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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?

van der Pas, D.J.

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Chapter VI

Conclusion

Introduction

Politicians and journalists in modern democracies are entwined in a relationship of mutual dependence and reciprocal effects. How and to what extent they influence each other is a topic that has interested many commentators and motivated a vast body of scholarly work, both on the power of the media over politics as well as on the influence of politicians and parties on the debate in the media. Issues and agendas lie at the heart of politics, so a pertinent question in the broader debate on the power relations between media and politics is to what extent both types of actor can influence the agenda of the other. Influence over either agenda is important, as a political system can only address a subset of all potential policy issues, and similarly there is room for only a limited number of issues in the public debate in the media. From the existing work on the European and American contexts, we know that the influence on either agenda is neither automatic nor categorical, but rather is *conditional*. As a consequence, the question is not so much *whether* the political agenda sets the media agenda and vice versa

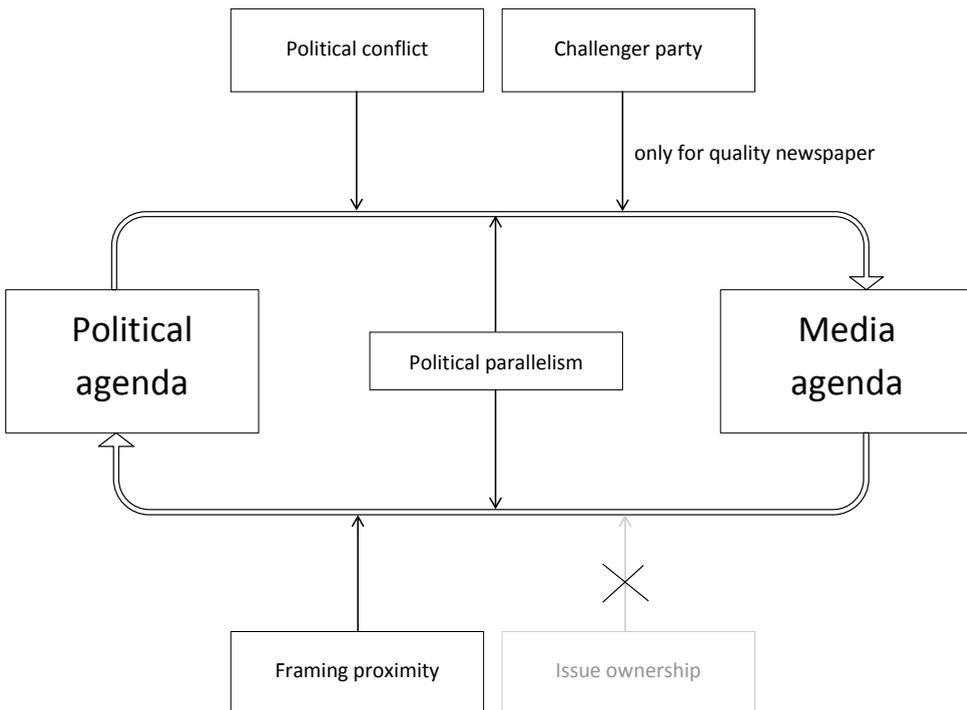


FIGURE VI.1. Summary of findings.

but *under what conditions* agenda-setting effects occur and when they do not. This dissertation contributes to the literature by addressing this question.

Main findings

Effects on the whole cycle

What are the main findings on these conditional agenda-setting effects between politics and the media? The main hypotheses and results are summarized graphically in Figure VI.1. Let me first discuss political parallelism, which is placed at the core of the model. Political parallelism refers to the linkages between specific newspapers and parties in terms of ideology, personal contacts and staff, or readership. Over the past half century, the relationship between the political realm and the mass media has changed drastically in Western Europe. While in the first half of the 20th century, political actors had the primacy in the relationship with the media, and newspapers were often directly owned by political parties, in the second half of that century, the mass media became more independent, professionalized, and came to be regarded as a force influencing politics, rather than vice versa. In this process, the links between media elites and political elites weakened, but political parallelism did not disappear entirely. Against this historical backdrop, chapters IV and V inspected whether parallel ties between parties and newspapers still influence the extent to which issues are adopted from one realm to the other and found that indeed parties adopt issues from parallel newspapers (i.e. political parallelism is a significant moderator), while these papers only tend to discuss issues contained in the parliamentary questions of parallel parties (i.e. the main effect of salience is only significant for parallel parties). It is particularly interesting that political parallelism affects agenda-setting in both directions, as this illustrates how entwined and mutually dependent politicians and journalists are. Both types of actor benefit from the mutual linkage: politicians because they are granted space for the dissemination of their issues in the media and journalists because their reports are legitimized by the adoption of parliamentarians. As the linkages are beneficial to both, they are likely to remain intact, and political parallelism will most likely continue to matter in the future.

Media agenda-setting by political actors

The upper half of Figure VI.1 depicts the factors, other than political parallelism, that were hypothesized to facilitate an issue becoming the subject of media attention. Political actors purposefully and unintentionally convey issue priorities and issue framings, and depending on their journalistic interests, the media may or may not respond with coverage of the issues. In other words, whether the political agenda sets the media agenda depends on both the messages political actors provide and the interests of the journalists covering them. From this starting point, I hypothesized that political conflict and the challenger status of political parties would ease the issue transfer from the political to the media agenda.

Conflict is a quintessential part of politics. Parties compete with one another over which issues should be addressed, which policy solutions are optimal for these issues and how the issues should be understood. In other words, they fight through selectively emphasizing issues, taking different positions and by framing issues in different ways. Chapter II combined these modes of party competition by distinguishing two types of conflict: positional and discursive, under the expectation that both types would enhance the effect of issue salience on media attention on an issue, due to the news value of conflict. In other words, the media are more likely to adopt an issue parties are discussing if the latter do so confrontationally. The results in this chapter were conclusive regarding discursive conflict: the more parties stress different frames, or different understandings of an issue, the more likely the media are to echo the attention devoted to the issue. Positional conflict was not a significant moderator. However, the results demonstrated that this type of conflict does matter, but in a small way: if parties are paying a *lot* of attention to an issue, then positional conflict gives rise to additional media coverage.

The reason that journalists respond to discursive conflict is the *news value* the conflict carries. However, journalists are not exclusively driven by news values; they are also guided by their normative understandings of how the profession should be carried out, and specifically by the *news norm* of watchdog journalism. Watchdog journalism implies that the media monitor the actions of the government and attempt to hold those in power accountable. Because challenger parties, i.e., parties that have never been in government, are equally

keen on putting pressure on the government, it is more interesting from the perspective of watchdog journalism to report on the parliamentary questions of challenger parties. In Chapter IV, I tested whether this is the case and found that it holds, but only for one of the two newspapers I studied. The *Volkskrant* reports on the parliamentary questions of challenger parties to a greater extent, but *De Telegraaf* does not. As the *Volkskrant* is generally considered a quality paper and *De Telegraaf* more tabloid-like, an explanation could be that the watchdog norm is more important in quality paper newsrooms.

In summary, the analyses in this dissertation provide examples of three selection criteria employed by journalists: news values, news norms and partisan ties. Both the news value of conflict and the news norm of watchdog journalism result in greater media agenda-setting power for challenger parties. The watchdog news norm does so directly, as (at least quality newspaper) journalists devote greater attention to the issues advanced by challenger parties, and the news norm of conflict does so more indirectly, as challenger parties are typically the parties that benefit most from an expansion of conflict. This overall agenda-setting advantage for challengers is striking, as they are generally at a disadvantage and receive less media attention than mainstream parties, particularly those in office. Thus, through the issue choice in their agendas, it seems that the media are *not* simply amplifying existing power inequalities.

Political agenda-setting by the media

The lower half of Figure VI.1 displays the conditioning factors of the media's power over the political agenda that are examined in this dissertation. As discussed, I hypothesized and found that parties' agendas in parliament are more influenced by coverage in parallel newspapers, specifically newspapers that are read by their voters. In addition, I expected that issue owners are more likely to copy an issue from the media agenda and that parties are more likely to adopt issues from the media when the framing is in their advantage. Overall, the hypotheses were that parties are guided by *what* is being discussed (i.e., whether they own the issue) and the *way* it is discussed (i.e., whether it is framed in their terms).

Regarding issue ownership, the results differed substantially from expectations. Two previous studies (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010;

Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011) found that in Denmark and in Belgium, opposition MPs were more responsive to the media agenda when it concerned an issue that they owned. Thesen (2013) found a similar but weak effect of issue ownership for opposition parties in Denmark and found that if the news is sufficiently positive in tone, government parties also respond more to owned issues. By contrast, I detected no such issue ownership effect in the case of the Netherlands in chapter V, and if anything, issue owners seem to be less affected by media reporting on their issues, at least for the two issues under study here, immigration and European integration. A likely explanation is that the owners of these two issues already devote such frequent attention to these issues that they are equally likely to discuss them after the media do so, while for non-owners, media coverage provides an additional incentive to place the issue on the agenda.

Finally, I hypothesized that parties choose to respond to issues on the media agenda if the way the issue is discussed in the media is to their liking. Specifically, I argued that, as an important part of the political struggle is fought over the way issues are framed, parties ignore coverage that is framed in their competitors' terms and respond by including an issue in parliamentary questions if the framing in the media is similar to their own. Thus, a similarity in the dominant framing in the media to that of the party moderates the effect of issue visibility in the media. I found that this is indeed the case for the issue of European integration in Sweden, while for the immigration issue in the Netherlands, a slightly different, but largely similar, pattern was found: framing proximity did not moderate the effect of issue attention in the media, but in itself already lead to heightened prioritization of the issues in parliament, possibly because media attention to this issue was high in the Netherlands throughout the period under study. As expected, for the issues to which the media hardly paid any attention, that is European integration in the Netherlands and immigration in Sweden, framing proximity had no effect. In summary, an issue on the media agenda is transferred to the parliamentary agenda if a party benefits from the way the issue is discussed (framing proximity) and if it is discussed by an allied news source (political parallelism), while issue owners were not more prone to react to the media discussing their issue.

Three main conclusions

What do these results tell us more broadly about the interaction between media and parties? In the introduction I outlined three overarching conclusions that arise from this dissertation, and I briefly return to these before addressing the contributions to specific literatures. First, this dissertation introduces framing into the literature on agenda-setting between the media and politics in both directions. Framing is a crucial part of party and issue competition, as different ways of defining and understanding an issue put different parties at an advantage, and therefore part of the struggle fought between parties is over the framing of issues. Because the fight over frames is so important for parties, it has implications for the signals parties send to the media and for what messages from the media parties are willing to pick up in parliament, and as such framing affects agenda-setting between media and politics.

Second, the research in this dissertation emphasizes that although the media can influence politics, they are not a unitary, unstoppable force as is sometimes suggested (see Brants et al. 2010; Stromback 2011; Walgrave 2008; cf. Mazzoleni and Schultz 247-249). As recent agenda-setting studies note (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Thesen 2013), political actors are often the ones who decide whether to use input provided by the media, and this active role of parties and politicians in filtering media attention is therefore not to be dismissed. Chapter III underlines the impact of strategic considerations of parties by showing that parties are more likely to respond to media attention if their framing is used. While this illustrates the active part of parties, chapter V demonstrates that the media are not one homogenous influence on politics (cf. Manin 1997, 228-229). Instead, parties have parallel bonds with certain newspapers and their agenda is affected by parallel papers, and not significantly by other newspapers. Thus, rather than *the* media having power over politics, the results in that chapter show that *some* media influence *some* parties.

Third, this dissertation shows that the media do not always work as a mirror reflecting existing power structures, but sometimes favor those with formally less power, such as challengers or allied parties. Bennett's (1990) famous 'indexing hypothesis' states that the range of views expressed in the media is indexed on the debate among political elites, and particularly government. This implies that the voices with more formal political power get heard more in the

public debate in the media. Indeed, many studies have documented an ‘incumbency bonus’ in the news, showing that government officials are featured more prominently in the news than their opposition or parliamentary colleagues. Though the findings in this dissertation do not contradict these studies, they counterbalance them somewhat by uncovering a previously neglected advantage that formally less powerful political actors enjoy, namely more media agenda-setting power. Although government politicians appear more in the media themselves, the parliamentary questions of challenger parties have more influence on which *issues* are being discussed in newspapers (at least in the quality press, see Chapter IV), which gives them a powerful weapon in issue competition. In addition, the fact that journalists are not merely echoing the formal power distribution is also evident in the fact that not all newspapers follow the same parties, but that each prefers to follow their parallel parties first and foremost.

Contributions to the literature

Political agenda-setting by the media

The results in this dissertation speak to the literatures political agenda-setting, media agenda-setting, party competition and issue competition, framing and media systems. Regarding the literature on political agenda-setting by the media, the first and the second conclusions I just mentioned are directly of relevance. Both the importance of framing and that of parties’ tactical considerations are in line with arguments put forth in recent scholarly work. Green-Pedersen and Stubager (2011), Thesen (2013) and Vliegthart and Walgrave (2011) call attention to the active role of parties, and the work in this dissertation adds further empirical evidence to this line. In addition, Thesen (2013) emphasizes that the content of news should be taken into account, so not just *whether* an issue is discussed but also the *way* in which, and the findings in this dissertation on framing provide a clear example hereof.

Besides extending this recent line of inquiry, this dissertation is also one of the first to point to the media system content in which agenda-setting takes place. To my knowledge, only one recent study, that of Vliegthart and Mena Montes (2014), also considers political parallelism in agenda-setting. These

authors compare political agenda-setting in the different media systems of Spain and the Netherlands by taking into account to which newspaper the opposition or the government is linked. Chapter V further elaborates our understanding of political parallelism in agenda-setting by considering the ties to newspapers for each individual party, rather than a whole opposition or government bloc, and by using a continuous and empirical measure of parallelism. This way, the results show that not all media have an equal bearing on all parties, or in other words also *who* discusses an issue matters.

Lastly, this research adds further empirical evidence on the role of issue ownership in political agenda-setting, and demonstrates that this explanation has its limitations. Previous studies on the parliamentary agenda of opposition parties in Belgium and Denmark found that issue owners are more prone to react to media attention for owned issues, however, chapter V shows that this explanation does not hold for immigration and EU issue owners in the Netherlands.

Media agenda-setting literature

Regarding media agenda-setting by political actors, Chapter I noted that our knowledge is much more limited than that on agenda-setting effects in the other direction. There is work on the prominence and visibility of politicians in the media (e.g. Tresch 2009; Hopmann, De Vreese and Albæk 2011), or the visibility of some of their activity such as parliamentary questions (Van Alest and Vliegthart 2013), and there is a substantial body of literature on political influence over the media agenda during campaigns (Brandenburg 2002; Lancendorfer and Lee 2010; Hopmann et al. 2012), but the research on the influence of policy agendas on the media agenda in non-election times is still very limited, especially outside the United States (see Vliegthart 2007 on the Netherlands; and Bartels 1996; Wood and Peake 1998; Edwards and Wood 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha and Peake 2004 on the US). By consequence, we know little about when parties are successful in setting the media agenda and when they fail in their attempts during routine times. As I mentioned earlier, this gap in our knowledge is striking because electoral preferences are formed early and gradually during the election cycle (Jennings and Wlezien 2013), and it is very important for political parties to garner attention for their topics in the wider

public debate in the media. A main addition this dissertation delivers to this field, therefore, is that it provides insight into media agenda-setting by political actors during routine times. This gives us information about how media and parties interact most of the time, outside the specific context of electoral campaigns, but it also broadens the scope to include the effects of routine time political activities such as parliamentary questions, rather than press releases which are typically studied in campaign time agenda-setting studies. Furthermore, by studying political influence over the media agenda outside the US in the multiparty system of the Netherlands, effects of this more complex political context come into focus. Chapter IV distinguishes between two types of opposition parties, mainstream opposition and challenger parties, and showed the journalists attribute unequal news value to the activity of government, mainstream opposition and challenger parties. Besides to these elements of the political context, this study also draws attention to the media system context, by showing how a feature of democratic corporatist media systems, that is political parallelism, moderates political parties' influence over the agenda in the media.

Party and issue competition, framing and media systems literatures

There are also two specific contributions to the literature on party and issue competition that are worth mentioning. The first is that in Chapter II, two forms of political conflict were conceptualized, namely discursive conflict and positional conflict. The former is seen as a conflict over the way issues are to be understood, and the latter as conflict over which policy solutions are most suited to address an issue. Furthermore, both were hypothesized to interact with issue salience, and as such the three ways in which parties are often thought to compete with each other, that is through salience, positions and framing, were combined into one conceptual model. The present research looks at the effects of these types of conflict on media reporting, but the conceptual model can be usefully applied more generally to study the competition between parties.

Second, the findings add to our understanding of the extent to which parties 'talk past each other'. Given that political parties attempt to make the most out of their relative strengths, many scholars have noted that they tend to discuss different issues rather than engage in dialogue with each other over policy solutions for the same issues (e.g., Budge and Farlie 1983; Petrocik 1996; Riker

1996). Yet, scholars have also noted that both types of competition between parties, that is issue competition through selectively emphasizing advantageous issues, and positional competition through the confrontation of policy positions, are not entirely mutually exclusive and in fact co-exist (Green Pedersen 2007). This dissertation draws attention to an additional way in which parties talk past each other. Besides that parties –at least to some extent- stress different issues from each other in one campaign, they also choose different moments to discuss the same issues during routine times. This is a consequence of the finding that parties emphasize issues in parliament when the media framing is right, because as parties have different frame preferences they will choose different moments to bring up an issue.

The results are also of interest to scholars in the field of framing research. In this field, most of the work has been conducted in lab-settings where subjects of experiments are exposed to a single frame at a time. While such an experimental se-up offers a great advantage in terms of internal validity, a call has been made to boost the external validity by looking beyond the lab-setting, as well as to consider more realistic situations of multiple, competing frames (Chong and Druckman 2007; Sniderman and Theriault 2004). This research answers to that call by demonstrating the importance of framing in a real world setting, and by looking at multiple frames at the same time through framing polarization (Chapter II) and framing proximity (Chapter III). Furthermore, most of the research on framing focusses on public opinion, while this dissertation shows that framing also has consequences for the behavior of political and media actors.

In addition, this research contributes to the literature on media systems, by showing for the case of the Netherlands how political parallelism pervades agenda-setting between media and parliament. Further, a measure of political parallelism between individual newspapers and political parties is developed in the chapters IV and V, and this measure can be extended to other media, such as TV as well. Moreover, it can readily be applied to data of other countries, and thus facilitate a systematic comparison between interactions between politics and media in different media systems, which is one of the prime interests of media system scholars.

Finally, this dissertation makes a number of methodological contributions that I would briefly like to highlight, as they can be of use in future studies. As

just mentioned, a measure for political parallelism was developed. Furthermore, a measure for framing distance was introduced, and the Esteban and Ray (1994) polarization measure was applied to frames and policy positions to operationalize discursive and positional conflict. Finally, dynamic operationalizations for issue ownership in media and in parliament were presented.

Further research

Generalizability

Given these findings, what are the interesting directions for future research on the mutual and conditional relationships between the media and political agendas? The first and obvious point that must be made here is that expanding the empirical range to include additional countries, issues and media outlets would contribute to the generalizability of the findings. Studying additional countries would be especially relevant regarding how political parallelism conditions agenda-setting. Chapters IV and V demonstrate that in the Netherlands in recent decades, parties and newspapers are connected such that each tends to adopt issues from a linked newspaper or party, thus providing information on the present state of the media system. As argued by Hallin and Mancini (2004), the Netherlands can be regarded as an instance of a democratic corporatist media system, yet to know whether political parallelism is equally important in other countries exhibiting this system, such as the Scandinavian countries and Germany, they would need to be studied in their own right. Further, it would be interesting to determine whether the results also apply to other media systems, such as the Mediterranean polarized pluralist and the North Atlantic liberal media systems. Arguably, in the polarized pluralist media systems, higher levels of political parallelism are to be expected, but comparatively assessing whether partisan links matter more or less in these countries could provide insights into a possible convergence of media systems (see Vliegthart and Mena Montes 2014).

As discussed in the introduction (Chapter I), the immigration and European integration issues are each part of a new cultural dimension of party competition that scholars contend has arisen in West Europe (Kriesi et al. 2006; 2008). This dimension provided the potential for contestation over and

politicization of the EU and immigration issues, which was only realized in a number of countries and periods, making the issues interesting research cases with substantial variation in the outcome. In contrast to earlier studies, the focus of this dissertation was not on inherent differences between issues but on the interests and strategic considerations of the actors involved. Therefore, the differences between issue types were taken out of the equation by centering on two issues instead of the entire agenda. The intuition is, however, that the explanations offered in this dissertation are not particular to these two issues, and this remains to be verified in further research. Moreover, considering the role of framing in agenda-setting revealed in this dissertation, in a next step, it would be of particular interest to assess the interaction between framing and issue types: can issues be reframed in such a way that they fall into a different issue type? Can this way agenda-setting dynamics be manipulated purposefully by political parties?

Finally, this dissertation only considered print media, examining two daily newspapers –one quality and one tabloid-style- in most chapters. The reason that daily newspapers were selected as the source of the media agenda is that previous studies have shown these to be the stronger political agenda setters, with other media such as television possibly playing a mediating role (Bartels 1996; Walgrave, Soroka and Nuytemans 2008). In further research, it would be interesting to take the full media agenda into account and, if possible, also consider inter-media agenda-setting effects to map the media's influence on the political agenda even more comprehensively. Moreover, due to their recent development, scholars have scarcely begun to explore the role that new media and social media play in setting either other media or political agendas, so this is a particularly interesting direction for future research. Social media also create additional possibilities to study how public opinion *in combination* with (social) media coverage impacts policy agendas.

Political agenda-setting by the media

The suggestions above primarily concern enhancing the generalizability of the findings presented in this dissertation; however, this is of course only one of the tasks for future research. To consider further topics for research, let us briefly reassess the extant literature on agenda-setting effects in the direction from the

media to politics. In 2006, Walgrave and Van Aelst provided a comprehensive overview of the field at the time and based on this outlined a preliminary model of political agenda-setting by the mass media. From the existing research, they distilled four factors conditioning whether and to what extent the media agenda has an impact on a political agenda: the type of issue, the type of media agenda, the type of political agenda, and the time period (electoral or nonelection periods). The model the authors subsequently proposed is displayed in Figure VI.2.

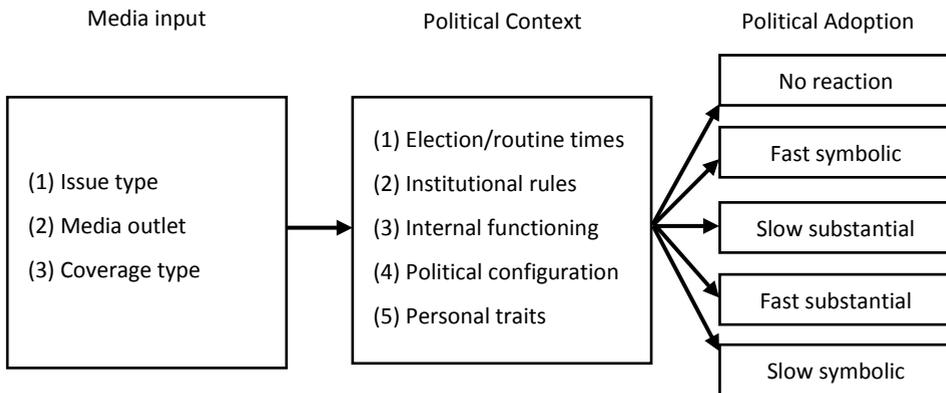


FIGURE VI.2. Model of political agenda-setting by the media outlined by Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006).

In the years since the publication of their article, progress has been made in identifying further factors that determine whether the mass media impact a political agenda. The most headway has been made regarding what Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006) categorized as ‘the political context’. This is unsurprising, considering that, as several researchers (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Thesen 2013; see Chapter III) have emphasized, parties have an active choice in whether and how they respond to media attention. The government or opposition status of a party and issue ownership are motives for parties that condition whether they copy an issue from the media agenda (Green-Pedersen and Stubager 2010; Vliegenthart and Walgrave 2011). The work of Thesen (2013) goes a step further to *combine* elements of the content of the media coverage with the structure of the political configuration. His attack and defend model –in brief- posits that opposition parties respond to bad news, while government parties

respond to good news. Similarly, Chapter III of this thesis proposes that depending on the way issues are framed in the media and on what the preferred frames of the parties are, parties will adopt an issue from the media coverage onto the parliamentary agenda or they will not.

Further progress can be made by looking at more aspects of the content of media coverage. For instance, how do parties respond to explicit positions on issues taken in the media? Do they respond when positions similar to their own are prevalent in the media, as with framing (Chapter III), or are they also confrontational, responding to opposing positions? Does it matter who is the source of the media item, for example do political ‘heavyweights’ writing in the media also carry greater agenda-setting weight? The media are –among other things- used by parties to communicate amongst one another (cf. the PMP cycle in Wolfsfeld 2011); how does this affect the transfer of issues from the media to the political realm?

Although many steps have been taken made to understand parties’ role in taking over issue attention from the mass media, existing empirical work all posits only one strategy for parties in the same structural position. This leaves no room for parties to adopt different strategies to deal with the media in similar situations. For example, as Thesen (2013) argues, opposition parties should respond to news that is negative in tone; however, not all opposition parties might adopt this strategy. Similarly, I argue in Chapter III that parties should discuss issues when the media framing is to their liking and remain silent otherwise. However, there might be alternative strategies, such as actively confronting opposing frames. These different strategies might be the results of party idiosyncrasies, differences in the parties’ member bases, the degree of professionalization and financial resources, or the relative weight of vote-, policy- or office-seeking goals (Müller and Strom 1999). Differentiating multiple alternative strategies opens up an interesting and understudied topic for further research, namely the *consequences* of agenda-setting strategies. Do the strategies outlined in existing research pay off, for example electorally, and how? What are the benefits of different strategies in the long and short run and in terms of office, voting or policy objectives?

In summary, referring to the preliminary model as described by Walgrave and Van Aelst (2006), my suggestions for further research are to (1)

continue uncovering how aspects of news content matter in combination with the political configuration, (2) use interactive and social media to explore the role of various forms of public opinion in political agenda-setting by the media, (3) specify and study alternative strategies parties can adopt in the same structural position, and (4) add a block on the right-hand side of the figure exploring the *consequences* of political agenda-setting by the media, and in particular of the diverse strategies parties employ herein.

Media agenda-setting by political actors

As discussed earlier, the impact of political agendas on issue attention in the media has been studied less extensively than agenda-setting in the other direction. Although this dissertation adds to our knowledge –we now know that (at least in the countries under study) the media are more likely to copy an issue from the political agenda if parties are in discursive conflict and when the issue is brought up by challenger parties or by parties that are linked to the particular media outlet– there is still much to be done.

In this dissertation, I contend that journalists select issues from the political agenda based on news values, news norms and their partisan ties. The news value scrutinized here (in Chapter II) is that of conflict, which is arguably the most relevant criterion regarding politics, however, there are other news values that might play a part. The news value of personalization, for example, may also be a factor facilitating the transfer of an issue from the political to the media agenda. If this is the case, then the next question is whether politicians can frame an issue in a more personalized way and thus incites greater media attention. This way, framing can once more be relevant in setting the media agenda. In this dissertation, I only looked at framing in terms of polarization, which is at the aggregate level of the party system, and therefore the frames of individual parties only mattered in reference to other parties' frames. An interesting route for further research is to study to what extent individual parties can frame issues such that they can increase or decrease the media attention devoted to the issues.

In addition to considering further news values (in addition to conflict) and framing at the party level, differences between media outlets have yet to be explored. In Chapter IV, on the news norm of watchdog journalism, a divergence

between De Telegraaf and the Volkskrant came to light, which was possibly due to one being more tabloid-like and the other falling into the category of quality papers. This begs the question, to be answered by further studies, of how big the differences in journalistic norms are between the staffs of different newsrooms. Moreover, what are the consequences of the different news norms for the outlet's coverage, particularly regarding who is granted the opportunity to discuss his or her issues?

As in the research on political agenda-setting by the media, progress can be made in understanding media agenda-setting by political actors by differentiating the different strategies parties may adopt in order to influence which issues are on the media agenda. I examined the influence of challenger parties, political conflict and newspaper-party ties on agenda-setting but did not allow for diverse strategies, for example within the group of challenger parties. So, like I argued above that parties in similar situations might respond differently to inputs from the media, they might also actively try to influence the media in different ways. To begin with, it would be interesting to know how party leaders and strategists reflect on this themselves and to know whether they consciously employ specific strategies to introduce issues into the broader public debate. Thereafter, it would be interesting to examine the effectiveness of different strategies. For example, is it sensible to save the party's strength and only make a concerted effort to influence the debate at well-timed moments (if so, which moments?), or is it important to continually steep the media debate with issues? How are different media channels to be employed in combination? Finally, and most important, do the parties that follow such strategies reap the benefits and, if so, in what form?

The PMPMPMP cycle

As discussed in the introduction (Chapter I), the influence between media and political agendas is reciprocal, and as such there is a continuous cycle of politics influencing the media, influencing politics, influencing the media, influencing politics, etc. (Kepplinger 2007; Wolfsfeld 2011, 30-31). One of the most important tasks for future research is to zoom out and consider this cycle as a whole. In this work, I focused on one constituent link at a time; however, to further our understanding, we should also trace issues throughout the chain. In relation to

the results presented in this dissertation, there are two concrete questions open, that require such an appreciation of the entire cycle.

One of the open questions regards the mechanism underlying political parallelism, and hence the answer should provide a remedy to one of the shortcomings of the research in this dissertation. As explained in this conclusion and chapters IV and V, the parallel ties between parties and news outlets operate in both directions, affecting both whether journalists adopt issues from the political agenda as well as whether parties copy issues from the media agenda. Parallelism was measured by looking at the readers of newspapers and which parties they voted for, with parties that were overrepresented among the readers being the linked parties. However, just because it was gauged this way does not mean that partisanship in the newspaper readership constitutes the mechanism by which political parallelism affects agenda-setting. Put differently: *how* do the ties between journalists and political actors structure issue transfer? Is it due to ideological congruence between the journalistic staff and politicians, in other words, are the journalists themselves partisan? Relatedly, do parties respond to parallel newspapers per se, or only if the coverage follows their political preferences? Alternatively, is the motivation for political parties akin to representation, in the sense that they believe that the issues raised by the newspaper their constituency reads are the issues that are on the minds of their constituency? Are newspapers motivated to follow the parties for which their readers vote for economic reasons, as they believe that catering to their readers is in their commercial interest? As yet another alternative, are the links purely based on informal contacts between politicians and journalists and personal relationships? Determining this mechanism is important, as the way ties between parties and the media will develop in the future depends on it, and moreover, it helps our understanding of the mediatization of politics.

Finally, the combination of the findings on framing proximity and on political conflict raises an interesting question spanning the entire agenda-setting cycle. Chapter III, on framing proximity, demonstrated that parties choose the right moment to discuss an issue, emphasizing it only if the framing in the media is correct. As parties each have different frame preferences, the result is that they will advance issues at different times and accordingly 'talk past each other' instead of engaging in dialogue. This is interesting in its own right, in light of the

literature on the lack of issue convergence between parties (e.g., Budge and Farlie 1983, Riker 1993, Sigelman and Buell 2004). However, this finding is also relevant to Chapter II, which shows that confrontation in the form of political conflict fosters the adoption of political issues by the media. So, if a party wishes to place an issue on both the media and parliamentary agenda, it is faced with the dilemma that direct confrontation with other parties helps to put the issue on the media agenda, while when adopting issues from the media agenda an evasive strategy seems to be best. This is only one example of an instance in which it would be fruitful for future research to combine the two halves of the cycle. Considering issue trajectories spanning the entire PMPMP cycle can thus provide us with more elaborate insights into what is on the center stage of politics, and what is left out.