

Which politicians pass the media gates and why?
A preliminary model and review of previous studies

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1. Introduction

Which politicians make it into the news and why? This is the central question in this paper on news coverage of individual politicians and a very relevant question in modern politics, where news media play an increasingly important role. Not only have mass media moved to the center of the political process, there also has been a shift from a party democracy to an audience democracy. This trend is characterized by a declining importance of political parties and their party programs and a more central role of personae (Brants, de Vreese, Möller, & van Praag, 2010). Such an audience democracy, together with the trend of candidate-centered politics, has influenced political news content. Research has shown that the focus of news coverage has shifted from parties and organizations to individual politicians and leaders (e.g. McAllister, 2007; Rahat & Sheaffer, 2007).

Individual politicians appear more and more in news media, which is an important means for them to be successful in politics. Citizens often rely only on news media to get informed about their representatives, which gives news media a crucial role in connecting voters to political actors. Media content helps the electorate to make knowledgeable choices in elections. Voters are likely to support only those candidates they know enough about and this knowledge is gained mostly from media (Bartels, 1988; Fogarty, 2008). Therefore, if and how politicians appear in news media, can have important electoral consequences. Moreover, getting media coverage might be advantageous during the policy-making process. Legislators use news media to gain public support and influence their counterparts in order to getting legislation passed (Kedrowski, 1996; Tresch, 2009).

Although the coverage of individual politicians has increased, it remains a highly selective procedure. Politicians must vie for the attention of reporters, editors and audiences in a very competitive environment (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). Since news media can't cover all politicians equal, they follow certain norms and rules in deciding whom to select as a news source. Scholars have tried to identify those selection routines to explain why certain political actors receive more coverage than others. In tradition of the seminal work of Galtung and Ruge (1965), many scholars apply news values when analyzing which politicians become news sources. However, these scholars all employ their own definition of important news values to study the news coverage of politicians. Besides the disagreement on relevant news values, studies also differ in the determinants they investigate. Most researchers focus on politicians themselves (e.g. Cook, 1986; Sheaffer, 2001), others on determinants of news media (e.g. Fogarty, 2008; Kahn, 1991) or the events covered (e.g. Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009). Furthermore, the studies in this field have been conducted in various countries with different research designs and little comparative work. This has resulted in inconsistent results. But surprisingly, these mixed outcomes did not instigate a real scholarly debate. The basic question of who gets into the news and why lacks a conclusive answer.

There are some authors who touch upon the problem of contradictory findings, but an integrative and comparative effort still has to be made. At the beginning of the '90's, Kuklinski and Sigelman (1992, p. 812) already mention the divergent conclusions within the subfield and cite some weaknesses. The first problem is "a failure in many studies to control for even the most obvious potentially confounding factors". Midtbø (2011, p. 227) labels the lack of control variables as "omitted variable bias". A second problem according to Kuklinski and Sigelman (1992) are the

short and different time periods studied which makes it hard to find changing relationships over time. They argue to think in terms of patterns of coverage rather than draw conclusions about media bias within a short time frame. A third complication is the focus on politicians' attributes as explanatory variables of coverage. The relationship between politicians and journalists is both intertwined and symbiotic and thus media characteristics cannot be ignored when trying to understand news coverage of politicians (Midtbø, 2011, p. 227). Sheaffer and Wolfsfeld (2004) also argue for investigating both variables of politicians and news media variables.

Our goal is to provide an answer to this question: which politicians pass the media gates and why do they? First, we propose a preliminary model for explaining news coverage of politicians, thereby bringing some structure into the overwhelming group of possibly influential variables. We develop a typology consisting of three levels of determinants: the micro-level of politicians, the meso-level of news media and the macro-level of country characteristics. Within each level, several features influencing politicians news coverage are discussed. More importantly, we focus on interactions between these levels. Therefore, the main and basic level of the model consists of the micro-level of individual politicians, which then is combined with meso- and macro-level variables. Second, the proposed model is tested by reviewing previous studies concerning news coverage of individual politicians. Based on a systematic selection of 24 relevant studies, the variables in the typology are tested for their effect and the model as a whole for its validity.

2. Preliminary theory

This study aims to determine why some politicians receive plenty of news coverage while others are neglected. Three levels of explanatory factors are distinguished: (1) characteristics of individual politicians, (2) news media characteristics and (3) country characteristics. First of all, I focus on the micro-level of politicians. Each politician has specific traits and qualities, leading to more or less coverage. The basic level of the model contains the direct effects of politicians characteristics on the amount of coverage each of them receives. Second, I examine whether news coverage of individual politicians changes under certain circumstances, due to news features on a meso-level and country features on a macro-level. Is physical attractiveness (micro-level) more important for politicians' television news coverage than for their appearances in newspapers (meso-level)? Do members of government (micro-level) receive more news coverage in parliamentary countries with strong governments (macro-level)? By focusing on interaction effects between three levels of explanatory variables, we contribute to the ongoing debate about news appearances of politicians. We bring some structure in the abundance of possibly influential characteristics by categorizing them and take into account contextual factors in order to develop a more comprehensive theory about news coverage of individual politicians.

Figure 1 presents the integrated model proposed and tested in this paper. The main effects of politicians characteristics on their amount of news coverage are central within this preliminary model. Afterwards, we try to explain conditional effects on who gets covered by taking into account features of news workers and organizations (meso-level) and features of political and media systems (macro-level). Of course, many more arrows and interactions might be added to the model. There might be correlations within a level as well as direct effects from the meso- and macro level on news coverage of political actors. However, the main focus in this paper is to determine the effect of politicians' traits on their coverage and next to investigate how meso- and macro-level variables change these direct relations. Each of the levels and their categories will be discussed and tested afterwards by undertaking a review analysis.

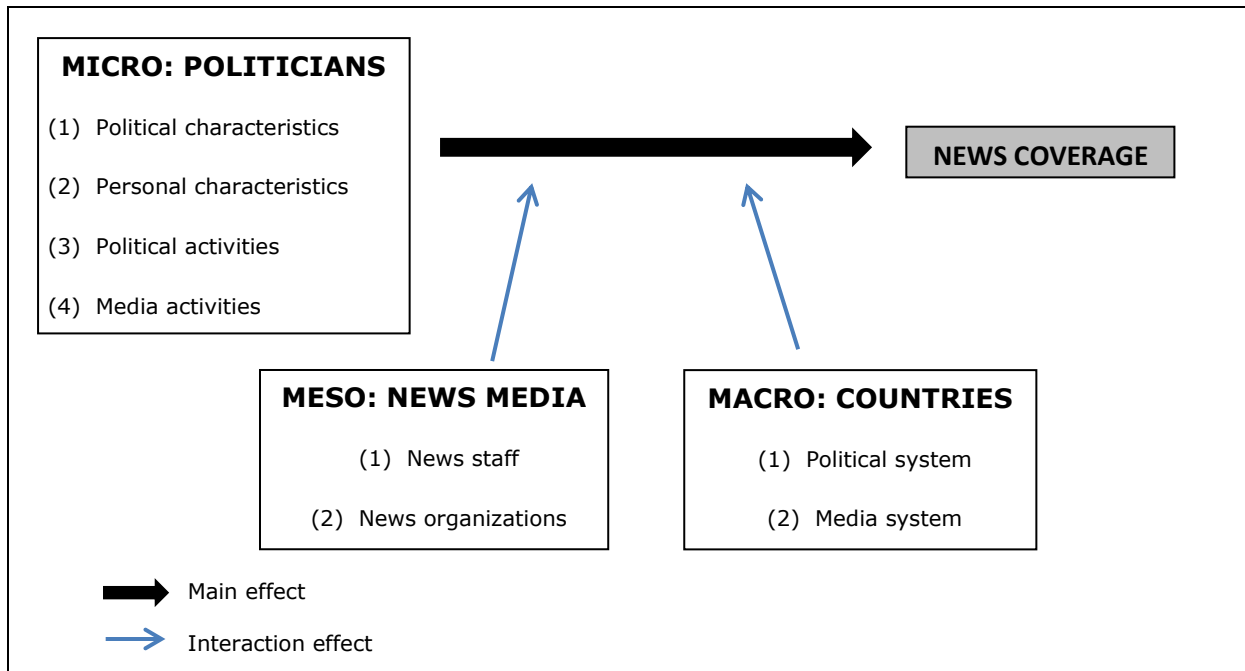


Figure 1: Integrated model with three levels

2.1. Micro-level

Scholars already have examined many 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 twofold typology corresponds with earlier discussions within the research field about the importance of both groups of variables. Early scholars concluded “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 in addition to structural characteristics and argue for a shifting focus “from who they are to what they do” (Midtbø, 2011, p. 230). Tresch (2009, p. 86) argues both components need to be taken into account: “[...] some parliamentarians have a competitive advantage derived from their official positions and functions [...] 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 pure political and more personal aspects (figure 2). This results in four groups of determinants on the micro-level of individual politicians.

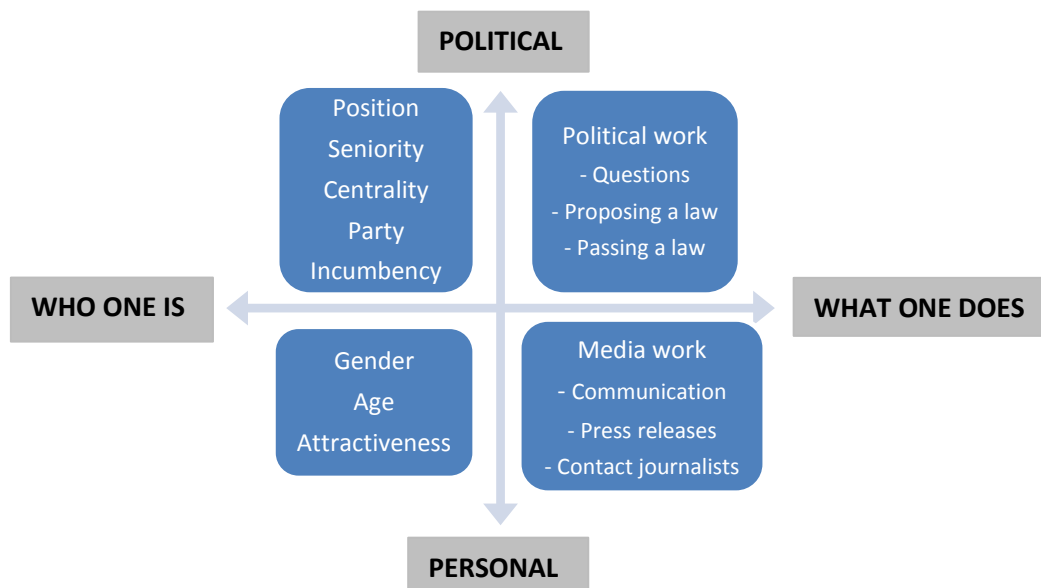


Figure 2: characteristics of politicians

Who a politician is...

Who a politician *politically* is should have the greatest impact on the amount of coverage he gets. Characteristics such as a high political position, having longer political tenure and being an incumbent are supposed to raise the news value of a politician, since news media tend to refer to elite people (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). The influence of these political qualities can be explained by journalists' news values and news routines. However, who a politician *personally* is more and more becomes important for electoral success and getting coverage. One can distinguish role-relevant (political) and role-independent (non-political) qualities of politicians. The role-relevant attributes are considered to be 'naturally' important for successful politics. Meanwhile, and consistent with the personalization thesis, non-political traits such as attractiveness have a growing importance (Rosar, Klein, & Beckers, 2008)

1) Political characteristics

Position. Politicians with higher political positions, such as ministers, chairpersons of parliamentary committees and party leaders, are more likely to get covered in the news. These powerful politicians have more interesting information to deliver and their actions have the potential to influence political outcomes (Elmelund-Præstekær, Hopmann, & Nørgaard, 2011; van Dalen, 2012). In selecting news sources, journalists seek officials who are presumed to occupy authoritative positions in decision-making processes (Bennett, 1996). This relates to the news values of Galtung and Ruge (1965), with journalists seeking *powerful elite people* as news sources. We expect the political position to be the strongest predictor of news coverage, as the news value of power has been established in many studies.

Seniority. Besides standing, the seniority of a political actor might enhance his news coverage. Research has shown that political experience correlates positively with the amount of contacts MPs have with journalists. Experienced politicians have a stronger position vis-à-vis media workers, have more contacts with reporters and consequently succeed better at making it into the news. Furthermore, they have adapted to the media logic. They keep news routines and deadlines in mind and thereby increase their chances for becoming a news source (Elmelund-Præstekær et al., 2011; Van Aelst, Sehata, & van Dalen, 2010). Journalists seek for *continuity* in their coverage (Galtung & Ruge, 1965). This might lead to selecting political actors with long tenure, who frequently have been a news source before.

Centrality. A third influential characteristic of politicians might be their centrality. Sheafer (2008) mentions the influence of political-cultural values on political news coverage. The ideological system of a nation has a symbolic center, which contains the consensus in the society, thus the shared political-cultural values. This ideological system influences which events and actors are judged as newsworthy. Thus, the closer a political actor finds himself near the symbolic center, the more media attention he might get. More extreme politicians are then expected to get less covered. However, taking in consideration the news values of Galtung and Ruge (1965), we can also expect more extreme or 'revolutionary' politicians to gain more coverage. Political actors with more extreme points of view might elicit *unexpectedness* or serve the *composition* of news by challenging the dominant view of politicians in the political centrum.

Party. Politicians belong to a certain political party, which also might affect the amount of media attention they receive. Attention for the different parties is expected to be divided more or less proportionally according to their score in the previous election. Journalists try to report as *balanced* possible, with electoral success of parties being a possible benchmark. Thus, being a member of a

party with a great vote share should enhance news coverage for that politician (Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe, & Fiers, 2008). Furthermore, the circumstances a certain party is in, might be important. 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 might benefit from this additional attention.

Incumbency. A last characteristic of individual politicians – and also related to party affiliation and position - is whether they belong to the political majority in a country or region. The government has decisive and executive power, allowing them to actually do something of relevance. They make laws, pass and implement them. The government makes news and has credibility as official news source about political decisions and events. Journalists just can't ignore the government as an official and important news source. Minority parties however can only display arguments and their discourse, without acting upon it. Therefore, politicians belonging to a majority party are supposed to generate more news coverage than minority politicians, often labeled by the *incumbency bonus* (Hopmann, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2011; Walgrave & De Swert, 2005). Nevertheless, some authors argue that the incumbency effect for the majority is limited to the members of the cabinet and the government leader. The surplus of media attention for majority parties and their members can be explained by the large attention these cabinet members and the government leader get, with the 'regular' party members even receiving less coverage (De Swert & Walgrave, 2002). Either way, we expect to see some effect of being a majority politician on the amount of received news coverage.

2) Personal characteristics

Socio-demos: gender and age. Several studies have shown that female politicians receive less news coverage (e.g. Kahn, 1994; Niven, 2005) as well as different coverage (e.g. Aday & Devitt, 2001; Kittilson & Fridkin, 2008). Therefore, the gender of a politician needs to be included at the micro-level, as it might have a considerable influence on the amount of coverage one receives. Another socio-demographic characteristic that might influence news coverage is the age of a political actor. However, age might have opposing effects. On one hand, it seems plausible that older politicians get more covered. Generally, they are more experienced – inside as well as outside the political world – and have more important political positions. On the other hand, there might be a 'popularity bonus' for younger people entering the political world. They are new, fresh and thus newsworthy people to introduce to the public (Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Midtbø, 2011).

Physical attractiveness. The physical attractiveness of a person might be a determinant of getting attention, especially when it comes to television news coverage. Research has shown that being judged as physically attractive is associated with having other socially desirable qualities. Attractive persons are considered to be sociable, intelligent, self-assured and competent. Furthermore, attractive men and women receive a higher degree of initial attention and are more successful in professional life (Hosoda, Stone-Romero, & Coats, 2003; Maner et al., 2003; Rosar et al., 2008). All these presumed qualities might boost a politician's electoral and legislative success, but can also have a positive effect on getting covered.

...or what a politician does?

Not only the structural features of political actors explain their amount of coverage, but also their activities matter. Payne (1980) classifies Congress members as either show horses – with much publicity but low legislative work – or work horses – with low publicity but much legislative work.

Politicians who are 'media savvy' and try to get publicity attain more coverage, whereas an higher amount of committee attendances does not enhance news coverage. According to Payne (1980), variations in personalities of politicians explain the differences in their behavior, with some focusing on legislative work and others on publicity. Show horses tend to be status types who are oriented toward prestige and who enjoy speech-making. Work horses are rather program types. They are preoccupied with substantive policy questions and enjoy participation in the policy-making process. We discuss the political as well as media activities politicians can undertake to attract reporters attention.

1) Political work

Since the media is the main channel by which the electorate is informed about the activities and accomplishments of their elected officials, we expect the media to monitor the work of elected politicians. News coverage should provide citizens the essential information to hold parliamentarians responsible for their (lack of) political actions (Sheafer, 2008). So the parliamentary work of a politicians matters for his news coverage: the more active one is, the more one should get attention by the news media. By proposing laws and asking parliamentary questions, political actors can increase their visibility in news media. Still, within this point of view the media are seen as passively providing a mirror image of the legislative process, but the news media also seek and process political information actively and rely on news factors (Midtbø, 2011). Thus, it is not necessarily the politician who works hard in parliaments that gets most attention, since other elements also play an important role.

2) Media work

In modern politics, media play an increasingly important role. Political actors have become more dependent on the media in their efforts to shape public opinion as well as the legislative process. To become visible in the media, politicians often have to adapt to 'media logic'. Contemporary politicians thus have to work hard to become news sources, by taking into account news values and media routines and acting upon them (Aalberg & Strömbäck, 2010). There are several ways, besides doing good parliamentary work, to enhance their visibility in news media.

First of all, politicians need to be aware of their communication style, what Sheafer labels "charismatic communication skills". An actor with these skills is demonstrating a higher level of playing by the rules of the arena, thereby increasing his legitimacy in the arena. Political actors thus have to play by the rules of the arena of political communication, with more charismatic players getting higher legitimacy and thus more news coverage (Sheafer, 2001, p. 714; 718). Politicians can enhance their communication skills by taking media training, hiring trained staff members and paying attention to their communication efforts towards media workers.

Those communication activities can be press releases and press conferences in order to get their message across which hopefully will be picked up in political news. Newsletters and press releases need to be drafted according to the standards of newsworthiness and be easily applicable by journalists, as they have considerable time constraints. By structuring their message to incorporate prevailing news norms and news routines, political actors are more likely to get covered (Flowers, Haynes, & Crespin, 2003; Larson, 1988).

Finally, politicians need to build and maintain good relationships with political journalists. Politicians possess specific and crucial information, but journalists selectively control access to the gates to the broader public. By holding good contacts with different journalists, political actors have

greater access to reporters to get their message noticed and pass through the media gate (Aalberg & Strömbäck, 2010; Brants et al., 2010).

2.2. Meso-level

The meso-level concerns media outlets and their staff members. Central in theories about news content are the concepts of news values and news routines (Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1973). Generally, news values determine if information is 'worthy' of news space, whereas news routines provide procedural shortcuts that reinforce news values and enable the media to make timely decision about newsworthiness (Flowers et al., 2003). Journalists judge stories according to their news values in order to decide whether it will become news. Daily news routines then guide journalists on how to report about news events and apply within and across news organizations. These news routines are followed by journalists across outlets and consequently they report about the same political actors most of the time (van Dalen, 2012). However, political news and its actors might vary according to which journalist wrote it. Furthermore, news organizations can follow somewhat modified working routines, dependent on their specific goals and audiences. Taking into account the meso-level of news organizations and their personnel therefore can show which individual characteristics of politicians become more important due to who selects the political actors within a certain news organization.

News staff

Journalists have to decide which issue is true and relevant and which actors are important within that issue. In general, they base their decision of newsworthiness on implicitly shared news norms. However, these news values are not binding and thus reporters subjective beliefs, attitudes and existing knowledge might also influence their news decisions and selection of political actors. Their predispositions are influential in three stages of the news process: exposure to, processing of and reproduction of information. In these three stages, existing knowledge and attitudes lead to the selective attention, selective perception and selective retention (Donsbach, 2004). News events consistent with journalists own opinion are attributed a higher news value than those opposing their own beliefs (Kepplinger, Brosius, & Staab, 1991). Applied to news sources, journalists and editors should select more often political actors who share their opinion on the issue at hand. Likewise, reporters might choose for those sources they already know and with whom they have good contacts. Furthermore, the way journalists define their job also affects their news judgment (Shoemaker, Eichholz, Kim, & Wrigley, 2001).

Besides the personal preferences of staff members also their socio-demographics might influence their news decisions. The democratic composition of a newsroom staff can have an impact on political news content. New journalists have diverse beliefs and priorities consistent with their gender, age and ethnicity, which leads to a different socialization into the workplace and other working routines. For example, news from female reporters shows a wider variety of news sources and a greater number of female sources (Aday & Devitt, 2001; Wagner, 2010). Some authors on the other hand assert that socialization is a function of the work environment. Beginners incorporate the prevailing rules and structures of the newsroom regardless of their gender, age or ethnicity and thus develop similar working routines (Rodgers & Thorson, 2003).

News organizations

Newspaper-Television. Newspaper coverage might differ from television news, since both have other formats, goals and audiences. The values and formats of television news has had an impact on the scheduling of political events - taken into account news bulletin timings - and the

personalization of the presentation of those events, with a sharper focus on top leaders (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). As such, the political position might be an even greater determinant of coverage for television news than for newspapers. Moreover, television is a highly visual medium and television journalists search for news with good visual resources (Shoemaker et al., 2001). Consequently, the appearance and eloquence of politicians might be valued more for television news. We might thus expect that communication skills and physical attractiveness are more important to get covered in television news than in newspapers.

National-Local. Looking at national news organizations vis-à-vis local media outlets can also show different coverage patterns of politicians. One hand, local media workers can follow news content of national newspapers and television stations. But more likely, they follow divergent news routines to select their news sources. They might decide less upon political standing but rather on closeness and availability of politicians. Furthermore, politicians might maintain closer relations with local reporters from their district, leading to more access and more attention. Their relationship is even more symbiotic because local journalists have less political contacts than national journalists have and politicians need visibility in their home region to obtain votes (Larson, 1988).

Public-Commercial. We might also expect to come across substantial differences in news content of public news organizations compared to commercial news outlets. Both have other goals and audiences, resulting in other working routines. The main difference is the dependence of commercial outlets on market resources, which make them focus on maximizing their audience by giving the audience 'what they want' (Brants & de Haan, 2010). Semetko and Canel (1997) make a distinction between 'sacerdotal' and 'pragmatic' reporting about politics. Public service broadcasting channels are 'agenda-senders'. They send the agendas from parties and political actors forward to the audience for deliberation. Commercial channels however take a more pragmatic approach to political news coverage. They set themselves an agenda for the news, based on the interests of its public and the judgment of its reporters. We might thus expect that political characteristics play a greater role for becoming a news source in news of public broadcasters, since they rather follow the political logic. Commercial broadcasters on the other hand are inclined to follow the media logic, designing messages to fit news routines and audience optimization strategies (de Vreese, 2001). However, in an increasingly competitive media market the public media also have to consider the saleability of their news. This might result in a convergence of selection routines of both outlets and pushing public media to incorporate a more pragmatic approach as well. There might be an mutual adaption between both types of broadcasts, resulting in similar political news sources (Brants & de Haan, 2010; Hopmann et al., 2011).

Type event. Journalistic gatekeeping practices might be changed when the news is event-driven. Event-driven news are 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 and for providing the framing when these unplanned actions occur. Event-driven news thus contrasts with 'pseudo-events', first coined by Boorstin (1977). Pseudo-events are not spontaneous, but carefully planned to appeal to journalist and news organizations. Press conferences are such events planned by officials and staged to facilitate news production routines and deadlines (Livingston & Bennett, 2003). In these pseudo-events, political actors with greater political standing will be the main news sources, since they are the principal players concerning the event at hand.

However, there might be a tradeoff between carefully planning an event and the newsworthiness of the information produced by the event. During press conferences, officials – mostly with high political standing – want to transmit the desired message and attempt to set the

topic for the rest of the event. But the lengthy and scripted statements of press conferences are less likely to produce unexpected information or good “sound bites” thereby decreasing the newsworthiness. Politicians - especially the ‘regular’ 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 might be studio interviews or stake outs when entering or leaving parliamentary hearings (Sellers & Schaffner, 2007).

Wolfsfeld and Sheafer (2006) discuss which types of political waves provide opportunities for which political actors to get covered. Political waves begin with a triggering event and result in extensive media coverage, with political actors trying to ‘ride’ the wave. In order to predict which actors can ride the wave, the amount of ideological and cultural conflict associated with the wave needs to be considered. In more closed, restricted waves, individuals closely linked to the story and its conflicts will be more likely to get covered. This relates to the concept of ‘thematic relevance’: the extent to which a political actor’s position can be linked to the event (Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006, p. 339). In more open waves, with news opportunities for various politicians, good communication skills and media work can enhance politicians chances to receive coverage.

Election period. News content is different in election periods compared to routine periods. Political actors behave differently during the weeks before elections and political journalists follow different logics. Political actors are more active in order to win additional coverage and the media devote more attention to politics in campaign times, opening opportunity windows for politicians. Journalists also pay more attention to rules on balance and objectivity (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). This is expected to lead to different political news sources during election periods compared to routine periods. Moreover, during election periods, the competitiveness of the race can influence which politicians get covered. Contested races generate more media coverage and also show different actors. For example, there might be a greater incumbency effect in competitive races, focusing on the challenges the incumbents have to face and their reactions to it (Ansolabehere, Snowberg, & Snyder, 2006).

2.3. Macro-level

Countries have specific news content according to their political system, media system, political culture, etc. The existence of different journalistic cultures and diverse political news content has been shown in many studies (e.g. Esser, 2008; Hallin & Mancini, 1984; Pfetsch, 2001). It seems plausible then that the characteristics of politicians in each country are attributed a different importance by journalists when selecting news sources. We look at some previous research to identify features of the political and media system that possibly determine which political actors appear in news media.

Political system

Van Aelst et al. (2010) investigated interactions between politicians and journalist, taking also into account the political system level. The number of seats in parliament is a first important factor. In large parliaments, the inter-politician competition is bigger and individual MP’s thus will have less opportunities to contact journalists. Secondly, the strength of the parliament in a country matters. In majoritarian democracies, the executive is dominant and government members will receive most attention. In consensus democracies on the other hand, there is a rather balanced power division between the executive and the legislative. Members of strong parliaments have more power to influence the workings of the cabinet and policy decisions and are therefore more interesting to

cover. In such countries, not only cabinet members, but also MP's can have good contacts with journalists. Furthermore, in consensus democracies conflicts between government and members of the opposition are more likely to get covered. Consisting of more parties in the parliament, debate between those parties has more political relevance than in majority democracy. Consequently, MP's in consensus democracies have more chances to become news sources (van Dalen, 2012; Vliegthart, Boomgaarden, Van Aelst, & de Vreese, 2010).

The strength of the party is another political system feature influencing political news sources. In countries where political parties have strong positions, such as Italy, Germany and Belgium, party leaders are expected to appear more in news media as spokespersons for their party. In countries as the US however, political parties are less relevant and nearly all attention goes to the president and his ministers (Hallin & Mancini, 1984; Pfetsch, 2001). These political system variables relate to the importance of power division. Some countries have more balanced power divisions than others, which in turn can lead to a more equal partition of news attention for political actors. This might be the case when both the government and parliament are strong and more parties are relevant in the political system (Hopmann et al., 2011).

Media system

Concerning effects of the media system in a given country on its political news content, we can employ the well-known typology of media systems of Hallin and Mancini (2004). They discern three political media systems: the liberal, the democratic corporatist and the polarized pluralist model. These systems have different historical developments and are characterized by certain power balances between media and politics (Vliegthart et al., 2010).

These media systems relate again to power distance in a country. Democratic corporatist countries such as Germany and Great Britain are characterized by strong party organizations and party-centered negotiation processes, leading to a smaller power distance and a more consensual relationship between journalists and politicians. Moreover, the different media systems can be linked to the distinction between sacerdotal and pragmatic reporting. Liberal systems, such as the US, have a strong and independent journalistic culture and the largest degree of journalistic intervention. This leads to a lesser focus on powerful officials but more on other characteristics that might enhance the newsworthiness of politicians, such as media work. Polarized pluralist models on the other hand have a more sacerdotal approach and tend to follow the events set by the political leaders (Esser, 2008).

However, some authors argue that there is a growing convergence of Western TV cultures over time. Western countries are faced with similar technological innovations and commercial pressures. There is also a growing interaction between journalists of different countries, leading to an international consolidation of news standards (Esser, 2008). These transnational influences might lead to comparable political news content. Journalists in different countries then focus on the same characteristics of politicians to select news sources. Yet, we expect differences to be found between countries and the political actors that can pass the media gates.

3. Selection and overview of studies

To test the determinants in our preliminary model, we conducted an overview analysis of studies in this subfield of political communication. The identification of relevant studies is thus crucial. The studies selected for this analysis were identified following a strict procedure.

First of all, three main keywords were identified: news, coverage and politicians. Those keywords summarize the main topic of this review paper. To be certain to find all relevant articles,

some alternatives for these three keywords were added (media, attention, candidate and political actor). Several combinations of these keywords were entered into the search engines of suitable databases: Communication Abstracts, Communication & Mass Media Complete and Web of Science. This resulted in a first limited group of seven relevant articles. Afterwards, each citation of these seven articles was scanned as well as all the references the studies included. Also other articles of the found authors were checked to verify if they were qualified to be included in this review study. This search resulted in some additional studies and each of these were in turn scanned for citations, references and similar work of the author(s). A last additional search was conducted by means of Google Scholar. The same key words were entered in various combinations.

From all studies found, only those that suited the following criteria were included:

- Dependent variable: amount of news coverage of individual politicians. Studies with coverage of government-opposition, men-women, two presidential candidates, etc. as dependent variable were excluded. Also studies that focus on tone, framing, etc. instead of quantity of coverage were excluded.
- Type of media: traditional mass media (radio news, newspapers and television news).
- Time period: from 1980 until 2012.
- Language: English.

Finally, the search resulted in a selection of 24 studies that fitted the criteria, which are the subject of the review analysis. Table 1 gives a chronologic overview of the selected studies, each with information about the country, medium, period and level investigated.

Study	Country	Medium	Period	Level
Payne (1980)	US	NP	Non-elections	Micro
Veblen (1981)	US	NP	Non-elections	Micro
Cook (1986)	US	NP TV	Non-elections Elections	Micro
Squire (1988)	US	NP TV	Non-elections Elections	Micro
Kahn (1991)	US	NP	Elections	Micro Meso
Kuklinski & Sigelman (1992)	US	TV	Non-elections Elections	Micro Meso
Haynes & Murray (1998)	US	Local NP National NP TV	Elections	Micro Meso
Negrine (1999)	Britain Germany	NP TV	Non-elections	Micro Macro
Schoenbach, De	The Netherlands	TV	Elections	Micro

Ridder & Lauf (2001)	Germany			Meso Macro
Sheafer (2001)	Israel	NP TV	Non-elections	Micro
Schaffner & Sellers (2003)	US	Local NP National NP	Non-elections	Micro Meso
Sheafer & Wolfsfeld (2004)	Israel	Radio	Elections Non-elections	Micro Meso
Wolfsfeld & Sheafer (2006)	Israel	NP	Non-elections	Micro Meso
Sellers & Schaffner (2007)	US	TV	Non-elections Elections	Micro Meso
Cohen, Tsfati & Sheafer (2008)	Israel	TV	Non-elections	Micro
Fogarty (2008)	US	Local NP	Non-elections	Micro Meso
Van Aelst, Maddens, Noppe & Fiers (2008)	Belgium	NP TV	Elections	Micro
Tresch (2009)	Switzerland	NP	Non-elections	Micro Meso
Van Aelst & De Swert (2009)	Belgium	TV	Non-elections Elections	Micro Meso
Tsfati, Elfassi & Waismel-Manor (2010)	Israel	TV	Non-elections	Micro
Midtbø (2011)	Norway	NP	Non-elections Elections	Micro
Waismel-Manor & Tsfati (2011)	US	NP TV Radio	Non-elections	Micro Meso
Fogarty (2012)	US	Local NP	Non-elections	Micro Meso

Gershon (2012)	US	Local NP	Elections	Micro Meso
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Table 1: Overview of selected studies

Note: NP stands for newspapers and TV for television news

This overview shows that the analysis of news coverage of politicians is an expanding research field. Where only four studies have been conducted in the '80's and four in the '90's, eleven studies have been conducted in the '00's and already five during the last two years. Most studies analyzed national newspapers and television news coverage. Radio has been investigated only twice. In the US, there also have been some studies analyzing local newspapers. Both election campaigns and routine time periods have been investigated and some scholars combined analyses of both periods. In general, the greater part of the listed studies focused on the micro-level solely (9) or on a combination of micro- and meso-level variables (13). Only Schoenbach, De Ridder, and Lauf (2001) examined all three levels in one study, although they focused on solely one characteristic at each level.

4. Review analysis

4.1. Micro-level

Political characteristics

The most studied variable is the political position of a politician. Moreover, this is the only characteristic that has proven to influence the amount of coverage in each study. Seventeen of the included studies (Cohen, Tsfati, & Sheafer, 2008; Cook, 1986; Gershon, 2012; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Midtbø, 2011; Negrine, 1999; Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Schoenbach et al., 2001; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Sheafer, 2001; Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2004; Squire, 1988; Tresch, 2009; Tsfati, Elfassi, & Waismel-Manor, 2010; Van Aelst et al., 2008; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006) find a significant effect of political position. Cabinet members, party leaders and committee chairs have a higher political standing and are therefore expected to receive additional coverage. The effect of position has been found during election periods 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. Thus, position a politician has is the most important predictor of getting covered, regardless of other control variables that were tested. Then the question remains: what with 'ordinary' MP's with an equal function? Which of them pass the media gates? Other traits might offer clarification.

The effect of seniority is not straightforward. Seven studies do find a positive effect of longer tenure (Cook, 1986; Gershon, 2012; Kahn, 1991; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Midtbø, 2011; Sellers & Schaffner, 2007; Tsfati et al., 2010; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011), but five studies do not agree (Cohen et al., 2008; Fogarty, 2008, 2012; Squire, 1988; Tresch, 2009). After a closer examination, it appears that seniority does have a positive effect on coverage, but only during election periods. Studies examining the effect of seniority solely during routine periods do not find a significant effect on coverage, whereas the other researchers do find such an effect. Thus, seniority is an important determinant for getting news coverage during election periods, but is of secondary importance during regular time periods. This implies an interaction between individual politicians' traits and news routines on the meso-level.

Political centrality has been investigated in eight studies. The general trend is that more extreme politicians, who stand further from the symbolic center in a society, receive additional

news coverage (Cook, 1986; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Payne, 1980; Sheafer, 2001; Squire, 1988; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011). However, two more recent studies conducted in Israel do not find an effect of political extremism on the amount of news coverage (Cohen et al., 2008; Tsfati et al., 2010). It seems that the importance of political extremism is country-specific with a smaller effect of the polarization of politicians in Israel than in the US.

Concerning the effect of party attachment on news coverage of, no clear pattern was found yet. Van Aelst et al. (2008) and Veblen (1981) conclude that party attachment is an important aspect when it comes to getting covered. But many researchers contradict their results by finding no significant effect of party attachment (Fogarty, 2008; Gershon, 2012; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Midtbø, 2011; Payne, 1980; Squire, 1988; Tsfati et al., 2010; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011). It could be that this effect is only small because other features that are related to party affiliation do have an 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.

There is one political characteristic that does not enhance news coverage of a politician: belonging to a majority party. Politicians who are part of the majority party do not receive additional coverage (Cohen et al., 2008; Cook, 1986; Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Midtbø, 2011; Squire, 1988). Some researchers even find an opposite effect: members of minority parties receive more coverage (Schaffner & Sellers, 2003; Van Aelst et al., 2008) than their counterparts of majority parties. There should be an 'incumbency bonus' for members of majority parties, but research has shown that this bonus is exclusively for members who already obtain a high function such as ministers and party leaders (De Swert & Walgrave, 2002). For regular MP's, belonging to a coalition party does not have such a positive effect.

Personal characteristics

Socio-demographic variables such as gender and age were included as control variables in some studies. Studies including gender as an independent variable show divergent results: seven of these studies do not find a significant effect of gender (Cohen et al., 2008; Cook, 1986; Gershon, 2012; Squire, 1988; Tresch, 2009; Tsfati et al., 2010; Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011), whereas the other three did (Midtbø, 2011; Van Aelst et al., 2008; Veblen, 1981). A closer examination indicates that this inconsistency might be explained by the measurement of political standing in these studies. Midtbø (2011), Van Aelst et al. (2008) and Veblen (1981) have a limited measure of the political standing of politicians by which they include a dummy variable of one function such as party leader or ministers. Precisely these researchers conclude that female politicians receive less coverage than their male colleagues do. The remaining studies include a more elaborated operationalization of political standing and fail to find a significant effect of gender. This implies an interaction between the gender and the institutional function of a politician: when taken the political function into account, female politicians receive approximately the same amount of coverage in news media.

Concerning age, Midtbø (2011) and Veblen (1981) conclude that younger politicians receive more coverage, whereas Cook (1986), Squire (1988) and Tsfati et al. (2010) cannot find such an effect. Both studies that find significant effects investigated newspapers coverage and the other three television news coverage. Surprisingly, being young seems to be an important personal characteristic to make it into newspapers, but not to appear on a visual medium such as television. All studies include also political tenure in their analyses, thus effects of age cannot be explained by interactions with experience.

Recently, there has been some research into the physical attractiveness of politicians. Tsfati et al. (2010) developed a measurements to determine the physical attractiveness of Israeli politicians and tested its effect on their coverage. They find a significant effect: beautiful politicians

receive more coverage, even when control variables such as seniority and parliamentary activity are included in the analysis. Waismel-Manor and Tsfatı (2011) replicate these results with Members of Congress in the US. Although only two studies have been conducted, it appears that attractiveness is an important determinant for coverage.

Political work

The seminal work of Payne (1980) suggested that a politician can't be both a work horse and a show horse. Much political activity is not compatible with being 'media savvy' and thus political active politicians have to be satisfied with less media attention. Early studies by Cook (1986) and Squire (1988) replicate the findings of Payne (1980) and conclude that sponsoring bills and trips to districts do not get rewarded with additional coverage. Also more recent studies do not find an effect of parliamentary activity (Fogarty, 2008, 2012) or even found a negative effect, with politicians who are politically very active receiving less coverage (Sheafer, 2001; Tsfatı et al., 2010). However, Tresch (2009), Midtbø (2011), Waismel-Manor and Tsfatı (2011) and Gershon (2012) do find a significant and positive effect of parliamentary activity, although the effect is rather weak. Overall, it seems that the effect of being a workhorse is at best modest for gaining coverage.

Media work

A first aspect of politicians who are, what Payne calls, show horses is their media motivation and media efforts. Politicians can enhance their coverage by maintaining good contacts with journalists and sending press releases compatible with news deadlines. These aspects have only recently been investigated and its effect has been confirmed by Sellers and Schaffner (2007), Cohen et al. (2008), Midtbø (2011), Fogarty (2012) and Gershon (2012). Politicians who set up interesting 'pseudo-events', have good contacts with journalists and sent press releases to newsrooms gain additional coverage. There are however two deviant studies (Fogarty, 2008; Waismel-Manor & Tsfatı, 2011) that not find such effects. Overall, it seems important for politicians to do some effort to gain journalists' attention and have a good media plan to get covered.

A second important aspect of doing good media work is having what Sheafer calls "charismatic communication skills". Political actors have to play by the rules of the arena of political communication, with more charismatic players getting higher legitimacy and thus more news coverage (Sheafer, 2001). Politicians can enhance their communication skills by taking media training and paying attention to their communication efforts. Three studies in Israel show the importance of having good communication skills to obtain coverage (Sheafer, 2001; Sheafer & Wolfsfeld, 2004; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006). However, further investigation in other countries is necessary to draw some conclusive answers.

4.2. Meso-level

News staff

In this selection of most relevant studies, no study has analyzed the effect of journalist characteristics on which politicians get covered. Studies taking the meso-level into account focus solely on features of news organizations and their news routines.

News organizations

A first broad distinction can be made concerning the type of medium. Do newspapers cover other politicians than television or radio news does? Cook (1986) does not find significant differences between newspapers coverage and television news coverage. Also Squire (1988) finds similar results for television and newspapers, with both types of media following mainly political characteristics such as senate leadership. Van Aelst et al. (2008) conclude that both television news and newspapers cover politicians according to their political characteristics, such as their political function and their electoral position. But they find some differences, with female politicians being covered less in newspapers. Another and rather expected difference between newspapers and television news is the importance of physical attractiveness. More attractive politicians will gain more coverage on television news compared to newspapers coverage (Waismel-Manor & Tsfati, 2011).

Difference in coverage between local and national newspapers has also been analyzed. Haynes and Murray (1998) and Fogarty (2012) conclude that local and national newspapers have a comparable political content. Local newspapers follow national coverage and thereby include mostly the same politicians. However, Midtbø (2011) and Schaffner and Sellers (2003) find that local newspapers focus less on politicians with a high standing and more on local politicians from within the region.

Schaffner and Sellers (2003) conclude that independent newspapers cover more local politicians, whereas newspapers that are part of a chain are more likely to cover the national, powerful politicians. However, they only analyzed local newspapers. Fogarty (2012) as well does not find different political news sources in local newspapers who belong to a chain. Gershon (2012) examined the effect of ownership of national newspapers and does not find different results for public and private newspapers. Schoenbach et al. (2001) also investigated the effect of ownership, this time according to television news. They conclude that television news on private and public broadcasts include mainly the same political actors. Moreover, there seems to be some differences between popular and quality newspapers, with popular newspapers covering more often political leaders than quality newspapers which have a more equal coverage of politicians (Midtbø, 2011).

The type of event that is being covered determines which politicians appear in articles or news items. In less controlled events, such as stake-outs and studio interviews, politicians without a high-ranked position have greater chance to get covered than in an arranged press conference, which generally is held by cabinet members or party leaders. But it also matters if the Senate is in session on the day of the event, how many politicians participate at the event, etc. (Sellers & Schaffner, 2007). Wolfsfeld and Sheafer (2006) confirm their hypotheses concerning open and closed waves. In open waves, communication skills are more important to get covered than thematic relevance is. During closed waves, journalists rather choose well-established politicians who are knowledgeable about the theme at hand for example as a cabinet member for that particular domain.

Lastly, news coverage of politicians is different in election periods compared to routine periods. During the weeks before election campaigns, news media cover less political leaders and more female politicians (Kuklinski & Sigelman, 1992; Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009). Sheafer and Wolfsfeld (2004) however find the opposite in Israel, with leaders receiving even more coverage during election weeks. Likewise, they conclude that communication skills become less important during election campaigns, since leadership position becomes more determining for getting covered. The reason for this contradiction is probably the divergent political media systems in the US, Belgium and Israel. The US belongs to the liberal model of Hallin and Mancini (2004), characterized by a pragmatic journalistic approach and thus depending less on political elites and their political agenda. Belgium fits within the democratic corporatist model with less power distance

and a more consensual approach. This leads to more equal coverage with less focus on political leaders. Israel on the other hand belongs to the polarized pluralist model and thus has a rather sacerdotal journalistic culture, where politicians follow the events set by the political leaders (Esser, 2008). Furthermore, the competitiveness of the race influences which politicians get covered. Kahn (1991) finds that incumbent candidates generally receive more coverage than challengers do, except during competitive races. In competitive races, the press treat incumbents and challengers almost equally. Schoenbach et al. (2001) also conclude that news coverage of politicians varies across campaigns. Dependent on the context of the campaign, certain positions become more newsworthy and therefore receive additional coverage.

4.3. Macro-level

Schoenbach et al. (2001) compared news coverage in the Netherlands and Germany. They identify two possible influences on coverage of politicians at the political system level: political culture and the amount of parties in parliament. The Netherlands has a 'consensus culture' of decision making, since Dutch governments traditionally have been consisting of several ideologically different parties. Related to this, a greater number of parties is represented in the Dutch parliament compared to the German parliament, due to the absence of a threshold for the proportion of votes a party must gain. The results show that political function is a greater determinant for news coverage in Germany than in the Netherlands. In Germany, the head of the 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 conclude that the Netherlands have a more equal access approach, due to the consensus culture, and Germany rather has a presidential approach. Another explanation the authors give is the relative strong position of the government in the Netherlands, leading to additional coverage for government members. Furthermore, they assume that the specific circumstances of the campaign as well as the attitudes of journalists towards politics can be influential factors.

Negrine (1999) compared Germany and Britain and also concludes that the chancellor in Germany gains the most coverage by far. However, he found that not party leaders come in second place, as Schoenbach et al. (2001) did, but a selection of ministers and contenders for high office. In Britain on the other hand, political party leaders and especially these of government parties, are becoming increasingly visible in television news. It appears that certain political functions gain additional coverage according to the political system of a country.

5. Discussion

In this paper, we presented a preliminary model to predict which politicians have more chance to become a news source. The main focus was on individual politician themselves. Which characteristics and activities determine the amount of coverage one receives? Afterwards, we tested for conditional effects. Dependent on contextual factors at the news media level and the country level, certain features of politicians might become less or more important to get covered. The preliminary theory consists of expected direct and interactive effects, which then were tested by reviewing prominent research with this subfield of political communication.

On the micro-level of politicians, political standing is clearly the most influential determinant for the amount of coverage a political actor receives. Politicians who obtain a rather high political position can be guaranteed a great deal of coverage. The other political characteristics are less influential for gaining coverage, although seniority can be important during election campaigns. Physical attractiveness is the only personal characteristic that has a clear impact on news

coverage. Attractive politicians get covered more, especially in television news. However, only two studies are conducted and thus the results are not robust yet.

Politicians without a high-ranking function can gain additional coverage by working hard, especially media work is important. Politicians who are 'media-savvy', have good communication skills and focus on getting journalists attention by sending press releases and setting up pseudo-events, have a good chance of getting covered. Working hard in parliament might lead to a good reputation among colleagues but does not necessarily get rewarded by additional news coverage. It seems that a combination of good political and media work results in more coverage. Whereas early scholars such as Payne (1980) make a clear distinction between show horses and work horses, this division has become an artificial one. Politicians can be show horses and work horses at the same time. Political activity and media activity are related, since making it into the news has become so central to the legislative process. 'Going public' can be a powerful strategy for influencing parliament and other political leaders. A political actor can try to build public support for certain policies by generating positive news content and such public support can in turn pressure the parliament to follow a proposed policy (Domke, Graham, Coe, John, & Coopman, 2006). Kedrowski (1996) talks about a new type of congressman that isn't either a show horse or a work horse, but combines both parliamentary activity and publicity to enhance their political success and news coverage. She labels them 'media entrepreneurs'. These legislators believe that obtaining publicity will allow them to set agendas, shape legislation and even move a bill through the process.

At the meso-level, it appears that some research has been done about the influence of news organizations and their news routines on which politicians become news sources. Female politicians appear less in newspapers, whereas more attractive politicians have a better chance at getting covered in television news. Local news organizations rely less on national, powerful politicians but rather select 'backbenchers' from within the region of their market. News routines are also contingent upon the type of event covered and during election weeks. In less controlled and more open events, function is less determining to get covered, but having good media relations and fluent communication is. During occurrences with a more closed theme, journalists will select high-ranked politicians, with knowledge about the issue at hand. During election period, finally, coverage becomes more equal, with less authoritative and female politicians also get a chance of getting covered. None of the included studies however has analyzed effects of journalists' characteristics on the political news source they choose.

Few studies have investigated differences in source selection in a comparative manner. The limited research shows that countries with a more consensual political culture have a more equal balanced group of politicians who appear in news. Likewise, politicians in countries with parties consisting of many parties have more chances to get coverage, in spite of their lower function. Until now, it is not clear which interactions occur between media systems and characteristics of politicians.

The overview analysis proves the utility of the preliminary theory in this paper. It makes clear which variables on the micro-level need to be taken into account when studying news coverage of political actors as well as the prevalence of interaction effects. This model is a first step in conducting systematic research analyzing all three levels to test and develop a more comprehensive theory about the determinants of individual politicians' news coverage. The overview indicates that more research needs to be done about the impact of journalists' treats on their sources choice as well as comparative studies to assess differences in coverage in various countries. Investigating the micro- and meso-level variables is an important first step, with conducting comparative studies as an essential next step.

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