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# Politicians in the News: Media or Party Logic?

## Media Attention and Electoral Success in the Belgian Election Campaign of 2003

*Peter van Aelst, Bart Maddens, Jo Noppe and Stefaan Fiers*

### ABSTRACT

■ This study departs from the finding that media attention contributed to the electoral success of candidates in the Belgian election campaign of 2003. While the authors do find an impact of media attention on the number of preferential votes for each candidate, in this study they take a closer look at the elements that determine this media attention. Do the media autonomously decide which candidate gets more attention than others or do they follow the hierarchy determined by the parties? In other words: is the media's interest in a politician a consequence of a media logic or of a party logic? As the study's multivariate analysis clearly indicates, both logics are relevant, with the party logic outweighing the media logic. However, the question remains to what extent the parties have already incorporated a media logic in the selection of their political personnel. ■

**Key Words** Belgian politics, election campaigns, media attention, media logic, news media

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## Introduction

In modern politics, the media are considered to be a(n) (al)mighty player. Politicians in particular are convinced of the fact that media attention is crucial for their electoral success and future career. Getting in the news is therefore seen as a question of political 'life and death'. So not surprisingly, when a politician loses an election the causes are frequently sought in relation to media exposure. When Walter Mondale lost the 1984 US presidential election campaign to Reagan, he declared that the main reason for his defeat was due to 'television, [which] never warmed up to him nor did he warm up to television' (Schudson, 1996: 121). Media exposure and electoral success are considered to go hand in hand. In particular, media attention during the election campaign, in the final weeks before Election Day, is seen as crucial to the election outcome (Harrop, 1987). This line of reasoning is strongly influenced by research that has shown that a larger proportion of voters tend to postpone their final choice. At the beginning of the 1960s, one in 10 British voters made up his or her mind during the actual campaign; by the 1990s, this number had risen to one in four (Norris et al., 1999). The latest national election study in Belgium showed that almost half of all voters made their final decision during the campaign period (Swyngedouw et al., 2004). In the eyes of the politicians, every 10 seconds of (favourable) media exposure can help to pull the floating voter to their side.

However, not all political scientists and media scholars are convinced of this almighty role of the media in the electoral arena. Opposing views and conflicting research results have led to opposing conclusions ranging from minimal to very powerful mass media effects (Noelle-Neuman, 1999). According to the pioneers of campaign research, in the mid-20th century the role of the media (radio, newspapers) was rather limited (Berelson et al., 1954; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). Interpersonal relations and the selective use of information by the public seemed to reduce the direct influence of the media. For several reasons, these viewpoints have not remained unchallenged. Modernization of society has profoundly transformed the social and political context. Political parties have found it ever more difficult to maintain the traditional ties with a better educated and more critical electorate (Dalton, 2000; Mair, 2005). Also, the media environment has changed dramatically, especially with the introduction and expansion of television. With a growing number of people receiving political information mainly, if not exclusively, via television and newspapers, the media have become a more central and autonomous player in the campaign (Swanson and Mancini, 1996). As a consequence, scientific approaches have also developed. New methods, new insights and new questions have been elaborated (Katz,

1980). Concepts like agenda-setting, priming and framing have given more insight into the power potential of the media (Iyengar and Kinder, 1988; Rogers and Dearing, 1988). However, these changes have not led to a broad consensus about the effective influence of media during election campaigns. While some scholars declare that 'the media do not cover the campaign, they are the campaign' (Harrop, 1987: 46), others believe that the short-term influences of the media are exaggerated and that parties and candidates remain the central players (Dalton et al., 1998; Mughan, 2000; Norris et al., 1999).

Earlier research has shown that media attention did have a significant effect on the electoral success of candidates during the Belgian election campaign of 2003 (Maddens, et al., 2006; Van Aelst et al., 2006). The more politicians appeared in the news, the higher the number of preferential votes they got. Appearances on the television news in particular had a substantial impact, while coverage in newspapers had a significant effect for the large number of less well-known candidates who never appeared on television. On the other hand, this research also revealed that media attention provides only a partial explanation for electoral success. Other factors like the strength of the party, the place of the candidate on the list and campaign expenditure also play an important role.

While we provide evidence that the amount of media attention did matter for electoral success, a second research question comes to mind. What determines the amount of media attention for a candidate? In this article, therefore, we focus on the characteristics and elements that have a favourable impact on the media exposure for individual politicians. In a presidential system, the challenger and the incumbent often receive attention in the news in equal parts. In a parliamentary system, like the Belgian one, with several political parties and hundreds of candidates competing for votes, equal media attention is not self-evident (Schoenbach et al., 2001). The central question here is whether the media autonomously decide which candidate gets more attention than others, or whether they follow the hierarchy determined by the parties. In other words: does the media's interest for politicians result from a media or from a party logic?

The concept of media logic was introduced by Altheide and Snow (1979) to describe the (powerful) working of media in contemporary society. This logic determines 'how material is organized, the style in which it is presented, the focus or emphasis on particular characteristics of behaviour, and the grammar of media communication' (Altheide and Snow, 1979: 10). In relation to media attention on political issues, the authors stated that news coverage of politics is more and more autonomously determined by the media and their criteria (Altheide and Snow, 1991). The concept was later

refined and used in an electoral context by Mazzoleni (1987) in Italy and Brants and van Praag (2006) in the Netherlands. According to Mazzoleni's findings, the traditional party logic was gradually replaced by a media logic in the selection and presentation of politics. The media logic states that news values become more determining in reporting on political parties and candidates. This news value orientation refers to common views about what is believed to be intrinsically relevant and interesting for the public (McQuail, 1993). Or as Shoemaker and Reese (1991: 90) state: 'news values provide yardsticks of newsworthiness and constitute an audience-oriented routine'. These news values transcend the work and opinions of a single journalist. Rather, collective routines and criteria grounded in an organizational context determine the news production (Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Tuchman, 2003). Thinking in terms of news values is not a recent phenomenon, as for instance the work of Galtung and Ruge (1965) shows, but according to the media logic this orientation is much more dominant in the present coverage of parties and politicians. This is in sharp contrast with the traditional party logic of party political motives and ideological balances limiting the freedom of newsmakers and journalists (Mazzoleni, 1987). Following Brants and van Praag (2006), we define another, *partisan* logic that in many West European countries preceded the party logic. For instance, in Italy, this logic remained present through the so-called *Lottizzazione*, in which the three public television networks each operated in favour of one political party (Roncarolo, 2002). This partisan logic, where the (written) press was almost the mouthpiece of party elites, was also dominant in (pillarized) states like the Netherlands (until the late 1960s) and Belgium (until the late 1970s). In most countries, this partisan logic was gradually replaced by a more distant party logic, with journalists no longer supporting parties but still respecting them as initiators of political news. The party logic no longer favours one party or ideology, but is instead guided by balance, fairness and a sacerdotal approach towards political actors (Semetko et al., 1991).

In this study, we examine whether this party logic is still present in today's era of media politics. We elaborate on these logics and try to measure them in a statistical model. Before we turn to the actual analysis, we describe our research design.

### Research questions and design

The research is based on a data set containing information about all 948 Flemish candidates<sup>1</sup> for the House of Representatives of the Belgian parliament. The dependent variables are the amount of media attention for these candidates in both the television news and in the newspapers during a six-week period

running up to Election Day. The television coverage is measured by counting the appearances of a candidate in the evening news broadcasts of both the public and the commercial channels. The newspaper coverage is measured by counting the number of articles (in the eight Dutch-language newspapers) in which the candidate is mentioned at least once.<sup>2</sup>

The central aim of our research is to find out which elements foster news media exposure. As stated in the introduction, there are two main logics that could determine how the news media divide their attention across the political actors. According to the media logic, the attention on politicians would be determined by journalistic criteria, the working rules of the media and elements that might attract and hold the attention of the public. This is in contrast to both the party logic (implying that the time allocated to the politicians is in proportion to the electoral strength of their party), and the partisan logic (implying that one or more parties are favoured over the others). How can these different logics be analysed in the context of this research? While there were hardly any distinctions in our data between newspapers and television channels with regard to the time that they devoted to the six political parties, we can exclude the partisan logic from our analysis. This (ancient) logic seems to be no longer in play in the Belgian media landscape, at least not on a pure quantitative level.<sup>3</sup> The fact that different audiovisual and written news media give almost equal attention to the different political players could mean one of two things. Either all these media follow the same logic determined by the parties, or they follow their own logic guided by a shared (commercial) news value orientation.

Our data set would allow several indicators of a party logic to be identified. First of all, there is the party affiliation of the candidate. Following a party logic, we would expect that the attention for the different parties is divided proportionally according to their score in the previous election. This would mean that candidates of the larger parties automatically receive more media exposure than the candidates of the smaller parties. A second indicator of the party logic would concern the position on the list and whether the politician is also a candidate for the Senate, the second chamber in Belgian politics. Both these decisions are primarily taken by party headquarters. If journalists rigorously follow the order of the list, the party indirectly determines the amount of media attention a candidate receives. In other words, the party logic can work on an external level (distribution of media attention between parties) and on an internal level (distribution of media attention between candidates of the same party).

Contrary to the party logic, the media logic is more difficult to operationalize, certainly in a statistical model for a large number of politicians. The central question is what news values determine the amount of attention

devoted to particular politicians? A first and crucial news value is probably the media's preference for the top decision-makers among the politicians. Many researchers considered the notion of political power as crucial for their prominence in the news. Because the words and acts of members of the government have more direct impact on the lives of readers and viewers, they have more chance to pass through the turnstile of the news media (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). Furthermore, politicians in government are often seen as a stronger news source. The government not only 'makes' news but mostly has a monopoly on the official version of the facts (De Swert and Walgrave, 2002; Ericson et al., 1987). As a consequence, we would expect members of government to receive a *bonus* in the distribution of media attention.

Apart from political power, many other news values could have an impact on the amount of media exposure. Schoenbach et al. (2001) refer to personal characteristics such as physical attraction and charisma. But how could their impact be measured empirically? Also, the element of conflict, one of the more sensational news values (Peter et al., 2004), could explain why the more bellicose politicians make it into the news, at the expense of the more conciliatory ones. But again, it is not easy to establish a potential-for-conflict on a candidate level. One indicator of media logic that we can measure is the 'non-political celebrity status' of a candidate (Green and Krasno, 1988). Since the late 1990s, it has become common practice in Belgian politics for parties to put candidates on the list who were not previously active in politics, but who are well known in the area of sports or entertainment, or simply because they are the son or daughter of a popular politician. One can easily imagine that these candidates receive more attention because the media favour candidates that are already widely known, have some familiarity with the media, or whose father was an infamous politician.<sup>4</sup> In the absence of more measurable indicators of the media logic, we assume that the more the party logic can explain media attention on political candidates the smaller the dominance of the media logic becomes. Besides indicators of both logics, other elements, like campaign expenditure and gender, could also influence media attention and therefore are added as independent variables to the model. But before we try to explain media exposure statistically, we take a (bivariate) look at the distribution of attention among parties and candidates.

## What determines media attention?

### *Media exposure for parties and candidates*

In the six-week campaign period, the Flemish news media devoted an unusually large proportion of space to the elections and to politics in general (Van Aelst, 2007). All together, the 948 Belgian candidates were

mentioned in more than 20,600 articles in the eight Flemish newspapers and appeared in almost 900 news items on the two national news broadcasts. The television-coverage data are highly skewed; no fewer than 88 percent of the candidates never appeared on the news and another 4 percent appeared only once on one of the two channels. As our earlier research has shown that a single appearance in an evening news broadcast did not make a difference, the relevant distinction is between the select group of candidates (8 percent) who appeared more than once in a news broadcast and those who did not. For the coverage of candidates in newspapers, the relevant distinction was between the candidates being mentioned in at least 25 articles (14 percent), those being mentioned in between 15 and 24 articles (9 percent) and those obtaining fewer than 15 articles (77 percent).

Table 1 indicates that the Liberal Party (VLD – Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten) received the largest share of attention in the television news: with more than a third of all news appearances. This is largely due to attention on the prime minister, Guy Verhofstadt. Given his larger share in both ‘number of appearances’ and ‘speaking time’, we can rightfully call this a prime example of a ‘Chancellor’s bonus’<sup>5</sup> (De Swert and Walgrave, 2002; Schoenbach et al., 2001; Schulz, 1996). The focus on Verhofstadt and a handful of other Liberal ministers also explains the relatively low percentage of Liberal candidates (20 percent) that appeared more than once in the evening news. This is in sharp contrast to the main opposition party, the Christian Democrats (CD&V – Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams): its politicians received less media attention in general, but the attention was more equally spread over a larger number of candidates. The additional exposure for the leader of the government is clearly an advantage for the Liberal Party, but not for all individual candidates of that party who often remain in the shadow of the chancellor. In addition to this ‘Chancellor bonus’, there seems to be a more general ‘government bonus’: apart from the Liberals, the other coalition parties (socialists and greens) received more media attention than could be expected on the basis of their prior election results.

On the other hand, there were also indications that news value criteria were tempered by a party logic with balanced attention on all the parties. On public television news broadcasts, for instance, Stefaan Declerck, the main party leader of the opposition, received as much speaking time as the prime minister. With regard to the candidates of the extreme-right party (Vlaams Blok), we still found elements of a (negative) partisan logic. Because of the extreme viewpoints on the immigrant issue, most journalists and newsmakers hesitate to give the Vlaams Blok politicians a forum in the media.



**Table 1** Attention given to political parties and candidates in television news and newspapers

	<i>Television news</i>		<i>Newspapers</i>			<i>1999 Election Lower Chamber</i>
	<i>Total appearances</i>	<i>Candidates who appeared more than once</i>	<i>Total mentioned</i>	<i>Candidates with 25+ articles</i>	<i>Candidates with 15–24 articles</i>	
Green Party	14.8	14.9	15.4	12.2	9.4	11.0
Flemish nationalists	3.4	4.0	8.3	6.9	7.1	8.8
Extreme right	4.8	5.4	9.5	8.4	17.6	15.3
Liberal Party	35.2	20.3	25.3	29.0	16.5	22.5
Social Democrats	23.4	23.0	25.0	19.1	30.6	15.0
Christian Democrats	18.4	32.4	16.6	24.4	18.8	22.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	(N = 877)	(N = 74)	(N = 20,699)	(N = 131)	(N = 85)	

We can conclude that the party affiliation of a candidate seems to have strong implications for his or her media exposure. Clearly, this is not the only element. To ascertain, for instance, that the political experience of the candidate or his or her campaign spending are not more important, we apply a logistic regression analysis.

*The factors that determine media attention: a multivariate analysis*

The multivariate effects for television coverage are estimated on the basis of a logistic regression analysis, with the binary news variable as dependent variable, and as independent variables: party, position on the list, political function on the local level, incumbency, candidate for the Senate, celebrity status, the three variables related to campaign spending<sup>6</sup> and gender. (A list of variables appears in the Appendix). The chi square/degrees of freedom ratio is used as a rough measure of the explanatory power of the variables. The analysis for newspapers is slightly different. As the dependent variable has three categories, we apply a multinomial logistic regression analysis in order to estimate the multivariate effects. The group of candidates having obtained the least newspaper coverage forms the reference category in the analysis. The first parameter refers to the top category (25 articles or more), and the second parameter to the category of between 15 and 24 articles.

As discussed earlier, we found clear differences between the candidates of the six political parties according to their party affiliation. In the multivariate analysis (Table 2) some of these differences remained significant. That candidates of the small Flemish nationalist party (N-VA – Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie) received less media attention was to be expected. The political weight of the party was limited and its future hardly stable. This was not the case for the extreme-right Vlaams Blok, one of Flanders' largest parties. As already suggested, this is partly due to newsmakers' hesitation to give a forum to the extreme ideas of the party. But arguably, the fact that a small number of leading figures claim all (the limited) media attention attributed to the party is as important an explanation. In the six weeks running up to Election Day, only five Vlaams Blok politicians appeared more than once in the evening news. As a result, the vast majority of the extreme-right candidates are hardly known to the public. On the other hand, candidates of the Social Democrat (Sp.a–Spirit) and Liberal parties received somewhat more attention, mainly in the newspapers. This 'government bonus' remained rather limited, nevertheless, because, as noted earlier, it was not spread equally across all individual candidates of the governmental parties.

As can be seen from Table 2, the best predictor for television and third best for newspaper coverage is whether or not a candidate is simultaneously running for the Senate. This result is striking, given the limited political weight of the Senate in Belgian politics. However, this is due to the larger electoral district for the Senate election: all inhabitants of Brussels and Flanders can vote for the same relatively small number of candidates. In other words, there is a strong bias in favour of candidates waging a national campaign, especially on television. Because some newspapers are still more locally oriented, this is less important for the written press.

For newspaper coverage, the incumbency status<sup>7</sup> is the most powerful variable. Nine out of 10 ministers and about half of the former MPs are located in the highest category of newspaper attention, compared to only 5 percent of candidates without political experience at national level. The incumbency status is also a strong predictor of television news coverage, but somewhat less pronounced: six out of 10 ministers and nearly one-third of former MPs appeared several times on television. For a large majority of incumbent MPs, it remains very difficult to pass the turnstile of television news; for candidates without national political experience it is almost impossible. Only a handful of newcomers (3 percent) managed to do so. These findings do not support the popular view that the news media are only interested in new and young candidates and that political experi-

**Table 2** Explaining attention given to politicians in television news and newspaper coverage

		<i>TV coverage</i>		<i>Newspaper coverage</i>		
		<i>Parameter</i>	$\chi^2/d.f.$	<i>Parameter</i>	$\chi^2/d.f.$	
	Constant	-1.56**	7.84**	-1.31* (+25 articles) -1.26 (15-24 articles)	2.38	
Party (ref. = CD&V)	Agalev	0.87	4.90***	0.08* -0.33	3.58***	
	N-VA	-1.61*		-0.85 -0.94*		
	Vlaams Blok	-1.88**		-1.87*** -0.30		
	VLD	0.10		0.90* 0.03		
	Sp.a-Spirit	0.96*		0.72* 1.04***		
Position on list (ref. = middle positions effective list)	1st, 2nd	2.53***	6.85***	1.88*** 1.43*	3.35***	
	3rd, 4th	0.17		0.33 -0.37		
	Last/before last	0.51		-0.18 0.11		
	1st, 2nd subst. list	-0.32		0.41 0.62		
	Other subst. list	-1.44**		-1.18** -1.12**		
	Political function municipal level (ref. = none)	Mayor	0.87*	1.85	0.55 1.11***	2.25*
		Alderman	-0.32		-0.11 -0.33	
	Local council.	-0.09		-0.01 -0.19		
Incumbency	Incumbent MP or minister	0.76***	13.1***	1.26*** 0.67***	22.00***	
Celebrity status	Celebrity	0.78*	5.82*	1.21** 1.27***	7.15***	

(continued)

Table 2 (continued)

		<i>TV coverage</i>		<i>Newspaper coverage</i>	
		<i>Parameter</i>	$\chi^2/d.f.$	<i>Parameter</i>	$\chi^2/d.f.$
Gender	Male	0.33	2.54	0.47**	8.07***
				0.57***	
Candidacy	Also Senate	1.14***	14.85***	1.31***	9.96***
				1.21***	
Campaign expenditure	Campaign expenditure	0.50	1.38	0.31	0.19
				0.28	
	Campaign expenditure <sup>2</sup>	-0.07	1.44	0.01	0.23
				-0.05	
	Maxkand	-0.11	0.10	0.70*	1.99
			0.37		
	Pseudo $R^2$		.612		.623

*Note:* The coefficients represent additive parameters and their significance in logistic regression analysis models predicting frequency of television news coverage (appeared +1) as independent variable. The newspaper model explains two categories (+25 and 15–24) with the <15 articles as reference category. Sig. \*\*\* = .001; \*\* = .01; \* = .05. See the Appendix for coding details of all the variables.

ence has lost its meaning. However, in contrast to political experience at the national level, a local mandate seems rather insignificant to obtain media exposure. Still, there is a small ‘mayor effect’ for newspaper coverage: mayors of local communities stand a better chance of being mentioned, at between 15 and 24 articles.

A third element that can generate media exposure is the position on the list.<sup>8</sup> It comes as no surprise that there is a very strong bias in favour of the candidates located highest on the list, who are most likely to get elected. Candidates at the bottom of the list – the so-called list ‘pushers’ – likewise obtain relatively more attention, but this effect was not significant in the multivariate model. The overall explanatory power of the position on the list remained lower than could be expected on the basis of its influence on preferential votes. In the case of newspaper attention, gender was found to be a stronger explanatory variable than the position on the list variable. Only one out of 10 female candidates was mentioned in more than 15 articles compared to almost one out of three male candidates. Surprisingly, this substantial newspaper bias against female candidates was still significant, after controlling for the incumbency effect. Women seemed not to fare much better on television news. For instance, only two

women were present in the top 20 of candidates with most television news exposure. However, this 'discrimination' did not remain significant when we controlled for other variables.

The non-political 'celebrity status' of candidates particularly affects the coverage in newspapers. Of all candidates with celebrity status, about nine out of 10 were mentioned in one of the two top categories. Surprisingly though, the effect on television news coverage is somewhat smaller, but still substantial and comparable to the effect of the position on the list. No fewer than seven out of 10 celebrity candidates manage to obtain at least two appearances on television.

Finally, the campaign expenditure of candidates had little or no impact on their exposure in the news media. In other words, a more expensive campaign does not appear to yield more votes because it 'buys' more free media coverage. This does not mean that investing in the traditional campaign outlets is useless, but it rather confirms earlier research that the campaign in the (free) news media and the traditional campaign on the street both have an independent effect on the electoral outcome of the candidates (Maddens et al., 2006).

All in all, both models worked quite well given a pseudo  $R^2$  value of .61 for television coverage and a pseudo  $R^2$  of .62 for newspaper coverage. This means that both our models to a large extent explain the media coverage of candidates. In the conclusion to this article, we elaborate on the interpretation of these results in terms of party vs media logic.

## Conclusion

In Belgium, as in many other countries, media attention is considered to be crucial to the electoral fortunes of political parties and individual candidates. Although scholars disagree on how large this influence is, most research confirms that media attention at least contributes to electoral success. Given that media attention matters, it becomes all the more relevant to explain how media exposure is allocated among the various candidates. We wondered whether the media attention was divided according to a traditional party logic, respecting the electoral strength of the parties and the (power) position of the candidates within the parties, or whether it was being attributed more freely following a media logic, driven by news value criteria. The results of our analysis are not straightforward since elements of both logics seem to be relevant. The hypothesis of the party logic could be tested statistically and it did indeed explain a significant part of the media attention. This leads to the conclusion that the politicians who topped the electoral lists of the larger parties and who were running

simultaneously for a seat in the Senate were attributed much more media attention than candidates of smaller parties (or the extreme-right party), candidates placed lower on the electoral lists and candidates running for the Lower Chamber election only.

However, this basic pattern is not valid for all individual cases. Clearly, some 'aberrations' of the party logic are revealed by our analysis. Some of these are difficult to capture within our conceptual framework. This is, for instance, the case with the finding that women candidates obtain less attention in the newspapers. Concerning the media logic, a government bonus was clearly present, especially for ministers in government. On top of that, the celebrity status, which can be considered as an outspoken indicator of media logic, proved to be highly relevant as well. As a result, candidates with a certain popularity outside politics – such as former journalists, athletes or television personalities – received relatively speaking far more attention in the media. The same applies to the media bonus that several relatives of former and well-known politicians received.

Other indicators of media logic were also present, although it was far more difficult to measure their effects statistically. For instance, media attention was strongly related to an 'eye-catching' event or campaign stunt. Most of these were created deliberately, and according to the rules of the media logic. They were announced well in advance and rendered an opportunity for the media to shoot interesting images of a candidate in an unusual setting or role. Hence, in the 2003 elections, we witnessed candidates windsurfing at the beach, climbing buildings or engaged in a 24-hour canvassing session. The media were overwhelmed by dozens of pseudo-events each day and necessarily made a selection (Boorstin, 1961). Still, it was striking that most media in their selection of such events respected a certain balance between parties and assigned different journalists to cover the various parties. This was mainly to avoid the impression of a bias in favour of one party or another. In other words, the media logic does play a role in dividing attention between political candidates, but not a clear-cut one, nor a very dominant one.

At least for the Belgian case, the expectations of Altheide and Snow that the media logic would become omnipresent and that all politics would evolve 'into an extension of media production' (Altheide and Snow, 1979: 146) were not confirmed. But the authors do have a point when they state that politicians take the media logic into account and adjust their behaviour and decisions to it. This was later labelled the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999). Certainly, the Belgian parties have incorporated the media logic to a certain extent, too. To give an example: both the Social Democrat and the Christian

Democrat parties put a young, promising and good-looking female candidate on top of one of their electoral lists. Given their celebrity status as daughter of a former heavyweight minister (van den Bossche, Sp.a) and spokesperson of a trade union (Vervotte, CD&V), the parties expected these candidates to do well in the media. Both women received plenty of media attention, appeared in the top 10 of preferential votes and made it to government. These are clear examples of the fact that the media and party logic get intermingled and it becomes hard to tell which logic is leading. This conclusion is in line with the findings of more qualitative studies, indicating that parties have come to understand media logic and try to use it to their own advantage (Larsson, 2002; Strömback and Nord, 2006). In turn, the strategic use of media logic and news management techniques has made journalists more sceptical about the intentions and qualities of some politicians (Zaller, 1999). We expect that this merging of the two logics will increase over the coming years. Hence, it is our conviction that the attention given to politicians will be increasingly divided on the basis of an interaction between political and media criteria.

### Appendix: list of variables

*Television coverage:* Number of news items in which a candidate appeared or was mentioned explicitly in the evening news (VRT or VTM), in the period 7 April 2003 to 17 May 2003. The data were gathered by the Electronic News Archive (ENA), a cooperation of the Universities of Antwerp and Leuven.

*Newspaper coverage:* Number of Dutch-language newspaper articles in which the name of the candidate is mentioned, in the period 7 April 2003 to 17 May 2003. The data were gathered on the basis of Mediargus, an electronic news archive that contains all articles of all eight Flemish newspapers.

*Celebrity status:* Dummy variable with a value of 1 for popular non-political candidates (like former athletes, journalists or television personalities) and for the sons and daughters of nationally known politicians. Candidates that featured on a list before 1999 were considered full-blooded politicians and hence were not included.

*Party:* CD&V ([Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams] Christian Democrats), VLD ([Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten] Liberals), Sp.a–Spirit (an alliance between the Social Democrat Party and a small left-liberal party), Agalev (ecologists), N-VA ([Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie] centre-right Flemish nationalists) and Vlaams Blok (extreme-right Flemish separatists).

*Position of candidate on the list:* Several dummies were created, which correspond to the expected critical positions. In this way it is also taken into account that the relationship between the position on the list and the number of preferential votes is probably non-linear.

*Candidate for Senate:* Dummy variable with a value of 1 if the candidate also runs in the concurrent Senate election.

*Gender:* Dummy variable with a value of 1 for male candidates.

*Incumbent:* Dummy variable with a value of 1 if the candidate is or has been a minister.

*Mayor/alderman/local councillor:* Dummy variable with a value of 1 if the candidate occupied this function in a municipality or city at the time of the campaign.

*Campaign expenditure:* Amount candidate spends per voter in the district (in eurocents).

*Campaign expenditure<sup>2</sup>:* Squared amount of candidate expenditure per voter in the district.

*High max:* Dummy variable with a value of 1 if the highest spending limit applies to the candidate.

## Notes

1. Since the late 1960s, the Belgian political system can be described as composed of two quasi-autonomous party systems, corresponding to the two largest language communities in the country. As a result, a federal election corresponds to two separate electoral campaigns, with different parties and with different media coverage. In this study only the Flemish candidates (Dutch-speaking) of the six largest parties are included.
2. The television channels looked at are VRT (public channel) and VTM (commercial channel). The eight newspapers are: *De Standaard*, *De Morgen*, *De Tijd*, *Het Laatste Nieuws*, *De Gazet van Antwerpen*, *Het Volk*, *Het Belang van Limburg* and *Het Nieuwsblad*. We are aware of the fact that politicians also appear in several other media outlets, including talk shows, popular magazines and websites. However, these were not included in our analysis.
3. We still found small, but rather insignificant, differences between newspapers in our analysis with regard to the tone of their coverage of certain leading political actors.
4. In the 2003 elections, only 24 candidates met these criteria and could be labelled as celebrity candidates (see Appendix for more details).
5. The term was first used in Germany to indicate that the prime minister or *Kanzelier* always received extra media attention, and that this was solely due to his position. Research in other western countries like the Netherlands, the UK and Belgium confirmed the existence of such a bonus (Poguntke and Webb,



- 2005). The 'Chancellor bonus' for Prime Minister Verhofstadt in 2003, with almost 10 percent of total appearances in the news, was noteworthy, but remained relatively small in comparison with, for instance, the Netherlands and certainly Germany (Kleinnijenhuis et al., 2001).
6. It can be assumed that the relationship between spending and the vote is non-linear in the sense that the marginal returns of spending will gradually decrease with the amount spent. To allow for this possibility, the normal practice in campaign expenditure research is to include the squared expenditure in the regression model (Samuels, 2001). In addition, we check how a dummy variable indicating whether or not a candidate is allowed to spend the maximum amount interacts with the expenditure effect.
  7. For statistical reasons, no distinction is made between incumbent ministers and incumbent MPs in the multivariate analysis. Due to the absence of ministers in the lowest newspaper category, no separate parameter for ministers could be estimated and the categories of incumbent ministers and incumbent MPs had to be collapsed.
  8. A particularity of the Belgian system is that the voters are presented with two different lists per party: a list of effective candidates and a list of substitute candidates, who take the seat in case of a vacancy.

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