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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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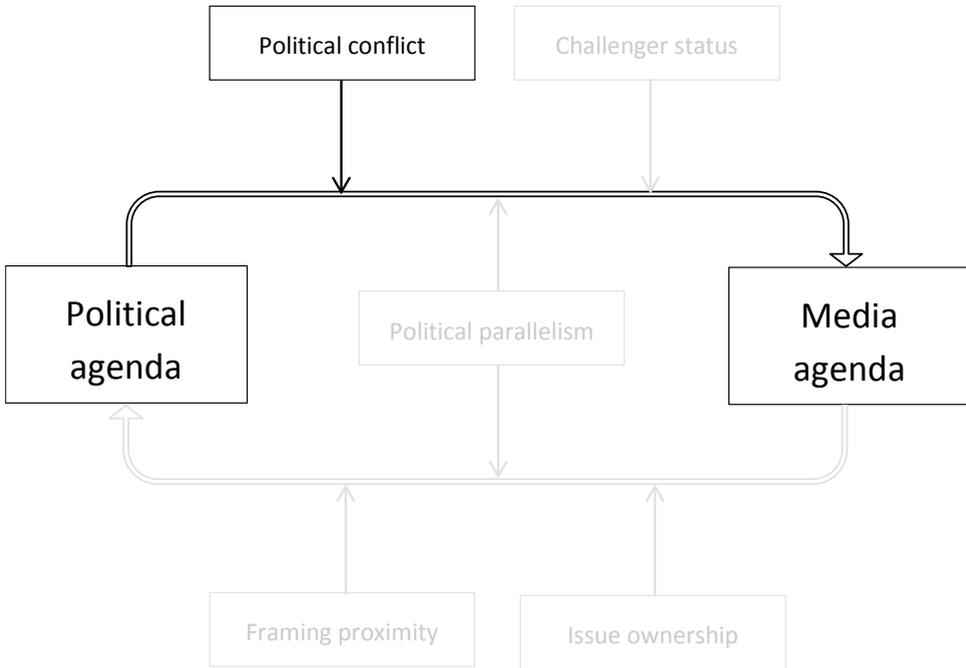
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Chapter II

Do Media Respond To Party Conflict?

Debates on European Integration in British, Dutch & German Party Manifestos and Newspapers, 1987-2006⁴

⁴ This chapter is based on an article co-authored by Rens Vliegthart that is forthcoming in *Political Studies*.



Abstract

How do policy issues reach the political agenda? This question has received ample scholarly attention over the last decades, yet scholars have only recently explicitly examined the ways in which political party and media agendas interact. This study extends this on-going work to examine how the conflict among parties in terms of policy stances they propose, *positional conflict*, and the meaning, i.e., frames, they attach to a policy issues, *discursive conflict*, affect media attention. By focusing on party debates on European integration in British, Dutch and German election campaigns between 1987 and 2006 and employing a pooled time series analysis, we show that discursive conflict and to a lesser extent positional conflict among parties boost media reporting on issues. These findings have important implications for our understanding of the dynamics in media attention to particular policy issues, as well as the way in which parties and media interact within election campaigns.

Introduction

The number of policy issues that have the potential to reach the political agenda in modern democracies is nearly infinite, yet only some issues gain the attention of politicians, journalists and voters. The process of “mobilization of bias” (Schattschneider 1960, 62), that is to say the struggle over which policy issues top the political agenda, has attracted widespread scholarly interest from students of both European and American politics (see for example Adams 1997; Carmines and Stimson 1989; De Vries and Hobolt 2012; Green-Pedersen 2007; Lindaman and Haider-Markel 2002; Kriesi et al. 2006; 2008; Riker 1982). Most of this work focuses on political parties, as they serve as the gatekeepers of parliamentary debate. Moreover, political parties have clear incentives to mobilize particular issues to advance their electoral standing. Yet, parties are largely constrained by media actors in their actions. Media attention is an important prerequisite for parties to reach the electorate. These complex interactions between party and media actors have received only scant scholarly attention. Only recently have political and communication scientists increased their efforts to study how the attention to and conflict over policy issues amongst parties and within the media interact (Vliegthart and Walgrave 2011; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006).

This chapter contributes to the existing body of work by examining how parties generate conflict over policy issues to influence media attention. We argue that there are at least two forms of conflict that parties can engage in: *positional* and *discursive* conflict. Both are ultimately aimed at winning votes with the goal of securing political office and implementing policy ideals (Strøm 1990). Positional and discursive conflict, however, differ in character. In the case of positional conflict, parties distinguish themselves from competitors by carving out distinct issue stances. In the case of discursive conflict, parties contest the meaning attached to a policy issue, that is to say, the framing of the issue. In this study, we explore the extent to which both discursive and positional conflict foster media attention. The chapter contributes to the literature on the interaction between the political and media agendas, which generally examines *salience*, by adding *conflict* among parties in both framing and policy stances as important moderators of salience effects. In this way, our study contributes to the literature emphasizing that political agenda-setting effects are conditional (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). It is one of the first studies to explore whether the way in which

parties present their issues in formal communication affects the agenda-setting power of those parties. As such, this study furthers our understanding of why journalists follow the content of the political agenda more closely in certain instances than in others.

We examine party-media dynamics by focusing on a policy issue that recently generated substantial contestation, European integration, within three countries, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom (UK). The European integration issue constitutes an excellent object of study for our endeavor. EU membership is not a novel phenomenon in Western Europe, but the contestation over European integration is (e.g., De Vries 2007; 2010; Hobolt 2009; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kriesi et al. 2006; 2008). Exploring the EU issue within the three countries outlined provides us with variation in the extent of conflict over time and space: while conflict over the EU has long been extensive in the UK, it remains limited in Germany and the Netherlands (De Vries 2007). In addition, following recent work demonstrating the multidimensional character of the process of European integration (Diez Medrano 2003; Helbling, Hoeglinger and Wüest 2010), we disaggregate the EU issue into a variety of sub-issues adhering to the different aspects of the integration process. This allows for a more fine-grained analysis of the consequences of party conflict for media attention.

Our study demonstrates that discursive conflict among parties indeed enhances the impact of party attention on media attention regarding EU issues. Specifically, journalists respond more strongly to issues advanced by political parties if these parties differ in how they present the issue, i.e., if they are in conflict regarding the framing. This finding lends credence to the conclusion put forward by Chong and Druckman (2007, 100) that “virtually all public debates involve competition between contending parties to establish meaning and interpretation of issues.” However, the other form of conflict we consider, positional conflict, does not significantly increase the transfer of salience from parties to the media. Thus, our findings suggest that parties play a pivotal role in garnering media attention on policy issues, especially when the parties advance opposing frames.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, we outline our hypotheses concerning the ways in which conflicts among parties affect media attention on policy issues. Next, we introduce our case, issues relating to European integration

in the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands. Third, we clarify our data collection and coding strategies. In a fourth step, we outline our measures and estimation method. Fifth, we present our empirical results and assess the robustness of our findings, and finally, we conclude by highlighting our main findings and their implications.

Theory and hypotheses

The relationships between the party and media agendas have recently gained increasing scholarly attention. Most of the work to date focuses on agenda-building linkages in which formal and documented aspects of the party agenda, e.g., transcripts of parliamentary debates, oral and written parliamentary questions and party electoral manifestos, are compared with actual media coverage (see Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). The focal point of this existing work is the transfer of the salience of issues from one agenda to the other: to what extent and under which conditions does an increase in attention to issues on the media agenda result in an increase in attention to the same issue on the political agenda – and vice versa? Unlike previous studies (e.g., Thesen 2013), however, the focus here is not on media content but the content of party communication. We consider conflict among parties as the key variable in explaining media attention to policy issues. Party conflict is important, as it signals to journalists which issues are politically contested and thus worthy of reporting. We argue that at least two forms of conflict among parties exist: *discursive* and *positional* conflict. While positional conflict relates to a competition of ideas on an issue, discursive conflict signifies the divergent meanings parties attach to an issue. Party conflict over an issue, either positional or discursive in nature, is likely to increase the effect of political attention on media attention on that issue, as conflict constitutes one of the most important news values that journalists adhere to – signaling that the political attention devoted to this issue is important (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harcup and O’Neill 2001). Conflict is an important aspect of political news coverage (Kleinnijenhuis et al. 2007). Issues on which political parties agree are not newsworthy and are considered uninteresting to report on or read about (Vliegenthart 2012). If parties express disagreement on an issue – either in the position they take or the framing they use – this is a clear signal to journalists that this issue might be worth reporting upon. Let us clarify

the concepts of positional and discursive conflict among parties and their relationships with media attention in greater depth.

Positional Conflict

Positional conflict is at the core of spatial theories of party competition (see Downs 1957; Druckman, Petersen and Slothuus 2013) and relates to the way in which parties attempt to distinguish themselves from their competitors. In the Downsian spatial model of politics, the policy preferences of voters and parties are represented as positions in a shared policy space. In this model, parties compete with one another by taking different positions in that space. Greater distances signify greater disagreement over policy. Introducing positional conflict is beneficial for parties, as their issue positions are an important factor explaining voters' ballot choices, a process referred to as issue voting. The most widely used conceptualization of issue voting is the proximity model, as developed by Enelow and Hinich (1984) in their seminal work *The Spatial Theory of Voting*. This model assumes that voters act rationally and vote for policy proposals that form the basis of future government. The rationale here is that each voter's utility of a party on a particular policy issue is a negative function of the issue distance between a voter and a party. In the case of redistributive attitudes, for example, one would expect voters to cast their ballots for a party or candidate whose issue position on redistribution is most proximate to their own. Consequently, by introducing positional conflict, parties offer voters a choice on a policy issue.

Our focus here is on this link between politics and the media. As argued, an important aspect of politics is the competition between contending parties over the policy positions they take. This disagreement, or conflict, signals to journalists that an issue deserves public attention. Conflict is a key news value that journalists abide by and thus determines to a considerable extent how much attention journalists devote to politicians (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harcup and O'Neill 2001). Politicians can devote substantial attention to a policy issue, but if they essentially agree on it, this attention is hardly considered newsworthy. Only if conflict exists will journalists consider the issue worth reporting on. This expectation is formalized in the following hypothesis:

H1 Positional Conflict Hypothesis: *Political attention on an issue is more likely to lead to media attention if parties are in positional conflict over the issue.*

Discursive Conflict

Discursive conflict refers to the different meanings, or frames, parties attach to policy issues. Parties not only must differentiate themselves from their opponents in terms of policy positions, but they also need to ensure that policy issues are defined within the terms of what they consider to be the problem at hand and what solutions should be proposed. In other words, it is important for parties to frame an issue in accordance with a party platform or doctrine (see Hinich and Munger 1993; Petersen, Slothuus and Togeby 2010; Slothuus and De Vreese 2010). The framing of an issue carries the definition of the problem or issue but also more or less explicitly demands certain types of solutions (Entman 1993). Particular ways of framing an issue may be more beneficial to parties, allowing them to force rivals to speak on an issue in their terms. As a result, discursive conflict constitutes an important dimension of party competition.

Though a wide array of framing studies have convincingly demonstrated the effects of single frames through experiments, only recently have scholars recognized the importance of studying framing outside of a laboratory setting and consider a more realistic situation of multiple frames that may compete (Chong and Druckman 2007; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). Furthermore, it is remarkable that no study to date has explicitly explored how *framing* in the political realm impacts *media attention*. Framing, or more specifically the divergence in framing, serves as an important indicator of the disagreement that exists among political elites. Ultimately, the use of different frames indicates that political actors emphasize different aspects of the issue and provide divergent definitions of the problem and different solutions (Vliegenthart and Van Zoonen 2011). By introducing different frames, parties fight over the terms of the debate. When parties compete in this way, they attempt to make their frame the dominant one by emphasizing it while aiming to avoid the frames employed by competitors (Hänggli and Kriesi 2010). As the media must make choices regarding their coverage on the basis of newsworthiness, of which conflict is an important criterion, we again expect a stronger effect of political attention on

media attention when competing frames are present. The discursive conflict hypothesis summarizes this expectation:

***H2 Discursive Conflict Hypothesis:** Political attention on an issue is more likely to lead to media attention if parties are in discursive conflict over the issue.*

It is worth noting that both hypotheses state that the transfer of salience from politics to the media is more likely to occur in the presence of political conflict. In other words, both posit a *conditional* effect: positional and discursive conflict are hypothesized to moderate the effect of political attention on media attention. As with any interaction effect, however, there are two complementary readings of it. The fact that political conflict moderates the effect of political salience on media attention necessarily implies that political salience moderates the effect of political conflict on media attention. By consequence, H1 and H2 also imply that political conflict is more likely to generate media attention if an issue is politically salient.

Alternative Explanations of Media Attention

There are several alternative expectations of increased media attention on a policy issue to consider. In addition to conflict, negativity is an important news value (Galtung and Ruge 1965; Harcup and O'Neill 2001). Journalists are known to over-report on negative news (Soroka 2006). In keeping with this literature, we also expect the media to pay more attention to those issues on which parties express more negative views regarding the EU. In other words, *predominantly negative stances towards European integration within party communication lead to heightened media attention.*

Moreover, the salience of issues for political parties might also induce additional media attention in itself, not only in interaction with conflict. In the literature, however, there are surprisingly few studies examining agenda-setting effects in this direction, and the few that exist find very limited to no effects of salience among parties on salience in the media (e.g., Bartels 1996; Vliegenthart 2007; Wood and Peake 1998). Moreover, if a direct spillover of political attention to the media is expected, it is likely to be short-lived and only prevalent during campaign periods (see Brandenburg 2002; Hopmann et al. 2012). In conclusion,

we take political attention into account, but our expectation is that *higher salience of parties regarding issues does not (independent of conflict) lead to heightened media attention on the same issues.*

The Case of EU Issues

We examine the degree to which discursive and positional conflict among parties affects media attention by focusing on the politicization of European integration in the period from 1987 to 2006. Overall, European integration constitutes an excellent case, as we have witnessed considerable party and public contestation over European integration in past decades (e.g., De Vries 2007; 2010; Hobolt 2009; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Kriesi et al. 2006; 2008). Up to the late 1980s, European integration was generally perceived as a foreign policy issue restricted to the realm of international relations. In this view, European integration occurred *among*, not *within*, the countries of (Western) Europe. Two decades later, this view clearly no longer holds. The transition of the European Community (EC) into the EU as outlined in the Treaty of Maastricht characterizes the transformation from a mere intergovernmental regime with primarily economic and market-related competencies into a supranational regime with increased political competencies (Hix and Høyland 2011; Hooghe and Marks 2009; Steenbergen and Marks 2004). As EU policy making has extended its scope from market integration to non-economic issues and has thus become more-and-more multidimensional, the integration process itself is increasingly contested.

Consequently, when studying the nature and impact of European integration either in Brussels or at home, scholars must consider the institutional complexity, multidimensional character and increased politicization of the process. The integration process is characterized by geopolitical, economic, institutional and, increasingly, social and cultural components (see Helbling, Hoeglinger and Wüest 2010). In order to do justice to these numerous aspects, we distinguish 13 different topics within European integration, which we call sub-issues, and trace the conflict over these sub-issues separately over time.

The recent qualitative changes in the European integration process entail that European integration is no longer a policy issue restricted to the realm of international relations and policy-making but part-and-parcel of domestic

politics. Therefore, we explicitly look at the dynamics among *domestic actors* underlying the increased conflict over EU matters. For this purpose, the political parties in the UK, the Netherlands and (West) Germany offer a representative picture, first because the three countries differ in the degree of conflict over European integration among parties. While the UK has long experienced large-scale conflict, conflict over the EU is only a recent phenomenon in Dutch politics and remains fairly limited in the German case (De Vries 2007; 2009). Second, all three countries experienced what is often considered the defining moment in the conflict over Europe, namely the Treaty of Maastricht, and therefore besides variation in space also offer considerable variation over election campaigns in the extent of conflict. Third, as these are all existing EU members, we are not faced with the potentially confounding effect of accession to the EU, as in Eastern European countries for example, which should lead to exceptionally high attention being devoted to EU-related issues (Tillman 2004).

Methods

Our positional and discursive conflict hypotheses are tested using time series data on 13 EU sub-issues from 1987 to 2006 in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany. The 13 sub-issues are listed in Table II.1. As discussed above, we anticipate positional or discursive conflict on a certain sub-issue to boost media attention on that sub-issue. We use party manifestos to gauge party framing and positions on these sub-issues, while we employ one quality newspaper per country as the basis of our media data.⁵

Independent variables: Discursive and positional conflict

We conducted a content analysis of party manifestos using trained coders to arrive at measures of positional conflict, framing conflict, negativity and the salience of each sub-issue. Every election, parties issue manifestos to clarify their positions on current and recurring issues, and these therefore provide an excellent source to measure party behavior (Budge et al. 2001). In each manifesto,

⁵Note that we do not expect the manifestos to have a direct effect on media reporting in forthcoming electoral terms, as they only receive limited readership. However, they are very carefully drafted and are therefore an accurate reflection of the parties' issue prioritizations, positions and framing.

TABLE II.1. EU issue subcategories.

1	EU general: European integration, European Commission, European Council, Court of Justice, Parliament, Committee of regions, treaties, referenda, Euroskepticism, EU's democratic deficit
2	Accession of countries to the EU
3	Economy, trade, fiscal stability and policy, European monetary union
4	Foreign Policy, diplomacy, defense, geopolitics, human rights
5	Social Policy, unemployment, social welfare, urban/rural planning
6	Crime
7	Environment
8	Agriculture
9	Immigration
10	Democracy, local government
11	Education, (information) technology, science
12	Arts, culture and media
13	Moral Issues

the coders isolated the statements that concern the EU and coded the EU sub-issue to which the statement was related. In addition, the coders indicated the position the statement expressed towards the European integration process, ranging from favorable (+1) to unfavorable (-1), including a neutral option (0), and the frame used by the party.

For each statement, the coders could select five non-mutually exclusive frames (each coded 0 if not present, 1 if present): the peace frame, the prosperity frame, the pride frame, the profit frame and the politics frame. The peace frame signifies that EU issues are described in terms of (international) security, diplomacy and/or war and peace; prosperity framing relates to the extent to which EU issues are presented from a social welfare or environmental perspective; the pride frame denotes that EU issues are presented from an national identity, ethnic, or cultural point of view; within the profit frame, the economic or financial aspects of EU issues are mentioned; and a politics frame discusses EU issues from an institutional or political-strategic viewpoint. Via these frames, parties can provide a meaning for each statement concerning a sub-

TABLE II.2. Examples of statements on the sub-issue ‘agriculture’ in different frames.

Party	Frame	Statement
Labour Party	profit	‘Because of our success in achieving extensive reforms in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), 2005 will be the first year for decades when farmers will be free to produce for the market and not simply for subsidy.’
Liberal Democrats	prosperity	‘We will insist on the enforcement of maximum time limits and for transporting live animals in the EU, a stricter timetable for banning veal crates and improved rearing conditions for pigs and chickens across the EU.’
Conservative Party	politics	‘We will continue to play a leading part in European Community negotiations to reform the CAP.’

issue in five different ways. Table II.2 presents examples of different framings of a given sub-issue, while Appendix B gives a graphical overview of the coded data.⁶

We are interested in two types of conflict among parties: positional conflict, in which parties differ in the substantive positions they adopt, and discursive conflict, in which parties compete over the actual terms of the debate. To obtain measures of both types of conflict, we use the coded manifesto data to calculate the *conflict* among parties. For positional conflict, we calculate the extent of ‘positional polarization’, indicating whether parties diverge in their positions regarding the EU. Similarly, for discursive conflict, we examine ‘polarized framing’, which captures whether parties are opposed in their framing instead of being similar.

The measure of positional polarization is developed in three steps. First, using the manifesto statements, the average position on the EU was calculated per sub-issue for each party. These positions vary continuously between -1 (completely negative) and +1 (completely positive). If a sub-issue was not

⁶Note that the intercoder reliabilities calculated on 10 % of the coded data both for coders across the different countries and within countries ranged between a Krippendorff Alpha of .69 and .87 for the specific frames used by parties as well as the positions adopted on the 13 sub-issues. These scores can be considered more than sufficient.

discussed by any party in a year, there is no conflict and the positional polarization was set to zero.⁷ Then, as a second step, the distances in position between party pairs were calculated by simply taking the absolute difference in position between two parties. Third, based on these distances, the Esteban and Ray (ER) polarization measure is computed (Esteban and Ray 1994). The ER polarization measure accounts for the size of the parties, their distance, and the ‘polarization sensitivity’, which was set at the standard level of 1.3.⁸ The index is calculated for each of the 13 EU issues in every party system for each election year issue as follows:

$$P_{issue}(\pi, d) = \sum_{a=1}^h \sum_{b=1}^h \pi_a^{1+1.3} \pi_b d(a, b)$$

where

$P_{issue}(\pi, d)$ is the positional polarization of the EU sub-issue.

h is the number of parties in the party system.

π_a is the size of party a , measured by the size of the parliamentary fraction.⁹

π_b is the size of party b , measured by the size of the parliamentary fraction.

1.3 is the value of the ‘polarization sensitivity’ parameter, or α .

$d(a,b)$ is the distance between the EU positions of parties a and b .

Our second measure of political conflict taps into discursive conflict with respect to the European integration project. An ER polarization index was also calculated for this type of conflict in three steps. First, for each EU sub-issue, the number of times each of the five frames is used by a party in a manifesto is counted and then divided by the length of the manifesto, to make these framing counts comparable across parties. Second, from these numbers of frame usage per

⁷We also calculated polarization scores without setting the elections with no positions on a sub-issue at zero, but treating them as missing, and this yielded similar results. This was also done for the discursive polarization measure, also with similar results.

⁸Esteban and Ray (1994) recommend an alpha value between 1 and 1.6. We also calculated polarization measures for the two most extreme values in this range. Results with these measures were very similar, and are available on request.

⁹The size of the parliamentary fraction in the most recent election preceding the manifesto was used, but if the party was not yet in parliament during this election, the next one was used.

party manifesto, Euclidean framing distances between parties are calculated.¹⁰ So, for each pair of parties, the distance in the framing of each EU issue is calculated in the following manner¹¹:

$$d(a, b) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^5 (a_i - b_i)^2}$$

where

$d(a,b)$ is the framing distance between parties a and b on one sub-issue.

a_i is the proportion of party a 's manifesto framing the EU sub-issue in terms of frame i .

b_i is the proportion of party b 's manifesto framing the EU sub-issue in terms of frame i .

i is the index of the five frames described above.

Third, an Esteban and Ray index was calculated for these distances using the same formula as for positional polarization. As for positional polarization, if a sub-issue was not discussed (meaning that no frames were coded), the measure was set to zero for no conflict. The procedure yields a measure of framing conflict for each of the 13 EU sub-issues in all three countries per election year. This framing polarization score is higher when parties differ to a greater extent in how they frame issues, all else being equal. For example, if Labour frames the issue of accession to the EU in exclusively social terms, and never in economic terms, while the Conservative Party only uses the economic frame, their framing distance will be large and the discursive conflict measured as polarization high. Moreover, the polarization is particularly high when parties form two separate camps of framing with approximately equal weight in party size. Thus, in the previous example, the polarization is higher if Labour and the Conservatives are of approximately equal size, and more important, it is lower if the Liberal Democrats adopt a bridging framing position by combining economic and social frames when discussing accession.

¹⁰We also calculated city-block distances, but as the two distances correlated highly and led to the same results, we only present the analyses using Euclidean distances.

¹¹Note that the more salient an issue is, i.e., the more it is mentioned in a party manifesto, the greater the framing distances are likely to be. This is, in addition to substantive reasons, why issue salience is included as a control variable in the models we present later in the chapter.

Dependent variable: Media Attention

This study examines the national news media's response to party conflict on EU issues, so the dependent variable is the amount of attention the news media pay to the specific EU sub-issues mentioned above. As political conflict is measured in election manifestos, we look at the response in the media throughout the subsequent electoral term (from the moment of publication of one election's manifestos to the next). We rely on an elaborate dataset collected previously, containing electronic copies of all articles mentioning the European Union, the European Community or any of its institutions for one quality newspaper per country from the early nineteen-nineties to the end of 2006 (Boomgaarden et al. 2010; Vliegthart et al. 2008). For the Netherlands, we have the articles from *NRC Handelsblad* from 1991 onwards, for Germany the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* from 1992 onwards and for the UK *the Guardian* from 1990 onwards.

Based on the manual coding of the party manifestoes as outlined above, we developed search strings for any of the 13 sub-issues. Using Will Lowe's *JFreq*,¹² we constructed a frequency list of all words that were mentioned in any of the statements coded as concerning a specific sub-issue. From the resulting 13 frequency lists, words were selected that can be considered indicative of the presence of an issue, based on frequency (words that only occur seldom were excluded) and uniqueness (words that occur frequently in the lists of several issues cannot be used to reliably distinguish one issue from another and are excluded as well).¹³ This procedure resulted in a list of a maximum of ten words per issue (word lists and more detailed information on the procedures are available from the authors upon request). For one sub-issue in each country (moral issues in the Netherlands; arts, culture and media in Germany and the UK) no word met the criteria outlined above, and this issue was consequently excluded from further analysis.

Using the search strings, we searched the newspaper database and determined the total number of articles mentioning each issue starting two months before an election (the moment most party manifestoes were published)

¹²See <http://www.williamlowe.net/software/jfreq/> for additional information.

¹³Specifically, a word was included in a search string for an issue if it met the following criteria: (a) it has a uniqueness score of at least 60% - i.e., of the occurrences of the word in all statements, 60% or more were in statements that were coded as concerning this specific issue; (b) it belonged to the ten most frequently used words with an authenticity score of 60%.

until two months before the next election (when new party manifestoes were published). This way, the independent variables, taken from the election periods, always precede the dependent variable in time. For the first and last election in each country, we do not have complete media data. Consequently, for the first election, we consider the coverage from the moment the newspaper is included in the database until two months before the second election. For the last election, we consider the period ranging from two months before that election until the end of 2006. The score that is used in the analysis is the *share* (i.e., percentage) of the attention on the EU as a whole that is devoted to a certain EU sub-issue in a given period. Taking the relative amount of attention per sub-issue ensures that trivial changes in the media format (e.g., from broadsheet to tabloid) do not determine the attention score. More important, the relative scores better reflect the substantive interest at the sub-issue level, as otherwise the general trend in attention devoted to the EU as a whole might drive the trends in all sub-issues.

We conducted an additional robustness check to test whether the inclusion of a single newspaper is problematic and does not offer an adequate reflection of the public debate that takes place within a certain country. For both the Netherlands and the UK we used additional quality newspapers (*Volkscrant* from 1995-2005, the *Times* and *Independent*, for the entire period) that were analyzed using the same search strings. The correlation between sub-issue attention in the *NRC* and *Volkscrant* series was .90, that between the *Guardian* and *Independent* was .91 and that between *Guardian* and the *Times* was .96. This indicates that – at least for quality newspapers – cross-issue and temporal variation in attention follow very similar patterns, also when the political leanings of those newspapers differ significantly.

Control Variables: Issue Negativity and Salience

We expect that the media not only react to conflict but also to negativism among parties. For each EU statement in the manifestos, we recorded whether it expressed a negative position towards the object, i.e., the EU in general. We assume that when discussing specific EU-related issues, parties are expressing an evaluation of the EU project as a whole. From the EU positions per statement (-1, 0 or 1 for negative, neutral and positive), we calculated the position for each party

TABLE II.3. Descriptive statistics.

	Germany		Netherlands		United Kingdom	
	Mean	Sd.	Mean	Sd.	Mean	Sd.
Media attention (%)	8.33	6.20	8.34	5.45	8.34	3.70
Negativity/positivity	0.486	0.408	0.126	0.407	0.264	0.595
Salience among parties	0.168	0.214	0.169	0.179	0.116	0.194
Election years	'90, '94, '98, '02, '05		'89, '94, '98, '02, '06		'87, '92, '97, '01, '05	

Note: Salience among parties (the number of EU statements divided by manifesto length in words, averaged over all parties) is multiplied by 1000 for readability.

per sub-issue and then took the average score of negativity/positivity towards the EU for a party system at a given time.

News media attention may also simply follow party attention, so we include the salience of sub-issues within the political system as a second control. Though based on previous studies this effect is unlikely, it is important to account for because framing polarization could be expected to be high for politically salient sub-issues. The salience of an EU sub-issue in a party system at a given time is calculated by counting the number of statements addressing a sub-issue in each party manifesto, dividing it by the length of the manifesto, and taking the mean score of all manifestos.

Table II.3 summarizes the main descriptive statistics for the salience among parties, attention in the media, and negativity, for each country. As the polarization numbers are not on readily interpretable scales, their means are not listed, but their development over time is displayed in Figure II.1. On average, both the positional and framing polarization between parties is lowest in the Netherlands, while German parties stand out for being most positive on the EU in their manifestos.

Estimation Method

Our dataset covers 13 sub-issues in three countries over five elections (1987-2006). This gives the data a time-series, cross-sectional structure, with N=36 (3x13 – 3 for the missing sub-issues) sub-issues and T=5 elections. We dealt with this structure by estimating OLS coefficients with panel-corrected standard errors, as prescribed

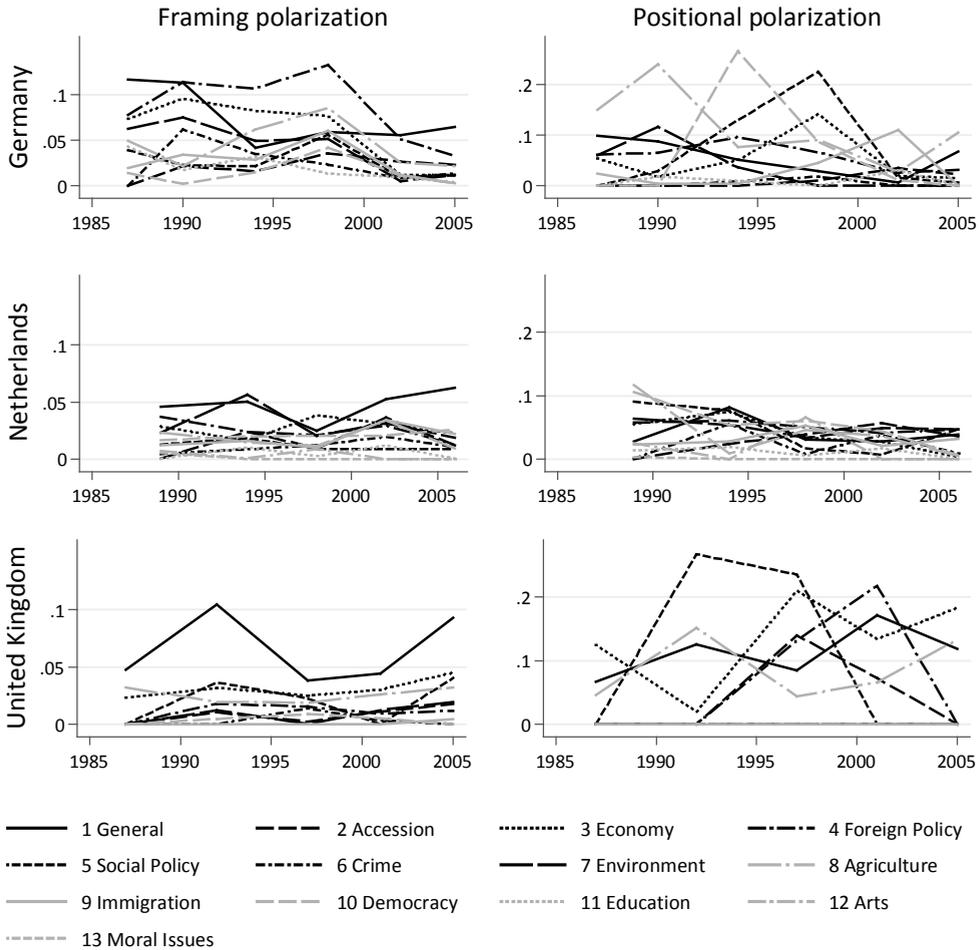


FIGURE II.1. Framing polarization (left) and positional polarization (right) scores.

by Beck and Katz (1995). This ensures that the estimation method accounts for both panel heteroskedasticity (different error variances for the different sub-issues) and contemporaneous correlation (certain sub-issues are similar, and attention to such issues may therefore follow a similar pattern over time, leading to correlated errors). The time variable was numbered such that elections being held in proximate years in different countries were assigned the same number. For example, the German elections of 2006, the Dutch elections of 2006 and the British elections of 2005 all were assigned the number 5, so that if something were

to cause increased attention on the same sub-issue in all three countries circa 2005/2006, the dependence in these observations was taken into account.

A prerequisite for valid estimation of the models is that temporal dependency is removed, which was done in two steps. First, the time series of the dependent variable were made stationary by first differencing the series. This was necessary because non-stationarity may produce spurious results, and as a panel unit root test (Maddala and Wu 1999) indicated that media attention to EU sub-issues is non-stationary, we used *changes* in media attention as a dependent variable¹⁴. We also differenced the independent variables to maintain the same substantive interpretation of the effects as in an un-differenced model. Second, we tested whether the dependent variable, the differenced series of media attention on the EU sub-issues, displayed serial correlation, and because this was not the case, we estimated the models without any autocorrelation terms.

Finally, to ease the interpretation of the interaction terms in the models, we standardized all variables, such that the main effects can be interpreted as the effect of the variable when the other variable included in the interaction is at its mean. Following the recommendations of Brambor, Clark and Golder (2005), we also present marginal effects graphs for the interaction effects. Marginal effect plots are a convenient way of summarizing at precisely which value of political salience the effects of the polarization measures become significant and vice versa— which helps to provide a substantial interpretation for our findings.

Results

Table II.4 displays the estimation results, presented in four models. First, two models are presented for each of the two types of political conflict: positional and discursive, which we operationalize as positional polarization (model 1) and framing polarization (model 2), respectively. Second, we present a model exploring the effect of both types of conflict simultaneously (model 3), and the final model presents the results for both types of conflict including the control for positivity/negativity in positions towards the EU among parties (model 4).

¹⁴The differenced series are stationary according to the same unit root test.

TABLE II.4. Effects on Δ media attention for EU sub-issues.

	Model 1: Positional conflict	Model 2: Discursive conflict	Model 3: Both types of conflict	Model 4: Both types + control
Δ Salience among parties	0.040 (0.116)	-0.015 (0.141)	-0.011 (0.143)	0.019 (0.156)
Δ Positional polarization	0.087 (0.066)		0.111 (0.058)	0.112 (0.080)
Δ Positional polarization x Δ salience	0.160*** (0.046)		0.053 (0.041)	0.098 (0.060)
Δ Framing polarization		0.101 (0.127)	0.083 (0.128)	0.071 (0.130)
Δ Framing polarization x Δ salience		0.160*** (0.039)	0.143*** (0.036)	0.123*** (0.033)
Δ Positivity about EU among parties				0.119 (0.120)
Constant	-0.045 (0.024)	-0.096* (0.046)	-0.100* (0.046)	-0.081 (0.064)
N (observations)	144	144	144	112
N (panels)	36	36	36	32
Adjusted R²	0.04	0.08	0.08	0.08
Chi² (df)	12.86 (3)	31.65 (3)	45.54 (5)	47.63 (6)

Note: Panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses. All variables are differenced and standardized. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed).

Regarding the first type of conflict, H1 stated that positional polarization increases the effect of political attention on media attention for European integration issues. In model 1, we observe a significant interaction between positional polarization and political salience, but in models 3 and 4, which also include discursive conflict, the interaction is smaller and no longer significant. Therefore, it appears that framing polarization, rather than divergent positions on the EU, affects whether media adopt issues from the political agenda. However, that is not to say that conflict over policy stances does not matter at all. Figure II.2 provides a more complete picture of the combined effects of positional

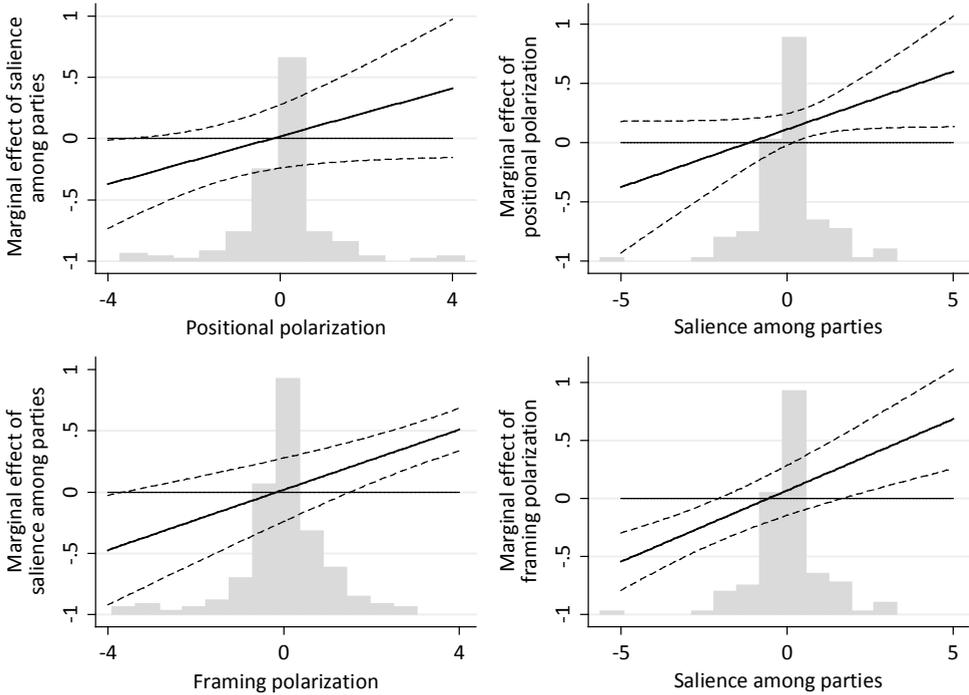


FIGURE II.2. Marginal effects based on model 4.

Note: The histograms indicate which values of the variable along the x-axis are in the dataset; the dashed lines indicate the 90% confidence interval.

polarization and political salience, based on model 4. The upper left panel displays the effect that attention among parties has on attention in the media, at different values of positional conflict (including the 90% confidence interval). The histogram displays which values of positional polarization are in the dataset. At all observed values of positional conflict, the confidence interval includes zero, confirming that political attention per se does not lead to media attention and also that the effect of political salience does not depend on the level of positional conflict. In the upper right panel, however, we see that positional conflict per se has a significant (and positive) effect on media attention when the moderator, salience among parties, is above the mean (zero). So, although the interaction is not significant, leading to a rejection of H1, in line with our expectations, positional polarization leads to media attention under the correct conditions. To be specific, when parties increase the salience of EU sub-issues in their

manifestoes, then heightened positional conflicts over an EU sub-issue lead to increasing newspaper coverage concerning these issues. This holds true, despite that we control for the overall negativity towards and salience of the EU sub-issue in the party system.

As models 2, 3 and 4 show, framing polarization has no significant main effect on media attention, but the interaction between political salience and framing polarization is positive and significant. This is in line with H2, which specified that discursive polarization enhances the effects of political attention on media attention. The lower panels of Figure II.3 depict the marginal effects. On the left, we observe that although framing polarization functions as a moderator, on average political attention has no effect on media attention. This is consistent with previous studies reporting that the media do not or hardly follow parties' issue priorities in general. However, we also note that when framing polarization is very high, the salience of an EU issue among parties has a significant, positive effect on media attention. Similarly, in the right panel, we observe that when media attention is sufficiently high (approximately over 1), framing polarization leads to increased media attention. Therefore, in line with our discursive conflict hypothesis, the more political parties engage in a salient struggle over the meaning of an EU sub-issue and use contesting frames, the more attention newspapers devote to the sub-issue.

Besides our two conflict measures, we control for parties' negativity towards the EU, which we also expect to increase media attention. Contrary to our expectation, the results indicate that media attention does not increase in response to more Euroskeptical party positioning. Apparently, the act of parties casting the EU in a negative light is not regarded as particularly newsworthy. This might be explained by our use of quality newspapers, which themselves tend not to be Euroskeptical. Most important, however, controlling for negativity does not alter the findings on political conflict. In conclusion, we accept H2 concerning discursive conflict as a moderator of media agenda-setting by political parties, and we reject H1 but note that positional conflict does directly increase the media coverage of an issue if it is coupled with sufficient attention from parties. Thus, the results confirm our expectation that the media respond to

conflict among parties over issues by paying more attention to these issues, but they appear to do so most strongly for discursive conflict.¹⁵

Conclusion

Most existing work on issue competition within the US and Western European contexts studies the strategies of political parties in competing over which policy issues top the political agenda (see for example Adams 1997; Carmines and Stimson 1989; De Vries and Hobolt 2012; Green-Pedersen 2007; Kriesi et al. 2006; 2008; Lindaman and Haider-Markel 2002; Riker 1982). This study builds on these studies to examine the interactions between parties and the media. Specifically, we explore the ways in which two types of conflict over policy issues among parties, positional and discursive, garner media attention. Examining the effect of party conflict on the media agenda is important, as parties are strategic actors that utilize conflict over issues to highlight programmatic differences to rally electoral support to strengthen their voice in parliament or increase the likelihood that they will be able to enact their policies while in office (Strøm 1990). Indeed, voters in contemporary democracies often turn to the media to obtain information on parties' policy ideas and activities. Excluding the role of the media in analyses of issue competition is potentially problematic, as one runs the risk of ignoring the important gate-keeping role media that actors play in setting the political agenda (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). By studying the dynamics of issue competition

¹⁵In addition to the models reported, we checked the robustness of the results in five ways. One, we estimated a model including country dummies and one including country dummies and interaction terms with these country dummies and the other explanatory variables, to examine whether the effects differed significantly between the countries, and they did not. Two, as for framing and positional polarization, it could be the case that a negative evaluation of the EU by all parties only affects the media if the parties devote sufficient attention to an issue. Thus, to assess this, we also included an interaction between positivity regarding the EU and salience among parties. The interaction was not significant, nor was the main effect of positivity at any value of the moderator significant. Three, we included period dummies, one at a time and simultaneously, to determine whether different scores in different elections drove the results, and they did not. Four, to inspect the sensitivity to different specifications in terms of serial correlation, we also specified models with a lagged dependent variable, a common ar1 term for serial correlation in the residuals and a panel-specific ar1 term; these results led to the same conclusions. Five, though the PCSEs can deal with contemporaneous correlation between the errors of different sub-issues to a considerable extent, the same sub-issues in the different countries could be extremely correlated, causing problems in the estimation of the errors. We inspected the errors, but the highest correlation in errors between the countries for the same issues was 0.25 for Germany and the Netherlands, which is well within the boundaries of what the technique can handle.

among parties over European integration and their effects on media attention, this study thus advances our understanding of the complex interrelationships between the party and media agendas.

We employ novel data on party debates on European integration in British, Dutch and German election campaigns between 1987 and 2006 and combine them with existing data on media attention on EU issues (Boomgaarden et al. 2010; Vliegenthart et al. 2008). In addition, rather than treating European integration as a single dimension on which parties compete and the media report, as in existing work, we open the black box of party competition over European integration by disaggregating the issue into 13 subcategories. This allows for a more fine-grained understanding of the different positions and frames parties employ regarding European integration issues, which is particularly important given the changes in the integration process in recent decades. We examine the extent to which positional conflict, in the stances parties take, and discursive conflict, in the frames parties use, affect whether attention devoted to different aspects of European integration among parties spills over to media reporting. By employing a pooled time series analysis, we show that discursive conflict over European integration indeed enhances the agenda-setting power of politics over the media, while controlling for the degree of negativity regarding the EU among parties.

If parties discuss a political issue in different terms and focus on different aspects, this signals to journalists that this issue is one that parties disagree on and might be worthy of reporting. The findings might help to explain why previous studies rarely found a direct effect of political attention on media attention, as the media only appear to adopt the political agenda when parties compete over the meaning of an issue. Discursive conflict is apparently more pronounced for journalists than positional conflict: positional conflict was not found to incur this significant moderating effect. However, positional conflict was important in a small way: in instances in which there is both a higher level of positional conflict and a higher level of salience in party platforms, journalists respond with increased attention. An explanation for this difference between the two types of conflict might be that framing is a particularly strong means of explicating differences with others (Vliegenthart 2012). Positions are often less pronounced and, especially in the context of party manifestoes, less saliently

indicated. For journalists, it is easier to report on discursive conflict that translates into media coverage in which opposing views are presented.

The finding regarding discursive conflict has particularly important consequences for how we conceptualize party competition and its effects on media reporting. The framing of policy issues is a central feature in media studies (see Entman 1993) but is largely neglected in the literature on party competition (for an exception, see Helbing, Hoeglinger and Wüest 2010). Most studies conceptualizing conflict among parties focus on differences in the positions parties take and the salience they assign to policy issues (see, for example, Stokes 1963; Budge et al. 2001; or Laver 2001). Our findings suggest that the different meanings, that is to say frames, parties ascribe to issues may be equally important. By framing issues in accordance with the overall programmatic slant of a party's platform, parties can ensure that policy issues are discussed on their terms and are most relevant to the solutions they propose. As a consequence, framing allows parties to suggest that certain solutions are more appropriate or credible. This in turn could have important implications for issue ownership and the degree to which voters associate parties with certain policy issues (Petrocik 1996). Our findings suggest that the linkages between the framing of policy issues and issue ownership may be a fruitful avenue for further research.

Regarding media coverage, we relied on a single quality newspaper for each of the countries. While we conducted additional robustness checks that also considered coverage from other quality newspapers, the media analysis remained limited in nature. Future research should consider a wider variety of news outlets, not only tabloid-style newspapers but also television and online media. We are convinced, however, that the results will be similar, as quality newspapers still act as strong agenda-setters for other media (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2008) and this study shows that coverage in different quality newspapers is strikingly similar. A second issue concerns the period under consideration: after 2006, the European Union experienced turbulent years and the issue of European integration became further politicized due to the economic crisis and the (further) rise of far-right parties, which speak against European integration, such as UKIP in the UK and the PVV in the Netherlands. It is likely that this increased polarization might further increase media attention on the EU. Indeed, research suggests that at least in the run-up to European parliamentary elections, media

attention has increased substantially (Boomgaarden et al. 2013). Whether the mechanism we revealed in this chapter has also been at work in recent years is a question for future research.

A final topic that constitutes an interesting avenue for further research is the possible endogeneity characterizing the linkages between party and media agendas. Here, we have focused on the degree to which party conflict –whether positional or discursive in nature– boosts the effect of parties on media reporting. Specifying the relationship in this direction seems particularly plausible, as conflict is a key news value employed by journalists. Moreover, we ensured that our measure of media attention only includes media reporting in the period after the electoral manifestos were issued or new ones were drawn up. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to expect that as party conflict garners media attention, this increased reporting may in itself result in higher levels or qualitatively different types of positional and discursive conflict among parties. It may prove worthwhile to explore these mechanisms in greater depth in future work.