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Dynamics of political information transmission: How media coverage informs public judgments about politics

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Acknowledgments

In essence, this dissertation is really an applied reiteration of an old and more general argument, articulated by such eminent scholars as Michael Delli Carpini in political science and Martha Nussbaum in the field of philosophy and law (to only name two): the argument that people need opportunities in order to flourish as citizens and, more generally, as human beings. When it comes to my own “flourishing” during the past four years as a Ph.D. student, I do not believe that I am in a position to make any judgments, at least when it comes to making judgments about my work – I happily leave that to others. I can say, however, that this has been, on many levels, a very educational and hence meaningful time for me, so my overall reflective judgment of this period is one of satisfaction and contentment, which I guess qualifies as an indication that I did flourish in one way or another. Looking back, with my future projects and goals in mind, pursuing a Ph.D. was just what I needed to do. I am grateful, then, to have had the opportunity to actually pursue a Ph.D. in the first place, and I thank the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR) at the University of Amsterdam, and in particular my main advisor Claes de Vreese, above all for providing this opportunity.

Of course, I also thank the members of my dissertation committee, including Hans Beentjes, Moniek Buijzen, Peter Neijens, Markus Prior, and Klaus Schönbach, for their involvement with and critical scrutiny of my work, and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research for funding the larger European politics research project which my own “Dynamics of Political Information” project was part of. Several outstanding colleagues and I worked together on this larger project, and I have been lucky to receive supervision from no less than three of them: Claes de Vreese, Hajo Boomgaarden, and Andreas Schuck. Over the years, this exceptional trio provided me with crucial feedback on my work (or whatever rambling theoretical argument it was that I had written up in a document and sent their way). Claes reminded me time and time again of the virtues of boldness and optimism. Hajo’s devil’s advocate approach let me identify my papers’ main analytical concerns long before reviewers could raise them. And Andreas inspired me to try and be as theoretically rigorous as

he is, as nothing beats a good theory. These are just examples, and each supervisor's unique contributions to this project were manifold. I hope it suffices to say that I thank all three advisors for helping me improve my dissertation on numerous occasions.

The other colleagues whom I had the pleasure of working with on the larger project are Rens Vliegthart, Joost van Spanje, Rachid Azrout, Judith Möller (currently a Ph.D. candidate but in the early period the best research assistant we could wish for), and, last but not least, Pieterjan "No Sweat" Desmet, who joined us from Belgium (still a country!) a bit later on. I thank all of them for their hard work on this giant project, especially during the data collection phase, and for their significant contributions, which I benefitted greatly from. Without exception, they were always available to answer my questions, comment on my research, or help me out in some other form. I'm especially grateful to Rens, and to Joost, for important bits of extra Ph.D. supervision. During work, our research group had many pleasant meetings and interesting discussions, and on more than one occasion after work did we enjoy a fine dinner in a type of restaurant that only a connoisseur like Claes could pick. (On that note I must also thank Claes for really delivering on the culinary part of my academic education.)

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exaggeration to say that our lengthy and frank conversations over coffee, and more generally his “holistic” approach to co-supervising a Ph.D. project, have made a huge difference for the better. I am deeply grateful for his time, listening ear, and help, all of which he didn’t have to afford me, but still did. We’re no longer colleagues, but we nevertheless should, I suggest, maintain our now traditional “coffee break” in the future.

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Needless to say, none of the aforementioned persons carry responsibility for any possible errors in this dissertation – only I do.

Matthijs Elenbaas,

Amsterdam, November 2012