



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

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

van der Pas, D.J.

**Publication date**

2014

**Document Version**

Final published version

[Link to publication](#)

**Citation for published version (APA):**

van der Pas, D. J. (2014). *From the press to politics and back: When do media set the political agenda and when do parties set the media agenda?* [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

**General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

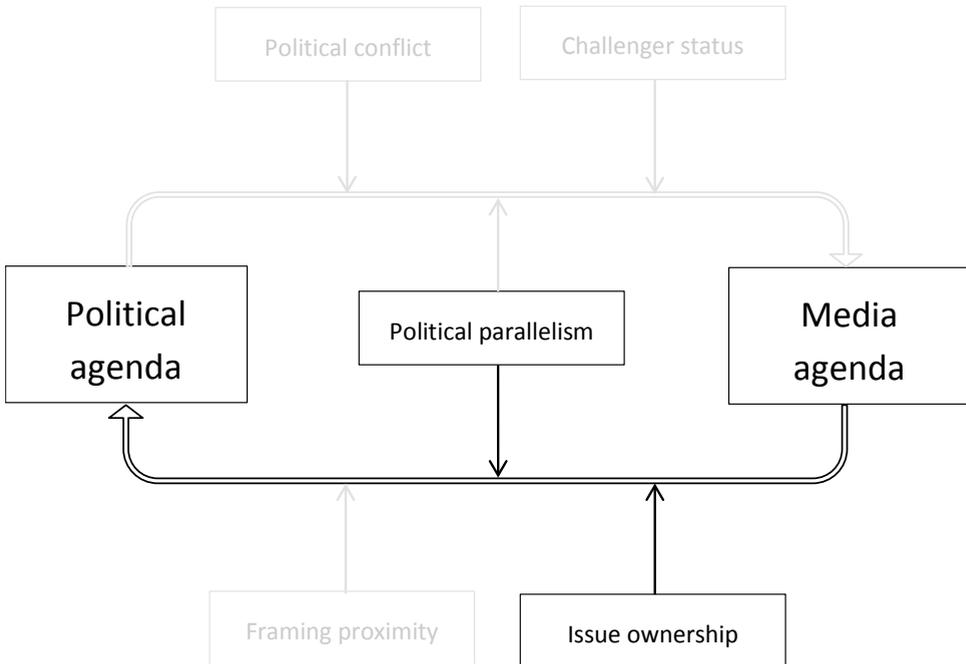
# Chapter V

## **Political Parallelism in the Media's Political Agenda-Setting Power**

*The Case of Parliamentary Questions in the Netherlands,  
1999-2010<sup>29</sup>*

---

<sup>29</sup> This chapter is based on an article co-authored by Wouter van der Brug and Rens Vliegenthart and is currently under review.



## Abstract

Due to the professionalization of the media and depillarization of society, the ties between media outlets and political parties have weakened in the Netherlands. In this chapter, we examine whether ties between parties and newspapers still determine when parties adopt issues from newspapers in their parliamentary questions by studying the attention devoted to the issues of immigration and European integration in De Telegraaf, the Volkskrant and parliament from 1999 to 2010. We find that parties only copy the issues from the newspapers their voters read, i.e., political parallelism structures the effect of the newspaper agendas on the agenda in parliamentary questions. In addition, we also inspect whether issue owners are more prone react to media attention for their issues by asking questions, but find no support for this hypothesis.

## Introduction

Up to 80 percent of parliamentary questions (PQs) in the Netherlands are explicitly inspired by media coverage (Ruigrok et al. 2013). This seems to imply that the media have a considerable influence on parliamentary activities, and in particular on the content of the Question Hour. This dominant role of the media in parliamentary affairs can be considered an outcome of a broader process that scholars have labeled *mediatisation* to describe the 'situation in which the media have become the most important source of information and vehicle of communication between the governors and the governed' (Strömbäck 2008, 230). Yet, does this imply that the media should be regarded as a single, unitary force that pushes issues onto the agendas of all parties equally? Or are there, despite the rise of a common 'media-logic' (Altheide and Snow 1979), still ties between parties and media outlets that determine whether a party adopts an issue from the media? In other words, is the media's agenda-setting power moderated by political parallelism?

This chapter seeks to answer these questions by examining whether parties are more inclined to follow the issue attention of the newspapers their voters read or whether they indiscriminately follow any paper. To this end, oral questions on the issues of immigration and of European integration in the Dutch parliament in the period from 1999 to 2010 are studied, as well as the attention devoted to these issues in two national daily newspapers. The findings confirm that political parallelism indeed shapes the agenda-setting power of newspapers over parliamentary factions in the Netherlands. So, parties are more likely to bring up an issue that was raised in a newspaper that their voters read. This is substantiated by a logistic pooled time series analysis.

In addition to political parallelism, this study considers another explanation for parties' willingness to copy issues from the media agenda, namely issue ownership. Since Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) argued that the agenda-setting power of the media is *conditional*, scholars have focused on the factors that explain when an issue is transferred from the media agenda to political agendas and when it is not (e.g., Thesen 2013; Van der Pas 2014; Walgrave, Soroka and Nuytemans 2008). One recurring explanation is the ownership of an issue: if the public clearly associates a party with a specific issue, it is seen as the 'issue owner'. Parties are most likely to respond to media

coverage of an issue that they 'own' (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegthart and Walgrave 2011). In this chapter, we also consider issue ownership but find no confirmatory evidence for the effect of ownership on the likelihood of adopting media issues. On the contrary, it seems that the owners have already prioritized their issues, leaving little for the media to add, at least for the two issues studied here.

By studying these two moderators, newspaper-party ties and issue ownership, this chapter contributes to the existing literature on the media's influence on parliament in four respects. First, while recent studies in the European context have elaborately considered factors that shape political agenda-setting patterns, characteristics of the media system and specifically political parallelism have received scant attention. Only one very recent study considered political parallelism as a moderator of political agenda-setting effects, but took a different, cross-national approach (Vliegthart and Mena Montes 2014). In the studies situated outside the US, the effects of different *types* of outlet –for example TV or print- are considered, but to our knowledge no study takes differences between outlets of the same kind into account (see Walgrave, Soroka and Nuytemans 2008). In this study, we contribute to the field by considering the agenda-setting effects of different newspapers separately and by explaining the varying strength of their agenda-setting power by the partisan ties of the newspapers. As such, this chapter combines the literatures on media-party parallelism and on agenda-setting.

Second, the role of partisan ties in newspapers' agenda-setting ability reveals how important parallelism remains in interactions between the media and politics. On the one hand, the theory of media logic implies that the interaction between the two is increasingly governed by the ground rules of the media, which follow from format requirements and news values that are shared between all newspapers or TV stations (Altheide and Snow 1979; Strömbäck 2008). Empirical studies have shown that, to some extent, signs of media logic are visible in the Netherlands (Brants and Van Kempen 2002; Brants and Van Praag 2006). Further, formal ties between a party and the media system, for example in terms of ownership, have long disappeared with *depillarization* of society (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Mancini 2012). On the other hand, in most northern European

---

countries, some form of political parallelism persists (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Van der Eijk 2000), and this study contributes further evidence on this subject.

Third, this chapter tests the hypothesis that issue owners react more strongly to the media agenda when their issue is at stake. Previous studies found support for this hypothesis in Belgium and Denmark using a general classification of all political issues (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegthart and Walgrave 2011), while the present study of two specific policy issues (immigration and EU integration) in the Netherlands does not find that the media more strongly set the agendas of issue owners. Possible explanations for this discrepancy are offered in the discussion.

Fourth and finally, the results of this chapter provide additional insights into the role and use of PQs in the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*. We know from previous research that many questions refer to media sources (Van Aelst and Vliegthart 2013), and the weekly Question Hour in the Netherlands is explicitly intended to allow MPs to confer on current events.<sup>30</sup> This chapter shows that the influence of the media on the topics of PQ is present in the very short term: the newspapers from the same day and the day before the Question Hour are clearly the most important with respect to the issue attention in PQs.

In the next section, the hypotheses are substantiated by first discussing media effects on the parliamentary agenda and then political parallelism and issue ownership. This is followed by a section on data and operationalizations, in which –among other things– the measures of parallelism and issue ownership are explained. Then, the statistical model is introduced, followed by the results and a discussion.

## Theory and hypotheses

PQs fulfill a number of functions in representative democracies, such as requesting information from ministers, pressing them for action, gaining personal publicity for the interrogator or building a reputation on specific matters (Russo and Wiberg 2010, 217-218). Martin (2011) distinguishes two broad motivations for asking parliamentary questions: holding the government accountable and developing a reputation among one's constituency. In line with the latter point,

---

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, [http://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/dossiers/rechten\\_van\\_kamerleden.jsp](http://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/dossiers/rechten_van_kamerleden.jsp)

questions are often considered an apt tool for parties to introduce issues onto the parliamentary agenda (Van Aelst and Vliegenthart 2013). While the agenda for plenary debates is difficult for a single party to influence directly, MPs are free to table questions on any topic in most parliaments and thus determine what issues are discussed.

Because of their symbolic nature, PQs represent the political agenda that is most responsive to the issue agenda in the media (Walgrave, Soroka and Nuytemans 2008). However, as is the case with other political agendas, the media's influence on the parliamentary agenda is conditional: occasionally the effect of issue attention in the media is substantial, and on other occasions there is no effect at all on what is discussed in PQs (Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011; Walgrave and Van Aelst 2006). The literature offers a number of factors to explain whether an issue is copied from the media, such as the frames used in the news coverage (Chapter III), whether the news is good or bad for the government (Thesen 2013), and what type of issue is being discussed (Walgrave, Soroka and Nuytemans 2008). Thus far, however, only one study has considered the question of whether the structural partisan ties of media outlets matter: Vliegenthart and Mena Montes (2014) found evidence that such partisan ties are important in Spain, where the opposition is only influenced by newspapers that are ideologically close, but not in the Netherlands. Their analysis, however, focused on the government and opposition as a whole and did not consider individual parties. To understand how structural ties between the media and politics might affect the impact of the media on the individual political parties' agendas, we next turn to the concept of political parallelism.

### Political parallelism

The concept of 'parallelism' was first introduced by Seymour-Ure in 1979 to describe the relationship between a medium and a party.<sup>31</sup> A newspaper parallels a party if it is 'closely linked to that party by organization, loyalty to party goals and the partisanship of its readers' (Seymour-Ure 1974, 173). However, as Hallin

---

<sup>31</sup> The concept is used, by Seymour-Ure and by Hallin and Mancini (2005), to denote parallelism between a single newspaper and party and that of the party/media system as a whole (Mancini 2012: 263). In the current chapter, we are interested in the first type of parallelism, between one party and a newspaper.

---

and Mancini (2005) and Mancini (2011) note, in most countries this type of press/party parallelism has almost entirely disappeared, and this is also the case in the Netherlands. The Netherlands were formerly the classic example of a 'pillarized society', in which different social subgroups each had their own institutions for nearly any aspect of social life, from political parties to football clubs, churches, newspapers and unions. This system eroded during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in tandem with the secularization of society, declining membership in political parties and the weakening of structured social cleavages (Brants and Van Kempen 2002; Brants and Van Praag 2006; Dalton 2004).

Although this type of press/party parallelism has faded, a different type of parallelism currently links parties and the media. Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe that in most European countries, the organizational connections between parties and newspapers have faded, but parallels between the two remain in terms of content, the affiliations of media personnel, and the partisanship of the audience. Specifically for the Netherlands, Van Kempen (2007) finds that there are still moderate levels of parallelism between the media and the party system.

There are at least two reasons to suspect that this form of alignment between parties and newspapers leads parties to adopt issues from their affiliated papers. First, the media are often regarded as a mouthpiece for sentiments of the public. The attention devoted to an issue in a newspaper would then imply that the readers consider it important, meaning that for a party with many of its voters among the readership, issue visibility in the newspaper can serve as an indication of their constituency's concerns. From this perspective, bringing the issue into parliament is a form of responsiveness to the voters of the party associated with the newspaper that suggested the issue. Second, media-party parallelism is reflected in the ideological leaning of the journalists and editors and in the content of the coverage. So, it is more likely that the content of the coverage suits the policy interests of parties that are linked to the newspaper, and therefore it is more beneficial for these parties to repeat the issue in parliament. The first hypothesis states the expectation following from these two considerations:

***H1 Parallel Newspaper Hypothesis:** Parties are more likely to ask PQs on an issue that was covered in a newspaper the party has a tie with than one that was covered in a paper they have no tie with, all else being equal.*

*Issue ownership*

In his influential article, Petrocik described issue ownership as a party's reputation for being better able to 'handle' a problem facing the country (Petrocik 1996, 826). The issue owner benefits electorally from additional attention being devoted to the issue, as this biases voters towards the party with the best reputation. Therefore, parties attempt to increase the salience of owned issues in campaigns such that these problems become prominent concerns among the electorate when casting their votes (Petrocik 1996; Budge and Farlie 1983). As it supports their efforts, issue owners are directly advantaged by media attention on their issues.

More recently, the concept has been argued to consist of two aspects: an associative dimension and a competence dimension (Van der Brug 2004; Walgrave, Lefevere and Nuytemans 2012). The competence dimension is largely determined by party preference (Stubager and Slothuus 2013; see also Walgrave, Lefevere and Tresch 2012), and as a result different sections of the electorate perceive –depending on their ideological position and party identification– different parties to be the owner of an issue. In the present chapter we are interested in ownership as a party characteristic, and not a voter-party property, so we focus on the associative dimension of issue ownership.

As issue owners expect to benefit from media attention on their issue, they are more likely to respond to such media attention by raising the issue even more themselves (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011). Green Pedersen and Stubager (2010) support this argument through an analysis of the Danish parliament and find that mass media attention on issues owned by the opposition leads the opposition parties to devote attention to those issues (except in the case of foreign affairs). Similarly, Vliegenthart and Walgrave (2011) find that in both the Belgian and Danish parliaments, opposition parties that have prioritized an issue in their previous election manifestos are more likely to respond to media attention on the issue than non-owners. Government parties are not more likely to adopt issues from the media agenda in Belgium, and in Denmark they are even *less* likely to respond to media attention. On average for both opposition and government parties, however, issue owners in both countries have a stronger response in parliament to media attention on an issue.

The two studies discussed above were conducted in countries that are similar in many respects to the Netherlands. Belgium, Denmark and the Netherlands are all relatively small EU countries with multiparty systems characterized by parties historically rooted in social cleavages, while all three have a democratic corporatist media system according to Hallin and Mancini's classification (2004). It is therefore reasonable to expect that issue ownership also facilitates the transfer of an issue from the media agenda to the owner's agenda in the Dutch parliament, which is under study here. This expectation is recorded in the second hypothesis:

***H2 Issue Ownership Hypothesis:** Issue owners are more likely to respond to media attention on an issue by asking parliamentary questions than other parties are, all else being equal.*

## Methods

The hypotheses are tested by following the attention on two issues over time in the Dutch parliament and in two Dutch newspapers. The issues are European integration and immigration. They are both non-economic issues with a potential for politicization; however, they vary in the amount of attention that they received, both in parliament and in the media. Immigration was on average quite high on the political and media agendas during the research period, while debate was relatively quiet around European integration, and over time both issues display considerable fluctuation in both media and political attention (see Chapter I).

This chapter seeks to explain when an issue travels from newspaper pages to the question hour in parliament; the dependent variable is therefore whether a party mentioned an issue in a parliamentary question during the weekly oral question hour. The weekly question hour is held every Tuesday and broadcast live on Dutch public television. Questions can be submitted to the chair of Parliament until two hours before the question hour begins. The chair makes a selection of the questions that will be asked, accounting for both relevance and urgency, while also ensuring that a wide variety of issues are addressed. Whether an issue was mentioned (coded with 0 and 1), is captured using previously developed search strings for immigration and the EU issues (Vliegthart 2007;

Vliegenthart et al. 2008; see Appendix A). These search strings were applied to the speeches during the parliamentary proceedings of the period from mid-1999 to December 2010 with the title ‘question hour’.<sup>32</sup> The results were disaggregated by party. As the question hour is held every Tuesday, this results in weekly scores for each of the parties represented in parliament over a period of twelve years.

Media attention is measured through two daily morning papers, the quality paper the *Volkscrant* and the more popular newspaper *De Telegraaf*. We chose newspapers over other media formats such as television or the internet because previous studies have shown that newspapers have the strongest agenda-setting effect (Walgrave, Soroka and Nuytemans 2008) and exhibit considerable variation in their (perceived) political leanings. In addition, as discussed in chapter I, a clear temporal separation between the dependent and independent variables can be made using newspapers, as they are published at a single, specific moment of the day. Attention devoted to the EU and immigration issues in these two papers is measured using the same search strings as were applied to the parliamentary data, using the newspaper database LexisNexis. *De Telegraaf* is only available in the LexisNexis database from 1999 onwards, so this is when we begin our analysis.<sup>33</sup> The approximate hit counts that result from the computerized content analysis using the search strings are converted into a visibility score using the same formula as in Chapter III:

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

where  $v(\text{issue})$  is the visibility of an issue in a given week,  $a$  denotes an article from all articles in that week,  $Hf_{\text{body}}$  is the number of mentions in the body of the article, while  $hf_{\text{head}}$  is the number of mentions in the headline (see Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart 2007, 80). Thus, mentions of the issue in the headline receive three times ( $2\log 8$ ) the weight of mentions in an article’s main text, and additional mentions in articles with numerous hits contribute less than the first few mentions do. We add the issue visibility in the Monday and Tuesday newspapers

---

<sup>32</sup> The data were provided by Maarten Marx and the PoliticalMashup project. Speeches by non-parliamentarians such as ministers were excluded.

<sup>33</sup> For a while, *De Telegraaf* had a Sunday paper, but it did not throughout the entire research period; for consistency, all Sunday papers were discarded from the analysis.

---

preceding the Question Hour to explain whether the issue was mentioned in a PQ (see Appendix G for the selection of this time span).

According to the first hypothesis, parties do not indiscriminately follow any newspaper, but rather copy issues from newspapers to which they are ideologically close. Parallelism can manifest itself in four ways: in the media content, the ownership of the media, the affiliations of the journalists and in the partisanship of the readers (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 28; Van Kempen 2007, 307). We measure the tie between a newspaper and party by examining the paper's readership and consider a party closer to a newspaper if the party enjoys more support among the readership than among the general electorate. Specifically, we use the Dutch National Election Studies to gauge the extent to which the voters of a particular party are overrepresented among the readers of the paper (Todosijevic, Aarts and Van der Kaap 2010). As in Chapter IV, to calculate the measure, the following formula is used:

$$Tie(part, paper) = \ln\left(\frac{O}{E} + 1\right)$$

where  $O$  is the observed frequency of voters for the party in the election study and  $E$  is the expected frequency if the voters were distributed independently across newspapers. The measure is computed using the election studies of 1994, 1998, 2002, 2003 and 2006, and each observation was coded with the most recent election study score (see Chapter IV).

The second hypothesis of this chapter concerns the issue ownership by parties. Specifically, we focus on the associative dimension of issue ownership rather than on the competence dimension (e.g., Van der Brug 2004; Walgrave, Lefevere and Tresch 2012). As Walgrave, Lefevere and Nuytemans (2009) argue, the association between an issue and a party derives from repetitive linking of the two in the media. To capture this, we measure associative ownership in newspapers by counting how many of the newspaper's articles on the issue also mention the name of the party. To do so, the same two daily newspapers, *De Telegraaf* and the *Volkskrant*, are employed. First, we selected the articles on the two issues, using the immigration and European integration search strings. For *De Telegraaf*, we were restricted by the availability of data in LexisNexis, which only starts in 1999, but for the *Volkskrant* we went back to 1995. This way, the issue ownership of the anti-immigration party CD can also be inspected. Second, we counted the number of the issue-related articles mentioning each party. To do

this, the party name search strings as used in Chapter III were employed (see Appendix A). Third, of both the total number of issue-articles and the number of articles mentioning the issue and a party, rolling averages of the past 52 weeks were derived, with decreasing weights for the 40<sup>th</sup> to 52<sup>nd</sup> week in the past. The reasoning was that ownership is a relatively stable attribute of a party but also must be allowed to change over time (see Petrocik 1996, 826 n2; Walgrave, Lefevere and Nuytemans 2009). In the fourth and final step, the ownership score for each week was calculated. Because large parties are mentioned much more frequently in the news than small parties, we must correct for party size (in terms of the number of parliamentarians), which was included as follows:

$$\text{Ownership} = \frac{\text{number of issue \& party articles} / \text{size of party}}{\text{total number of issue articles}} * 100\%$$

The averages of the resulting issue ownership scores for each party are displayed in Figure V.1. As the figure shows, the scores correspond to general understanding of Dutch politics, with, for example, the anti-immigration party PVV scoring high on the ownership of both immigration and European integration.

As a final point on operationalization, we control for the number of seats the party holds in parliament in the models, as larger parties are often granted more speech time in parliament and have more staff to help prepare questions.

#### Statistical model

The dependent variable reflects whether a party mentioned an issue during the weekly question hour, which we analyze separately for each of the two issues. As it is a dichotomous variable, we employ logistic regression. In addition, there are three methodological concerns that must be addressed. First, the behavior of parties is followed sequentially over weeks, so that there could be temporal dependence in the data. Beck, Katz and Tucker (1998) recommend using time dummies or splines for such dependence in dichotomous variables; however, Carter and Signorino (2010) recently demonstrated that including the duration (t) since the last event and t<sup>2</sup> and t<sup>3</sup> in the regression performs equally well as splines but is easier to interpret and is superior to time dummies. Consequently, in

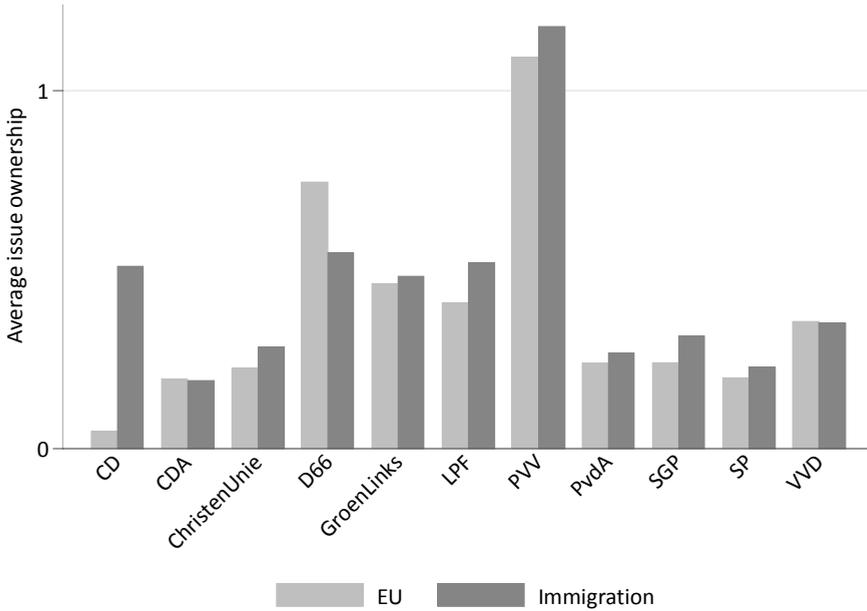


FIGURE V.1. Mean issue ownership of the EU and immigration issues, 1995-2010.

preparation for the main analyses, logistic regressions including only these duration variables were conducted, and the significant effects were retained in the main analyses. None were needed for the EU, while for immigration,  $t$  and  $t^2$  were necessary.

Second, the observations are clustered by week: there are multiple observations in each week, one for each party. To deal with this, cluster-corrected (sandwich) standard errors are estimated. Third, the observations are also clustered by party. One option to address this is to include party fixed effects (party dummies), and another is to estimate a multilevel model with a random intercept for parties. The latter is an attractive option; however the higher levels should have at least approximately 20 observations (Hox 2010, 233-4), and the number of parties is much lower than that. Therefore, we only estimate this type of model as a robustness check in Appendix H. The option of party fixed effects has the drawback that part of what we wish to explain, i.e., differences between parties in their issue attention in parliamentary questions, is effectively eliminated from the data through the use of the party dummies. Therefore, we opt for an analysis without party dummies (so only correcting for the clustering in weeks) but include the same analyses *with* party fixed effects in Appendix H.

This chapter is about the contingency of the parliamentary agenda-setting power of newspapers, and the hypotheses as such demand interaction effects. To determine whether parties only respond to reporting in newspapers that they are close to, we included an interaction term between the party-paper tie and issue visibility in the newspaper. To capture whether issue adoption from the media is stronger or weaker for owned issues, we included an interaction between issue ownership and issue visibility in the newspaper. Ultimately, the following model is estimated for each of the two issues (with the component in parentheses only pertaining to the immigration issue):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{logit}(\hat{y}_{it}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{visibility Telegraaf}_t + \beta_2 \text{visibility Volkskrant}_t \\ & + \beta_3 \text{issue owners}/ip_{it} + \beta_4 \text{tie to Telegraaf}_{it} \\ & + \beta_5 \text{tie to Volkskrant}_{it} + \beta_6 \text{issue owners}/ip_{it} \\ & * \text{tie to Telegraaf}_{it} + \beta_7 \text{issue owners}/ip_{it} * \text{tie to Volkskrant}_{it} \\ & + \beta_8 \text{party size}_{it} \quad (+ \beta_9 \text{duration}_{it} + \beta_{10} \text{duration}_{it}^2) \end{aligned}$$

where  $i$  is the index of parties and  $t$  are weeks. We standardize all the variables that are included in the interactions to ensure that the main effects are easier to interpret. To grasp the effects of the interactions and main effects, we include predicted probability graphs (see Brambor, Clark and Golder 2005).

## Results

The first hypothesis of this chapter contends that parties are more likely to copy the issue agenda of a newspaper that they have ties with in terms of readership. It is known that parliamentarians often directly take inspiration from media coverage in their parliamentary questions and frequently refer explicitly to media items. So before we model when parties copy the issues of immigration and European integration, we examine whether parties are more likely to cite a newspaper that their voters read in their parliamentary questions. To do so, we use all parliamentary questions from 1995 to 2010 (i.e., not just immigration and EU questions) and for each party take the percentage in which an explicit reference to De Telegraaf or the Volkskrant was made. The relationship with newspaper ties is depicted in Figure V.2.

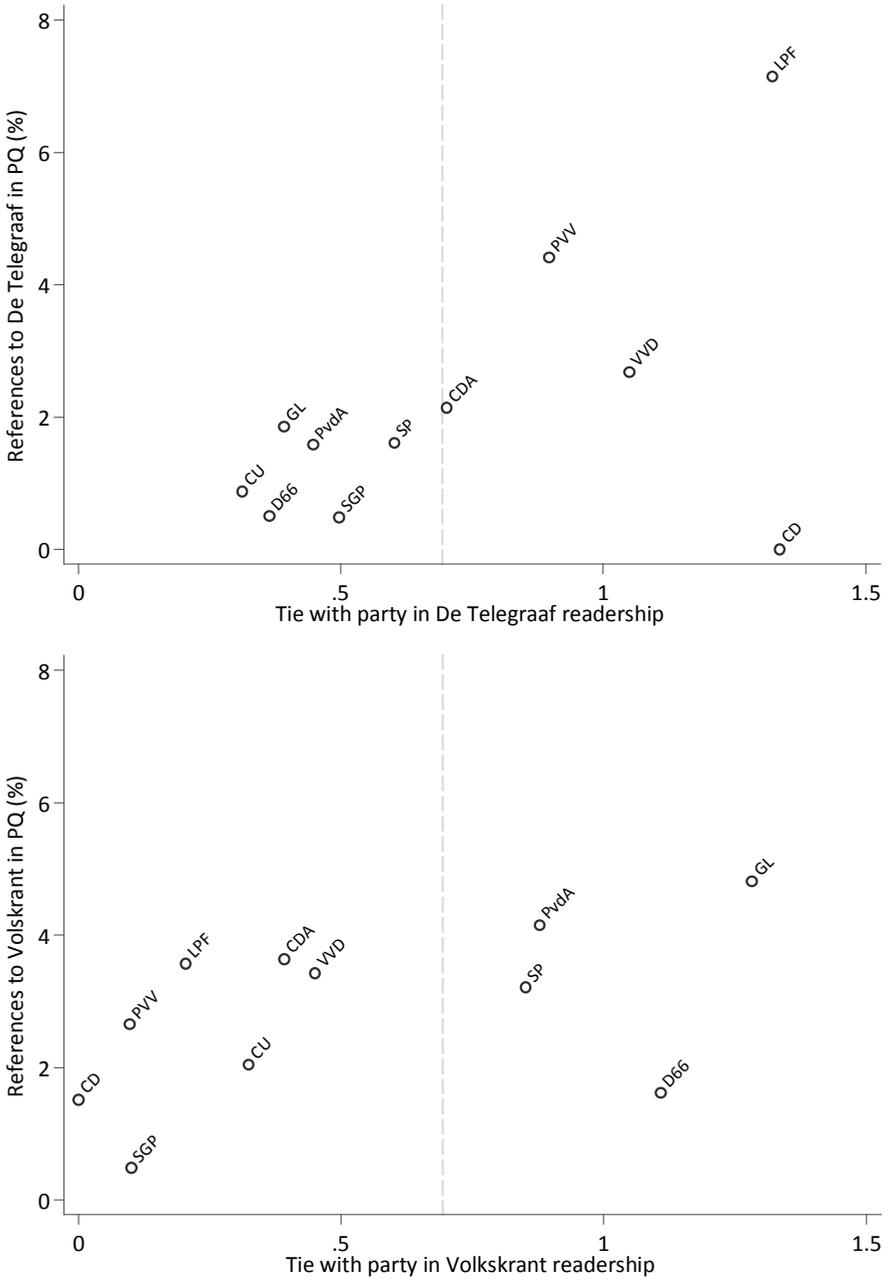


FIGURE V.2. References to newspapers in all PQs and tie between party and newspaper, 1995-2010.

Note: The dashed line indicates the turning point from underrepresentation of the party's voters to overrepresentation.

The figure displays a positive relationship between references to a newspaper and the number of party voters among its readership. For both De Telegraaf ( $r=.52$ ,  $p=.10$ ) and the Volkskrant ( $r=.51$ ,  $p=.11$ ), there is a strong -though insignificant- correlation. A notable outlier is the CD, the voters of which tend to read De Telegraaf, but which almost never responds to the newspaper's issue agenda. Then again, this is not very surprising, given the CD's ostracized position and strained relationship with the media (Van Spanje and Van der Brug 2007). In general, there is a clear pattern of parties mentioning the newspapers they have ties with more often. However, it nevertheless might be the case that parties mention the name of a linked newspaper, while they allow their agendas to be set by any newspaper. To study when attention is copied, with or without explicitly mentioning the newspaper, we turn to the results on the issue attention on the EU and immigration issues, presented in Table V.1.<sup>34</sup>

The first part of the table presents the main effects, which, as the variables in the interactions are all standardized, reflect the effect of a variable if the other variable in the interaction is at the mean (zero). Thus, the fact that the visibility in De Telegraaf of both the EU and immigration is positive and significant means that for parties with an average tie to De Telegraaf and average issue ownership, issue attention in De Telegraaf is an incentive to ask a parliamentary question on the issue. The main effect of issue attention in the Volkskrant, by contrast, is not significant, meaning that for parties with an average tie to this paper and average issue ownership, attention to the EU or immigration in the Volkskrant does not tempt them to ask PQs on these issues. The main effect of the tie between parties and both newspapers is significant, which means that if these newspapers devote an average amount of attention to the issues, tied parties respond with a greater increase in attention than parties without these ties. The main effect of EU ownership is not significant, but ownership of the immigration issue is, meaning that parties that are associated with immigration in the media also mention it more often in parliament. This difference corresponds to the notion that the immigration issue is more politicized and has multiple parties that clearly attempt to distinguish themselves on that issue.

---

<sup>34</sup> The number of observations differs for each model for a two reasons. First, for De Telegraaf, data are only available beginning in 1999, while for the Volkskrant they are available from 1995. Second, fewer observations are available for the immigration models, as the inclusion of duration dummies leads to missing observations in the beginning of the research period.

---

TABLE V.1. Explaining issue mentions in PQs in the Netherlands, 1999-2010.

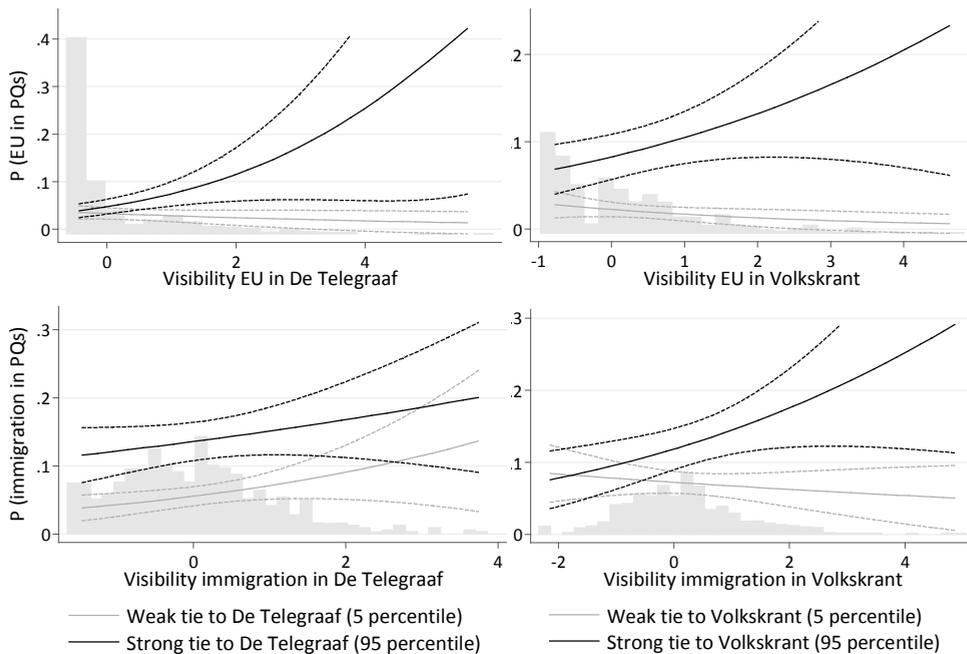
	PQs on the EU		PQs on immigration	
<b>Main effects</b>				
Issue visibility in De Telegraaf	0.221*	(0.094)	0.176*	(0.079)
Issue visibility in Volkskrant	-0.054	(0.129)	0.042	(0.077)
Tie with De Telegraaf	0.194†	(0.108)	0.370***	(0.071)
Tie with Volkskrant	0.485***	(0.090)	0.199***	(0.059)
Issue ownership	-0.118	(0.080)	0.133**	(0.043)
<b>Interactions</b>				
Issue visibility in De Telegraaf x Tie with De Telegraaf ( <b>H1</b> )	0.249**	(0.089)	-0.054	(0.058)
Issue visibility in Volkskrant x Tie with Volkskrant ( <b>H1</b> )	0.181*	(0.080)	0.101*	(0.042)
Issue visibility in De Telegraaf x Issue ownership ( <b>H2</b> )	0.175**	(0.060)	-0.029	(0.041)
Issue visibility in Volkskrant x Issue ownership ( <b>H2</b> )	-0.092	(0.086)	0.012	(0.049)
<b>Controls</b>				
Party size	0.004	(0.005)	0.005	(0.003)
Time since last PQ			-0.023**	(0.007)
Time since last PQ 2			0.000*	(0.000)
Constant	-3.238***	(0.155)	-1.979***	(0.127)
<b>N</b>	4494		4621	
<b>McFadden's pseudo R2</b>	0.03		0.05	
<b>Log likelihood</b>	-826.053		-1522.835	

Note: Logistic regression coefficients with clustered standard errors in parentheses. Issue visibility in both papers, issue ownership, and the newspaper-party tie variables are all standardized. †p<.10 \*p<.05; \*\*p<.01; \*\*\* p<.001 (two-tailed).

The first hypothesis, that parties are more likely to follow the media attention of the newspapers their voters read, is tested in the first two interactions. The interaction is positive and significant in three out of the four cases: for the EU issue in De Telegraaf and for both immigration and European integration in the Volkskrant. Therefore, attention devoted to the EU in De Telegraaf and to the EU and immigration in the Volkskrant has a stronger impact on parliamentarians of parties that are linked to the newspaper that stresses the issue. Regarding the attention devoted to the immigration issue in De Telegraaf,

the results are not as expected, as the interaction is not significant. In summary, we find support for the hypothesis in three out of four cases.

So what is the overall effect of these interactions on the questioning behavior of parties? Figure V.3 plots the predicted probabilities of a party asking questions on the EU and immigration, based on the models presented above. The upper left panel depicts the probability that the EU is mentioned in a party's PQ, depending on how much attention De Telegraaf devoted to the EU and whether the voters of the party are over- or underrepresented in the readership of De Telegraaf. If De Telegraaf pays little attention to the issue –represented on the left side of the graph- both parties with and without a tie to De Telegraaf in terms of readers have a low probability of asking a question regarding European integration, approximately a 0.04 chance. However, if attention to the issue in De Telegraaf increases, the probability of mentioning the issue goes up for parties with a link to De Telegraaf, up to approximately 0.4 if there is much attention



**FIGURE V.2.** Predicted probability of issue mention in PQs, depending on visibility and paper-party tie.

*Note:* Predicted probabilities based on models in Table V.1. The histograms display how often these (standardized) values of issue visibility occur in the dataset; the dashed lines indicate the 95% confidence intervals.

devoted to the EU, while for unaffiliated parties, the probability remains low. The issue of the EU in the Volkskrant (upper right panel) and of immigration in the Volkskrant (lower right) present similar pictures: issue attention in the newspaper leads to a greater likelihood of the party asking questions on the topic, but only for affiliated parties. Finally, the lower left panel depicts the discordant case, in which the hypothesis does not hold. It indicates that as the visibility of immigration in De Telegraaf increases, allied parties stress the issue more (though not significantly), but so do parties that have no tie with De Telegraaf.

We now turn to the evidence on hypothesis two, also presented in Table V.1. Here, three out of the four interactions are *not* significant. Issue owners do not seem to react more strongly to EU visibility in the Volkskrant or to immigration in either newspaper. In two instances, the interaction is even negative, though not significant. Only the EU issue in De Telegraaf conforms to the expectation: EU issue owners are more likely to respond to coverage on the

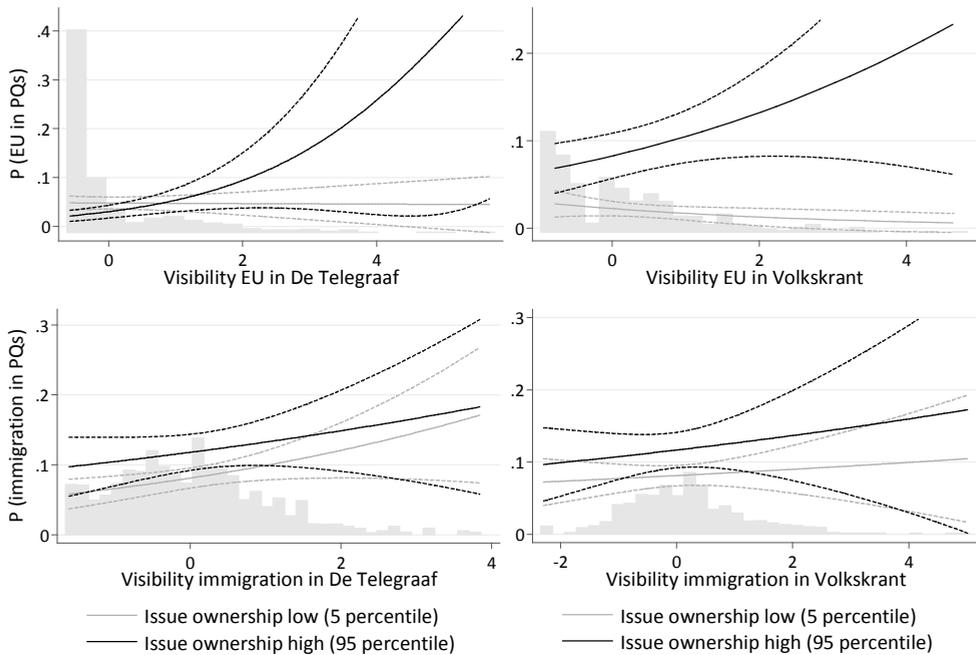


FIGURE V.3. Predicted probability of issue mention in PQ, depending on visibility and issue ownership.

Note: Predicted probabilities based on models in Table V.1. The histograms display how often these (standardized) values of issue visibility occur in the dataset; the dashed lines indicate the 95% confidence intervals.

issue in De Telegraaf. Again, the resulting predicted probabilities are plotted, in Figure V.3. Here, we observe that even regarding EU ownership and EU reporting in De Telegraaf, the results are not convincing. For an issue owner, the predicted probability does rise as attention to the issue in De Telegraaf goes up, but the likelihood of mentioning the issue is not significantly higher than that of non-owners. Overall, we must conclude that there is no supporting evidence for the issue ownership hypothesis. In Appendix I additional analyses with alternative operationalizations of ownership can be found that lead to the same conclusion.

## Conclusion

In the age of *mediatization*, political actors and the media increasingly depend on, anticipate, and follow one another (Strömback 2008; Van Aelst and Vliegenthart 2013). Moreover, the notion of *media logic* in politics implies that ‘the power to define who and what is politically relevant lies firmly with the media’ (Brants and Van Praag 2006, 30). Accordingly, parties need to conform to the rules and format requirements of the media, which are moving towards more consumer-centered journalism. This chapter does not directly contradict this understanding of media logic but argues that the power of the media over politics is also still structured along ideological lines between parties and media outlets. The empirical analyses of Dutch parliamentarians’ oral questions on the issues of immigration and European integration revealed that parties are clearly more inclined to follow the agendas of newspapers that their voters read. Thus, political parallelism structures the political agenda-setting power of the newspapers. This might be a consequence of strategic considerations on the part of political parties: following the newspapers that their potential voters read shows responsiveness and helps them to obtain a favorable image among their constituency.

There are of course limitations to the conclusions that can be drawn from the present study. First, we studied political parallelism in a single country, and it is therefore uncertain whether the hypothesis also holds for other European countries. It is reasonable to suspect that similar patterns hold in other democratic corporatist countries, but this remains to be confirmed by future research. Additionally, in this study two issues were followed separately over time, and consequently an important question is whether the results can be generalized to

---

other issues, or whether they are particular to these two. Both issues themselves display comparable effect sizes despite being at very different stages of politicization, which suggests that these effects may be quite robust. However, it is conceivable that for certain issues, specific papers have a very strong reputation –for example a financial daily on financial issues- meaning that no party can ignore the coverage of that paper on that issue (see e.g., Vliegthart and Mena Montes 2014 on the economic issue). As for the choice to study political parallelism in agenda-setting, this can arguably be seen as the ‘least-likely’ area to exhibit ties between parties and the media, as for example the editorial section would be a more likely venue to detect the partisan slant of a newspaper (Van Kempen 2007, 305). Thus it is telling that even in the transfer of issue attention from one agenda to the other, ties between parties and papers matter.

An important question that follows from these findings is whether such parallelism between newspapers and parliamentary groups is beneficial or detrimental for a representative democracy. On the one hand, it could be regarded as a sign that parliamentarians are responsive to their constituencies, as MPs choose to listen specifically to the newspapers for which their electorate is overrepresented in the readership. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as signifying that parties may excessively rely on the issues that happen to be discussed in certain newspapers. While the answer to this question can in part only follow from a normative discussion, further research into the causal mechanism underlying parallelism in agenda-setting should also provide part of the answer. Do parties follow particular papers because the content of the coverage more closely suits their platform? In that case, it is possible that both the stronger agenda-setting effect of a newspaper on a party and the overrepresentation of the party's voters among the readers are both consequences of the newspaper's content. Alternatively, is it the case that parties know what newspapers their voters read and wish to provide their constituents a service by devoting attention to their issues? In that case, the media content is not the underlying cause, but merely a mediating factor. Further alternative causal scenarios are conceivable, but it is clear that an interesting point for further study is what precise aspects of newspaper motivate parties to adopt the attention devoted to an issue.

Finally, this study also investigated the role of issue ownership as a contingent factor in the relationship between attention in the media and attention in parliament and –surprisingly– found that issue owners are *not* more likely to ask parliamentary questions if their topic has been covered in the media. Appendix I demonstrates that this holds for dynamic and time-invariant measures of issue ownership, as well as media-based and parliament-based ownership. This is inconsistent with prior studies that found such an effect for opposition parties in Denmark and in Belgium (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011). An obvious difference with these studies is the countries under scrutiny. However, this is not truly an *explanation* for why the results diverge. As discussed above, this chapter only looks at two issues, while the other research on ownership takes the entire political agenda into account. The immigration issue in particular had very clear owners in the Netherlands during the period under study, so it is possible that there is a ceiling effect: because the immigration issue owners already frequently stress the issue in parliament, they are not concerned by whether the media also devote attention to it. However, this still does not explain why no effect was also found for the EU issue. Thesen (2013) offers a more sophisticated explanation for how issue ownership operates in agenda-setting: he expects that opposition parties that are owners respond to *negative* news in order to pressure the government. Unfortunately, in the present study, we did not consider negativity in the news, so we cannot check this empirically, but it also appears that this is not the explanation for the unexpected findings. The issue owners of immigration are generally opposition parties, so they should respond to negative news, and we know from other research that immigration was discussed quite negatively in Dutch news during this period (e.g., Van Klingeren 2014). Why issue owners are not more susceptible to media attention in their PQs on immigration and the EU in the Netherlands, therefore, remains to be explained. A tentative explanation is that oral questions are highly constrained in number, and institutional gatekeeping processes limit parties’ opportunities to respond to media coverage on owned issues: questions that address such matters might be considered too predictable and thus not make it into parliament. Whether this is the case is a subject for future research.

---