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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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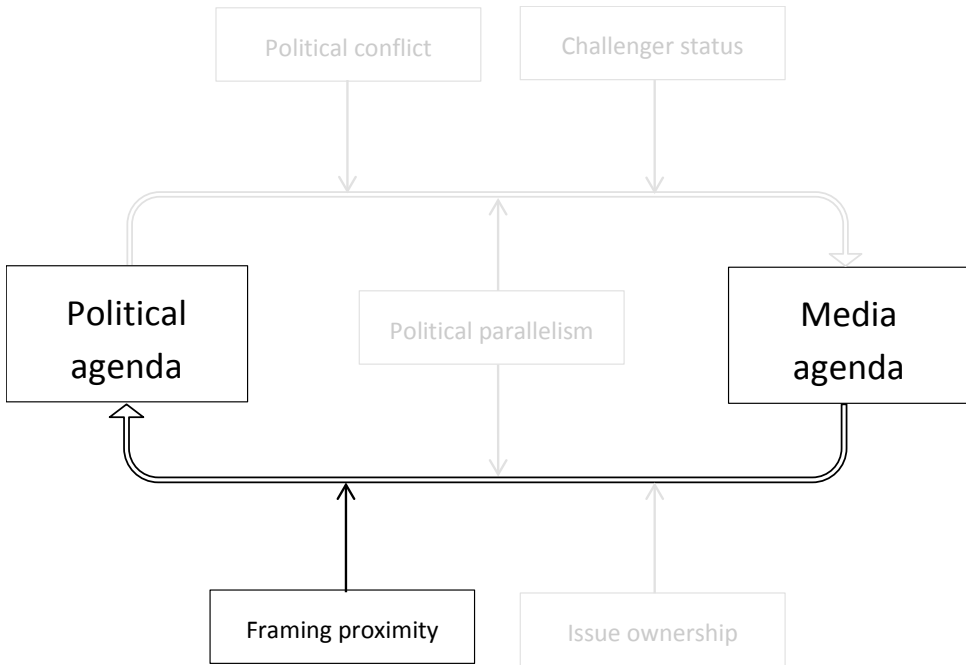
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Chapter III

Making Hay While the Sun Shines

*Do Parties Only Respond to Media Attention When the Framing Is Right?*¹⁶

¹⁶ This chapter is based on an article that appeared in *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 19(1), 42-65.



Abstract

When do parties take over the media’s issue attention in parliament? Scholarly work has shown that the mass media’s influence over the political agenda is conditional, yet only recently scholars started to consider the active role of parties and their strategic incentives in responding to the media. This chapter argues that parties only respond to media attention if the issue is framed in the party’s terms, as the right framing helps the party attain its policy goals. This argument is supported by pooled time-series analyses of the issue of European integration and the issue of immigration in Sweden and the Netherlands over the period 1995 to 2010. Altogether, the study contributes to our understanding of the strategic incentives and options parties have in responding to the media, as well as to our knowledge of the role of framing in political competition.

Introduction

Do the mass media dictate the political agenda? The scholarly work on *mediatization*, *mediamalaise*, and *media-logic* seems to suggest that media have a large and growing influence on the workings and the content of competition between parties (Altheide and Snow 1979; Mazzoleni et al. 2003). Yet on the other hand, studies on the effect of the media agenda on political agendas have produced conflicting findings and scholars have now come to the conclusion that the magnitude of mass-media's agenda-setting power varies (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). The differences in media influence on political agendas can partly be explained by the nature of the issues on the table (e.g., sensational or nonobtrusive), the type of media outlet (e.g., TV or newspaper, quality or tabloid), and the time (campaign or routine times), but also an important part of the explanation lies in the strategic behavior of political actors. The strategic interests of political parties form "a crucial gate-keeping mechanism in terms of mass media influence on macro-politics," as Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010, 664) note.

This chapter expands the research on how political parties strategically filter or amplify media attention. Specifically, it examines whether parties selectively discuss issues when the media framing is to their advantage, and remain silent about the issues when it is not. I argue that in this way they take advantage of the opportunities the media environment offers. Parties prefer issues to be framed in a particular way because a frame entails a problem definition and suggests appropriate solutions. As a consequence, parties themselves use the frame that most closely suits their policy program, but it is also rational for parties to talk about an issue when the framing in the media is how the party likes to frame the issue. In other words, the frame preferences of political parties should moderate the agenda-setting power of the media. This hypothesis is tested using the issues of European integration and immigration in newspapers and the parliaments of the Netherlands and Sweden in the period from 1995 to 2010.

The study contributes to existing research in three ways. First, it underlines the importance of framing in party competition and connects it to agenda-setting. Agenda-setting studies are mainly concerned with the salience of issues, while political competition is for a substantial part fought over the

definition of an issue, with parties striving to make their interpretation dominant (e.g., Callaghan and Schnell 2001; Daviter 2007). The present findings confirm that not only the sheer quantity of political or journalistic attention devoted to an issue needs to be considered, but that also qualitative aspects in terms of frames are important. In other words, not only *what* is on the agenda, but also the *way* issues are discussed matters. Only recently scholars have started to expand the scope of political agenda-setting studies to the qualitative characteristics of news reporting and political discourse (most notably Thesen 2013), and this study adds framing to this broader picture. This way, it bridges the two distinct literatures on framing and on political agenda-setting by the media.

Second, the study contributes to the recent strand of agenda-setting literature that stresses that parties strategically use media attention to advance their own goals (see Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Thesen 2013). Parties, by responding selectively when framing in the media is advantageous, and remaining silent when it is not, actively take advantage of situations arising the media, rather than passively undergoing the influence of the media. Thus, this study underlines that the media indeed exert an unmistakable influence on politics, but that this influence is filtered by the strategic considerations of political actors.

Third, it also contributes to the literature on framing. Much of this research is on the effects of framing on *individuals*, typically studied in lab settings (Chong and Druckman 2007). This study shows that frames indeed also have important effects in real-world settings on the actions of collective actors such as political parties.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I shortly discuss previous findings on the media's political agenda-setting power and more broadly on framing, from which this study's expectations are formulated. After this, the issues of immigration and of European Union (EU) integration in Sweden and in the Netherlands are presented, which are used as cases to test the theory. Then, I explain how from newspaper databases and parliamentary records the media and party agendas are measured, and what the manual coding procedure was used to measure framing. This is followed by a description of the statistical model, after which the results are presented. Finally, the implications and limitations of the

finding that parties' response to media attention is moderated by favorable framing are discussed.

Theory and hypotheses

The question whether the mass media steer the political agenda has been picked up in many studies. However, what stands out from this body of research is disagreement: While some find a very strong impact of the media, others hardly find any influence at all. For example, Vliegenthart and Roggeband (2007) find a very small and negative effect of media attention for immigration on the parliamentary agenda in the Netherlands, while in a study of the neighboring country Belgium, Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011) find that increasingly and in general considerably the media determine what is discussed in parliament. In a review of the literature, Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) point out that these contradictions imply that the political agenda-setting power of the media is *contingent*. There is no simple answer to the question to what extent the media determine the political agenda, but the media's influence depends on a number of factors (see also Walgrave, Soroka and Nuytemans 2008).

Which factors, then, moderate if the media influence the political agenda? The authors have suggested that the type of issue (Bartels 1996; Soroka 2002), the type of media outlet (TV or newspaper, public or private) and the way topics are covered matters. Eilders (2000; 2002), for example, argues that the media are more likely to exert an influence when they collectively focus on the same issues (focus) and when they do so with overwhelmingly similar opinions (consonance). Moreover, besides characteristics pertaining to the media agenda input that political actors are confronted with, parties and other political actors themselves play an active role in choosing when to copy issues from the media agenda. The transfer of salience is by no means automatic or mechanic, as political actors have a *choice* whether to react or not to what the media are covering, and often consider this carefully.

The question then becomes, as Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006, 99) put it: "Why do political actors embrace issues put forward by the media?" Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2010) have recently examined the strategic incentives parties face when deciding to adopt issues from the media agenda, and found that parties tend to respond to media attention on issues they "own" (see also

Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011). This chapter extends the argument that the media's influence on the political agenda depends on parties' strategic interests in political competition, but it also takes the *way* topics are discussed into account. In a recent study on Denmark, Thesen (2013) found news content characteristics in interaction with the political context condition parties' incentives to adopt owned issues from the media agenda. For example, opposition parties have more reason to respond to bad news than government parties, because government could be held responsible for the situation. In this chapter, the idea that the content of the coverage—not just the topic—matters in parties' decisions to bring news into politics is further explored, by considering more broadly how an issue is framed. However, before moving further, I turn to the concept of *framing*, to develop how this is a crucial concept in understanding the strategic incentives parties have to adopt issues from the media agenda.

Framing and Party Competition

Framing, in Entman's (1993, 52) much cited definition, 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." So, by framing the meaning of an issue or problem is construed, and as a consequence certain solutions become more salient, while others are pushed to the background. Parties, in pursuit of the implementation of their specific policies, want issues to be defined in terms facilitating their solutions. In other words, parties have a great interest in promoting the framing that most closely fits their program (e.g., Helbling, Hoeglinger and Wüest 2010). This makes it more likely they will attain their policy objectives, as well as their vote-seeking objectives if they successfully get their frames across to the electorate (Müller and Strøm 1999).

Much like they "own" particular issues (Petrocik 1996), then, parties may be linked to certain frames. This notion has recently been recognized in the literature on policy framing. Slothuus and De Vreese (2010), for example, use the term *party frames* to denote issue frames that are explicitly sponsored by a political party. Similarly, Petersen, Slothuus and Togeby (2010) argue that parties use frames to signal their value reputations or ideology to citizens. Accordingly, voters associate political parties with particular frames in the political debate, that

is, they recognize the party frames. To sum up, parties promote the issue frame that leads naturally to their preferred policy solutions. In parallel fashion, their competitors strive for their framing of an issue to become the dominant interpretation. An important part of party competition is, therefore, a struggle over the meaning of an issue, that is, a fight over frames (see Chapter II). In this way, frames are an integral part of party competition (see also Chong and Druckman 2007; Hänggli and Kriesi 2010; Sniderman and Theriault 2004).

As argued above, political parties work hard to get the frames that are supportive to their argument into the dominant discourse. Conversely, their competitors also promote their framing, while other actors in the public sphere (journalists, opinion makers, interest groups, etc.) also add to the total framing of an issue. Parties therefore rarely have a monopoly over the way issues are defined. This straightforwardly leads to the reason why parties should pay attention to the same issues as the media do when the media are using their frame. When media reporting provides a context in which their frame prevails, their policy solutions appear more plausible, so it makes sense to strike iron when it's hot and discuss the issue in parliament at that moment. In contrast, if parties broach a topic while the framing of it in the media is in discord with their platform and framing, they will have a hard time finding support for their policies. Previous studies have shown that framing is more persuasive if it resonates with prior beliefs or opinions an individual holds (e.g., Entman 2004; Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Schemer, Wirth and Matthes 2012). As Hänggli and Kriesi (2010, 143) summarize "frames that employ more culturally resonant terms have a greater potential for influence." When a party discusses an issue in a frame that was just used for the same issue in the news, the audience is already familiar with the frame. As a consequence, it not only saves a party the effort of framing the issue in the preferred frame, it also makes the framing of the party more powerful because it resonates.

Hypotheses

The expectation of this study is that parties stress issues when the media framing is congruent with their own framing. So parties keep an eye on the framing of an issue in the media, and respond in parliament when the media framing resembles their own. This directly leads to the first hypothesis:

H1 Framing Proximity Main Effect Hypothesis: *The closer the framing of an issue in the media is to the framing of the party, the more likely the party is to address the issue in parliament.*

Accordingly, when the media framing is not to their advantage, parties will call less attention to an issue than usual. This does not mean that they will be completely silent on the topic, but simply that—everything else being equal—they emphasize it less than they would have had the media framing been closer to their own. In short then, Hypothesis 1 postulates an effect of framing closeness between a party and the media on a party's issue salience. However, the way an issue is framed in the media should matter only when there is sufficient coverage. If the media hardly report on an issue, the mix of frames used in those few articles will not be very important, whereas when newspaper pages overflow with articles on a certain topic, the framing of this huge amount of coverage matters a lot for parties. In other words, it could be that media attention needs to pass a certain threshold before framing starts to have an effect, that is, there is an interaction between the closeness in framing and media salience:

H2 Framing Proximity Interaction Hypothesis: *The closeness in framing between a party and the media has a stronger effect on a political party's agenda when media attention for the issue is high.*

While this interaction means that more media attention bolsters the effect of framing closeness, it conversely would also indicate that media attention has a stronger effect on parliamentarians when the framing is congruent. These two readings of the interaction effect are merely two sides of the same coin; however, it is worth noting the substantive implication. Interpreted that way, closeness in framing is one of the factors that moderate the impact the media agenda has on the political agenda (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). The interaction hypothesis therefore speaks directly to the literature on the conditionality of the media's political agenda-setting power.

As noted before, parties also actively try to influence the way issues are framed in the public debate, and journalist often use politicians as direct sources in their coverage. It could be, therefore, that parties do not actually respond to the right framing in media, but simply first spread their framing of a topic in the

media, and then address the issue in parliament. If this were the case, a closeness in framing between media and a party preceding a parliamentary question would merely be an epiphenomenon of the fact that the party is the “framer” in both domains. To test this alternative explanation, whether a party is a big contributor to the coverage of an issue in the media is included as a control variable.

The hypotheses are tested on the issues of European integration and immigration in Sweden and the Netherlands. In Sweden, the EU is a politically contested issue, but immigration is remarkably little politicized, whereas in the Netherlands immigration has been fiercely disputed in politics, and the EU until very recently retained its “sleeping giant” status (Van der Eijk and Franklin 2004). Thus, these four cases present a nice spread in predicted outcomes, because—following the interaction hypothesis—framing closeness should only have an effect in the cases when media salience is sufficiently high. According to the hypotheses, an effect should be visible for immigration in the Netherlands and the EU in Sweden, but not for immigration in Sweden and the EU in the Netherlands. In the next section, the context of the two countries and issues is discussed a little further.

The Issues of Immigration and the EU in Sweden and the Netherlands

Like many of its Nordic neighbors, Sweden is somewhat reluctant toward the European Union. Entry to the Union was decided by a very narrow majority in a referendum in 1993, shortly after which support declined to a minority again. The Miljöpartiet and Vänsterpartiet (Green party and Left party) even called for a withdrawal from the Union, and since continued to oppose European integration. The Eurosceptic parties led a successful campaign against adoption of the Euro currency at the 2003 referendum, and also consistently perform well at European parliamentary elections, with most notably the single issue Eurosceptic party Junilisten receiving 15 percent of the votes in 2004 (Raunio 2007). In addition, the issue has laid bare deep tensions within the Social Democratic party, and is on average very salient among Swedish parties (Netjes and Binnema 2007). Immigration, on the contrary, is exceptionally little politicized in Sweden (Dahlström and Esaiasson 2013). There was an anti-immigration party in the early nineties, Ny Demokrati, but it disappeared from parliament quite quickly. The mainstream right had strategic incentives to keep the issue nonsalient, to be able

to govern together with proimmigrant parties as well as to keep internal divisions below the surface (Green-Pedersen and Krogstrup 2008). As a consequence, even though there existed anti-immigrant sentiment among the public, the issue was not prevalent in Swedish politics up till 2010.

In the Netherlands, immigration received some political and media attention in the 90s, but the main anti-immigrant party, the Centrum Partij, and later Centrum Democraten (CD), was effectively boycotted in parliament as well as in the media (Van Spanje and Van der Brug 2007). Full politicization of the issue did not take place until the early 2000s, after the debate was sparked by international events such as the 9/11 attacks and Madrid bombings as well as the adoption of the issue locally by more mainstream actors (e.g., Paul Scheffer). Most crucial though was the spectacular rise of anti-immigrant party Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in 2001 to 2002 (Koopmans and Muis 2009). Mainstream parties were left in an awkward position, as the Labor party PvdA was blamed for past failures of immigration policies and the liberal party VVD was confronted with pressure from competitors to the right (Van Reekum and Duyvendak 2012). From 2006 the anti-immigrant niche was filled by Wilders' Party for Freedom (Van der Brug et al. 2009). By contrast, the issue of European integration remained on the background of Dutch national politics for a longer period, and while it was shortly contested around the 2005 referendum (De Vries 2009), the issue only as recently as the 2012 elections really broke into the domestic political debate.

Table III.1 below summarizes the expectations for the four cases. Two of the cases, immigration in Sweden and the European integration issue in the Netherlands, only provide weak tests of the theory, as merely the absence of an effect is predicted. The expectation here is that the closeness in framing has no significant main effect, due to the relatively low media salience of the issues. Though it is less evident whether to anticipate an interaction, my expectation is that media attention in these cases is never enough for the main effect and interaction to combine into a significant effect of the closeness in framing. The two other cases, the EU in Sweden and immigration in the Netherlands, offer the more thorough tests because here significant effects are expected. In both these cases, parties are expected to emphasize the issue more in parliament when the media use their frames, and put less emphasis on it if the media framing is very much unlike their own (H1). In addition, they are expected to respond more

TABLE III.1. Summary of Expectations for the Four Cases.

Country	Issue	Level of Politicization	Expectation Regarding Main Effect Framing Proximity (H1)	Expectation Regarding Interaction Between Framing Proximity and Media Salience (H2)
Sweden	EU	High	Positive	Positive
Sweden	Immigration	Low	Zero	Zero
Netherlands	EU	Low	Zero	Zero
Netherlands	Immigration	High	Positive	Positive

Note. H1 = main effect hypothesis; H2 = interaction hypothesis.

strongly to media framing when attention for the issue in the media is high (H2). In combination, the four cases—with their crossed expectations—give the opportunity to exclude country as well as issue specific explanations, and thus really put the spotlight on the framing and attention as causes.

Methods

Salience

This chapter inspects if parties pay more attention to an issue if the media framing coincides with their own, so the response variable is the salience of an issue for a specific party. Parliamentary questions are used to measure this, as they are the prime avenue for parties to put new issues on the legislative agenda and thus further their policy goals (as opposed to manifestos for example, which are further removed from implementation). Furthermore, parliament is also the political arena that is most likely to respond to the media agenda (Walgrave, Soroka and Nuytemans 2008). The measure for salience was obtained via automated content analysis on the oral questions in the parliamentary proceedings from 1995 to 2010. First, the text of the oral questions was selected from the proceedings based on the titles.¹⁷ Second, the number of words related to the issue, either immigration or European integration, was counted for every

¹⁷ The data were provided by Maarten Marx, who selected it from the data set created in the PoliticalMashup project. The parliamentary questions were found by selecting from the Dutch data the speeches with “vragenuur” in the title, and from the Swedish data the speeches with “frågestund,” “frågor till,” or “Svar på interpellation” in the title. Speeches that were not by members of parliament were filtered out (such as ministers responding to questions).

question using previously developed search strings (see Vliegenthart 2007; Vliegenthart et al. 2008; search strings may be found in Appendix A). This count was summed over all questions of a party in the same quarter of a year. Because oral and written questions are primarily an instrument of the opposition, government parties ask fewer questions and consequently score lower on the issue words. As a third step therefore, the search string count was divided by the total number of words in the questions posed by members of the party in that quarter.¹⁸ Thus, the resulting salience score taps the amount of time and resources a party is willing to invest in an issue, given the limited number of issues they can address in parliamentary questions (see Appendix C for a descriptive overview of the collected data).

Salience of the issues EU and immigration in the media, one of the independent variables, was measured in a very similar way with an automated content analysis of two daily newspapers. Previous work has shown that political parties respond more strongly to newspapers than to television or radio news, so newspapers were chosen over other media for their most likely effect (Bartels 1996; Roberts and McCombs 1994). To get a representative overview of newspaper reporting, for the Netherlands the most widely read quality paper, *Volkskrant*, and the most widely read tabloid paper, *De Telegraaf*, were selected, while for Sweden the most read morning paper *Dagens Nyheter* and most read evening paper *Aftonbladet* were included. First, like for the parliamentary questions, the number of EU and immigration related words were counted with the help of search strings in LexisNexis' newspaper database for the Dutch papers and the newspaper archive Retriever for the Swedish papers. Second, a visibility score was calculated using this formula:

$$v(\text{issue at } t) = \sum_{a \in \text{articles at } t} {}^2\log(8hf_{\text{head}} + 2hf_{\text{body}})$$

where $v(\text{issue})$ is the visibility of an issue in a given quarter (t) of a year, a denotes an article from all articles in this period, hf_{body} is the number of mentions in the body of the article, while hf_{head} is the number of mentions in the headline. The log

¹⁸ Members of the European Parliament were counted as speakers of their respective party's parliamentary fraction; speakers from the Dutch Antilles and Aruba were excluded, as well as all Dutch parties that spoke less than 600 paragraphs (out of 469,733 paragraphs of parliamentary speech, so less than 0.13 percent) over the whole research period in the Dutch parliament. No such procedure was necessary for the Swedish data.

transformation and the multiplication by 8 and 2, respectively, gives mentions in the headline three times the weight of mentions in the rest of the article (see Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007: 80).¹⁹ Third, the visibility scores of the two papers in each country were combined with equal weights, except for the period prior to 1998 when De Telegraaf was not digitally available, and for which a weighted version of the Volkskrant score was used.²⁰ Finally, because an interaction term is used in the models, the visibility score was standardized within each issue and country combination, so that the main effects can be interpreted more easily.

As discussed, an alternative explanation for a congruence in framing could be that parties first plug an issue (using their framing) in the media, and subsequently discuss it in parliament. This explanation is tested by including as a control the percentage of coverage of an issue in which the party name occurs. The idea here is that if a party is directly responsible for the framing in an article, for example, a party member is explicitly quoted or paraphrased, the name of the party will be mentioned. This control was constructed by selecting the articles from the two newspapers that contain at least one immigration or EU search string word in the header, and by counting within these articles the percentage containing the party name or acronym (see Appendix A).

Framing

To gauge the framing of the issues among political parties and in the media, trained coders manually coded newspaper articles and parliamentary questions and speeches. For the newspapers, three (EU) or four (immigration) articles per month were randomly selected from all articles in the database containing at least one mention of EU or immigration related words in the header. We selected from

¹⁹ Newspapers change their formats and the newspaper databases may contain gaps, so to check whether this influenced the results, the total number of words in the entire paper of every second week of the month was counted for the Dutch newspapers. This measure for the size of the paper was also summed over quarters, and used to divide the EU and immigration word counts by, yielding a measure of the relative salience of an issue at a given time. This measure correlated very strongly with the visibility score used in the main analyses, and led to similar results.

²⁰ This was done by calculating how much higher the mean visibility in the two papers was than then the visibility in only the Volkskrant, and multiplying the Volkskrant score by this factor in the period when only this paper was available.

articles mentioning these terms in the header to ensure the coders received material that was on-topic, and articles that were nonetheless not on-topic were manually filtered out afterward. Similarly, for political framing, four parliamentary questions were randomly sampled from the question hours in which the EU and immigration search strings yielded at least three hits, and off-topic questions were discarded manually. In addition, for the Dutch parliament in each year the two debates containing most EU or immigration related words were selected, and from these debates the first entry of each party was coded. This is the speech MPs prepare completely beforehand, so it reflects the carefully chosen framing of the party best.

For each issue, the coders could choose six non-mutually-exclusive frames: the economic frame, the social frame, the cultural frame, the judicial/legal frame, the international security frame and the political frame.²¹ The economic frame signals that the issue of immigration or European integration are described in economic or financial terms and/or referring to economic or financial consequences for individuals, groups, organizations, or countries. The social frame means the issue is presented in light of concerns dealing with the welfare state, social housing, health care, elderly care, education, or other social concerns. The cultural frame is used for example for mentions of uni/multiculturalism, cultural integration or assimilation, creating, maintaining or defending of own or others identity or nationality, the use of religious symbols, signs, or holidays. The judicial or legal frame denotes framing in terms of laws and regulations, for example mentions of jurisdiction, (criminal) law, justice, discrimination, or human rights. The international security frame means the issue is presented in

21 The intercoder reliability for the frames in Dutch material was 0.65, 0.46, 0.61, 0.46, 0.63, and 0.41 (Krippendorff's α on a random sample of 254 units with five coders), respectively, for the economic, social, cultural, judicial, international, and political frame, and in the Swedish papers 0.52, 0.38, 0.61, 0.52, 0.48, and 0.24 (Krippendorff's α on a random sample of 72 articles with two coders). Overall, these reliability scores range from acceptable to rather low. However, there are two reasons why these data can still bring valuable insights. Firstly, the codes for individual frames are not used directly in the analyses, but grouped per time period into a frame usage fraction and then combined over frames into the framing proximity score. Each observation of the framing proximity measure is built up of on average 210 codes (6 frames \times on average 15 articles = about 90 newspaper codes, plus about 6 frames \times on average 20 parliamentary speeches or questions = 120 codes of parliamentary material, giving a total of 210 codes), and can therefore be expected to be much more reliable than its constituent parts. Second, the lower reliability scores bias the estimates such that effects are less likely to reach significance. In other words, the lower reliability scores make the tests of the hypotheses more conservative in the cases where positive effects are expected.

light of the international balance of power between states, peace and war, security, defense, or geopolitics. The political frame, finally, is when the issue is discussed from an institutional or political-strategic viewpoint, for example dealing with the notion of democracy, constitutional affairs, the institutional framework, the bureaucracy, political institutions, elites, or parties.

Via these frames, parties or journalists can provide a meaning in six different ways to the issues of immigration and European integration. The hypothesis of this chapter is that a closeness in framing between a party and media matters, so how is this measured? To tap the closeness in framing, a simple measure of Euclidean proximity was calculated in four steps. First, for each party the preference for a frame was assessed by calculating the fraction of questions and speeches in which the frame was used over all coded parliamentary questions and speeches. Second, the scores for each party were standardized within a frame, so only the differences among parties, and not so much among frames remained.²² Third, for every quarter of a year in the research period, the fraction a frame was used by the media was calculated from the coded newspaper articles, and these fractions were also standardized within each frame. Because three to four articles were sampled per month for each of the two newspapers, the quarterly framing scores for the media are based on 18 to 24 coded articles, minus the articles that coders deemed off-topic. Fourth, an overall framing proximity measure was computed for each issue separately via a Euclidean distance formula multiplied by -1:

$$proximity(part, media\ at\ t) = -1 * \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^6 (part_i - media\ at\ t_i)^2}$$

where i is the index of frames, $part_i$ is the standardized fraction of questions in which the party uses frame i , and $media\ at\ t_i$ is the standardized fraction of coded articles at time t using frame i . Thus, the proximity in framing between a party and the media at a given time point is the reverse of a framing distance score.

²² In addition, some frames are used far more often in the political arena than in the media, yet it is undesirable that these differences due to the arena start driving the results. This is also avoided by this standardization. In particular, for the Dutch immigration issue the political frame was used much more frequently in parliament than in newspapers (about 70 percent versus about 30 percent of coded units), so as an extra check the analysis was repeated for this issue but excluding the frame altogether, yielding identical results.

Last, like the media salience measure, the framing proximity score was standardized within a country-issue combination for ease of interpretation.

Statistical Model

For each of the four cases (the issues of immigration and European integration in Sweden and the Netherlands) a separate model was built with the issue attention of parliamentary parties in the question hour as the dependent variable. This gives the data a time-series cross-sectional structure, with panels being parties which are followed over time, measured in quarters from 1995 till 2010. First, the temporal structure was dealt with by checking that the series were stationary, and including in the right-hand side of the equation the dependent variable with lag 1 (the previous quarter) and lag 4 (a year earlier). The residuals were afterward inspected and found to be white noise, so serial correlation was sufficiently modeled. Second, OLS estimates with panel-corrected standard errors were used with a correction for contemporaneous correlation and heteroskedasticity (Beck and Katz 1995). Furthermore, to make sure the causal factors took place before the response, a lag of 1 quarter was used on every independent variable. Finally, in avoid giving small parties a disproportionate importance in the analysis, observations were weighted by party size (as the share of parliamentary seats).

Results

We now turn to the empirical tests of the theory. According to the first hypothesis of this chapter, framing proximity between newspapers and a party has a positive effect on the party's issue salience: The more the framing in the media is supportive to a party's argument, the likelier the party is to bring the issue up in parliament. Furthermore, following the second hypothesis, this effect is stronger the more media attention there is, implying that there is a positive interaction between framing proximity and media attention. In Table III.2, the separate models for each four cases are displayed. To start with the *weakest* tests of the theory, that is, the cases in which only the absence of an effect was predicted, we can see that as expected neither for immigration in Sweden nor for the EU in the Netherlands any of the explanatory variable has a significant effect. The main effect of framing proximity is in both cases almost zero, and the interaction

TABLE III.2. Determinants of Issue Attention in Parliamentary Questions, 1995–2010.

	Netherlands		Sweden	
	Immigration	EU	Immigration	EU
Framing proximity t-1	0.023*	0.001	-0.001	0.005
	(0.011)	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.006)
Media salience t-1	0.001	-0.006	0.002	0.003
	(0.011)	(0.004)	(0.009)	(0.005)
Framing proximity t-1 x media salience t-1	-0.002	-0.004	-0.009	0.020**
	(0.010)	(0.004)	(0.009)	(0.006)
Party-issue co-occurrence in media t-1	-0.002	-0.000	0.001	-0.002
	(0.002)	(0.001)	(0.002)	0.001
Parliamentary questions t-1	0.109	-0.006	0.156	0.123
	(0.086)	(0.068)	(0.080)	(0.067)
Parliamentary questions t-4	0.214*	0.009	0.192**	0.193**
	(0.087)	(0.049)	(0.066)	(0.069)
Constant	0.104***	0.036***	0.048***	0.076***
	(0.020)	(0.006)	(0.011)	(0.011)
N (parties x time points)	413	402	301	287
N (parties)	11	10	7	7
Adjusted R ²	0.05	0.00	0.10	0.08
chi2	14.82	3.32	21.12	21.72

Note. OLS estimates weighted by party size with correlated panel-corrected standard errors in parentheses; framing proximity and media salience are standardized per country and issue combination. Significance levels: *p <.05; **p <.01; ***p <.001.

between the framing proximity and media salience is also not nearly significant. For the EU issue in the Netherlands, the model explains none of the variance, while for immigration in Sweden there is some variance explained, but this can be attributed to the lagged dependent variables.

So the two cases where no effect was expected indeed display none, but what about the cases where the framing closeness between parties and the media *should* matter? Looking at the first model, for the issue of immigration in the Netherlands, we see a significant positive main effect of framing proximity, but no significant interaction between framing proximity and the attention for the issue in newspapers. So Dutch parties tend to pay attention to the framing of

immigration and discuss the topic more when the framing the media matches their own, but do not do this more intensely when media report a lot about immigration. In other words, the framing matters, regardless of the amount of media attention. This is effect is found while controlling for the party's own occurrence in the coverage of the issue, which indicates that parties do not merely respond to the media attention they generated themselves. In addition, it is striking that media salience does not have a significant impact on the questions parties ask on immigration topics in parliament. Possibly sheer attention in the media only has a short term effect that is not captured in the quarterly time span used here, while apparently the influence of the framing context provided by the media is more persistent.

Finally, in the last column the model for the EU issue in Sweden has no significant main effects, but does have a significant positive interaction between framing proximity and media salience. To get a clearer picture of the net effects in realistic situations for the issue of the EU in Sweden, Figure III.1 shows the marginal effect of framing proximity on party issue attention in parliament depending on the salience in the media, and conversely (in the lower panel) the effect of media salience depending on the proximity in framing (see Brambor, Clark and Golder 2005). The histograms display which values of the variable along the x -axis are in the data set. In the upper panel we see that when media salience is relatively low (below 0.46), the effect of framing proximity is not different from zero, or even negative (for media salience values below -1). Yet as the salience of EU matters in the Swedish papers goes up (above 0.46), the effect of framing proximity becomes positive and increasingly strong. In other words, when newspapers write very little about the issue, it does not matter for parties whether the media framing coincides with their own, but when the issue is all over the papers, the framing becomes more and more important. This amounts to more than a threshold: The effect of framing proximity actually keeps growing as media salience rises. Again, this holds while controlling for coverage in which the framing might directed by the party. The lower panel is based on the same interaction, but here the emphasis is on the transfer of salience, with framing proximity on the x -axis moderating the effect of the media agenda on the party agenda in parliament. The effect of media attention on party agendas indeed ranges from significantly negative to significantly positive depending on framing

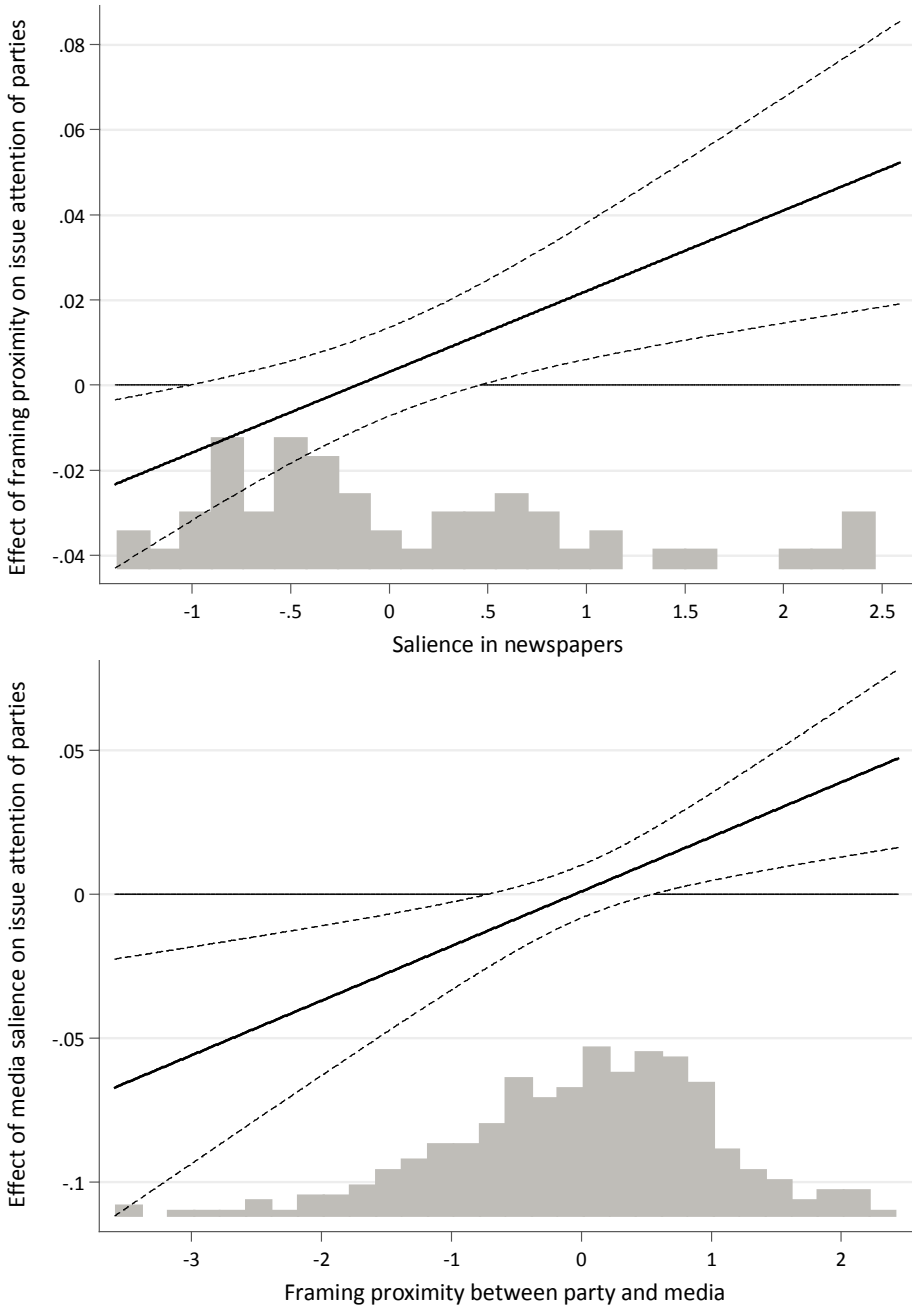


FIGURE III.1. Marginal effects for the EU issue in Sweden.

Note: The histograms indicate which values of the variable along the x-axis are in the dataset; the dashed lines indicate the 95% confidence interval.

proximity: When the media framing is similar to that of the party, parliamentarians adopt the issue the media put on their agenda, however when the media framing is not at all like their preferred framing of the issue, they actually discuss the issue *less* if the media bring it up.

In summary, as expected in the two cases of politicized issues a closeness in framing with the media leads parties to emphasize an issue more. Nevertheless, there is a subtle difference in the way in which frame closeness works: in one case through a main effect (H1), and in the other via an interaction (H2). On the one hand, for the issue of the EU in Sweden a significant interaction between media salience and framing proximity was found, which means that parties react to the frames in the media more when the issue is more visible in the media. On the other hand, for immigration in the Netherlands only a main effect of framing proximity was found, so for this issue the amount of media attention was of no importance. It therefore appears that, at least in the period from 1995 till 2010, Dutch parties were *always* sensitive to the framing in the media, whereas for Swedish parties media framing only mattered if the visibility was high enough. A possible explanation for this difference is that the attention for immigration in Dutch newspapers was always high while it varied for the EU in Sweden, or alternatively, that the immigration issue was such a game changer for Dutch politics that parties were constantly watching the framing, even if it was not on the front pages. As said though, this is a small difference, as for both cases in most instances a closer resemblance to the media framing led to a greater issue emphasis in parliament.

Conclusion

An important part of politics is the struggle over the way problems are defined. Parties not only compete by taking different positions or selectively emphasizing different issues, but also by promoting their way of understanding the issues, that is, *frames* (see Chong and Druckman 2007; Hänggli and Kriesi 2010; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). This study adds to our understanding of this struggle over meaning by showing that parties strategically bring issues into parliament when their framing is prevalent in the media, and avoid an issue when it is not. It is rational for parties to put issues on the political agenda when the framing in the media is similar to the party's own framing, as the party frame will resonate and

the party's proposed policy solutions will seem more appropriate. Contrariwise, when the media use a framing that is very different from the party's own, it will be very hard for the party to find support for its policies in parliament, and it would be wiser to keep the issue of the legislative agenda. Four cases with each a pooled time-series model bring support to the theory. As expected, in the cases of the unpoliticized issues of immigration in Sweden and European integration in the Netherlands, parties were unresponsive to the framing used in the media, while for the politicized issues of European integration in Sweden and immigration in the Netherlands parties put the issues on the agenda when the framing in the media was right.

At least two conclusions follow from these findings. First, the results underline the importance of framing in political competition. Much of the work on party competition focuses on either positions or on salience (Budge and Farlie 1983; Downs 1957), while the struggle over frames is an essential part of politics. Yet framing studies have only recently begun to consider situations outside the experimental setting and with competing frames (Chong and Druckman 2007; Schaffner and Sellers 2009). This study provides evidence of the significance of frames in the real-world setting of media-politics interactions in parliamentary democracies. Moreover, the impact of framing was even more pronounced than that of media salience, which had a significant effect in only in one of the cases. The limited effect of media salience is probably due to the focus on long term dynamics, and it is likely that a stronger effect would have been visible with a monthly or weekly time span. Yet in this light the consistent effect of framing closeness is even more interesting, as apparently the consequences of media frames *do* persist over a longer period.

Second, the findings emphasize that parties opportunistically choose when to respond to the media and when not to. Thus, they contribute to the recent set of studies that stress that the transfer of salience to politics is not automatic, but that parties strategically filter media attention according to their interests (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Thesen 2013). This way, the study also adds to our wider understanding of the conditionality of the media's political agenda-setting power (Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006).

In this chapter, only two policy issues in two countries are studied, and this of course begs the question whether the results of this chapter hold equally

for other issues. A full answer requires research on more issues, but immigration and European integration do seem to be typical of the wider set of politically contested issues. However, not all issues are contested: Just like there are valance issues for which parties do not hold different positions, there might be issues for which parties agree over the framing, or have not developed their frame preferences yet. Further research could establish which issues are characterized by a framing consensus and, relatedly, when and how parties form preferences for specific frames.

In brief, this chapter found evidence for a very general pattern of political responses to media communication. It argued that this strategy would help a party attain its goals, and as a follow-up it would be very interesting to see if this behavior indeed brings the intended benefits. Do parties that keep more firmly to this media strategy get more policies implemented? Do they get a more favorable evaluation from voters as a result of frame resonance? Does this strategy help parties become associated with an issue and possibly attain ownership in the eyes of the electorate? Furthermore, the proposed media strategy should serve the policy-seeking goals of the party, but not all parties are equally policy-seeking. It is therefore to be expected that, even though the pattern found here holds in general, some parties use a very different strategy when it comes to dealing with media frames and attention (see also Hänggeli and Kriesi 2012). Are there for instance parties that do not avoid a topic when the framing is contrary to their own, but rather try to engage in the conversation and turn the framing around by stressing the issue more? Surprisingly little research is done on different strategies for media frames, let alone what the consequences of different strategies might be. These are interesting questions for further research, as answers bring us closer to understanding what is on the political agenda, and moreover, who determines what is.