Abstract

Based on a sample of ten countries and 21 TV stations (four weeks of main TV news) we compare (1) the amount of crime coverage, (2) the framing of the crime stories, and (3) the sensationalist character of the formats. Private channels, more than public channels, cover crime, use human-interest framing and sensational formatting to tell their crime stories. The media-politics system matters for the framing of crime coverage; stations in Democratic-Corporatist systems use less human-interest frames. Media market fragmentation and competition boost human-interest framing and sensational format use. The smaller their news room, finally, the more TV stations use human-interest framing.

Keywords: crime news, TV news, comparative communication, media systems, media market competition, public broadcasting.

Crime News and its Antecedents. A Comparative Analysis of Crime Coverage on Television in Ten Countries

Crime coverage has been studied extensively. This is no coincidence as crime coverage is relevant for at least two reasons. First, crime coverage can be, and has been, considered as an indicator of the general 'quality' of TV news and the informative value of TV news. Scholars have been worried about the declining quality of TV news (see for example: Patterson 1993) with ongoing processes of tabloidization and sensationalization (for an overview see Norris 2000). In these accounts, crime coverage has served as a prime indicator with more crime coverage indicating less quality as crime replaces political news and foreign news and is associated with soft news (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1991). Second, more than other kinds of coverage, crime coverage bears consequences. On the individual level, studies showed that crime coverage has a strong effect on the public agenda—the topics people care about (Lowry, Nio, and Leitner 2003; Soroka 2002). The more the media report about crime events the more the audience thinks that crime rates are high (Davis 1952). Crime coverage also increases support for a repressive approach to crime and may increase racism (Gilliam and Iyengar 2000). Crime coverage has an effect on feelings of insecurity and fear (Gordon and Heath 1991; O'Keefe and Reid-Nash 1987; Romer, Aday, and Hall Jamieson 2003). These feelings of insecurity contribute to feelings of general malaise and to social (in people) and political (in political institutions) distrust (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Singorielli 1994). On the aggregate level, studies showed that rising amounts of crime coverage elicit policy changes in crime policy. If crime coverage goes up, for example, attention for crime in parliament and government goes up too (Walgrave, Soroka, and Nuytemans 2008). Finally, research found that there is an association between the level of crime coverage and the electoral success of right-wing populist parties (Walgrave and Deswert 2004).

Despite the ample attention to crime in the news, extant work has not focused systematically on (1) *comparing* the levels and types of crime news in different countries and on different TV stations—a very large majority of studies deals with TV news in the US and ignored other countries. Nor has there been an effort (2) trying to *account* for crime news on TV-why is there more, and different, crime coverage on some TV stations compared to others? (but see: Kleemans, Van Cauwenberghe, d'Haenens, and Hendriks Vettehen 2008)?

Our aim here is *to assess the amount and type of crime coverage across countries and TV stations and to explore the factors determining amount and type of crime coverage.* Based on a sample of ten countries and 21 TV stations we analyze the amount of crime coverage, the framing and the format of the crime stories. The paper explores why crime is covered differently in the countries and on the stations under study. We explore differences between TV stations, controlling for the real crime rates, depending on the media system, the type of station (public-private), the media market situation, and journalist staff size.

Crime in the news: hypotheses

By far most of the work on crime coverage has dealt with describing the amount and the type of crime coverage or with the effects of crime coverage on the public or on elites. Hardly any empirical studies have explored comparatively why some channels devote more, and different, attention to crime than others. The study focuses on five possible explanations.

A first, and obvious, explanation holds that crime coverage rates are driven by real crime rates. As crime goes up or down coverage follows suit. This base-line expectation is partially contradicted by extant work. Some studies found that coverage and reality were negatively correlated (Antunes and Hurley 1977; Ghanem 1996; Windhauser, Seiter, and Winfree 1991) while other studies found no correlation whatsoever (Graber 1980; Sheley and Ashkins 1981). When focusing on more specific types of crime and their coverage, scholars

came to mixed conclusions (see for example: Graber 1979; Marsh 1991; Sheley and Ashkins 1981; Sherizen 1978). All these studies, though, examined crime rates and coverage through time; none of them, except for the study by Marsh, focused on comparing crime coverage between countries. In this study, we will consider real crime rates as a *control* variable. We test whether crime coverage is associated with media system, media type, media market and news room variables *on top* of the effect of real crime rates. By controlling for crime rates, we grasp a part of the larger socio-economic and political differences between countries (e.g. social inequality) that cause diverging crime rates and filter them out when assessing the direct impact of media system, media type, media market, and news room variables.

Public service and private channels have different goals (Holz-Bacha and Norris 2001). Crime coverage is commercial coverage fitting into the tabloidization of news (Esser 1999). Crime often has a high news value and attracts a wide audience (Lotz 1991). Moreover, crime news is 'easy' news. The facts often are accessible, there are a lot of sources, it is easy to narrate, there are clearly defined good (victims) and bad guys (offenders) involved, the subjects of crime news are weak and cannot challenge wrong news coverage etc. (Lowry, Nio, and Leitner 2003). Hence, the cost of crime news is low, while its impact in terms of audience may be high. This makes bringing more crime news attractive for commercially driven media outlets. Market-driven journalism, also, resorts more to sensationalism to reach the audience (Hendriks Vettehen, Nuijiten, and Beentjes 2006). Many scholars have examined the news differences between commercial and public broadcasters (for an overview see Norris 2000). Studies found that private channels aired more soft and sensational news than public broadcasters (Hvitfelt 1994; Norris 2000: 110-111; Powers, Kristkjansdottir, and Sutton 1994). Therefore, we expect that also in terms of crime news we will find more crime news, and in different formats and frames, on private stations than on public channels.

H1a: Private channels bring more crime coverage than public broadcasters;

H1b: Private channels use the human interest frame more often than public stations;

H1c: Private channels rely more than public broadcasters on sensational formats in their crime news.

Students of comparative communication got their 'bible' when Hallin and Mancini published *Comparing Media Systems* in 2004. The book is widely cited by almost any study engaging in comparing media systems. The authors' main claim is that the relation between media and politics differs systematically across countries leading to different media systems each with specific dynamics. They distinguish three types of systems: the Liberal, the Democratic-Corporatist and the Polarized-Pluralist type. The book does not produce predictions about the specific news content generated by these different types. We believe that especially the professionalization of journalism, one of the key dimensions of the typology, may bear consequences for crime news. Professionalization refers to the fact that journalists are autonomous, also from commercial pressures, that they have their own distinct professional norms and that they have a public service orientation (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 33-41). Both the Liberal model and the Democratic-Corporatist model are characterized by a strong professionalization, the first in a non-institutionalized and the latter in an institutionalized way. The Polarized-Pluralist model, in contrast, is less professionalized and journalism is more 'instrumentalized' for political and commercial goals. We anticipate that strong professionalization, and especially institutionalized professionalization, leads to less, to less sensational and to less human-interest framed news.

H2a: There is less crime coverage in Democratic-Corporatist countries than in Liberal and Polarized-Pluralist countries;

H2b: Crime coverage in Democratic-Corporatist countries relies less on human-interest framing than in Liberal and Polarized-Pluralist countries;

H2c: C*rime coverage draws less on sensational formats in Democratic-Corporatist countries than in Liberal and Polarized-Pluralist countries.*

Also the competiveness of the TV market may affect the amount, format and frame of a station's crime coverage. In some countries, the competition among the TV stations is mitigated as there are only a handful of stations amongst which, most of the time, a strong public broadcaster (Picard 2002). In other countries, the media market is strongly fragmented with fierce competition between many players. As crime has the capacity to attract a large audience, we expect that crime coverage would be affected by market competition. That media market competition can affect the content of news has been substantiated (Atwater 1984; Powers, Kristkjansdottir, and Sutton 1994). Competition forces media outlets to cater to the prejudices of their readers; the more competition the more aggressive catering to the prejudices there will be (Mullainathan and Shleifer 2005). Studies have pointed out that increasing competition among news providers leads to more sensational and human interest news (Hendriks Vettehen 2008; Slattery, Doremus, and Marcus 2001). Also Patterson, in a similar vein, sees a direct link between what he calls 'commercialization' of the media and resorting to more sensational formats and a more frequent use of human-interest frames (Patterson 2000). We expect media competition to have an effect on crime coverage on top of the type of station (commercial versus public) since broadcasters tend to imitate each other in situations of heavy competition (McQuail 1988). Hence, not only the attention for crime but also the degree of sensationalism and the type of framing depends on market competition.

H3a: Heavy competition on the media market leads to a larger amount of crime coverage;

H3b: Heavy competition on the media market leads to more human-interest framing of crime news;

H3c: Heavy competition on the media market leads to a more frequent use of

sensational formats.

We argued that crime makes for easy news: its cost is relatively low (while its effect in terms of audience attractiveness may be large). Therefore, we expect there to be an association between the amount of journalists working in a station's news room and crime coverage. When a TV station has a relative small amount of journalists, so that journalists cannot specialize, we expect the relative share of crime stories to be high; this small group of journalists has to fill all daily news slots and cannot but rely on easy and quick crime news requiring little specialization. Also the framing may be related to journalist staff size. Framing crime structurally requires much more specialization and contacts with specific sources than framing crime in a human-interest way (since bystanders and victims are ready available).

H4a: Small journalist staff size leads to a large amount of crime coverage;

H4b: Small journalist staff size leads to more human- interest framing of crime news.

Data and methods

We rely on a comparative dataset with evidence regarding four weeks of TV coverage in ten Western countries. The sample partially is a convenience sample. Availability of newscasts online and of native-speaking coders played a role. However, we consider the sample to be sound on theoretical grounds too. It includes most main West-European countries (with the exception of maybe Spain, Denmark or Sweden) and adds Turkey and Canada. As we will show below, the sample is diverse on the dependent and independent variables and, for example, includes countries from Hallin and Mancini's three media systems.

The sample of newscasts was taken between December 2006 and April 2007 and contains 28 news casts per TV station. The same days were selected throughout so as to avoid that international crime or large events would bias the data and make them non-comparable between countries. In none of the countries, the research period fell in an election period. In

almost all countries, we included the largest commercial channel and the public broadcaster and analyzed their the main TV news show in prime time. In total 672 broadcasts and 8,947 news items were analyzed and coded. Table 1 contains the description of the evidence.

<Table 1 about here>

Although the number of TV news broadcasts is the same for all stations, the total number of news items differs. This is due to two factors: the length of the main newscasts differs and also the length of the news items differs across channels. In France, the private broadcaster *TF1* has long newscasts with on average short items leading to a lot of items (N=712) while the other extreme, *ITV* in the UK, has short newscasts leading to a smaller sample of news items (N=155). The issue here is whether we can compare these different samples. We believe this to be the case as we took for each country the main news show aired in prime time. Whether stations make long or short news shows or use long or short items does not really matter; we are interested in TV stations' structural policies regarding crime news. We draw most of the time on percentages and not on absolute figures.

Although the total number of items is large, the amount of items per country and per station is not very large. With 28 days of news chances exist that our sample is too small and that random differences due to local events and temporary situations conceal structural differences between countries and stations. For example, serial killings in a certain country during the research period may seriously affect the amount and type of crime news in that country without pointing towards a systematic difference in coverage. That is why we spread our sample out over a period of five months to avoid single events to dominate the sample. We are aware of those problems but they do not impede our undertaking. If the sample is too small this will most likely lead to conservative errors. Moreover, we are not aware of any

other international comparative news study that draws upon a larger non-electoral news sample as most comparative studies focus only on election periods (and on election news) (Van Aelst and De Swert 2009 : 152).

Trained coders, most of them native speakers, watched the recorded news broadcast, and analyzed them item per item. The crucial variable is the issue code. Drawing upon a detailed issue-codebook, coders could attribute up to three issue codes to a single news item. If one of these three possible codes refers to the broad crime code, we consider the item to be about crime. In many cases, coders only gave one code; the average number of issue codes per item is 1.47. Apart from the issue code (in this case: crime item or not), two other types of variables are coded: the actors that are interviewed in the item (framing) and the sensationalist character of the formats used in the item. Intercoder-reliability scores were generally satisfying with Cohen's kappa .80 for the issue code, .74 for the sensationalism index, and .90 for the human-interest variable (based on 4% double codings).

First, in terms of the actors, we only record an actor if he/she is actually interviewed or quoted in the news item or when he/she forms the subject of the news item. Many different people are shown in crime news items and, in this study, we focus on only one type of actor: involved persons (standers-by, witnesses, victims, perpetrators…). The idea is that this type of actors grasps the frame that is used to tell the crime story: from what perspective, from which angle are the stories about crime brought? Crime stories can be told from the perspective of the involved people which implies that the main angle is human interest: How are people reacting when they are confronted with crime? Who are the victims? Who are the perpetrators? The frame adopted is probably also an episodic frame, it does not focus on the structural causes but rather on the personal perception and consequences of crime (Iyengar and Kinder 1987). Ericson and colleagues found this type of 'individualistic' coverage to overwhelm the structural-causal coverage of crime in their study of Canadian newspapers

(Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1991). In sum, we measure the presence of a human interest frame through the presence of involved persons in the crime item.

Second, in terms of the format of the coverage, each news item was scored on a number of dummy variables tapping its sensational character (Grabe, Zhou, and Barnett 2001). Three types of sensationalism are being distinguished: sensationalism in images, in sounds, and in the emotions of people on screen. Sensational images are images showing actual violence, bodies of dead people, or injuries of people. The sound of a crime news item can be sensational too: it can have a music score, contain dramatic sound (e.g. gun shot), contain dramatic sound produced by people (e.g. crying, screaming…), and can incorporate sounds of joy. Finally, the people shown in the news items can display strong emotions of sadness, fear, fury or joy (for a similar operationalization of sensationalism see: Hendriks Vettehen, Nuijiten, and Beentjes 2006). We use a very simple aggregated dichotomy: as soon as a news item contains one of the things above, we consider it to be a sensational item. In summary, the study has three dependent variables: (1) the amount of crime news; (2) the framing of crime items; (3) the sensationalist format of crime news.

The independent variables are fourfold. As put forward above, we hypothesize that the type of TV station determines the crime news. This variable is easy to operationalize: TV stations are scored ‘1’ when they are private and ‘0’ when they are public channels. The second independent variable is the media system. We follow Hallin & Mancini’s typology and distinguish Liberal systems, Democratic-Corporatist systems, and Polarized-Pluralist systems. The third independent variable is the media market situation in the different countries. We constructed three separate media market variables based on the 2007 TV fact book (Committee 2007). The first measure is market *share* per station: how large (in %) is the audience of the TV station? Note that we take general market share of a channel as we cannot distinguish between TV news and general market share. Second, we tap market *fragmentation*

in a country by adding up the market shares of the public broadcaster and its largest private competitor and then reversing the value. We create a third media market variable coined *news competition*. It taps to what extent, in a country, several news casts compete with each other in prime time. This variable is scored '1' in case of a duopoly, '2' when there are three main players in the news market, '3' stands for more than three players, and '4' means that there are many players and that the news market is very competitive. The fourth independent variable is staff size. We have no direct measure of the size of the news rooms of the 21 stations in our sample but use an indirect measure. Very often, the name of the journalist making a news items is shown on screen or he/she says his/her own name. We calculated, per channel, the average amount of news items a journalist made during the research period. The more news items he/she made, we assume, the smaller the total journalist staff. We acknowledge that this is a very indirect measure of staff size, but it is the only information we have.

As a control variable we use the actual amount of crime occurring in the countries under study. We rely on crime rate data produced by Eurostat and the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics. All figures are from 2006[1]. The data we use are all based on police statistics and thus largely based on crime reporting by citizens.

Assessing crime coverage

How much crime is there on the news? Our data allow us, according to our knowledge for the first time (but see: Heinderyckx 1993), to assess the amount of crime news in ten countries and on 21 TV stations. Figure 1 gathers the data on crime (and justice) and compares them with the two other most frequent issues in the news (politics and economics).

[1] Eurostat (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/); The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (http://www.statcan.gc.ca).

<Figure 1 about here>

The first thing that catches the eye is that crime coverage is the single most important topic in the news. On average, over 10 countries and 21 TV stations, 17.4 percent of the news is devoted to crime stories. The second most popular topic following at a distance is politics with 12.3 percent, then follows economics (10.5%). Interestingly, the stories dealing with justice issues strongly affiliated with crime get another substantial piece of the news cake with 10.2 percent. We defined justice stories here as stories that deal with the organization of the police or the justice department, stories that focus on crime policy and prison policy, stories related to crime prevention, and, most importantly, all stories dealing with trials. This final trial subcategory is by far the largest one in the justice category (more than half of the justice stories). When we would use a broader definition of crime stories, including the law suits that are the consequences of crime and that do contain a good deal of information about the crime itself, the total share of crime stories would have been well above one fifth of all stories. The point is simple: there is *a lot* of crime on TV news.

Comparing the different TV stations shows that the high crime average is not due to one or just a few crime stations. For 17 of the 21 channels crime is the most important topic in the news; on 19 channels crime figures among the top two topics. In France (*FR2* and *TF1*) and in Germany (*ARD* and *ZDF*) crime is challenged by runners-up (mainly politics). The good news for our analyses is that, notwithstanding the substantial average amount of crime news, the variance between stations is large, there is something to be explained. The uncontested crime champion is the Turkish commercial channel *Star* that systematically devotes one third of its news to crime coverage.

Crime coverage is event-driven. There is not much continuity in the news about crime. On some days a large chunk of the daily news goes to crime, the next day hardly any news

covers crime events. For some TV-stations the standard deviation of the daily crime coverage is larger than the mean which implies that crime coverage is very volatile and goes up and down oscillating wildly. That crime news is strongly event driven can also be demonstrated by correlating the daily crime share between the TV stations in the same country. Correlations (Pearson) are mostly high and range from .76 in Turkey to .33 in Canada. These coefficients indicate that crime coverage in a country reacts to events and that most TV stations react to some extent similarly to the same events or absence of events.

The second dependent variable is the framing of crime news as measured by the type of actors quoted in the news stories. If a story contains people that are somehow personally involved in the event we suppose a story gets a human interest frame. Table 2, first part, contains the data per TV station.

<Table 2 about here>

In general, TV news seems to rely a lot on involved actors; one third of all actors speaking are victims, offenders, eye witnesses, friends, family etc. suggesting that the human-interest frame is widely employed. The table documents that differences between stations are large. The Turkish *Star*, again, stands out with in half of its stories a human-interest frame while the Norwegian *NRK* seems to use the frame least (20%).

The third dependent variable is the news format, which we defined as the degree of sensationalism of the news. We explained earlier how we operationalized this dimension in images, sounds and emotions. The second part of Table 2 reveals that there are considerable differences between stations in the extent that they use sensational formats. The index (last column) summarizes the table and varies between 88.8 percent (*Star*, private channel in Turkey) and 8.1 percent (*VRT*, public broadcaster in Belgium-Flanders). This indicates that

almost all crime stories aired on *Star* have at least one sensationalist feature and that almost no stories aired on *VRT* have sensationalist formatting. Both Turkish channels really stand out as also the Turkish public *TRT* uses a lot of sensationalist formats. On closer inspection, Turkish sensationalism is partly due to the abundant use of a music score when reporting about crime. Yet, even without taking music into account, *Star* would still be the champion of sensationalism (68.3) while *TRT* would score above the median (26.1). Looking at the different sensationalist formats shows that all elements are used to some extent and not only in Turkey. Crime stories often contain images of actual violence, of dead or injured people. People featuring in crime news regularly show extreme emotions of sadness, fear, fury or joy. TV news often employs dramatic sounds to increase the effect of the news.

Explaining crime coverage

Our explanatory variables are all situated on the aggregate TV station and country level. This implies that the statistical power of our analyses is confined since we only have 21 cases at our disposal. For some analyses the N is even smaller as some data are missing (media market data for Canada). This limits the statistical tools at our disposal and compels us to rely on simple analyses, correlations and simple regressions. As our independent variables are structural and clearly 'precede' crime coverage both in time and theoretically, we believe we can cautiously make causal inferences based on simple correlations. Our analysis strategy consists of four steps. First, we calculate simple Pearson's correlations between all dependent and independent variables. Second, we run a large number of simple regressions testing to what extent differences in crime coverage can be explained by each of the different independent variables while we control for real crime rates; we report Beta coefficients and significance. Third, we test the robustness of the found correlations by following a so-called jack-knife procedure. Jack-knifing means that estimates are calculated each time on a slightly

different dataset. Each single correlation is based on the total sample minus each time one case; all cases are deleted consecutively. This procedure tests whether significant coefficients (we only do this for the significant results) are not artificially produced by one or a few outliers. We report the average correlation coefficients and indicate how many of the correlations did not reach the threshold of statistical significance. Fourth, we run somewhat more elaborate regressions testing to what extent a certain independent variable affects crime coverage *on top* of not only the real crime rate in a country but also the effect of TV station type (public-private). As the number of observations is really small, we apply slightly more relaxed significance thresholds for the correlations. Table 3 reports about the first three analyses.

<Table 3 about here>

The hypothesis we put forward was that commercial TV would feature more, more human-interest framed, and more sensational crime coverage. All these hypotheses receive support as can be seen in the upper part of the table. Pearson's correlations all reach conventional statistical significance. Beta coefficients too, testing for example whether the amount of crime news on private TV is larger on private channels than on public channels while controlling for the real crime rate, are significant. The jack-knifing procedure testing for the robustness of the relations yielded similar results with mean correlation coefficients similar to the actual correlation; only in one case (of the twenty), the association between sensationalist format and media type, there was a single case, when the Turkish *TRT* was not included, in which the parameter did not reach statistical significance. Hence, we can confirm H1a, H1b, and H1c. Private channels do not only bring more crime news, they frame their crime news differently than public broadcasters and they wrap it in a more sensationalist

format.

The media system typology from Hallin & Mancini does a worse job in explaining differences between TV stations. We expected that the Democratic-Corporatist model, due to the high and institutionalized professionalization of journalism in these countries, would feature less, differently framed and less sensational news. None of the coefficient reaches conventional levels of significance, but some of them do pass the lower .15 significance level. The amount of crime news is definitely not affected by the media system type and we reject H2a for the time being. Framing seems to be affected to some extent with, as expected, less human-interest framing in Democratic-Corporatist countries; both correlations and Beta coefficients flirt with the significance thresholds. We can cautiously maintain H2b. The same applies to sensationalist crime formats: there seems to be a slight effect of media type but it does not work in the regression analysis. We put H2c on hold.

To what extent are media market features associated with crime coverage? The amount of crime coverage is only slightly affected by the media market situation. The simple correlations all go in the expected direction—the smaller the market share the more crime news, the more fragmentation the more crime news and the more news competition the more crime news-but they only reach low levels of significance. The Beta coefficients are not significant. Consequently, we put H3a on hold. Regarding framing, results are stronger and go in the expected direction. A larger market share does, as expected, reduce the amount of human-interest framing (only correlations, Betas not significant). The same observation applies to the fragmentation dimension. The more fragmented the market the more human-interest framing—this again corroborates our expectation (correlation significant, Beta too, mean correlation mostly significant except for two cases). The news competition variable generates the same pattern: cautious confirmation of the expectation for human-interest but the relation is hardly significant and the Beta is not significant. We can maintain H3b and

await further evidence. For the degree of sensationalism, the results are candid and strong. All correlations and Betas are significant, and jack-knifing yields high mean correlations. H3c receives strong support: heavy market competition, whether measured through market share, fragmentation or direct news competition, has a strong impact on how crime is covered. The more competitive the TV market the more sensationalist the crime stories channels bring in their daily news. Regarding the media market variables we can conclude that they drive crime coverage. Competition affects the amount, the framing and, in particular, the format of news stories in the daily news on TV.

In terms of staff size, we see that the size of the news room affects the framing in a human-interest perspective. The correlation is significant and passes the jack-knife test (see similar magnitude of mean correlation and all correlations are significant). The Beta coefficient too, when controlling for real crime rates, is significant. H4b receives support: when journalist are short in numbers and thus not able to specialize, they resort to easy and cheap human-interest framing. H4a, though, must be rejected. The amount of journalists and their supposed specialization, is unrelated to the incidence of crime stories on a TV station.

Our dataset is not large enough to test all hypotheses simultaneously in an integrated multivariate model. Hence, we have no idea which of the independent variables matters most. To further test to what extent the different determinants matter when competing with each other, we ran a number of simple OLS regressions predicting crime coverage. In each regression, we always control for real crime rates *and* for media type (public-private). As media type consistently affected all three dependents, we consider it in these final regressions as a control variable and check whether media system, media market and staff size significantly affect crime coverage on top of crime rate and media type. In each regression we, thus, only test one additional independent variable. Table 4 has the results. We do not display the full results but mark the significant ($p<.1$) variables.

<Table 4 about here>

For the amount of crime in the news, only media type is significant (H1a). None of the other variables is significant when regressed on crime coverage together with real crime rates and media type. Human-interest framing is significantly affected, on top of media type (H1b) by all other dimensions: Democratic-Corporatist media system (H2b), media market fragmentation (H3b), and staff size (H4b). Crime news format, finally, is affected by all media market variables (H3c) on top of medium type (H1c).

So, although the number of cases is very small, the regressions reveal a clear structure. Crime coverage is caused by a complex interplay of several media and media system variables. Media type matters across the board. The media system affects the framing of crime news. The media market has an effect on the framing and the format of crime. And the size of the journalist staff affects the framing of crime news.

Conclusion

The empirical results of the study can be summarized in a few points: (1) Crime is the single most covered issue across countries and TV stations; (2) Crime news is event-driven and volatile; (3) A substantial amount of crime stories contains sensationalist format elements and comes with human-interest framing; (4) Private channels bring more crime news, use more human-interest perspectives and draw more on sensationalism; (5) In Democratic-Corporatist media systems, TV stations' crime reports are less framed in terms of human-interest than in Liberal of Polarized-Pluralist media systems; (6) Market competition especially affects the format of crime coverage but also the framing; (7) Staff size affects who is quoted and thus the framing of the crime news.

The study revealed large differences between news channels. Interestingly, we found the largest differences in story formats rather than in the amount of crime coverage. Most of the broadcasters in the study devote a considerable share of their main evening news to crime events, few stations abstained from reporting about crime. The way crime stories are narrated, however, and whether they are formatted in a sensational, shocking and emotional wrapping, differs extensively; some channels use an extremely sensationalist language, others channels stay close to the facts and tend to dedramatize crime. Also the perspective of the crime stories varies considerably: many channels adhere to a human interest perspective. Framing and format, by and large, vary much more than amount.

The study confirms that public and private broadcasters are different. Different funding structures lead to different takes on crime. Probably the most interesting finding is that specific media market characteristics matter on top of media type. We found robust differences between channels that operate in a relatively non-competitive and non-fragmented markets with a few large players compared to those operating in highly competitive, fragmented markets with many players. When TV markets are highly fragmented, stations are engaged in a ruthless fight for audiences and crime news, especially sensational crime news, is considered as a primary arena in the battle for the public. Even public broadcasters in fragmented markets go along and compete with their private challengers by sensationalizing their crime reporting. Associated with that finding, we also saw that small newsrooms with only few journalists produce more crime news than larger newsrooms. Again, the logic is an economic one: the cheaper the news has to be, the more crime there will be and the more it will rely on human-interest and episodic framing. These findings support earlier studies focussing on market conditions and commercialization pressures to explain content differences between media outlets.

The study has several limitations. The main limitation relates to the data and the

design. Our analyses were situated on an aggregate level and we had relatively few cases at our disposal. We tested for the robustness of the found effects but we need more data in more countries and from more TV stations to make sure our findings hold the track and can be generalized. Probably, country and station features interact with each other but we could not test for this. Also, we expect that individual features at the journalist level may have an effect on the type of crime coverage. Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe to have shown that crime coverage is worth investigating in a comparative perspective and that comparing crime coverage sheds light on the antecedents and drivers of crime coverage.

Finally, the study started by claiming that examining crime news is important as crime coverage is a valuable indicator of news quality. Our results suggest that the quality of the news may be in peril. Crime coverage is ubiquitous in the news and often packed in a sensational and typical soft-news framing. Public broadcasting makes a direct difference by restraining from frequently covering crime, from using human-interest frames and from employing sensationalist formats. In some countries with a media-politics system rooted in different historical trajectories, the quality of the news seems to be safeguarded too as long as professional journalism standards are holding firm. One of the main threats for news quality does not seem to be commercialization per se but rather the fragmentation of media markets. The more fragmented the markets are, the less media outlets care about quality and the more they compete down-market while catering to the fears and prejudices of the public at large. The presence of a large public broadcaster may suppress trends towards market fragmentation and news competition and maintain quality in the news overall. Public broadcasting, thus, may not only directly affect crime coverage. Indirectly, the mere presence of a strong public broadcaster can affect the commercial competitors and structure the competition in a market and contribute to better news quality.

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Tables and Figures

Table 1: Sample of 28 days of coverage in main evening newscast on 21 TV stations (December 2006-April 2007)

TV Station	Country	Channel type	# news items
VRT	Belgium-Flanders	Public	595
VTM	Belgium-Flanders	Private	594
RTBF	Belgium-French	Public	512
RTL-tvi	Belgium-French	Private	559
CBC	Canada	Public	208
CTV	Canada	Private	347
Fr2	France	Public	574
TF1	France	Private	712
ARD	Germany	Public	262
ZDF	Germany	Public	293
RTL	Germany	Private	336
RTE	Ireland	Public	484
RAI	Italy	Public	487
NOS	Netherlands	Public	334
RTL4	Netherlands	Private	286
NRK	Norway	Public	481
TV2	Norway	Private	400
TRT	Turkey	Public	598
Star	Turkey	Private	496
BBC	UK	Public	234
ITV	UK	Private	155
Total			8,947

Figure 1: Coverage (in%) of three most important issues and the justice issue on the main evening newscast on 21 TV stations in ten countries (December 2006-April 2007).

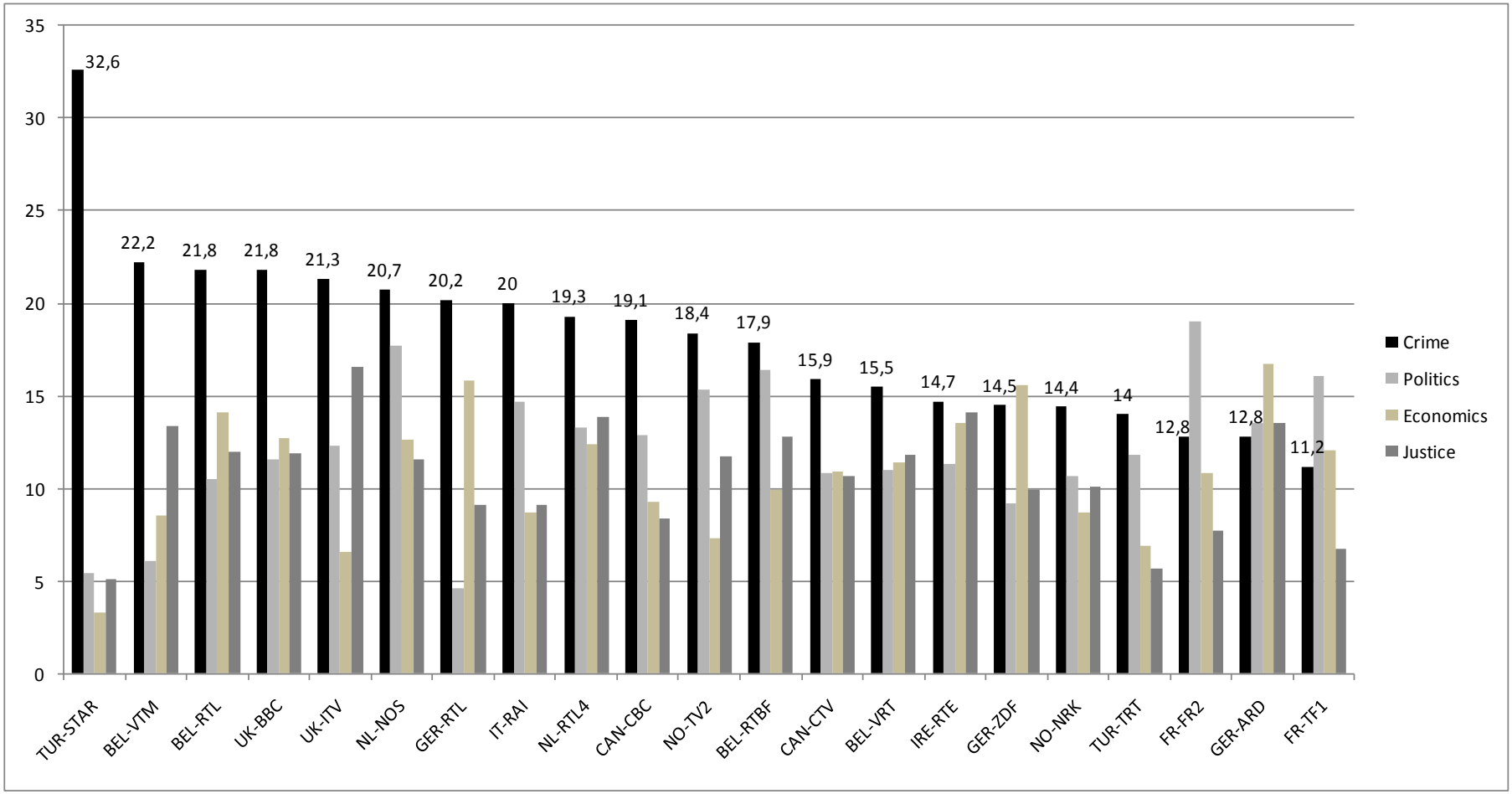

Table 2: Framing and sensationalism of crime news on 21 TV stations

	Framing[1]	Sensationalist formats												
	Human interest	Images			Emotions				sounds				Sensationalism index[2]	N
		Violence	Dead	Injured	Sadness	Fear	Fury	Joy	Music	Drama sounds	Drama Persons	Joy		
Star	51	25.7	15.6	10.1	19.6	3.4	16.2	6.1	70.4	15.6	14.5	10.1	88.8	179
TRT	28	17.7	2.1	6.3	7.3	1.0	6.3	0.0	50.0	4.2	6.3	0.0	70.8	96
RTL4	32	20.5	11.0	4.1	4.1	5.5	4.1	2.7	0.0	1.4	1.4	4.1	41.1	73
CTV	38	10.2	15.3	3.4	13.6	1.7	3.4	8.5	1.7	0.0	5.1	5.1	39.0	59
RTL	39	11.4	10.0	1.4	8.6	2.9	1.4	5.7	2.9	4.3	5.7	4.3	38.6	70
NOS	28	19.8	6.2	2.5	1.2	1.2	4.9	3.7	3.7	3.7	1.2	6.2	35.8	81
TF1	29	8.8	7.8	5.9	7.8	3.9	4.9	2.9	0.0	5.9	7.8	4.9	27.5	102
RTL-tvi	44	4.7	1.3	6.0	11.3	3.3	4.7	1.3	2.0	1.3	4.0	1.3	26.7	150
VTM	44	7.0	1.9	3.2	7.0	1.3	2.5	2.5	5.7	1.9	5.1	2.5	26.1	157
RTBF	33	9.9	4.0	5.9	7.9	0.0	8.9	1.0	0.0	3.0	5.0	2.0	25.7	101
RAI	42	11.0	3.9	3.9	4.7	2.4	1.6	3.9	3.1	5.5	5.5	7.9	25.2	127
ARD	27	7.5	7.5	5.0	5.0	0.0	7.5	7.5	0.0	7.5	7.5	5.0	25.0	40
Fr2	30	9.3	3.1	2.1	5.2	4.1	8.2	6.2	2.1	2.1	3.1	3.1	24.7	97
CBC	30	6.8	4.5	6.8	2.3	0.0	2.3	2.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	22.7	44
BBC	40	11.1	1.9	3.7	3.7	1.9	7.4	9.3	1.9	1.9	3.7	7.4	22.2	54
ITV	42	6.3	6.3	3.1	0.0	3.1	9.4	3.1	6.3	3.1	0.0	6.3	21.9	32
TV2	23	13.0	2.6	2.6	5.2	1.3	9.1	2.6	0.0	5.2	2.6	0.0	20.8	77
NRK	20	13.4	3.7	4.9	4.9	1.2	6.1	3.7	0.0	6.1	6.1	4.9	19.5	82
ZDF	27	2.2	6.5	0.0	6.5	0.0	0.0	4.3	2.2	2.2	2.2	2.2	15.2	46
RTE	39	9.8	2.2	2.2	1.1	1.1	3.3	2.2	0.0	1.1	2.2	0.0	13.0	92
VRT	36	3.6	1.8	0.9	0.9	0.9	2.7	3.6	0.0	0.9	0.9	1.8	8.1	111
Total	35.5	11.5	5.6	4.5	7.1	2.0	5.8	3.7	10.6	4.2	5.0	3.9	33.5	1,927

Note: [1] Framing refers to the people who are interviewed. The figures refer to the percentage of items with interviewed involved persons (human-interest).
[2] The sensationalization index refers to the total amount (%) of crime stories that has at least one of the sensationalism features.

Table 3: Correlation (Pearson's) coefficients and significance, Beta coefficients (regression controlling for real crime rates) and significance, and average correlation coefficients (jack-knifing).

		Amount crime news	Human interest framing crime news	Sensationalist format crime new
Media type				
Public-private channel (N=21)	Pearson's.	**.405 (.034)**	**.403 (.035)**	**.302 (.092)**
	Beta	**.416 (.072)**	**.412 (.072)**	**.362 (.049)**
	Mean corr.	.422	.402	.303 (1 ns)
Media system				
Democratic Corporatist (N=21)	Pearson's.	-.039 (.434)	**-.309 (.086)**	*-.272 (.116)*
	Beta	-.026 (.928)	*-.415 (.143)*	.100 (.673)
Media market				
Market share (N=19)	Pearson's.	*-.288 (.116)*	*-.296 (.109)*	**-.656 (.001)**
	Beta	-.291 (.250)	-.296 (.241)	**-.564 (.002)**
	Mean corr.			-.657
Fragmentation (N=19)	Pearson's.	*.306 (.102)*	**.368 (.060)**	**.684 (.001)**
	Beta	.328 (.209)	*.391 (.130)*	**.549 (.004)**
	Mean corr.		-.365 (2 ns)	-0.683
News competition (N=21)	Pearson's.	*.254 (.133)*	*.278 (.112)*	**.626 (.001)**
	Beta	.297 (.257)	.316 (.227)	**.545 (.024)**
	Mean corr.			.624
Medium's staff size				
Small staff size (N=21)	Pearson's.	.215 (.174)	**.471 (.016)**	.147 (.263)
	Beta	.223 (.438)	**.485 (.031)**	.222 (.246)
	Mean corr.		.468	

Note: One tailed significance tests. Coefficient printed in bold when p<.1 and in italics when p<.15.

Table 4: Significant predictors in regressions each with three independents (public-private broadcaster and real crime rate always included as control variables)

	Amount crime news	Human interest frame crime news	Sensationalist format crime news
Media type			
Public-private channel	**X**	**X**	**X**
Media system			
Democratic Corporatist		**X**	
Media market			
Market share			**X**
Fragmentation		**X**	**X**
Competition			**X**
Medium's staff size			
Small staff size		**X**	

Note: Coefficient marked when significance of Beta $p<.1$.

Technical appendix: description of the independent variables

	Crime rate in country[1]	Media & politics system[2]	Media market			Staff size
			Market share[3]	Fragmentation[4]	News Competition[5]	General[6]
ABC	3.73	Liberal	9.0	12.0	4.0	1.49
ARD	7.63	Democratic corporatist	14.6	28.6	3.0	1.38
BBC	8.14	Liberal	23.7	44.0	3.0	1.51
CBC	6.98	Democratic corporatist	-	-	2.0	1.35
CBS	3.73	Liberal	10.0	12.0	4.0	2.09
CTV	6.98	Liberal	-	-	2.0	3.08
France2	5.66	Polarized pluralist	20.3	52.0	2.0	2.40
ITV	8.14	Liberal	20.3	44.0	3.0	2.41
NBC	3.73	Liberal	9.0	12.0	4.0	2.50
NOS	7.42	Democratic corporatist	13.6	27.5	2.0	2.98
NRK	5.8	Democratic corporatist	39.9	70.0	1.0	2.66
RAI	4.96	Polarized pluralist	23.8	44.9	3.0	1.88
RTBF	9.47	Democratic corporatist	15.3	46.3	1.0	3.45
RTE	2.45	Liberal	27.5	40.3	1.0	2.78
RTL	7.63	Democratic corporatist	13.0	28.6	3.0	1.59
RTLtvi	9.47	Democratic corporatist	25.8	41.1	1.0	1.21
RTL4	7.42	Democratic corporatist	13.9	27.5	2.0	7.88
Star	1.38	Polarized pluralist	9.7	14.2	4.0	4.03
TF1	5.66	Polarized pluralist	31.7	52.0	2.0	2.67
TRT	1.38	Polarized pluralist	4.5	14.2	4.0	1.50
TV2	5.8	Democratic corporatist	30.1	70.0	1.0	2.35
VRT	9.47	Democratic corporatist	29.9	51.8	1.0	4.48
VTM	9.47	Democratic corporatist	21.9	51.8	1.0	5.35
ZDF	7.63	Democratic corporatist	14.0	28.6	3.0	1.49

Notes: [1] Crime rate data are coming from Eurostat (http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/); The Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (http://www.statcan.gc.ca). Figures refer to the number of registered offences per 100 inhabitants in 2006.

[2] Media & politics system variables are taken from Hallin and Mancini (2004).

[3] Market share data are coming from Television 2007, International Key Facts. Figures refer to the general audience share of the specific channel.

[4] Fragmentation data are coming from Television 2007, International Key Facts. Figures refer to the sum of the general audience share of the largest public and largest private channel. Value is reversed in the analyses.

[5] Figures refer to the news competition on national level. 1: there are two channels who provide news in prime time; 2: there are three channels who provide news in prime time; 3: there are four channels that provide news in prime time; 4: there are more than four channels that provide news in prime time.

[6] Figures are the average amount of items per known journalist. Only these items are included when the journalist who made the items is known by name.