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From the press to politics and back: When do media set the political agenda and when do parties set the media agenda?

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Chapter I

Introduction

Introduction

Why are some issues the subject of heated political and public debate, while others receive almost no political or media attention? Many scholars have noted that there is virtually no limit to the number of potential issues that could be the subject of public policy (e.g., Carmines and Stimson 1989; Dearing and Rogers 1996; Hillgartner and Bosk 1988; Schattschneider 1960). As Jones and Baumgartner (2005, 11) note, 'a pretty good beginning assumption is that the desires of citizens to have their problems addressed […] are infinite.' However, a prerequisite for political action and policy change is political attention, and the number of issues that can receive attention in a political system is inevitably limited. Agenda-setting, or the process by which 'attention is allocated to some problems rather than others' (Jones and Baumgartner 2005, viii-ix), is therefore a crucial aspect of politics.

One of the most important ways in which new issues present themselves to political actors is through the media. Coverage in the media can provide policymakers with information on developments in society, and moreover, politicians often regard media attention as an indicator of what citizens find important. However, we know that media attention on an issue is only sometimes translated into political attention (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). In other words, political actors selectively adopt issues from the media agenda onto the political agenda, and they often ignore the issues presented in the media. Similarly, politicians and parties attempt to affect the broader debate and push their issues on the media agenda, but they are only sometimes successful in influencing the issues to which the media devote their attention. This dissertation contributes to our understanding of the mutual influence between media and political agendas by studying when agenda-setting occurs in one direction or the other and when it does not. Specifically, it asks: ***Under what circumstances do the media influence what is on the political agenda, and under what circumstances do parties influence the media agenda?***

Political agenda-setting
Prioritizing policy issues on the political agenda is a crucial part of party politics. First, to reach their ideological goals, the policy issues parties wish to address

need to be introduced on the political table to begin with. In the national politics of representative democracies, this means that if a party wishes to have its policies on an issue realized, it must ensure that the issue is on the legislative agenda (Vliegenthart, Walgrave and Zicha 2013). Any agenda, however, has a 'limited carrying capacity' in the sense that only a finite number of topics can be included. As there are potentially infinite issues, issues can themselves be considered to compete for a spot on the agenda (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). To achieve their *policy objectives* (Müller and Strøm 1999), parties need to ensure that their issues are on the political agenda, as this is the beginning of the political decision making process.

Second, parties also fight over which issues should top the political agenda to maximize their electoral support. Certain issues are more electorally advantageous than others for specific parties, as these parties are considered the most competent at handling that particular problem (Petrocik 1996) or because they hold a position that is favored by a large part of the electorate (Riker 1996). As a result, parties not only compete for votes by taking different issue positions but also by selectively emphasizing issues that are electorally attractive (Schattschneider 1960, Budge and Farlie 1983; Riker 1996; Carmines and Stimson 1986; see also Vavreck 2009). By the same token, parties attempt to draw attention away from issues that favor their opponents. Recently, scholars have argued that this form of competition, called 'issue competition', has grown increasingly important in Western European politics (Green-Pedersen 2006; 2007). Socio-structural voting has declined (Dalton 2002), leaving parties with a more volatile electorate which partially bases its electoral decisions on the issues that are on the agenda.

While parties thus seek to determine the political agenda, they do not operate in a vacuum. Instead, it generally believed that the media substantially impact the political process and outcomes. Indeed, a recent study found that many politicians in Belgium and the Netherlands think that the media have too much power over politics and often set the political agenda (Van Aelst et al. 2008). Also in scholarly accounts the media are often accorded considerable influence on politics, and by implication on the political agenda. For example, over the last half century, politics in Western European democracies have reputedly become increasingly *mediatized* (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Schulz

2004; Strömbäck 2008), and governed by a *media logic* (Altheide and Snow 1979; Meyer 2002). According to these theories, political actors adopt the logic of the media, conforming to the rules set by the media's 'rhythm, grammar and format' (Altheide 2004, 294). This stands in contrast to an earlier age of 'party logic' in which 'reporters obediently and respectfully followed the agenda set by politics' (Brants and Van Praag 2006, 28; see also Mazzoleni 1987).

One of the essential questions regarding the power of the mass media over politics is whether the media are able to set the political agenda. Over the past two decades, the body of research on this question has grown noticeably; however the central conclusion thus far is that there is no simple answer. Occasionally the media have a sizeable impact on the selection of issues that are discussed in politics (e.g., Soroka 2002), while on other occasions the media seem to play little or no role in determining the political agenda (e.g., Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg 1995; Walker 1977). Reviewing these apparent contradictions, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) conclude that whether the media set the political agenda is dependent on the circumstances, i.e., is *contingent*. In other words, whether an issue in the media spotlight receives political attention depends on a number of factors, such as the type of issue, the type of media outlet covering it, whether it is a routine or campaign period, which party is in government and which in opposition (Bartels 1996; Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Soroka 2002; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011; Wood and Peake 1998). In short, the question is not whether the media influence the political agenda, but rather when and under what circumstances they do.

Media agenda-setting

Just as they have a stake in setting the political agenda, it is equally important for parties to ensure that advantageous issues are one the *media agenda*, while damaging issues are discussed as little as possible in the media. Studies into the influence of the media on public opinion have famously revealed that although opinions are not easily changed by media reporting, the mass media are 'stunningly successful in telling [the public] what to think *about*' (Cohen 1963, 13, emphasis mine; Dearing and Rogers 1996; McCombs and Shaw 1972). In other words, by prioritizing certain issues, the media can influence what issues the public finds important and eventually has in mind when choosing between

parties at elections (priming). Thus, to ensure that voters are thinking about the issues that give them a competitive advantage, it is crucial for parties to place these issues high on the media agenda.

Surprisingly, however, the effect of political agendas on media agendas has received less extensive study than the opposite effect. This is startling because, as argued above, control over the media agenda is a coveted asset in party competition. Furthermore, most studies conducted to date focus on the effect of campaign messages such as press releases (e.g., Brandenburg 2002; Hopmann et al. 2012; Lancendorfer and Lee 2010), meaning that we know little about whether issue attention spills over from the political agenda to the media agenda during routine periods. Yet, political preferences are formed gradually throughout the electoral cycle (Jennings and Wlezien 2013), and hence to maximize votes, it is sensible for parties to attempt to set the media agenda and eventually the public's agenda at any time. In addition, most studies that consider the effect of political agendas on the media agenda during routine periods are conducted in the specific context of the United States (Bartels 1996; Edwards and Wood 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2004; Wood and Peake 1998). In these studies, the presidential agenda sometimes sets the media agenda, but not for all issues or at all times, while the congressional agenda is almost entirely ignored by the media. In a study on the Netherlands, Vliegenthart (2007) found a very weak effect of attention devoted to the issue of immigration in parliamentary speeches on the visibility of this issue in the media.

Thus, overall, the parliamentary agenda seems to have little or no effect on the media agenda; however, as in the case of the agenda-setting effect operating in the opposite direction, the effect might be *conditional*. During routine times, political activity is often not of interest to the news media, and therefore the policy issue will not reach the media agenda, while in certain instances the issues discussed in politics are of great interest to the media and receive ample coverage. The puzzle, therefore, is when the issues political parties advance are covered by the media and when they remain unnoticed.

To summarize the discussion thus far, parties have a clear interest in influencing what issues are on the political as well as on the media agenda, in view of policy goals and electoral gains, while journalists allegedly have substantial influence over politics in general, including political agendas.

Empirical studies on the relationship between issue agendas in politics and in the media have demonstrated that there is a *reciprocal* relationship, and moreover, that the influence in either direction is *conditional*. This dissertation contributes to our knowledge of the conditional nature of the relationship between the media and political agendas. The influence is mutual, but the actors on both sides, journalists and political actors, each have their own goals and incentives that govern how they respond to the political or media agenda, respectively. The transfer of an issue from one agenda to the other is therefore never automatic but is in either direction contingent on the goals and incentives of both media and political actors. On the one hand, the strategic interests of political parties in conjunction with media content condition whether issues from the media discussion are brought into the political arena. On the other hand, parties attempt to influence the public debate in the media, but their efforts to do so are filtered by news makers' interests, such as journalistic norms and news values.

Core of the dissertation

Figure I.1 displays the conditional factors explaining when an issue moves from one agenda to the other that are tested in this dissertation. The larger arrows from the political agenda to the media agenda and vice versa represent the transfer of an issue from one agenda to the other, while the smaller arrows pointing at these larger arrows represent the conditions that explain when the transfer occurs and when it does not. That is, these are the conditioning factors. The numbers next to the arrows denote the corresponding chapters in this thesis. As these numbers indicate, two of the four empirical chapters focus on the conditional effects of policy agendas on media agendas (Chapter II and IV, upper big arrow in Figure I.1) and two study the conditional effects of the media agenda on politics (chapters III and V, lower big arrow in Figure I.1). Before discussing the overarching conclusions that result from this model, let me shortly explain the conditioning factors in the figure.

As the figure displays, political parallelism is a factor that I hypothesize influences the transfer of issues in both directions. Political parallelism refers to the links between specifics newspapers and parties, and these are expected to structure both if issues from newspapers are brought into parliament, and if issues parties stress in parliament are covered in newspapers. Historically, in
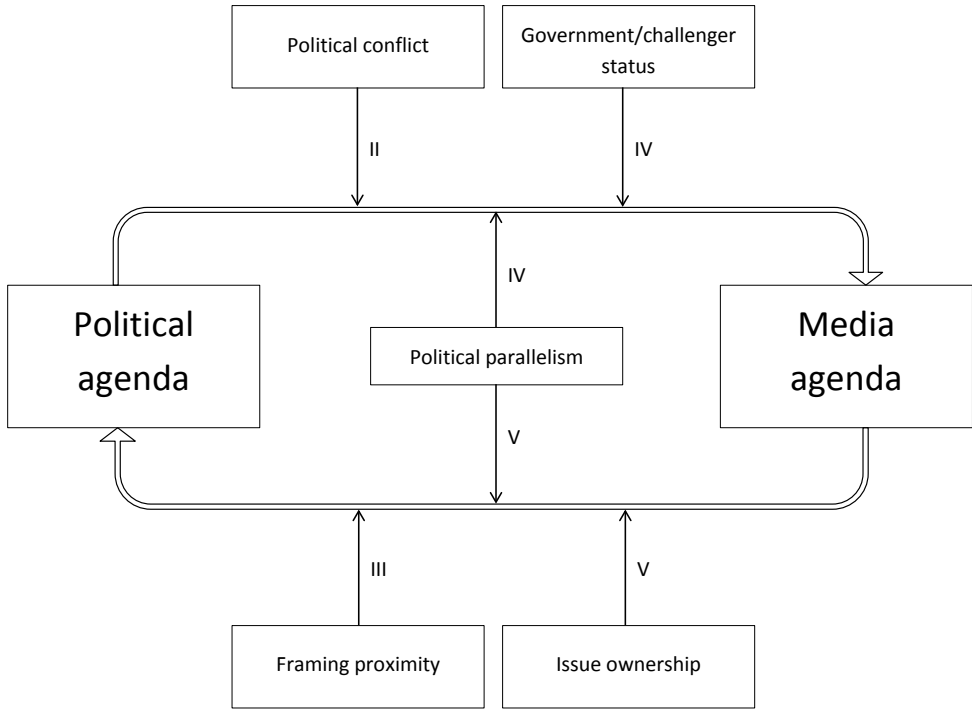
FIGURE I.1. Summary of dissertation.

most Western European countries, newspapers had strong ties to political parties, in terms of ownership, readership and ideological orientation of the newsroom staff. The formal part of these ties has eroded, but in most countries there are still (informal) links between outlets and parties in the political orientation of the journalists, editors and the readers. I hypothesize that these links matter for agenda-setting in both directions. In other words, *who* in the media or in politics discusses an issue, matters for whether actors from the other arena copy it.

Turning more specifically at the upper half of Figure I.1, this dissertation considers two factors –besides political parallelism- to explain whether an issue from the political agenda moves to the media agenda: political conflict and government/challenger status. What is essential for grasping this part of the puzzle is the incentives of journalists and editors, as they are the gatekeepers of the media agenda. To make a selection out of the infinite amount of potential news stories, they make use of *news values*, while the way they exercise their profession is guided by their own normative idea of news making, i.e. *news norms*.

Due to the journalistic news value of conflict, more media attention goes to issues over which parties are in conflict. In addition, the news norm of *watchdog journalism* makes newspapers pay more attention to issues if they are brought up by challenger parties. The effect of the news norm of conflict is corroborated empirically in Chapter II, and that of the watchdog norm in Chapter IV.

In the lower half of Figure I.1, we see that framing proximity and issue ownership are deployed to explain when the media agenda sets the political agenda. Whereas in some popular accounts the media are pictured as an almost deterministic force on politics, Chapter III and V argue that though media have some power over the political agenda, political actors also strategically choose when to respond to media attention. I expect that whether they choose to do so depends on *what* the media talk about, and *how* they talk about it. What the media talk about matters because parties that 'own' an issue benefit if it rises on any agenda, so if the media discuss it they should be the first to use the opportunity put it on the political agenda as well. This argument has been made previously and substantiated with research in Belgium and Denmark (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011) and I test it for the Netherlands in Chapter V. Contrary to expectations, I find no supporting evidence.

How issues are talked about in the media matters because parties prefer to pay attention to the media's issues when the media are discussing them in a way that suits the party, i.e. when the media are using the party's *frames*. Put differently, whether a party adopts an issue from the media agenda depends on the similarity between the framing in the media and the framing of the party, or the 'framing proximity'. In contrast to the issue ownership explanation, I do find supporting evidence for this 'framing proximity' hypothesis, in Chapter III.

Finally, I hypothesize that political parallelism affects both the issue transfer from the political arena to the media realm, as well as the other way around. Strangely, links between parties and news outlets have never been considered in agenda-setting research, with the result that in the extant research all newspapers are assumed to exert an equal influence on all parties and all parties are assumed to have an equivalent chance of coverage in all newspapers (but see Vliegenthart and Mena Montes 2014). This assumption connects with the idea of the media as an homogenous force on politics, and with the idea of the media simply mirroring what happens in politics. In Chapter V we show that

parties take inspiration from specific newspapers for their parliamentary questions, while in Chapter IV I show that newspapers only tend to cover the parliamentary questions of parties they are linked to.

Overarching conclusions

There are three overarching conclusions that arise from the findings in this dissertation that I would briefly like to highlight. First, this dissertation adds the concept of framing to the discussion of political-media agenda-setting. To frame is 'to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation' (Entman 1993, 52). Thus, framing is part and parcel of the competition between parties, as the issue itself is defined through framing. Because framing involves a definition, a causal interpretation and a treatment recommendation, what policies are appropriate follows from how an issue is framed. As Schattschneider (1960, 66, emphasis in original) argued: 'Political conflict is not like an intercollegiate debate in which the opponents agree in advance on a definition of the issues. As a matter of fact, *the definition of the alternatives is the supreme instrument of power*.'

In this dissertation, I argue that framing matters in two ways: for political agenda-setting by the media and for media agenda-setting by political actors. The latter is the subject of Chapter II, in which the role of political conflict in media agenda-setting in studied. As discussed, parties contest the interpretation of issues by promoting different frames, and journalists are responsive to this struggle over meaning because of the news value that conflict carries. Consequently, issues over which parties engage in a framing conflict are more likely to reach the media agenda, while –ceteris paribus- consensually framed issues are more easily ignored by the media.

The second way in which framing matters for agenda-setting is in the reverse direction, with issues moving from the media agenda to the political agenda. In Chapter III, I demonstrate that parties not only actively promote their own framing but also respond tactically to the framing environment offered by the media. Specifically, they prioritize issues in parliament when the framing in the media is in concord with their own framing, and avoid the issue when the media framing is very different from their own. In these two ways, via framing

proximity (Chapter III) and conflict in frames (Chapter II), framing is an important factor influencing whether an issue from the media debate receives political attention and whether an issue from the parliamentary debate garners media attention.

The second overarching conclusion arising from the research in this dissertation is that although the media clearly influence the political agenda, the media are not the unitary, irresistible force they are sometimes suggested to be (by politicians, for example, see Strömbäck 2011; Walgrave 2008). As discussed above, parties adopt issues from the media agenda, but they strategically choose when to do so and when not to, depending on whether the media framing suits them (Chapter III). In addition, Chapter V demonstrates that political parallelism between newspapers and parties affects the political agenda-setting power of the media. Political parallelism refers to the connections between specific parties and newspapers, in terms of ideology, readers, or staff. In this chapter, I show that parties do not simply copy the agenda presented by any newspaper but take issues from those papers that their voters read. In this way, there are links between parties and the news media that govern whether an issue presented in newspapers is addressed in parliament, and therefore not all outlets exert an equal influence on all parties.

Third, the evidence presented in this dissertation demonstrates that the media do not purely act as a mirror reflecting existing power structures (cf. Bennett 1990). Political parallelism works in both ways: not only are parties more likely to follow an associated newspaper, but their parliamentary questions are also only reported on in newspapers that are read by the party's voters (Chapter IV). Accordingly, the links between parties and papers (political parallelism) structure the issue transfer in both directions. For media agenda-setting by politicians, this means that the media do not uniformly reflect whatever is happening in politics, but instead newspapers mirror the issue priorities of the parties they are linked to in terms of readership.

Another way in which the media do not merely reflect the present power configuration is that they offer certain advantages to challenger parties, i.e., opposition parties that have never been in government. In general, government parties are presented more prominently in the news (an *incumbency bonus*, Hopmann, De Vreese and Albæk 2011); however, in Chapter IV, I show that the

issues that challengers advance in parliamentary questions receive more attention in the media than those presented by government parties. Thus, while challengers are themselves less visible in the news, they are granted greater agenda-setting power, and as such the media also function as a 'weapon of the weak' rather than a tool for those already in power. In addition, Chapter II demonstrates that the media devote more attention to issues over which parties are in conflict, and we know from previous research that challenger parties have the greatest incentive to expand the political conflict to new issues (Hobolt and De Vries 2012, Van de Wardt 2014). By responding to political conflict, the media thus devote attention to the issues that challengers seek to politicize.

Case selection and data

How the goals and incentives of media and political actors influence whether issues from one agenda are adopted by the other is studied by examining two policy issues, immigration and European integration, in a selection of Western European countries from 1995 to 2010. I will now expand on the case selection and data that were collected to study the relationship between media and political agendas.

In an influential study, Kriesi and his colleagues (2006, 2008) argue that globalization gave rise to a new structural conflict between those profiting from it and those who are disadvantaged by the increased economic and cultural competition. Immigration and European integration are issues through which the conflict spurred by globalization can find expression, and as such both issues had the potential to become salient in the public and political debate in Western European countries in the past few decades.[1] However, this potential was not realized in all countries. For example, in Sweden, the issue of European integration was discussed abundantly in the past few decades (Lindahl and Naurin 2005; Netjes and Binnema 2007), while immigration received little attention until very recently (Dahlström and Esaiasson 2013; Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008). By contrast, the EU issue was never particularly prominent in the Dutch political debate in the 1990s or the early twenty-first century, while immigration was one of the most prominent issues (Vliegenthart 2007; Muis

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[1] In this dissertation, "immigration" denotes the immigration to and integration into society by persons with immigrant backgrounds. Also, "the EU issue" refers to the issue of European integration.

2012). These disparities are all the more striking, as social conditions concerning immigration and European integration are relatively similar in Sweden and the Netherlands: both are EU members and have received substantial numbers of immigrant workers and asylum seekers. In sum, the two issues represent fruitful research cases with considerable variation in the levels of politicization across countries and over time and essentially invariant politicization potential.

This dissertation studies the mutual influence between the media and the political agenda; so what is an agenda, and how is it measured? Dearing and Rogers (1996, 2) define an agenda as 'a set of issues that are communicated in a hierarchy of importance at a point in time'. As this definition indicates, agendas concern a *hierarchy* of issues, and these issues need to be *communicated*. The focus of this dissertation is not on the entire agenda, but on two specific issues, and hence to trace these issues in terms of communicated importance, I examine the *amount of attention* that is devoted to each of these issues. For both the media and political agendas, attention is measured using automated content analysis. For each of the two issues, search strings are employed to count the number of words in a text or a speech that relate to either European integration or immigration (see Appendix A). This method allows for reliable measurements across large amounts of material, making it possible to trace the development of the issues over a long period of time.

To measure attention devoted to immigration and European integration in the media, the content analysis is applied to national newspapers, retrieved from the LexisNexis and Infomedia databases.[2] Ideally, attention to the issues in a variety of media – TV, radio, social media and the internet- would be taken into account, but this would obviously be very costly, and newspapers serve as a good representation of the national news media agenda. Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2008), for example, found that in Belgium, newspaper agendas have a stronger influence on television agendas than vice versa. Bartels (1996) reports that in the United States, the newspaper The New York Times has more influence on the political agenda than television news does, while the latter follows the agenda of that newspaper (see also Roberts and McCombs 1994). Therefore, newspapers

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represent the best option for using a single source to tap the media agenda. Chapter II, covering the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands, only studies quality papers, while the other chapters all consider one quality paper and one tabloid-style paper for each country.

The political issue agenda refers to the issue hierarchy communicated by a certain political institution, and hence there is not one but many political agendas. In this dissertation, I concentrate on national politics in a selection of Western European countries. Moreover, the focus is on the strategies and incentives of individual parties, and hence it is necessary to distinguish among the different issue agendas of separate parties. To do so, I consider two political issue agendas: the issue priorities parties convey in their election manifestos and the issues they draw attention to in parliament by posing parliamentary questions. The parliamentary arena is the start of the legislative process and is the place were government officials and elected representatives interact in policy decision making. The parliamentary question hour is the institutionalized moment at which parties can present new issues for discussion and thus the occasion for both government and opposition members of parliament to influence the issues on which policy action will be set into motion.

The agenda of the political system as a whole is only considered in Chapter II, as this chapter examines the conditioning effect of political conflict, which is a feature of the party system and not of individual parties (for the party-system agenda, see Green-Pedersen and Mortensen 2010). This chapter also considers effects over the longest time span: it examines how the conflicts generated by parties in their election manifestos increase media attention on an issue during the next electoral cycle. This long period is why manifestos are selected as the source to measure the political agenda in this chapter: these are the official documents in which parties establish their positions on issues for the coming electoral term (Laver and Garry, 2000).[3]

As argued above, parties compete over the definition of issues by promoting diverse framings, and in order to study the effects of this struggle over frames on political and media agenda-setting, I measure framing by parties and

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[3] The parliamentary data were also collected under the NWO Conflict and Security Grant, and the manifesto data for Chapter II were collected by Catherine de Vries under the NWO Veni project number 451-08-001.

the media. This is achieved via the manual coding of party manifestos (Chapter II), parliamentary questions and newspaper articles (Chapter III) by trained coders.

Causality between media and politics

All four empirical chapters of this dissertation focus on conditional *effects* or *influence* between the media and political agendas, but causal effects are notoriously difficult to isolate in the relationship between the media and politics. Politicians and journalists have been described by a number of metaphors that indicate the level of entanglement between the two: as two partners in a tango (Gans, 1980) or a rumba (Ross, 2010), as chicken and egg (Vliegenthart 2007, 108), dueling partners (Schroder and Phillips 2007; see Ross 2010), and in symbiosis (Brants et al. 2010). At least four factors make it difficult to discern which of the two actors is affecting the other.

First, the effects between media and political actors are reciprocal: newsmakers affect the behavior of politicians, but politicians are also important sources for journalists, purposefully create media events and directly contribute to coverage by writing opinion articles and so forth. Wolfsfeld (2011, 30-31) aptly summarized this when he described processes involving politics and media as a Politics-Media-Politics cycle (PMP), or better yet as a PMPMPMP cycle. Further, this cycle of mutual influence does not consistently begin on one of the two sides, politics or media. In essence, if there is convergence or correlation between the two, this would say little about who is the cause and who is the effect.

Second, the effects between politics and the media are not only reciprocal; they are also often anticipatory (Kepplinger 2007). Though there is some debate concerning the extent to which politics is mediatized (see Strömbäck 2008), there is no doubt that the mass media have fundamentally grown in importance over the past century and politicians have increasingly become dependent on media coverage. Many of the actions of politicians are not directly in reaction to media reporting, but are performed with the intention of provoking a reaction –most likely favorable coverage- by the media. In this way, the presence of the mass media influences the behavior of politicians even without the media acting initially.

The third reason that causality is difficult to ascertain in politics-media processes is quite obvious but worth mentioning nonetheless: many of the processes of interest, such as agenda-setting between political and media agendas, are macro processes and are therefore nearly impossible to study experimentally on individuals in laboratory settings. Fourth and finally, not all of the behavior that influences one of the actors occurs publicly, rendering parts of the process invisible to the researcher. Politicians and journalists frequently maintain informal contact (Van Aelst, Sehata and Van Dalen 2010); hence, for example before a parliamentarian asks questions on an issue, she might inform a journalist about it 'off the record'. In that case, the MP has initiated a possible media report, but this would not necessarily be directly visible in the coverage or parliamentary behavior.

These, and other problems associated with studying causality in media-politics relationship may never be entirely solved, but in this dissertation I nonetheless attempt to move toward a causal analysis and cautiously make causal claims. There are three methodological tools that aid in this effort. First, all analyses employ a clear temporal order, in which the presumed cause is measured at an earlier point in time than the presumed effect. Second and relatedly, where necessary, the analyses control for the dependent variable's recent past. Thus, for example, in Chapter III the issue priorities of parties in parliaments serve as the dependent variable, while the visibility of the issues –one of the independent variables- is measured one quarter of a year earlier. In addition, a lagged dependent variable is included in the model. The combination of the two ensures that effects captured by the model are not –at least temporally-operating in the reverse direction, in this case parliament causing media visibility.

Third, wherever possible I empirically model alternative explanations that contradict the causal order I hypothesize. For example –again- in Chapter III, I study the responses of parties in parliament to media coverage, and I hypothesize that parties respond to media attention by raising the issue in parliament only if the framing of the issue in the media is akin to their own framing. Thus, media attention and framing are regarded as causes and parliamentary issue prioritization as the effect. However, an alternative explanation is that media attention does nothing to parties' issue priorities in parliament, but instead parties first discuss an issue in the media, before bringing

it into parliament. I control for this explanation by also measuring whether parties are mentioned in the media coverage. Overall, by excluding such alternative explanations and specifying the temporal order, the analyses do not provide undeniable evidence on the causality in a given relationship, but they do bring us one step closer to finding the most plausible causal interpretation.

Outline of the empirical chapters

The chapters are ordered such that the earlier ones involve effects spanning the longest period, while the latter ones are the most fine-grained in time scale. Accordingly, Chapter II examines political conflict and issue salience among parties during elections and the consequences for the media agenda throughout the subsequent electoral term. Chapter III, which inspects framing proximity between newspapers and parties and its impact on parties' issue priorities in parliament, employs a 3-month time span. It is no coincidence that the two chapters on framing involve effects over longer periods, as the framing of an issue is unlikely to change overnight, and the effects of framing should be expected to materialize slowly. Chapters IV and V examine parliamentary questions and the effects *on* and *of* media reporting, respectively, both of which are characterized by very short attention cycles. Consequently, in these two chapters, weekly data are employed.

Chapter II begins with the notion that politics essentially concerns conflict and goes on to distinguish two types of political conflict: *discursive* and *positional*. Discursive conflict, which I discussed above on page 4, refers to the contest between parties over how an issue should be understood and is measured through polarization in framing. Positional conflict, by contrast, refers to the confrontation between the various policy solutions parties propose and is measured through polarization in positions. This chapter does not consider the immigration issue but uses the multidimensional nature of the EU issue to inspect 'sub-issues' of European integration in three countries with varying levels of contestation over the EU: the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands. The findings support our expectation that the media only copy the sub-issues that parties prioritized in their manifestos if the parties are engaged in discursive or positional conflict over the sub-issues.

Chapter III argues that it is rational for parties to draw attention to an issue in parliament when the media framing is similar to the preferred framing of the party, while they should remain relatively silent on an issue when the framing in the media is in discord with the party's framing. I test this hypothesis using the EU and immigration issues in Sweden and the Netherlands in the period from 1995 to 2010. Because media attention on immigration in Sweden was generally low during this period, while the media visibility of the EU was low in the Netherlands, I expect that the effect of proximity in framing will not be visible for these issues, but by contrast it is very clear for the immigration issue in the Netherlands and the EU issue in Sweden. In general, these expectations are born out in the empirical analysis, with certain differences in how framing proximity operates in the Netherlands and Sweden.

Chapter IV studies which parliamentary questions are successful in producing media attention on an issue and which questions fail to set the media agenda in the subsequent week, based on questions on immigration and European integration in the Dutch parliament from 1995 to 2010. I hypothesize that journalists are both driven by the norm of *watchdog* journalism and by their partisan ties, i.e., their '*lapdog*' side. Following the watchdog norm, I argue, journalists should devote greater attention to the parliamentary questions of challenger parties. Challenger parties are opposition parties that have never been in government (Hobolt and De Vries 2012), and because they have no prior office responsibilities and low coalition potential, they attack the government most fiercely in their parliamentary questions. Watchdog journalists respond to this because they consider it part of their job to hold the government accountable. At the same time, newspapers have ties with particular parties, and therefore also act as the 'lapdogs' of these parties, devoting greater attention to their questions.

Chapter V inspects whether the ties between newspapers and political parties also influence whether politicians replicate the issue attention in a newspaper in their parliamentary questions concerning immigration and European integration in the Netherlands. Up to 80 percent of parliamentary questions in the Netherlands are explicitly inspired by media coverage (Ruigrok et al. 2013); however, in this chapter we demonstrate that newspapers have significantly more agenda-setting influence over parties they have ties with, thus showing that political parallelism operates in both directions of the agenda-

setting process. Although we can only draw this conclusion for the Netherlands, there is reason to suspect that it should also hold for countries with similar media systems, such as the Scandinavian countries (Hallin and Mancini 2004). In addition, we test an extant hypothesis in the literature that issue owners respond more strongly to media attention on their issue but find no support for it. If anything, issue owners tend to devote such attention to their issue that media attention seems to matter *less*, at least with respect to these two issues in the Netherlands.

Chapter VI concludes this dissertation by summarizing the results and providing directions for further research.