainly on the most powerful politician being the president or the prime minister.

Beyond the Effect of Power

The discussion above about the contingency of power indicates that power is not always as crucial as previous research did suggest. Moreover, this finding implies that other assets than political power can help less powerful politicians to pass the news gates anyway. In the next paragraphs, I discuss which characteristics and activities of politicians – the micro-level in the model – explain news coverage of individual politicians *beyond power*. Which politicians get covered when controlling for the effect of political power? To this end, I go back to the classification of micro-variables formulated in chapter one and discuss all relevant parts that have been examined in this dissertation (figure 6.1.).

Figure 6.2. Typology of Micro-level of Politicians



The figure is based upon two dichotomies: (1) structural characteristics of politicians versus activities of politicians and (2) within political institutions versus outside political institutions. This results in four groups of variables of politicians which might impact the amount of news coverage they receive. On the upper left hand side reside the structural characteristics that are clearly related to individuals' public mandate as a politician. The findings in this dissertation indicate that except for institutional position – which grants them politicians power within the political system – these institutional characteristics don't matter all too much. In fact, it looks like the impact of political power overrules any effect from the other characteristics, except for the size of the party: politicians who belong to larger parties make it more into the news. Coverage of politicians is indeed proportional to the electoral strength of their party. However, this relationship relates to power as well. Politicians who have little formal power on the individual level can derive power from the party on a higher level, as larger parties have a bigger weight within the political system and they have a better shot at influencing policy decisions (Van Aelst, Maddens, et al., 2008).

Seniority does not relate to news coverage of politicians and neither does being a majority member. First, a senior MP will not surpass a new and rather unexperienced cabinet member in media visibility. Although the former will have plenty of political experience and achievements, the latter has a more important position in society and consequently is judged as being more newsworthy

(chapter three). But even amongst politicians with a similar political standing such as parliamentarians, seniors do not profit from additional media attention (chapter four). Second, members of majority parties do not get additional media attention either. However, this conclusion needs to be nuanced, as it concerns the absence of an effect *when controlling for political power*. As research on the 'incumbency bonus' shows, government parties in general are more visible in the news, but this additional attention goes to cabinet members for the larger part (Walgrave & De Swert, 2005). Less powerful politicians such as parliamentarians do not profit from belonging to a majority party, as the findings in chapter 3 indeed show. If the reasoning above is correct, we should find a significant effect of being a majority member when *not controlling for political power*. To test this, I did some additional analyses based upon the data in chapter 4 in which politicians with different political positions were included, such as the prime minister, cabinet members, party leaders and members of parliament. The same analysis without including the political position as an independent variable indeed yields a significant effect of being a majority member ($B = 0.18$, $p = 0.001$). It is thus again clear that controlling for political function is crucial when examining news coverage of politicians, and the lack thereof in some studies might account for inconsistent findings of the impact of being a majority member.

The next group of individual features of politicians consists of their personal characteristics. These characteristics are fixed socio-demographic variables, such as age and gender, and they are not derived from their position in the political world as is the case with the institutional characteristics. Of course, socio-demographics can impact the position one acquires within the political system, with for example women obtaining less powerful positions in general. In this dissertation however, the impact of these fixed characteristics of politicians on their news coverage was central, in a way that goes beyond their link with political power. For age, the results are clear and consistent with the bulk of previous studies: it does not relate substantially to media visibility of politicians.

Concerning gender, the picture is less clear. The findings of chapter three – which examined newspaper coverage of MPs – and the findings of chapter five – which examined the newsworthiness of MPs by means of a factorial survey – indicate that gender does not matter: male and female politicians receive a similar amount of news coverage when they have the same political standing. In chapter four however, a substantial effects of gender does come across: female politicians get less speaking time on television news, even when controlling for their political function. Three explanations might account for these contradictory findings: (1) the micro-level variables of politicians included in the analysis, (2) the type of medium analyzed and (3) female politicians being less willing to speak up in television news.

First, the three chapters differ in which characteristics and activities of politicians are analyzed. In chapter 3 and chapter 5, I included politicians' political work and media work, while this was not the case for the analyses in chapter 4. As already addressed in the discussion of chapter four, the gender bias found might be accounted for when looking at whether female politicians undertake less or other actions than male politicians do. This is a plausible presumption, as other chapters show that the activities of elected representatives taken within institutions and outside institutions to gain publicity have a considerable impact on their chances to pass the news gates. To put this more in perspective, I ran the analyses of chapter three and chapter five again, this time without the actions politicians take. Contrary to my expectations, gender does not yield a significant effect when excluding all activities in chapter 3 ($B = 0.13$, $p = 0.186$) and neither when excluding media reactivity and actions in parliament in chapter five ($B = 0.02$, $p = 0.925$). In addition, I did some t-tests on the activities in chapter 3 – as they are extensively measured – to explore whether women and men differ in their activities. The results show that men do not sponsor bills more often ($t = -0{,}144$, $p = 0.886$), they do not ask more oral questions ($t = -0.718$, $p = 0.475$), and neither do they draw up more written questions ($t = 0.124$, $p = 0.902$). Also concerning media work, large differences are absent: men and women are similar in the amount of press releases they send ($t = -0.591$, $p = 0.556$), in the personal website they present to citizens and journalists ($t = 0{,}037$, $p = 0.970$) and in the amount of Tweets they send ($t = -0.826$, $p = 0.411$). However, male politicians substantially have more often contacts with journalists than female politicians ($t = -3.857$, $p < 0.001$). On the whole, the additional analyses show that the gender bias found in chapter 4 is not likely to be a consequence of male and female politicians taking other actions inside and outside political institutions, except for their contacts with journalists. If male politicians have better relationships with political journalists regardless the political position they occupy, it can enhance their news coverage.

A second explanation concerns the type of medium analyzed in the three chapters. Chapter three focused on newspaper coverage – and no effect of gender is apparent – whereas chapter four examined television news. As already shown in chapter two, television news and newspapers include other politicians in their coverage. Since newspapers have a larger 'news hole', they provide more opportunities for a wide range of actors to be included as a news source, which ultimately might benefit female politicians.

Third, I examined speaking time in television news, which relates to *media voice* where actors can actually speak up in the news media. *Media visibility* on the other hand implies mere appearances in the news, as was the case in chapter three. Although female politicians speak less on Flemish

television, it might be that they receive an equal amount of media attention when it comes to appearances in the news. And indeed, when repeating the analysis of chapter three with media appearances as dependent variable instead of speaking time, the significant effect of gender disappears (B = -0.90, p = 0.06). This relates to the distinction made in the introduction between push and pull factors in the political news making process: female politicians might simply be less keen on speaking in front of the camera's. If they are less willing to provide good quotes and images – so present themselves less as speaking source for television news – it is quite obvious that they indeed receive less speaking time when they get mentioned as a news source. Little is known yet about the differences between men and women in their eagerness to be captured on camera, but it might relate to the finding that women invest less in creating and maintaining personal relations with political journalists and in general are less media savvy than men are (Aalberg & Strömbäck, 2010).

When moving the focus from the structural characteristics of politicians towards their activities, we can distinguish between pure political initiatives within institutions on the one hand, and actions directed to gain publicity on the other. It is clear that both political work and media work do not enhance news coverage on the whole, but that differentiation between specific activities is necessary. Concerning political activities, merely being present in parliament to vote and participate at parliamentary debates is not sufficient to get access to journalists and neither is specializing in one policy issue. The latter finding relates to literature on media responsiveness. MPs who are specialized in one or a few issues tend to utilize information from the news media less often as an inspiration for their political initiatives as this information is rather broad. They prefer to use specialized and more detailed information to draw up their initiatives (Sevenans, Walgrave, & Vos, forthcoming). However, being reactive to the news media and employing media stories to take political initiatives enhances ones coverage, as will be discussed later on. What does actually matter are parliamentary initiatives: asking questions in parliament and proposing laws. However, they have other effects across the various stages in the news making process. Bill proposals directed at the substantial policy agenda have an impact during the first stage in which journalist select which politicians are newsworthy to make a news item about, whereas asking more written and oral questions results in more actual news coverage.

To promote their political work and inform citizens about their achievements, politicians need to take care of their communication strategy. They need to have a clear and up-to-date website which is easy to consult by journalists and they also profit from building – and maintaining – good personal relationships with political journalists. Moreover, they should be responsive to ongoing news stories and communicate about 'hot topics' to make it into the news. By surfing along a news wave,

politicians can promote themselves and their ideas concerning that issue. The clear impact of media reactivity is interesting, as it combines the importance of both political work and media work. When a news story creates a window of opportunity, politicians need to act upon that newsworthy issue *and* they need to communicate about that action in a proper way to attract the attention of journalists and editors. This finding corresponds to agenda-setting research on the reciprocity of media and political agendas (van Santen, Helfer, & van Aelst, 2013). Politicians who are responsive to the media in general – by both basing their initiatives on the news and actively trying to get into the news – succeed in their goal of passing the news gates.

When looking at the figure and its elements as a whole, one can ask what is decisive in the end to pass the news gates: who a politician is or rather what a politicians does. I conclude that in the first place journalists and editors select based upon *who a politician is*. Or rather: how powerful the politician is. However, when looking at news coverage of politicians residing towards the end of the political hierarchy, *what one does* clearly becomes more important than who one is. Structural characteristics related to who a politician is such as seniority and gender are subordinate to both the actions they take within political institutions and external efforts to promote themselves and their activities. Midtbo's (2011, p. 230) claim for a shifting focus *"from who they are to what they do"* thus applies to the comprehensive study in this dissertation, but only after ruling out the strong impact of political standing first.

Implications

The findings in this PhD dissertation have some theoretical, societal and normative implications, which are worthwhile to address in this conclusion.

For my PhD research, I analyzed formal power as being a determinant of news coverage, but the opposite relation is relevant as well: can news coverage have an impact on the formal power of politicians? In other words: can the mass media 'make or break' politicians? The central point in this question is whether the news media themselves are responsible for creating the existing political power hierarchy. Considering the media's reliance on the power of political actors for the construction of news, it is reasonable to believe that the mass media *follow* the prevailing political power hierarchy rather than *producing* it. Indeed, media attention can help politicians to climb the hierarchical ladder, for example by generating more preference votes, but this will rather concern minor steps on the ladder, with the real political game being played behind the curtains. This

conclusion connects to the Politics-Media-Politics (PMP) principle: changes in the political world lead to changes in media performance, which then result in subsequent changes in the political environment (Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2009; Wolfsfeld, 2004).

However, this is not to say that the news media are 'merely' following political processes at all times. They do not have a passive role in the PMP cycle but are also active constructors of the news with their own professional interests. The news media "*do not only reflect political realities, they also actively transform them into news stories that are both interesting and culturally resonant*" (Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2009, p. 147). In this respect, scholars raise concerns about the independence of the news media from those in powerful positions and are accused of maintaining or even strengthening existing power relations, with little opportunity for oppositional voices to be heard (Shehata, 2010). They bolster the 'principle of cumulative inequality': those that need media access the most find it the most difficult to obtain it (Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2004, p. 78). This dissertation proves that less powerful politicians are indeed unable to break this cycle: they will always receive less news coverage compared to more powerful contenders. However, the findings in this dissertation also show that among equals with a similar political standing, some MPs succeed better in attracting media attention than others, which in the end may help to acquire more political power.

Another socially relevant consideration concerns the functioning of politics in a highly mediatized society. As my research proves, politicians who are eager to feed the media monster with applicable events are more likely to get covered. As a result and consistent with theories on the 'mediatization of politics', they will adapt to media logic to correspond to the news values and working routines of the news media (Esser & Strömbäck, 2014). One could argue that politicians' focus on the media might contradict with their prime task within democracy of producing good public policy and representing citizens. However, theoretical and empirical research indicates that the strength and influence of media logic on political processes does not need to be overestimated. In general, political actors utilize the media on their own terms and to their own benefit. They are not forced to interact with the news media all the time, but utilize them to reach their own goals (Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013). Politicians will not blindly be guided by the news media, but keep them in the back of their mind and react when appropriate or necessary.

In the same vein, one could wonder whether the news media are successfully fulfilling their role in contemporary democracy. One of the main tasks of the news media is to supply citizens with complete and nuanced information to enable them to assess political processes and make informed electoral choices (Asp, 2007; Strömback, 2005). However, the trend of personalized coverage and a

higher focus on political leaders might draw the attention away from substantive coverage of policy processes and legislation. News coverage that is more about persons than about policy might lead to ignorant voters who care about personalities instead of good public policy that enhances society. Yet, the shift from coverage of parties and institutions to coverage of individual politicians does not necessarily downgrade the quality of political news. While covering individuals, the news media can still report on substantive societal issues as opposed to privatized coverage in which the personal characteristics and the private life of politicians are central (Van Aelst et al., 2011). Personalization does not necessarily result in more privatization of political news and thus not directly causes a threat to the democratic informative function of the mass media.

The current dissertation also points in that direction by concluding that for MPs it is more important what they do than who they are. Members of parliament get covered when they undertake relevant legislative actions in parliament, which journalists judge as relevant for citizens. When the news media report on legislators' activities in parliament, the audience gets informed about ongoing societal issues and political processes. Moreover, the finding that news coverage of individual politicians becomes less skewed during election campaigns signals that citizens receive rather balanced electoral information. If the news media cover both political leaders and oppositional voices, voters can get acquainted with a large range of political voices which allows them to cast informed votes.

Limitations and Further Research

For the research presented in this dissertation, I consciously decided on the point of departure and the methodology to apply. These decisions inevitably had consequences for the further course of the studies across the chapters and the results that came forward. Although I stand by the choices thoughtfully made, the limitations of this dissertation deserve some elaboration. Addressing the limitations allows for speculation about findings that might have occurred when examined differently and also provides input for further research.

First of all, the dependent variable in the dissertation consisted of the *amount of media attention* that individual politicians attract. This implies that politicians' media access was analyzed which includes both media visibility and media voice. The former implies mere presence in the news whereas the latter also indicates that political actors have an actual voice in the news. Two questions pop up concerning the decision to analyze the amount of news coverage: (1) what if politicians want

to *avoid media attention* instead of attracting it, and (2) what if politicians want to influence the *type of news coverage* they receive and thus want to control media framing.

In general, politicians are eager to attract media coverage, as they acknowledge the central place that the mass media occupy in contemporary society and politics. However, on certain occasions politicians might benefit from *not* appearing in the news. They may withhold information to avoid that the news media devote attention to issues that may damage them or that might generate a competitive disadvantage (Walgrave, Van Aelst, & Bennett, 2010). Moreover, when the government has to make unpopular policy decisions or has caused a political fiasco, they try to release that news on a very busy news day in order to 'bury' their bad news (Lee, 2005). To relate this idea back to the starting point of the current dissertation, agenda-exclusion is mainly an instrument of elite politicians and only to a minor extent of ordinary MPs (Walgrave et al., 2010). Political leaders such as cabinet members and party leaders take important decisions for the larger group – making government decisions and delineating the party strategy – and are responsible for the consequences thereof. They are the ones who have to admit mistakes and thus apply blame avoidance strategies to minimize bad publicity (Nielsen & Baekgaard, 2013). As avoiding media attention is rather a task of powerful politicians and since I look mainly beyond political power in this dissertation, examining which politicians succeed in minimizing bad coverage was out of scope. It is however a valuable research field to explore how, when and why political leaders try to downgrade the amount of media visibility.

Next to looking which politicians are visible in the news media, it is interesting to analyze *how* they get covered. This concerns the distinction between the ability to set the agenda on the one hand and controlling the framing of the news on the other. The former concerns what and who is covered in the news – the focus in this dissertation – whereas the latter deals with the question of how the news media report about issues and news sources (Strömback & Nord, 2006). Whereas politicians can steer to a certain degree what the news is about, it is much more difficult for them to also control the framing of the news. Once the media agenda is set, journalists and editors select which aspects and whom to emphasize, and how the news will be structured (Strömback & Nord, 2006; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). In the stage of defining and structuring the news, journalists have the upper hand in the power relation between politicians and journalists. However, some politicians do succeed in steering news framing and this is once again related to political power: powerful, high-standing politicians have more leverage to negotiate on how exactly a story is covered, in the same way they also have more resources to negotiate about their access to the news media (Van Aelst et al., 2010; Midtbø, 2011). As a consequence, I expect that political power is even more determining

for explaining which politicians can influence news framing compared to which politicians appear in the news. This implies that power will be less contingent on situational factors concerning framing and that aspects beyond power will matter less as well.

Second, the essential independent variable to explain the amount of media attention was political power, which was conceptualized as being *formal power*: the political power one derives from his/her institutional position in the political system. This is a common perspective in traditional political science literature and is traditionally described as 'legitimate power' (French & Raven, 1959) or 'legal authority' (Weber, 1947, 1961). However, other types of power such as 'expert power' or 'referent power' (French & Raven, 1959) might enhance politicians' news coverage as well.

For instance, having good relations with political journalists can be considered to be an informal – or even intermediary – condition of power. As mentioned before, politicians can use interactions with journalists to pressure their peers during legislative processes. This way, they gain influence and indirectly also power (Van Aelst et al., 2010; Domke et al., 2006). Moreover, political journalists can provide politicians with 'expert' advice. Many political journalists have been part of the inner political world for a long time already. By discussing their ideas with journalists, politicians hope to receive advice on how to present their positions and policy proposals. Journalists are thus a valuable source of relevant political information. As they wander around continually to meet politicians of various parties, they can transmit information from one politician to another. Especially for parliamentarians who are not involved in internal party decisions, it might be crucial to obtain this important political information (Davis, 2007, 2009) and use it as munition to attract journalists' attention. I classified contacts with journalists as being an aspect that matters beyond power, but it can be seen as related to power as well. Either way, personal relations with political journalists help politicians to pass the news gates, regardless whether this is regarded as a consequence of the informal power these relationships offer or rather as an additional means to attract more media attention.

Third, I presented a three-level model to scrutinize the interaction effects on news coverage between micro-level variables of politicians on the one hand and meso-level variables of the news media and macro-level variables of countries on the other. To explain the contingent effect of power, several aspects of journalists, media outlets, media systems and political systems – which reside on the meso- and macro-level – were taken into account. Concerning the other micro-variables of politicians, next to power, only interactions with meso-level variables were included such as journalists' characteristics and the type of medium. It would be interesting to also analyze how the impact of these features and activities of politicians differs across countries. Comparative research

can reveal how for example gender or political activities have a differential impact on who passes the news gates across countries. This dissertation already encompasses plenty of variables so additional comparative analyses lied outside its scope, but it is nevertheless interesting to speculate about how country differences might explain news coverage of ordinary politicians.

For example, country-specific differences might account for the amount of news coverage female politicians receive. A higher degree of penetration of women in politics, which can be seen as a proxy for the 'female emancipation level' or the presence of women in key positions in society as a whole, might lead to female politicians also being more visible in the news. Countries with proportional electoral systems and legislative gender quota create more opportunities for women to be elected and consequently to get covered (Dahlerup, 2012; Tripp & Kang, 2008). In countries where female representation on politics is rather high, as is the case in Belgium with approximately 39 per cent of parliamentarians being a women (www.ipu.org), one can expect that gender plays only a minor role in the allocation of media attention to politicians, as this dissertation proves. In countries where women are more absent in politics however, such as the U.S. (19%), the U.K. (23%) or France (26%) (www.ipu.org), the gender bias will probably be more prominently present in the news.

Also the impact of political work can differ amongst countries. The power of parliament vis-à-vis the government varies across democracies and consequently parliamentarians and their legislative actions are more newsworthy in certain countries compared to others. Majoritarian democracies are characterized by the dominance of the executive over the legislative whereas in consensus democracies power is more balanced between government and parliament. Parliaments in consensus democracies typically consist of multiple parties who have to debate and cooperate. This makes parliament a more powerful institution in these countries compared to majoritarian countries where government is more powerful. This way, members of strong parliaments are more newsworthy for journalists as they have the potential to influence policy decisions (Van Aelst et al., 2010; van Dalen, 2012). Moreover, MPs' parliamentary questions might have a differential impact on news coverage across countries. Parliamentary questioning is an instrument that exists in all Western parliamentary democracies, but its exact nature differs (Russo & Wiberg, 2010). Van Santen and colleagues (2013) show that journalists perceive PQs more newsworthy when questioning hour is a weekly televised event with only a limited amount of MPs asking questions and when the questions are submitted only shortly before questioning hour, as it raises the surprise element of parliamentary questions. However, the authors also stress the need for more comparative research to confirm their findings about the influence of parliamentary questioning procedures on news coverage.

Last, this dissertation shows that it is indispensable to include new media when analyzing contemporary political news content. News output from new media includes different types of politicians compared to traditional media, and politicians on their part can utilize new media channels to increase their visibility and to make it into traditional news outlets. Although it is clear that politicians on news websites differ in some respect from those on television and in newspapers, it is crucial to remark that I investigated the news websites of traditional news outlets. This implies that those news websites are related to offline newspapers or television news programs and that its content is produced by journalists within the same media organization. Setting up interactive websites enables media outlets to supplement their offline editions with background information and online videos. However, online journalism often is restricted to the conventions of classical political journalism (Deuze, 2003; Schulz, 2014).

In this respect, it would be interesting to analyze which politicians appear on independent and alternative political news websites such as politico.com and apache.be to pinpoint whether these outlets employ different source selection mechanisms compared to websites related to traditional media outlets. In my view, this could go two ways. On the one hand, independent news websites might rely even more on powerful news sources, as they have less resources and contacts to reach a broader group of political news sources. They can try to attract news audiences by reporting mainly about political leaders. On the other hand, journalists working for these alternative news channels might see themselves more as being public watchdogs who act independent from those in power. This way, they might want to shy away from the political status quo and focus rather on oppositional voices who challenge existing power structures such as opposition politicians.

Final Words

Politics is about power. Political journalism is *almost* all about power. Political journalists are guided by the trail of power, but deviate from the path from time to time. Therefore, this PhD dissertation was about nuances. Political power is crucial to explain news coverage of politicians, but also contingent on situational factors. In these circumstances, there is light at the end of the media tunnel for the less endowed politicians. Although not an easy task, less powerful politicians can pass the news gates when they handle it the right way. 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.

Referring to soccer provides a clear metaphor to frame this conclusion. Government members, party leaders and members of parliament all play in separate leagues. MPs cannot compete with government members who are playing in premier league, but have to fight against each other to get media credit in their own, lower league. However, the findings in this dissertation show that some MPs succeed better in scoring than others, which eventually may lead to an upgrade to play in a higher league.

To demonstrate this more practically, I return once again to the example in the very beginning of this dissertation. Liesbeth Homans, member of the Flemish parliament for N-VA at that time, appeared ten times in the television news during 2013, whereas Danielle Godderis-'T Jonck, who holds exactly the same political mandate, was never visible in the television news. As they are both women with comparable political experience and both belong to the same government party, the discrepancy in news coverage can be explained by looking at their efforts to court the news media and their political initiatives. In a recent MP survey, Homans stated that she has daily contacts with political journalists, mostly by means of by telephone conversations. She is also active in parliament: she initiated 11 law proposals and asked 308 parliamentary questions in total during the legislature of 2009 to 2014. Taking this together, she can easily get access to the news media to transmit information about her parliamentary work at the right timing. Godderis-'T Jonck on the other hand takes less parliamentary actions – 6 law proposals and 238 parliamentary questions – but mainly has far less contacts with journalists. She interacts with political journalists only a few times a year, which results in no news coverage. What's more, after the elections of May 25th 2014, Homans became a cabinet member of the Flemish government. Being successful in attracting news coverage thus pays off and helps politicians to climb in the political hierarchy, which shows the relevance of examining political news in contemporary mediatized society.

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