

Mediatization and Political Agenda Setting: Changing Issue

Priorities?

Introduction: Political agenda-setting and mediatization as distinct worlds

Agenda-setting is one of the most influential theories on the media's political influence (Graber, 2005). While often focusing on the media's impact on *public* opinion, another equally important facet of agenda-setting theory has the media's influence over the agendas of *political* actors and policy makers as its central object of investigation. Scholars use the term 'political agenda-setting' and in some instances 'agenda building' to refer to the transfer of media priorities to political priorities. Despite the growing popularity and importance of political agenda-setting research, it has seldom been conceptualized as part of or related to the mediatization of politics.

For several reasons, political agenda-setting studies and mediatization studies have developed as almost completely distinct research schools (but see Van Noije, Oegema, & Kleinnijenhuis, 2008). Political agenda-setting studies share a strong empirical focus. They deal mainly with testing the effect of the media agenda on the political agenda in different contexts and circumstances. The basic question underlying most of the research reads: does more journalistic attention for an issue lead subsequently to more attention for that issue by politicians? With the help of sophisticated methods such as time series analyses researchers have been able to provide a nuanced and detailed answer to this question, identifying a set of contingent factors that determine the size and strength of the effect. While being empirically strong and analytically sophisticated, political agenda-setting work has, until recently,

remained somewhat undertheorized. In particular, insights on why and how politicians adapt to the agenda of the media are still in need of elaboration. Furthermore, agenda-setting focuses only on thematic priorities and it remains unclear how the impact of the media on issue agendas relates to other types of influence.

The literature on mediatization, on the other hand, has been characterized by a broader theoretical input and goals (see chapter 1 and Y?), as well as by a broader scope covering media influence on several areas outside politics. The thesis on mediatization of *politics* provides an overarching view on the role of the media in the political system, and is in this volume defined as a long-term process through which the importance and influence of media in political processes and over political institutions and actors has increased (see chapter 1). While being strong on conceptual discussions and theoretical perspectives, the mediatization literature is lacking in empirical research.. Admittedly, some recent studies explore mediatization empirically. For instance, related to the 3rd dimension of mediatization (see chapter x), Strömbäck and Nord (2006) find that journalists retain the most power over the content and framing of news while other studies document how mediatization of news content is stronger in the US compared to Europe (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011; Esser, 2008). Furthermore, analyses indicate that mediatization has affected the organization of European political parties (Donges, 2008) and the (media) behavior of Members of Parliament (Elmelund-Præstekær, Hopmann, & Nørgaard, 2011). Nevertheless, there is still “a remarkable dearth of systematic empirical research on the mediatization of politics” (Strömbäck 2011: 423). One reason might be that there is little consensus on how this meta-theory should be translated into operationizable phenomena and concrete hypotheses. Some scholars even claim that mediatization partly transcends media effects and is therefore hard to measure by traditional empirical research (Schulz, 2004). Finally, the mediatization literature often addresses the implications of growing media influence on democracy (Esser & Matthes,

2013; Landerer, 2013; Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999). These normative considerations are mostly ignored in the empirical driven agenda-setting work. The table below contrasts – in a bit of a simplified manner - the research associated with the two media-and-politics theories.

Political Agenda-setting	Mediatization of politics
Middle range theory	General theory
Mainly empirical focus	Mainly theoretical focus
Focus on political content, issues	All aspects of politics
Media influence is contingent and often modest	Media influence is often large and growing (process)
Media influence can be measured	Mediatization of politics goes partly beyond media effects and is difficult to measure

Against this background, this chapter discusses and compares both concepts and streams of research with a focus on what they can learn from each other. On the one hand, we argue that political agenda setting research can be used to make at least a part of the fourth dimension of the mediatization theory empirically testable. On the other hand mediatization can provide a broader theoretical framework embedding the role of the media in political agenda setting. We point to challenges and limitations when trying to integrate the two bodies of literature. But first, we give an overview of the central ideas and main findings of studies that focused on the political agenda-setting influence of the media.

Political agenda-setting and the media

The origins of a popular concept

Both in communication as well as in political science, agenda-setting has become one of the dominating paradigms. The same concept, however, means quite different things in the two domains. In communication science, agenda-setting is largely a theory about media effects on citizens: media coverage of issues influences the issue priorities of the public, and indirectly their voting preferences. Since the study of McCombs and Shaw (1972) the popularity of the agenda-setting approach among media scholars has grown steadily and is now one of the most-cited media effects concepts (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Dearing & Rogers, 1996).

In political science, the political agenda-setting approach deals mainly with the limited attention of political actors for a wide range of political issues. Building on the insights of Schattschneider (1960), Cobb and Elder (1972) were among the first who investigated why some issues managed to get the attention of decision makers, while others failed. The media was seen as one of the possible factors that could influence the agenda of policy makers, but not a very important one. Gradually the media got more attention in the study of political agendas, but it was seldom the main focus of attention (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Kingdon, 1984; but see Linsky, 1986).

A more recent stream of research tries to combine both traditions and focuses on the effect of mass media coverage on the political agenda (Rogers & Dearing, 1988; Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). For these scholars, the central question is to what extent mass media coverage affects the issue priorities of politicians. Although some prefer the term *policy* agenda-setting (Rogers & Dearing, 1988) or *agenda-building* (Denham, 2010), we refer to this research as political agenda-settingⁱ. This does not mean that we believe that the political

agenda-setting process is highly similar to the process of public agenda-setting. Although both processes deal with the relative importance or salience of issues we agree with Pritchard (1992) that the agenda of policy makers is different from the agenda of the public. The agenda of politicians is hardly ever operationalized by asking them to list the issues on top of their mind, but rather by looking at their words or deeds (see below). It is not what politicians think (cognitive) but what they do (behavior) that matters. Furthermore, using the term agenda-setting does not imply that the agenda of politicians is simply 'set' by the media but rather the media is one potential source of influence among many others.

Political agenda-setting can be considered as an early stage of the larger policy process. This process has generally been conceptualized in terms of a sequence of different phasesⁱⁱ: problem identification, policy formulation, policy adoption, implementation, and evaluation (Cobb & Elder, 1981: 394). Agenda-setting overlaps with this first phase. Due to its ability to focus attention, media influence is typically seen as relatively high in this phase of the policy processⁱⁱⁱ (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Esser & Pfetsch, 2004: 388). This does not mean that journalists entirely autonomously initiate new issues, but rather that they play a role in strengthening and structuring the initiatives taken by political actors (Reich, 2006; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). Mostly this role is defined positively: issues that are high on the media agenda can obtain, in turn, a more prominent position on the political agenda. However, the media also influence the political agenda by filtering and selecting issues that do not appear on the agenda. Or, as Van Praag and Brants (1999: 199) conclude on the basis of their campaign study: *"The agenda-setting power of journalists seems to lie more in denying access and in forcing politicians to react on issues than in actually initiating them"*. Some have called this negative agenda-setting effect 'agenda-constraining' (Walgrave, Van Aelst, & Bennett, 2010); it is closely related to the well-known gatekeeping process (Shoemaker, 1991) in communication science: only a part of the many issue messages

generated by political actors pass the media gates and receive news coverage. From a policy perspective the media contribute to limiting the scope of decision-making to some issues (Bachrach & Baratz, 1962: 952).

Defining and operationalizing the political agenda

Agenda-setting scholars never study ‘the’ political agenda, but rather choose to focus on one or more distinct political agendas (Dearing & Rogers, 1996: 18). Actually, there is no such thing as the political agenda (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006: 95). Political agenda-setting scholars have studied (a combination of) the following agendas: of parliament or Congress (Soroka, 2002b; Trumbo, 1995; Van Noije, et al., 2008; Jones & Wolfe, 2010), political parties (Brandenburg, 2002; Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Kleinnijenhuis & Rietberg, 1995), government (Walgrave, Soroka, & Nuytemans, 2008; Thesen, 2013), the President (Gilberg, Eyal, McCombs, & Nicholas, 1980; Wanta & Foote, 1994; Edwards & Wood, 1999), or public spending (Cook & Skogan, 1991; Pritchard & Berkowitz, 1993).

Each political actor has its own semi-independent agenda that is composed according to its own logic and dynamic. Furthermore, most agendas can be operationalized in different ways. For instance, the agenda of a political party can be measured by coding its manifesto, an extensive document that can be considered as a list of issue priorities (Walgrave & Lefevere, 2010). The same party agenda, however, can also be operationalized by using a much shorter time span as Brandenburg (2002) did by using daily press releases during a British election campaign. Both ways of measuring the party agenda are valid, but not identical as both agendas, manifestos and press releases, play different roles and are ruled by diverging, short- or long-term, dynamics.

Not every political agenda has the same relevance for actual policy. Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) suggest that agendas can be placed on a continuum ranging from symbolic to

substantial. Symbolic agendas are primarily rhetorical: they contain the talking of politicians but have limited tangible political consequences. Substantial agendas on the other hand do have a direct impact on, or *are*, policy (e.g. legislation, budgets). In their overview of political agenda-setting studies Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) showed that all studies that actually found strong media impact on the political agenda defined the political agenda symbolically rather than substantially; they found effects of media coverage on parliamentary debates or presidential speeches (e.g. Bartels, 1996; Edwards & Wood, 1999). However, when more substantial political agendas like legislation and budgets were subject of study, researchers found much less media impact. Probably the most substantial political agenda is the state's budget or what Pritchard and Berkowitz (1993) call the 'resource agenda'. The allocation of money and resources to different issues or policy domains has the most far reaching, tangible consequences. However, since this agenda is highly incremental and stable over time it is no surprise that hardly any media impact has been found (Landry, Varone, Laamary, & Pesant, 1997; Pritchard & Berkowitz, 1993; but see Van Belle, 2003).

In sum, findings on the agenda-setting impact of the media depend to a large extent on how scholars define and operationalize the political agenda. Media influence is strongly associated with which type of political agenda we are looking at. Although probably the most important factor explaining variation in media impact, it is certainly not the only one.

3. The contingency of political agenda-setting by the media

Most agenda-setting studies cited above rely on a time-series design testing to what extent the actual behaviour of political actors regarding specific issues is preceded in time by media coverage about the same issues. A majority of these studies have concluded that 'the media matter', but at the same time stressed the conditionality of the media's influence on the political agenda (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2011). Besides the type of political agenda (see

above) we distinguish between, and briefly discuss, four contingent factors: types of issues, characteristics of the media agenda, party characteristics, and system level characteristics.

First, the influence of the mass media varies considerably across issues. According to Soroka (2002a: 16) “difference in agenda-setting dynamics are most often products of differences in the issues themselves”. Soroka has introduced a typology distinguishing between prominent (e.g. unemployment), sensational (e.g. environment) and governmental (e.g. national deficit) issue types. Media influence on the political agenda is most plausible for sensational issues that are not obtrusive (little direct experience) and that lend themselves to dramatic events. Differences in the agenda-setting impact of the media can also be related to the structure, constellation of actors and dynamics of a policy field in which an issue is embedded. Also, some issues are simply not newsworthy and therefore lack the basic premise for media impact (Koch-Baumgarten & Voltmer, 2010).

Second, we mostly talk about ‘the’ media, but that does not mean that all media outlets and types of media coverage have the same agenda-setting potential. Previous studies have shown that newspapers have a higher agenda-setting impact but that this influence only becomes effective via TV news (e.g. Bartels, 1996). Some types of coverage such as investigative journalism clearly have a higher impact on politics than routine coverage (Protest et al., 1987). Coverage exerts more influence if it is congruent across outlets (Eilders, 2000). The more homogenous the media, the more difficult for politicians to ignore it. Also the tone of the news is relevant: positive and negative news lead to different public and political reactions (Soroka, 2006; Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Thesen, 2011).

Third, Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010) and Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011b) found party characteristics in multi-party systems to be a third set of contingency factors. They showed that the political influence of the media depends on parties’ institutional

position (opposition versus government) and the own issue agendas of the parties. Opposition parties react more on media cues than government parties and parties in general tend to embrace mediatized issues to a larger extent when they 'own' these issues. In a recent study, Thesen (2011) has linked the tone of the news and party positions showing that opposition parties mainly react to negative news as it offers them the opportunity to attack government policy, while government parties prefer to use positive news to defend their policy record.

A fourth and final set of contingent factors are related to the country level, being the political and media system at stake. Despite the increased attention for the contingencies of political agenda-setting we still know relatively little about how the responsiveness of politicians to the media agenda varies across countries. The literature about political agenda-setting is overwhelmingly based on single-country studies and mainly comes from the United States (see Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010: 663). Only a few studies looked at the agenda-setting role of the media in comparative perspective. For instance, Van Noije et al., (2008) compared press coverage and parliamentary debates in The Netherlands and the UK while Vliegthart and Walgrave (2011a) focused on parliamentary questions and news coverage in Denmark and Belgium. Both studies stress the similarities rather than the differences in the media-politics dynamic between the two countries. However, studies that included more different countries found differences in media impact across institutional systems. Van Dalen and Van Aelst (2012) compared the perceptions of political journalists on the political agenda-setting power of different actors including the mass media in eight West-European countries. Spanish journalists perceive the role of the media in the agenda-setting process as much weaker. This could be related to the higher degree of political control over the media in Spain and to the degree of political concentration of power. In political systems that lack strong centralized power, such as Sweden and Norway, politicians are more responsive to the agenda of the media, journalists contend.

Towards an integration of agenda-setting and mediatization

We believe political agenda-setting studies may complement mediatization theory in different ways. This implies, however, that we specify what agenda-setting can and cannot contribute to. In this section we sketch some ideas about how both streams could enter into a dialogue and profit from each other. As mediatization is a broad theory that stretches across all aspects of politics it is important to define where political agenda-setting can be helpful. Therefore, we use the conceptualization of Strömbäck (2008; see also Strömbäck & Esser, 2009; Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013; see also chapter X). Strömbäck distinguishes four distinct but highly related dimensions in the process towards a complete mediatization of politics. The first dimension relates to the extent to which the news media have become the most important source of information and channel of communication between citizens and political actors. The second dimension is the degree of independence of the media vis-à-vis political institutions. The third dimension of mediatization refers to the extent to which media content is determined independently by the media's own news values and by their need to attract a large audience. It is clear that these three dimensions or trends have an influence on the behavior of politicians, which is conceptualized as the fourth dimension of mediatization:

“The fourth dimension of mediatization thus refers to the extent to which political actors adjust their perceptions and behavior to the news media logic rather than political logic. This might affect not only their communication efforts, but also the actual political output and the way political actors are organized.” (Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013: 344)

Political agenda-setting makes in particular one aspect of the fourth phase testable: the ability of the media to co-determine the thematic agenda of politicians. To the extent that media coverage influences the issue priorities of political actors, politics is mediatized since political actors are affected in their behavior. A growing number of political agenda-setting

literature show that this is actually the case. Not only US studies (Trumbo, 1995; Baumgartner, Jones, & Leech, 1997; Edwards & Wood, 1999; Yanovitsky, 2002), but more recently also European studies proved that the media matter. For instance, Bonafont and Baumgartner (2013) show in the Spanish case that when newspaper attention to an issue spikes, parliament tends to follow.

While the current strand of political agenda-setting research seems to confirm the idea that the media matter for politics, thereby supporting the main idea of the 4th dimension of mediatization that political actors tend to follow the media logic, a good deal of the available evidence nuances the media's power. Indeed, most studies found that the media seem to exert some power but that this power is by and large limited and almost always highly contingent (see above). The media has an influence on some issues but not on others, and in some political contexts but not in others. For example, the fact that studies found most influence of the media on symbolic and not on substantial agenda's challenges the claim of mediatization scholars that mediatization affects the (policy) output of politics. The media logic definitely affects what politicians *talk* about, but there is much less proof that it influences what politicians actually *do*.

The nuanced findings of political agenda-setting studies seem to be at odds with politicians' perceptions. Elite surveys in several European countries have shown that a large majority of politicians perceive the media as an undisputed agenda-setter and reckon that the behavior of politicians is highly mediatized (Strömbäck, 2011; Van Aelst et al., 2008). These media power perceptions, however, might be related to other aspects of political life such as the media's influence on the personal careers of politicians (Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2011). Political agenda-setting work can say little on these other aspects of politics. Added to that, the contradiction between empirical political agenda-setting studies and the perceptions of elites may be due to the fact that elites, even if they seemingly appear to have taken the

initiative unaffected by the media agenda, still may have been affected by the media—and thus mediatized. In fact, political agenda studies are unable to assess the anticipatory behavior of political actors. Political actors may act by devoting attention to an issue not because the media have acted before but because they think the media will act (or not). Cook (2005) noted that the negotiation of newsworthiness between journalists and politicians is partly indirect and implicit because political actors (attempt) to anticipate how journalists will react to their communication messages. According to Davis (2009) there is an all-permeating ‘media reflexivity’ (politicians invariably think about possible media coverage when they undertake something) that has become part of every single decision a politician takes. This pre-emptive behavior can be considered as proof of mediatization but is very difficult, if not impossible, to capture with classic political agenda-setting designs.

In the remainder of this section we discuss three specific aspects of the political agenda-setting literature that directly speak to the central claim of mediatization scholars. First, we show that the media not only affects the political agenda but that there are good reasons to believe that the opposite is the case as well. Next, we discuss the fact that political elites use the media agenda strategically and are not taking over media cues blindly. And finally, we highlight some longitudinal political agenda-setting studies that test whether the media’s impact on the political agenda increases over time, a key claim in the mediatization debate.

1. Media and politics: a reciprocal relationship

The mediatization literature is based on the idea that media influence politics, and claims that political actors need to adapt to the media and its logic. This premise, however, is not uncontested. Probably the best known theory claiming that politics affects the media (and not the opposite) is Bennett’s (1990) indexing theory. The gist of it is that journalists monitor

the range of ideas and opinions present among the political elites and focus their coverage on these political cues only. They have no interest in devoting attention to novel ideas that fall outside of the scope of elite attention. While Bennett's theory is not particularly focused on issue salience transfer it has clear agenda-setting implications: issues are initiated by elites and only afterwards picked up by the mass media, not the other way around. Other theorists of media-politics relations have formulated similar accounts. Wolfsfeld (2011), for example, speaks of the PMP-model with 'PMP' standing for Politics-Media-Politics. He claims that almost everything, so also attention for new issues, starts with politics, that it then spills over to the media and that political actors then again react to this media coverage. Similarly, in his book *Cycles of Spin*, Sellers (2010) argues that strategic communication (by Congress members) and agenda-setting (by the media) should be studied together as both processes form an integrated whole. In short, this work suggests that "*news construction is a negotiated process*" (Bennett & Livingston, 2003: 359) and that, to fully understand the interaction of media and politics, we need to take into account the efforts of both sides.

A majority of agenda-setting studies acknowledge that the relationship between media and politics can only be described as a *reciprocal* one. Political actors adopt issues that have been mediatized but the opposite happens as well, of course: media start covering issues after, and because, they have received political attention. In a sense, it is not more than normal that media cover things that happen in politics. This is the news media's prime role: covering things that happen in the world and that may be relevant to their users. The mere fact that there is a transfer from politics to media that counterbalances the media-to-politics transfer puts the mediatization approach into perspective. Political actors still are independent and they even affect the agency that is affecting them. In other words, there is a process of 'media agenda-setting' going on. Political agenda-setting work can provide to the mediatization

debate a more explicit understanding of the complex, multi-directional battle between media and political actors.

It is clear that political actors have a keen interest in feeding the media with the issues they care about. For example, parliamentarians have an interest in devoting their attention to some issues and not to others. Some issues correspond to their own ideological preferences, or to the preferences of their constituency. Other issues may be directly damaging for their competitors producing a competitive advantage. Following Fenno's (1973) typology of Congressmen's incentives, issue attention is a resource that can be employed by MPs to increase their chances of re-election, to generate policies reflecting their ideological preferences or to increase their power in parliament. Consequently, MPs also have an interest in drawing media attention to the issues they address in parliament. It increases their visibility regarding the issue and, more generally, increases the salience of the issue among the public and among colleagues. Hence, there are good reasons to expect that issues on the political agenda would translate into media attention.

An example of a reciprocal approach to political agenda-setting is the paper by Edwards and Wood (1999) studying the US president and his agenda relationship with Congress and the mass media using time series data. They find that the president sometimes reacts to the media but often also sets the agenda and makes the media cover his own preferred issues. Especially with regard to domestic issues the president is able to act in an entrepreneurial fashion and to impose his agenda onto the media (and often also onto Congress). Van Noije and colleagues came to a similar nuanced conclusions after investigating agenda interactions between parliament and media in the UK and the Netherlands from the late 1980s to the early 2000s: influence goes in both directions (with more impact from media on politics than the other way around, though). Brandenburg (2002), studying election campaigns in the UK, found the politics-to-media influence to largely

outweigh the opposite relationship. Parties select issues and the media follow. Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg (1995) similarly found that politics was leading the media in the Netherlands regarding economic issues in the early 1980s.

These handful of studies looking at both directions of impact support the idea that the agenda interactions between politics and media are essentially bidirectional. It must be acknowledged that most of these reciprocal studies date from a few years back drawing on evidence that is at least ten years old. Things may have changed. In fact, as has been shown in one of the previous sections, there is evidence that the agenda influence of the media has risen over time as the mediatization theory would predict. That the media matter more now for politics than they used to, does not automatically imply that politics would matter less for the media and that the opposite power relation would have disappeared altogether. We rather expect that the mutual entanglement of media and politics has increased in both directions, but we do not have empirical proof for that contention.

Based on a survey among MPs in five countries, Walgrave and colleagues (2010) show that MPs who tend to take their cues *from* the media are also the ones who are the most successful in getting their issues *into* the media. This suggests that, on the individual level, when the impact in one direction is strong it tends to be strong in the other direction as well. When actors surf on the media waves and react to media coverage they, in turn, get their actions more easily in newspapers and on TV. This finding indicates that there is a feedback loop in which media power and political power reinforce each other, at least on the level of individual MPs. In a recent study, Midtbø and colleagues (Midtbø, Walgrave, Van Aelst, & Christensen, 2013), drawing on similar evidence, find that this mutual reinforcing relationship also applies to the country level. In countries where MPs, in their legislative activities, take more media issues into account they also display higher success rates in getting media coverage for their initiatives.

In sum, theoretical and empirical research in political agenda-setting challenges what we perceive as an overemphasis on the strength and political influence of media logic in mediatization theory. Political agenda-setting studies suggest that reciprocal analyses offer a more nuanced picture. And even *when* political actors take over media issues, they do this on their own terms and with clear strategic goals. This argument will be developed next.

2. Mediatized politics as strategies of party and issue competition

As shown extensively in a bulk of research, including political agenda-setting studies, the media influence the behavior of politicians. However, this should not be interpreted to mean that politicians are always forced to react and adapt. Political actors also proactively try to use the media to reach certain political goals (Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013). This constitutes a key finding in the many political agenda-setting studies reviewed above, where the political contingencies of media influence on politics is modeled (cf. Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2006).

Several examples seem relevant to explain how political actors react strategically to media coverage. For instance Yanovitsky (2002) showed on the basis of his longitudinal study of the issue of drunk-driving that legislative action only followed when it fitted the policy-makers' agenda. Moreover, the studies finding that parties are more likely to respond to news on issues they 'own' (cf. Green-Pedersen and Stubager, 2010; Vliegenthart and Walgrave, 2011) highlight how parties act strategically when facing the media agenda. The theory of issue ownership argues that a party's history of political prioritization, competence and policy results on a specific issue generates an electoral advantage because the public comes to think of the party as more capable of handling it (Petrocik, 1996). Thus, when left-wing parties respond more often to news on (un)employment and the environment and right-wing parties

concentrate on crime and immigration, they are actively trying to capitalize on their issue specific electoral benefits. Finally, Thesen (2013) finds that government and opposition parties have divergent preferences for news tone in political agenda-setting and that the attribution of policy responsibility by the media is crucial to understand how and why political agendas are set by the media. Opposition parties respond to bad news that (implicitly or explicitly) attributes blame to the government, because this will help politicize government incompetence. The government prefers to respond to good news that reflects positive developments in social problems because this could politicize policy success.

In these examples, media attention to issues offers opportunities of politicization to political actors (Green-Pedersen, 2011: 143). Thus, even though a media logic shape the way in which political actors communicate their messages (Esser and Mathes, 2013: 177), a distinct political logic of party and issue competition is crucial to explain when and how politicians react to media coverage. If the media offer a means to politicizing preferable issues, own competence or the incompetence of opponents, then news attention often turns into politics. Consequently, mediatized politics should be considered as a more evenly matched contest between media and political logic. It is a process in which political actors actively use media attention to their advantage, thus behaving in accordance with a political logic of party competition. Put differently, politicians react to the media, because they want to, not only because they have to. To be sure, recent mediatization contributions acknowledge this, as in for instance the (somewhat negative) concept of ‘self-mediatization’ (Esser, 2013). However, our contention is that much of the literature still implicitly portray political actors as forced and somehow helpless when faced with the media logic. This is perhaps best illustrated by Cook’s (2005: 163) widely supported and cited claim that politicians might win the daily battles but end up losing the war “as they apply standards of newsworthiness to evaluate issues and policies”. The implication is that even though political actors do use the media to

their own ends, a loss of power and influence is still unavoidable (see also Esser & Matthes, 2013: 186). Rather we prefer the concept of ‘strategic adaptation’ (Landerer, 2013: 253), because it captures both the force of the media (necessitating adaptation) and the strategic motives of politicians, without a preconceived idea about the outcome in terms of the media-politics power balance.

The idea that mediatization involves increasing media influence in society and politics is common to the mediatization literature (cf. Mazzoleni, 2008; Hjarvard, 2008). Most often, this influence is said to decrease the importance of political logic and influence (cf. Meyer, 2002; Strömbäck, 2008). Besides raising the status of political logics in the media-politics relationship, we believe that political agenda-setting could challenge or at least supplement the prevailing zero-sum game interpretation where gains for some actors come at the expense of others (Strömbäck & Dimitrova, 2011: 32). The combination of political actors that adapt to or master media communication and the media’s increased societal importance, at least questions an à priori conclusion of a loss of influence of political actors. From an agenda-setting perspective, what facilitates such an argument is the strong emphasis on form/format in mediatization research. Effectively, the question of which issues and problems are on the agenda and who benefits from the political attention these problems are receiving are more or less ignored. Rather than just assuming decreasing political influence, the effect of mediatization should be treated as an empirical question; some political actors might lose, but others might as well win.

Recent mediatization perspectives do offer a theoretical account of this, at least at an institutional level. The idea is that political institutions vary in their need for publicity, and this variation in turn explains why institutions or processes that are “characterized by the power- and publicity-gaining self-presentational aspects of political logic” are more mediatized than those “characterized by the policy- and decision-based production aspects”

(Esser & Matthes, 2013: 177). This fits nicely with political agenda-setting findings on the differences between substantial and symbolical agendas (see above). However, a political agenda-setting perspective could draw attention to a supplementary view focusing on actor-level variation in mediatized politics and, most importantly, its effects. For instance, Thesen (2012) argues that opposition politics is more mediatized than government politics. Both opposition and government parties would like to maximize attention to advantageous issues and avoid the less preferable issues from the media agenda, but the nature of the media agenda, and of party competition, skews the outcome of political agenda-setting processes in favour of opposition parties. First, opposition parties have more opportunities to politicize favourable issues from the media agenda due to a negativity bias in news coverage. Second, the increasing frequency of political scandals in the media (Thompson, 2000), their effect on the vote shares of political parties (Clark, 2009), together with the fact that such events constitute the strongest predictor of opposition responses to news, make them a strong opposition asset in media-based party competition.

In sum, we argue that mediatization does not necessarily equal a zero-sum-game between media and politics. Rather, there is a need, in both political agenda-setting and the mediatization literature, to differentiate between political actors or institutions, and to study how the media affect the distribution of power between them. We will elaborate on this point in the conclusion.

3. Mediatization: the influence of the media is growing?

A final key assumption in mediatization literature is that the impact of media on society, and the political process in particular, is growing. The theory does not claim that media influence was absent in the past, but rather that it has grown over time. Strangely

enough, this claim is seldom backed up by longitudinal data that actually show that media impact is on the rise (but see Zeh & Hopmann, 2013; Elmelund-Præstekær, et al., 2011).

In the agenda-setting literature time is a central concept. The idea of media impact is mainly based on the fact that the issue was on the media agenda first and on the political agenda later. In that respect the assumption of mediatization as a process can be rephrased in terms of contingent political agenda-setting: *time* is a variable that moderates the effect of the media agenda on the political agenda. As time progresses, the impact increases. Since agenda-setting studies often rely on longitudinal time series designs that cover considerable periods in time, this hypothesis can be tested straightforwardly by including an interaction term between time and issue attention in the models. If this interaction term is positive and significant, it signals a confirmation of an increasing agenda-setting power of media. While this test is rather straightforward and agenda-setting data are suitable to conduct it, remarkably enough, very few scholars have incorporated this idea of (linearly) changing influences in their models. This is mainly a consequence of the high requests in terms on resources and time to gather longitudinal data on different agendas.

In a study covering ten years (1993-2000) of agenda-setting in Belgium, Vliegthart and Walgrave (2011) did incorporate this test in their models and they found a confirmation. Over a time period of eight years the reactivity of MPs to media coverage increased. In their study of agenda-setting patterns in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, Van Noije and colleagues (2008) divided their research period (1988-2003 for the UK and 1995-2003) in three (UK) respectively two (Netherlands) sub-periods. In the United Kingdom, they found that the impact of media was stronger in the later periods. In the Netherlands, results show that media's agenda-setting influence was absent in the first period, but present in the last period. From these findings, we can tentatively conclude that agenda-setting studies provide

cautious support for the claim of mediatization scholars that the media's power over the political process has indeed increased in the past two decades.

Conclusion and Discussion

In recent decennia, both mediatization and political agenda-setting have become central concepts in political communication. Although both deal with the influence of the media on politics, they have largely developed as distinct fields. In this chapter we tried to integrate the two traditions, or at least start a dialogue about how political agenda-setting could be integrated in the more comprehensive theoretical story of the mediatization of politics. We suggested three aspects that have been used in political agenda-setting studies that could be useful to adjust or complement mediatization research.

First, agenda-setting work suggests that the power relationship between politics and media is reciprocal. The media influence the work of political elites but the opposite is the case as well. This nuanced image of media-politics agenda interactions complements the more one-sided and crude account offered by mediatization scholars (e.g. Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999) claiming that politicians cannot but adapt to a powerful media logic that threatens to reduce their power and autonomy. Empirical research in political agenda-setting that includes reciprocal design challenges this claim.

Second, even *when* political actors take over media issues, they do this often on their own terms and with clear strategic goals. In a sense, rather than to a general decline of power of political actors, mediatization probably leads to a *redistribution* of power in politics, with some actors profiting and other paying a higher prize. In a more general way, political agenda-setting studies, through their attention to the dynamics of party competition, may

nuance the distinction between media and party logic that is key in the mediatization literature. From a mediatization perspective, opposition parties that respond frequently to negative news reflect an adaption to or adoption of a media logic where conflict and negativity is important. However, such a pattern of behavior, is also undoubtedly inherent to political competition and party strategies for electoral success. In this perspective, strong agenda-setting effects or close interactions between media and politics take place as a result of *overlapping logics*, rather than one logic dominating the other.

Third, mediatization as a concept refers to social change over time, in this case a growing influence of the media on political actors. Most studies, however, deal with mediatized politics and don't study actual changes over time. In political agenda-setting the temporal aspect is central and therefore offers an opportunity to actually test this. To be honest, as only few agenda-setting studies have actually employed a longitudinal perspective, this is rather a suggestion for further research.

We don't claim that these three factors have been completely ignored by mediatization scholars so far. We rather argue that they should be placed more center stage in a way that mediatization becomes a more nuanced and empirically testable theory. More in general, the idea of contingency that gradually has become an integrated part of agenda-setting research has too often been downplayed in mediatization studies. There are accounts that develop the notion of contingent mediatization, such as Esser and Matthes' (2013: 177) distinction between the "power- and publicity-gaining" and the "policy- and decision-based" aspects of politics, where the former induces stronger mediatization. This way of reasoning is in line with the distinction made in political agenda setting between 'symbolic' and 'substantial' agenda's. In our view, such perspectives deserve more research attention, both because they nuance the mediatization thesis and because they represent interesting opportunities for integration with similar conceptualizations in political agenda-setting. Furthermore, moving in

the direction of a more empirically testable theory does not mean that the all-inclusive concept of mediatization should be reduced to a few simplistic stimulus-response hypotheses. For instance, the anticipatory behavior of politicians towards media coverage cannot easily be captured in a classical design that focuses on political and media agendas. At the moment political agenda-setting studies probably underestimate media influence as politicians incorporate beforehand how journalists will cover (or ignore) their actions. Still, we believe scholars of both traditions should try to come up with more innovative and advanced research designs that can tackle the media reflexivity of political actors. If this and other empirical and theoretical challenges are ignored, than mediatization and political agenda-setting will probably further develop as distinct fields that hardly speak with each other.

Finally, if both strands of literature would be able to be integrated more, not only mediatization, but also political agenda-setting can profit. The big advantage of agenda-setting is its clear and undisputed focus on issue salience. However, this is also its weakness. Political agenda-setting studies talk about media influence on issue priorities, but have little or no idea how this impact relates to other types of media influence. Mediatization can be a useful concept with which to place the agenda-setting impact of the media in perspective.

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ⁱ ‘Agenda-setting’ is preferred over ‘agenda-building’ because it allows political media effect studies to connect with the large political agenda-setting research tradition in political science. Berkowitz (1992) tried to differentiate between agenda-setting and agenda-building as two related but different processes. We rather treat these terms as synonyms (see also McCombs, 2004: 143). The reason to prefer ‘political’ agenda-setting over ‘policy’ agenda-setting is mainly because the later term is more narrow and focuses primarily on what governments say and do, while the first term is much broader and for instance also includes the agendas of ordinary MPs or political parties.

ⁱⁱ The idea that the policy process is a well-structured chronological process is highly contested by public policy scholars. Among others Cobb and Elder (1981) claim that the classical idea of a policy process should be replaced by a more dynamic and flexible model (see also Kingdon, 1984).

ⁱⁱⁱ Esser and Pfetsch (2004: 388) add that also in the last phase of the policy process the role of the media becomes more important again.