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Political Parallelism in Media and Political Agenda-Setting

DAPHNE J. VAN DER PAS, WOUTER VAN DER BRUG, and RENS VLIAGENTHART

This article investigates whether agenda-setting relations between newspapers and political parties are influenced by political parallelism. Our case is the Netherlands, a country characterized by high levels of journalistic professionalization and independent media. We focus on newspaper coverage and oral parliamentary questions and use time series analysis to inspect influence both of parliament on newspapers and of newspapers on parliament. The results show that parties respond only to issues raised in newspapers their voters read, and that newspapers only respond to the agenda of parties their readers vote for. This demonstrates that even in mediatized, professionalized media contexts, parallelism is still of importance to understand the relationship between media and politics.

Keywords political parallelism, agenda-setting, parliamentary questions, newspapers, the Netherlands

Introduction

In recent years, the political agenda-setting approach toward studying the interaction between parliament and media has become increasingly popular. Extant research in this tradition shows that the effect of media on politics and vice versa is a contingent one, where direction and size depend on a wide variety of factors. These factors cover a whole range of issue characteristics, media characteristics and political party characteristics (see Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006 for an overview). Until recently, however, maybe one of the most obvious moderating factors has received hardly any attention: political parallelism. Political parallelism refers to the ties between a medium and a political actor (Hardy, 2008; Seymour-Ure, 1974). It is quite remarkable that political parallelism has been ignored as a moderating factor, since Hallin and Mancini identify it in their seminal work *Comparing Media Systems* (2004) as one of the most important elements that characterize the media system of a country.

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As far as we are aware, there is only one study that focuses on the extent to which political parallelism moderates agenda-setting effects: a study by Vliegthart and Mena Montes (2014) on the coverage of the economic crisis. They show that in Spain, a country with high levels of political parallelism, political agenda-setting effects are particularly strong between newspapers and parties with similar political leaning. In the Netherlands, a country with low levels of political parallelism, there is no such partisan bias. However, the analysis for the Netherlands is conducted on the level of the government parties as a group and opposition parties as a group. Political parallelism is not measured and analyzed at the level of individual parties, as we do in the current study.

We provide a detailed analysis of the way political parallelism shapes the agenda-setting effects of the media on parliament and vice versa in the Netherlands. We consider the Netherlands to be a *critical* case. Originally characterized by the pillarized structure of its society (*verzuiling*; Lijphart, 1968) and strong formal and informal ties between political parties and newspapers, depillarization has taken place quickly. Also, journalism has changed rapidly in the past decades (Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Vliegthart, 2012). It is nowadays characterized by independent media and high levels of professionalization. Mainstream media might have a certain political leaning or orientation, but lack a clear partisan bias. It is argued that the interaction between journalists and politicians in the Netherlands follows to a considerable extent a media logic, which implies that the interaction between the two is governed increasingly by the ground rules of the media, which follow from format requirements and news values that are shared between all newspapers and TV stations (Altheide & Snow, 1979; Strömbäck, 2008). If we find parallelism to exert an influence on agenda-setting patterns in a country with such a highly professionalized media, it is likely to occur more generally across a wide variety of countries and contexts.

This article seeks to unravel the importance of political parallelism, by examining whether parties are more inclined to follow the issue attention of the newspapers their voters read, and conversely whether newspapers are more responsive to the parliamentary questions of parties their readers vote for. To this end, oral questions on the issues of immigration and of European integration in the Dutch parliament in the period from 1996 up to 2010 are studied, as well as the attention for these issues in two national daily newspapers. A measure for political parallelism is created using micro-level data from the Dutch National Elections Study. The findings confirm that political parallelism indeed influences the agenda-setting power of newspapers on parliamentary parties in the Netherlands, as well as vice versa. So, parties are more likely to bring up an issue that was raised in a newspaper their voters read. This is substantiated by pooled time series analyses.

By studying the role of newspaper-party ties in agenda-setting between media and politics, this article contributes both to the literature on political parallelism and that on agenda-setting. First, the importance of partisan ties in agenda formation shows how important parallelism still is nowadays in interactions between media and politics, even in a Western country with a high degree of professionalization of political communication.

Second, while recent studies in a European context have studied a wide range of factors that shape political agenda-setting patterns (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006), characteristics of the media system and specifically political parallelism have hardly been considered. In the studies situated outside the United States, 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, & 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.

The Concept of Political Parallelism

The concept of parallelism was first introduced by Seymour-Ure in 1974, to describe the relationship between a medium and a party.¹ A newspaper parallels with 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, p. 173). Hallin and Mancini’s (2004, p. 27) seminal work redefined the concept from *press-party* parallelism to *political* parallelism, reflecting the historical shift that had taken place from links between media and specific parties, to links between media and general political tendencies in society. Thus, the authors acknowledged that there were still relevant links between media and politics, but that these had taken new forms, most notably a shift in focus from *parties* to political *orientations*. The most important drivers of these shifts were the decline of political parties in West European democracies, and the commercialization of media. Of the three elements originally identified by Seymour-Ure, the organizational links in the form of ownership became less typical. Instead, parallelism was seen as driven largely by market segmentation and by the political involvement of owners and journalists (Mancini, 2012, p. 267).

Hallin and Mancini (2004) employed political parallelism as one of the four characteristics of a media system, and on that basis arrived at a classification of three ideal typical media systems (see also Van Kempen, 2007). The *liberal* model, applying to the United States, Ireland, Canada, and to some extent the United Kingdom (but see Aalberg, Van Aelst, & Curran, 2010), is characterized by the near-zero levels of political parallelism, with a strong norm of balanced coverage and providing “information.” The *democratic corporatist* model, which groups together the Northern and Central European countries of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland, by contrast traditionally had a strong party press, but has shifted to a more neutral press. The Mediterranean or *polarized pluralist* model, covering France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, is marked by strong parallelism with clear ideological links between parties and media outlets (see Baumgartner & Chaqués Bonafont, 2015; Vliegthart & Mena Montes, 2014).

The democratic corporatist media system has experienced a transition from high parallelism to much lower levels. The high levels of parallelism were present for a large part of the 20th century, when organized social groups played a central role in structuring social, political, and cultural life, and also important parts of the media system. Newspapers were directly linked to organized social groups, and consequently highly partisan. Since the 1960s and 1970s, this system of *segmented pluralism* largely eroded and newspapers lost their immediate organizational connection to political parties. Even though this type of press/party parallelism has faded, Hallin and Mancini (2004) describe that in most democratic corporatist media systems, there are still parallels between newspaper and political parties in terms of content, affiliations of the media personnel, and partisanship of the audience (see also Patterson & Donsbagh, 1996).

The Netherlands used to be the classic example of a pillarized society, in which different social subgroups each had their own institutions for almost any part of social life, from political parties, to football clubs, to churches, to newspapers, to unions. Like in many North and Central European societies, this system eroded in the second half of the 20th century, in tandem with the secularization of society, declining membership of political parties, and weakening of structured social cleavages (Brants & Van Kempen, 2002; Brants & Van Praag, 2006; Dalton, 2004). However, most national dailies gradually redeveloped substantively distinct profiles with recognizable ideological positions (Van der Eijk, 2000) and there is still some parallelism between the media and parties in terms of partisanship of the audience (Van Kempen, 2007).

Even though scholars have distinguished different dimensions of political parallelism, they tend to focus on three aspects: ideological, organizational, and political (party) affiliations of the users of a medium (e.g., Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Hardy,

2008; Seymour-Ure, 1974). This study focuses on one of these dimensions of political parallelism, the party affiliations of the users of a medium, but for simplicity we will refer to it in more general terms as “political parallelism.” Yet, it is important to realize that this aspect of political parallelism represents the weakest of the three types of ties (ownership, content, and audience/voters) between media and parties. When a politician like Silvio Berlusconi of Italy owns a television station, it seems very likely that there will be strong links between the agenda of the medium and the agenda of the politicians’ party. Also, when journalists have strong party preferences and personal ties with politicians of specific parties, it will be hardly surprising if we would find a link between the parties’ agendas and the agendas of associated media. Yet, for the weakest form of parallelism, the partisanship of the audience, the moderating effect might be less obvious. So, given the fact that we focus on the weakest form of parallelism, it seems plausible that we provide conservative estimates of its (conditioning) effects. Why and how this form of parallelism would matter for agenda-setting is the topic we turn to in the next section.

Political Agenda-Setting by the Media

Research into the *conditions* under which the media influence the agenda of political parties has identified various moderators, such as the frames used in the news coverage (van der Pas, 2014), whether the news is good or bad for the government (Thesen, 2013), and the type of issue that is being discussed (Walgrave et al., 2008). A number of recent studies stress the active role parties play in deciding when to adopt issues from the media (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Thesen, 2013; van der Pas, 2014; Vliegthart & Walgrave, 2011). Thus far, however, only one study has considered the question of whether the structural partisan ties of media outlets matter: Vliegthart 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.

We focus on the partisanship of the readers of newspapers, and argue that parties have reason to pay relatively more attention to issues that receive much coverage in newspapers read by their voters. This is because of two reasons parties might expect this coverage to reflect (to some degree) the issue priorities of its readers. First, parties might see the issue attention in a newspaper their voters read as an indicator of their constituents’ concerns, because they think journalists follow the priorities of their readers. Indeed, one of the roles that some political journalists see for themselves is to pay attention to all sorts of sentiments among the public. Attention for an issue in a newspaper would then mean that the readers consider it important. Second, parties might think that the media set the issue agenda of their consumers. The issues covered in the newspaper a party’s voters read can thus be expected to subsequently become important to the readers of the newspaper (i.e., the party’s voters). From both perspectives, bringing the issue into parliament is a form of responsiveness, not only to concerns of journalists, but more importantly to the party’s supporters. From this reasoning, we arrive at our first hypothesis:

Political agenda-setting hypothesis (H1): Parties are more likely to follow the issue agenda of parallel newspapers in their parliamentary questions than of non-parallel newspapers.

Media Agenda-Setting by Parties

Although agenda-setting research has made considerable progress in explaining the mass media's power over the political agenda, few studies examine whether and how political actors can influence what is on the media agenda, at least in the European context. Those studies that do examine this topic primarily focus on election periods, explaining how through campaign communications, parties can influence election news coverage (Brandenburg, 2002; Hopmann, Elmelund-Praestekaer, Albaek, Vliegenthart, & de Vreese, 2012; Lancendorfer & Lee, 2010). As a result, we know very little about the influence of parties over the media agenda in routine periods. In addition, because campaign studies often look at press releases, we know even less about the media agenda-setting power of *parliament* during routine periods. This is surprising, because much parliamentary activity—for example, speeches and questions—is largely symbolic in nature and not intended to influence policies, but to contribute to the broader public debate. In particular, by asking parliamentary questions, parties attempt to attract public attention to their specific issues, either to set the electorate's issue priorities through the media or to use the media to force government parties to address an issue (Martin, 2011; Russo & Wiberg, 2010, pp. 217–218).

Furthermore, the studies that consider media agenda-setting by parliament during routine periods tend to examine the U.S. context. Most of these studies find small, nonexistent, or at best issue-dependent influence of the legislature on the media (e.g., Bartels, 1996; Edwards & Wood, 1999; Eshbaugh-Soha & Peake, 2004). Outside the United States, in a study of the issue of immigration in the Netherlands, Vliegenthart (2007, p. 64) finds “limited evidence for the claim that media tend to follow politics.” Van Aelst and Vliegenthart (2014) show that parliamentary questions in the Netherlands receive only very limited, direct coverage. van der Pas and Vliegenthart (2015) show that in the long term, media only respond to issues over which parties are in conflict.

In summary, very few studies have addressed the question of whether the legislative agenda affects media attention, and the conclusion thus far is that the influence is either limited or nonexistent. In a way this is not so surprising, because few of the issues that are discussed in parliament have news value for journalists and the audience. As a wealth of communication research has demonstrated, the media have a limited “carrying capacity” (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) and newspapers must be very selective in prioritizing potential news stories. To do so, journalists employ ground rules for deciding what is news (see Harcup & O’Neill, 2001), such as the news value of *power*, leading newspapers to allocate disproportionate space to elite actors, particularly those holding the highest government offices (Hopmann, de Vreese, & Albæk, 2011). Whether an issue from the parliamentary agenda appears in the news is likely to depend on whether journalists see it as having news value.

For two related reasons, one could expect journalists to be more prone to adopt an issue from parliamentary questions of an affiliated party. The first is that news editors and journalists have their own policy positions and will consider the parliamentary questions of parties that hold similar positions more newsworthy or interesting because they view them through a partisan lens. Possibly, as a response to such reporting, newspapers would attract readers who also hold similar views. The second is that newspapers have a historical legacy of ties with certain parties, and even though the current editors might not be partisan anymore, the particular audience still is (or partly is). It would then still make sense from a market perspective to cater to the partisan preferences of the newspaper's audience, and to pay special attention to the questions of some parties while

ignoring others. Both reasons lead to the same expectation, which is provided in the following hypothesis:

Media agenda-setting hypothesis (H2): Newspapers are more likely to follow the issue agenda of parallel political parties than of non-parallel political parties.

Of course, newspapers could decide to focus on different issues from the issues of parallel parties, in order to broaden their appeal and attract new audiences. To the extent that newspapers follow this strategy, the effect of the party agenda on the media agenda will not be moderated by political parallelism. In that case, we will find no support for H2.

Case Selection

These hypotheses are tested by tracing two issues over a period of 15 years (1995–2010) in newspapers and in parliament in the Netherlands.² The Netherlands have experienced a remarkable de-alignment since the middle of the past century, and concurrently the media have thoroughly professionalized and moved away from a partisan logic (Brants & Van Praag, 2006). Considering these developments, the Netherlands provide a context where one would expect a low impact of political parallelism compared to many other countries (see also Vliegthart & Mena Montes, 2014). In this respect, it can be considered a critical case: if we find any effects of political parallelism here, they are likely to be present in other countries as well.

The issues under scrutiny are immigration and European integration. Both are part of the “new politics” dimension (Hooghe, Marks, & Wilson, 2002; Kriesi et al., 2008), which in this research period provided parties with fresh, potential issues to politicize. As such, European integration and immigration both meet the minimal requirement that they *could* have been politicized, yet they vary greatly in the extent to which they actually were in the Netherlands. Immigration was politicized spectacularly from the early 2000s onward, while until 2010 European Union (EU) integration only received considerable political attention due to the 2005 referendum on the Constitutional Treaty but remained mostly outside the political and media limelight (De Vries, 2009). Therefore, the two issues represent *diverse cases* (Gerring, 2007) in terms of political attention and media attention, which strengthens the generalizability to a wider range of issues. The case of the EU issue shows whether the political parallelism hypotheses pertain to issues for which attention (both politically and in the media) is generally low, and conversely the immigration issue will reveal whether the hypotheses hold for issues that receive ample attention.

Measurement

Political Parallelism

Political parallelism is a frequently described concept, but it is not as often operationalized into a concrete measurement (Norris, 2009). Here, we measure it through one of its manifestations: the partisan affiliations of the newspaper readers. For the present research, this is preferable over measuring it in the media content, as we aim to study the *effect* of parallel ties on the content (issue choice) of the newspapers. Also, organizational ties are no longer an apt way to measure parallelism, as this does not match with parallelism nowadays, which is no longer expressed in formal ties (see Mancini, 2012). The partisan

affiliations of readers (or media consumers) have been used convincingly by Van Kempen (2007) to compare parallelism across countries on a continuum. We similarly rely on representative surveys, but use a slightly different measurement, as the focus here is on parallelism between individual newspapers and parties, and not at the country level.

A party is considered tied to a newspaper if the party enjoys more support among the readers of the newspaper than it does among the general electorate. We use the Dutch National Election Studies to gauge the extent to which voters of a particular party are overrepresented among the readers of the paper (Todosijevic, Aarts, & Van Der Kaap, 2010). To calculate the measure, the following formula is used:

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

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 over newspapers. A natural log is taken so that, for example, twice as many voters in the readership and twice as few have the same effect size. Finally, 1 is added before taking the log because the log of 0 has no outcome, so by adding 1 the parties with zero voters among the readers of a newspaper will receive a score of 0. The measure is computed on the election studies of 1994, 1998, 2002, 2003, and 2006, and each observation was coded with the most recent election study score.³ The average score for each party over all years is displayed in Figure 1. The negative relation ($r = -0.51, p = 0.09$) in the figure confirms that both newspapers are from different sides of the political spectrum, as parties tend to have either a parallel tie with *De Telegraaf* or *De Volkskrant*.⁴

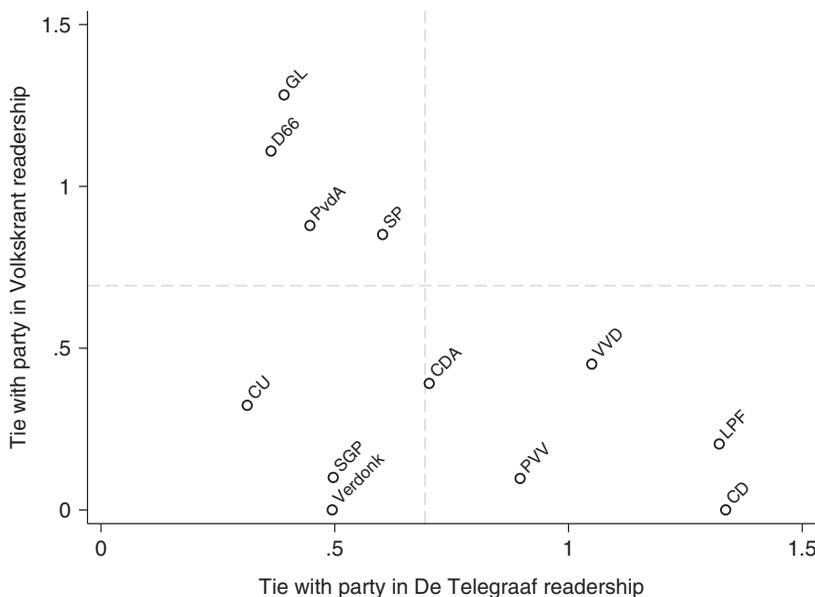


Figure 1. Relation between parties’ tie with De Telegraaf and with the Volkskrant.

CD = Centrum Democraten, CDA = ChristenDemocratisch Appèl, CU = ChristenUnie, D66 = Democraten 66, GL = GroenLinks, LPF = Lijst Pim Fortuyn, PvdA = Partij van de Arbeid, PVV = Partij Voor de Vrijheid, SGP = Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij, SP = Socialistische Partij, Verdonk = MP Rita Verdonk, VVD = Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie.

Content Analysis: Issue Attention in Parliamentary Questions

The issue attention of parties is measured through an automated content analysis of the questions asked verbally in parliament each week to the government minister responsible for the specific policies. The weekly question hour in the Netherlands is held every Tuesday and broadcast live on Dutch public television. Members of Parliament (MPs) are allowed to submit their questions 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 (van der Pas, 2014; Vliegthart, 2007; Vliegthart, Schuck, Boomgaarden, & de Vreese, 2008; see supplemental Appendix A). These search strings were applied to the speeches during the parliamentary proceedings of the period from 1995 to 2010 with the title “question hour.”⁵ The results were recorded at the party level. As the question hour is held every Tuesday, this results in weekly dichotomous scores (issue mentioned, yes or no) for each of the parties represented in parliament over a period of 15 years. Further descriptive information of the content analysis data can be found in supplemental Appendix B.⁶

Content Analysis: Media Issue Attention

Media attention to issues is also measured by an automated content analysis of two daily morning papers, the quality paper *De Volkskrant* 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 et al., 2008) and exhibit considerable variation in their (perceived) political leanings. In addition, 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.⁷

This study seeks to explain when an issue travels from newspaper pages to the question hour in parliament, and the other way around. In order to correctly specify these effects, we use a slightly different measure for media issue visibility when used as a dependent or as an independent variable. For media attention as an independent variable explaining whether an issue is mentioned in parliamentary questions (PQs), we first explored on which day of the newspapers MPs draw in their questions. Inspection of a sample of 100 PQs revealed that most questions refer to newspapers of either the same day, or the day before. Therefore, we use the hit counts resulting from the computerized content analysis of the Monday and Tuesday newspapers, and convert them into visibility scores using the following formula:

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

where $v(\text{issue at } t)$ is the visibility of an issue at the day of the question hour and the day before, a denotes an article from all articles in that week, hf_{body} is the number of mentions in the body of the article, and hf_{head} is the number of mentions in the headline (see Boomgaarden & Vliegthart, 2007, p. 80). Thus, mentions of the issue in the headline

receive 3 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 employ a slightly different measure in the models in which media issue visibility is the dependent variable. In these models we want to explain the prominence of the issues in the newspapers, but we also want to be able to connect it to specific parties. Therefore, we do not only measure in the newspapers of the week following the question hour whether the immigrations or European integration issues were mentioned, but also whether any of the parties in parliament were mentioned. The resulting dependent variable is a count of the number of articles that mentioned both the issue (either EU or immigration) and a party. When both a party and the issue are mentioned, it is more likely that the coverage actually is based on the PQ, and not spuriously caused by an external event. The search string for the political parties can be found in the supplemental Appendix A.

Estimation Techniques

We estimate two types of models. The dependent variable in the first model is political parties' issue attention in PQs. These models enable us to test whether the influence of parallel newspapers is larger than that of non-aligned newspapers (H1). In the second type of model the dependent variable is issue attention in the newspapers. These models allow for a test of the hypothesis that PQs of parallel parties have a larger influence than that of non-aligned parties (H2). As the dependent variable differs in measurement level in both cases, a different modeling technique is required, which is explained here. We model the effects in both directions, from media to politics and from politics to media, separately, but to ensure the correct temporal order between cause and effect, we study the newspaper coverage *preceding* the parliamentary question hour for H1, and the coverage *following* the weekly question hour for H2.

Modeling Party Issue Attention in PQ (H1)

In the models testing H1, the dependent variable is whether a party mentioned the issue in the weekly question hour, which we analyze independently for each of the two issues. As this is a dichotomous variable, we estimate the effects by means of logistic regressions. Furthermore, observations are nested within party and in time period (week). We deal with the nesting in week by estimating cluster-corrected (sandwich) standard errors. The nesting in party could be modeled using party fixed effects; however, this takes out part of the variance we aim to explain. For this reason we do not opt for this solution in the main analyses, but rather estimated models including party dummies as a robustness check, and these provided very similar results (see supplemental Appendix C). Finally, observations following one another in time are non-independent, and to account for this, we include duration variables measuring the time span since the last PQ, the time since the last PQ squared, and the time since the last PQ to the power of 3, as prescribed by Carter and Signorino (2010; see also Beck, Katz, & Tucker, 1998). Preparatory analyses showed that for the EU issue none were needed, and for immigration duration and duration squared were necessary.²

H1 is about the contingency of the parliamentary agenda-setting power of newspapers, and as such it demands interaction effects. To see whether parties only respond to reporting in newspapers they are close to, we include an interaction term between the party-paper tie and issue visibility in the newspaper. Issue visibility in the newspapers is measured on the day of the PQ and the day before (Monday and Tuesday). The number of seats the party holds in parliament is included in the model, to control for the fact that

bigger parties possibly get more opportunities to ask questions. All in all, the following model is estimated for each of the two issues (with the part in parentheses only pertaining to the immigration issue):

$$\begin{aligned} \text{logit}(\hat{y}_{it}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{visibility Telegraaf}_{t-1} + \beta_2 \text{visibility Volkskrant}_{t-1} + \beta_3 \text{tie to Telegraaf}_{it-1} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{tie to Volkskrant}_{it-1} + \beta_5 \text{visibility Telegraaf}_{it-1} \times \text{tie to Telegraaf}_{t-1} + \beta_6 \text{visibility Volkskrant}_{it-1} \times \\ & \text{tie to Volkskrant}_{t-1} + \beta_7 \text{party size}_{it-1} (+\beta_8 \text{duration}_{(it-1)} + \beta_9 \text{duration}_{(it-1)}^2) \end{aligned}$$

where i is the index of parties and t is weeks.⁸

Modeling Newspaper Responses to PQs (H2). A second set of models addresses H2, explaining the attention for the EU issue and immigration issue in the two newspapers. We analyze the visibility of each issue in each newspaper separately, which means we estimate four models. The dependent variable in every model is the number of newspaper articles that mention both the party and the issue, measured weekly for 11 parties over a period of 15 years. As a consequence, there are again three types of dependence within the data: observations follow one another in time, and observations are nested within party (panel) and in time points. In addition, the number of articles is a count variable with overdispersion, making linear regression inappropriate. To deal with these issues, pooled time series models were estimated using generalized estimating equations (GEE), specifying a negative binomial distribution with a log link for the dependent variable (Hilbe, 2011; Rabe-Hesketh & Skrondal, 2005). This type of model includes a parameterized within-panel correlation structure, through which the autocorrelation in the observations of the same party can be modeled. For the analyses in this paper an AR10 correlation structure was chosen, thus accommodating any possible correlation in newspaper coverage up to 10 weeks in the past. Furthermore, a Huber-White sandwich estimator of variance was used to account for the clustering within party (the panel variable).⁹

Again, the hypothesis (H2) is tested using interaction effects. So, to study whether newspapers respond more strongly to PQs of parallel parties, we include the interaction term between newspaper-party tie and the dummy variable indicating whether the party asked a PQ on the issue. As larger parties are more likely to get coverage regardless of their activity in parliament, we include a control for the number of seats in parliament. To sum up, for each of the two issues in each of the two newspapers, we estimate the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(\hat{y}_{it}) = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{issue in PQ}_{t-1} + \beta_2 \text{tie newspaper-party}_{t-1} + \\ & \beta_3 \text{issue in PQ}_{t-1} \times \text{tie newspaper-party}_{it-1} + \beta_4 \text{party size}_{it-1} \end{aligned}$$

where i is the index of parties and t is weeks.

Empirical Results: Effects of the Media Agenda

The first hypothesis of this article predicts that parties are more likely to copy the issue agenda of a parallel newspaper. To study whether there is indeed an effect of the amount of attention in an aligned newspaper, we turn to the results of the regression analyses presented in Table 1.¹⁰ The first hypothesis 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 *De Volkskrant*. So

Table 1
Explaining EU and immigration issue attention in PQs

	Dependent: PQ on EU issue	Dependent: PQ on immigration issue
Issue visibility in <i>De Telegraaf</i>	-0.008 (0.063)	0.023* (0.011)
Issue visibility in <i>De Volkskrant</i>	-0.047 (0.054)	-0.007 (0.005)
Tie party to <i>De Telegraaf</i>	0.365 (0.293)	1.011** (0.314)
Tie party to <i>De Volkskrant</i>	0.779** (0.270)	-0.369 (0.265)
Issue visibility in <i>De Telegraaf</i> x Tie party to <i>De Telegraaf</i>	0.166† (0.088)	-0.010 (0.013)
Issue visibility in <i>De Volkskrant</i> x Tie party to <i>De Volkskrant</i>	0.075† (0.040)	0.014** (0.005)
Party size	0.006 (0.005)	-0.000 (0.003)
Time since last PQ		-0.026*** (0.007)
Time² since last PQ		0.000* (0.000)
Constant	-4.114*** (0.368)	-2.613*** (0.359)
<i>N</i> (parties)	10	10
<i>N</i> (parties × weeks)	4832	4797
Pseudo <i>R</i>-square	0.03	0.04

Note. Logistic regression coefficients with standard errors clustered on week in parentheses.
† $p < 0.10$. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

attention to the EU in *De Telegraaf* and to the EU and immigration in *De Volkskrant* has a stronger impact on parliamentarians of parties that are linked to the newspaper that stresses the issue. For attention 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.

To facilitate the interpretation of these interactions, Figure 2 presents the marginal effects of issue visibility in the media at different values of party-newspaper ties. Here, we see that *De Telegraaf* significantly sets the agenda on the EU issue for most parties, except those with a fairly negative tie to the newspaper (Figure 2[c]). For both issues, *De Volkskrant* is able to set the PQ agenda only for parties to which it has a fairly strong (immigration issue) to strong tie (EU issue). These three cases show that parties only effectively listen to their voters' preferred newspapers. Again, as the regression table showed, the immigration issue in *De Telegraaf* does not conform to this pattern.

Finally, to give an impression of the magnitude of the effects, Table 2 displays by how much the probability of a PQ on the EU or on immigration rises if media attention goes from the lowest extreme to the highest on the issue. The bottom row shows that the

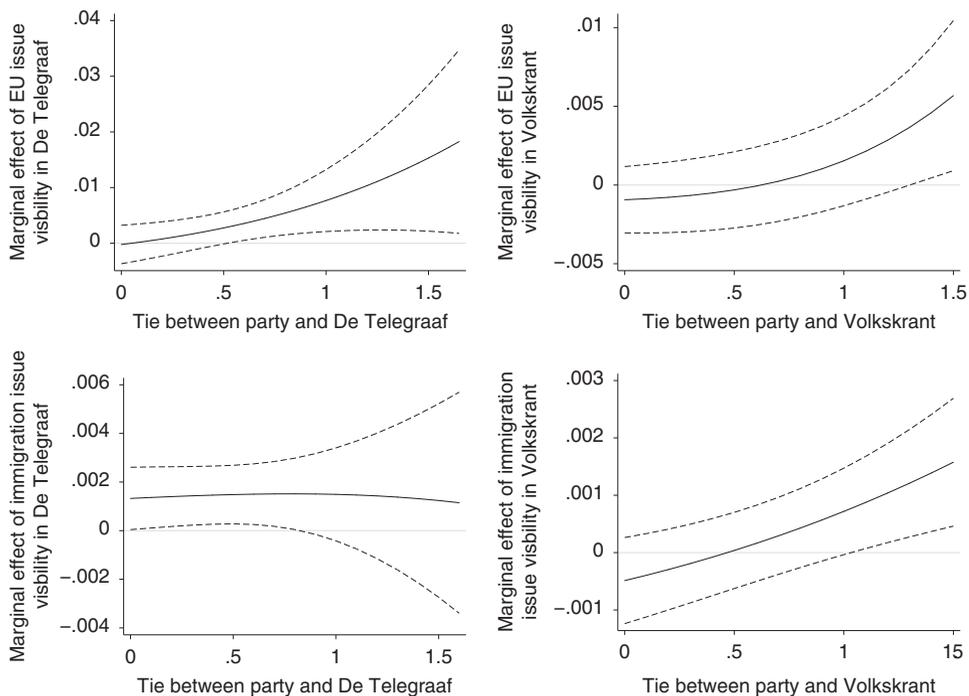


Figure 2. Marginal effects on the probability the issue is mentioned in PQs (95% CI).

Table 2
Change (Δ) in predicted probability of PQ on issue

Tie between party and newspaper	If EU visibility in <i>De Telegraaf</i> goes from min to max	If EU visibility in the <i>De Volkskrant</i> goes from min to max	If immigration visibility in <i>De Telegraaf</i> goes from min to max	If immigration visibility in the <i>De Volkskrant</i> goes from min to max
Minimum	-0.00	-0.02	0.10	-0.06
Midpoint	0.12	0.00	0.11	0.04
Maximum	0.69	0.18	0.07	0.31

Notes. The minimum and the maximum are the lowest and highest observed values of the variable. For party tie with *De Telegraaf* the values are 0 and 1.68, for *De Volkskrant* 0 and 1.53. For EU visibility in *De Telegraaf* the values are 0 and 14.66, for EU visibility in *De Volkskrant* 0 and 21.08, for immigration visibility in *De Telegraaf* 0 and 60.19, for immigration visibility in *De Volkskrant* 0 and 142.81. The midpoint of the tie variable is defined as the value when party voters are neither underrepresented nor overrepresented among the newspaper readers, which is at $\ln(2) \approx 0.69$. Bold entries indicate a significant effect at $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

probability a party that is very closely tied to the newspaper asks a question on the issue increases by 7% to 69%, after such an extreme increase in media attention. For parties with a neutral tie (midpoint), the increase in probability rises between 0% and 12%, while for parties with a negative tie, there is an (insignificant) decrease of 6% up to a modest increase of 10% in the probability of raising the issue in the question hour.

Empirical Results: Effects of Parliamentary Questions

The results thus far show that parliamentarians are more responsive to the issues raised by linked newspapers, but are journalists also more responsive to their parallel parties? Hypothesis 2 (H2) proposes that newspapers are more likely to report on the parliamentary questions of ideologically proximate parties, and Table 3 provides the tests of this proposition. We first look at the main effect of the tie between party and newspaper. For both issues in both newspapers, the effect is positive, while for the EU and immigration in *De Telegraaf* it is also significant. This indicates that at least *De Telegraaf* reports more extensively on the parties their readers vote for in their coverage of the EU and immigration even when the parties are not asking parliamentary questions about these issues.¹¹

Regarding the interaction between party overrepresentation and parliamentary questions, we see that—as expected—the effect is positive in all four cases, but significant only in the case of the issue of immigration in *De Telegraaf*. This suggests that only for this issue and newspaper does the effect of asking parliamentary questions differ significantly depending on the extent to which the party is supported among the newspaper's readers. However, as Brambor, Clark, and Golder (2005) point out, even if the interaction term itself is insignificant, the combination of the main effect of X and the interaction between X and Z might nevertheless depend on Z, implying an important conditionality in the relationship. Concretely, regarding the results discussed here, this means that whether parties can successfully put issues on the media agenda by bringing them up in the question hour might still depend on whether their voters are sufficiently represented in the newspaper's audience. This is displayed graphically in Figure 3, where the net effect of asking parliamentary questions on an issue is plotted for different values of the political parallelism variable, along with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3 shows that, as expected, both newspapers ignore the parliamentary questions of parties that are severely underrepresented among their readers, as the marginal effect of parliamentary questions is insignificant at low values of newspaper-party ties in all four cases. However, at approximately the point at which a party is neither under- nor over-represented in the paper's readership, the marginal effect of PQs reaches significance for both issues and newspapers. In other words, a parliamentary question only causes an issue to rise on the newspaper's agenda if there is sufficient support for the party among the newspaper's audience. Thus, in line with H2, there is a clear partisan bias in the attention of these daily newspapers.

So far the results were presented in terms of the models' coefficients, which cannot be easily interpreted due to the log transformation in the model. To remedy this, Table 4 presents the expected multiplication of the number of articles covering an issue and party if a party asks parliamentary questions on the issue compared to when it does not. In the first row, which presents the expected increase in the outcome in the case of extreme underrepresentation of the party among the newspaper's readers, none of the increases/decreases are distinguishable from zero. As noted earlier, the newspapers do not respond to activity in parliament of unlinked parties. At the midpoint of the parallelism variable, a PQ on EU or immigration leads to 1.07 to 1.28 as many articles, so an increase of 7% to 28% (the latter not significant). This shows that the PQs of parties with a neutral tie in most cases still effectuate a small increase in issue visibility in the media. Finally, the bottom row shows that in the case of the strongest parallelism between a newspaper and a party, a PQ can lead to a 10% to 138% increase in newspaper articles on the issue.

Table 3
Explaining EU and immigration issue attention in newspapers

	Dependent: Articles on party and EU in <i>De Telegraaf</i>	Dependent: Articles on party and immigration in <i>De Telegraaf</i>	Dependent: Articles on party and EU in <i>De Volkskrant</i>	Dependent: Articles on party and immigration in <i>De Volkskrant</i>
Issue in PQ (1 = mentioned)	-0.414 (0.495)	-0.047 (0.052)	0.015 (0.160)	0.049 (0.044)
Tie party-newspaper	0.887* (0.413)	0.766† (0.394)	0.396 (0.336)	0.351 (0.280)
Issue in PQ × Tie party-newspaper	0.952 (0.637)	0.171* (0.084)	0.265 (0.225)	0.030 (0.048)
Party size	0.036*** (0.007)	0.037*** (0.008)	0.037*** (0.008)	0.036*** (0.007)
Constant	-3.253*** (0.404)	-0.812* (0.353)	-2.019*** (0.466)	0.181 (0.384)
<i>N</i> (parties)	10	10	11	11
<i>N</i> (parties × weeks)	4882	4882	6721	6730
Adjusted deviance	2259.372	4120.149	4761.726	5260.626

Note. Coefficients from GEE negative binominal regression with log link with standard errors in parentheses.
† $p < 0.10$. * $p < 0.05$. *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

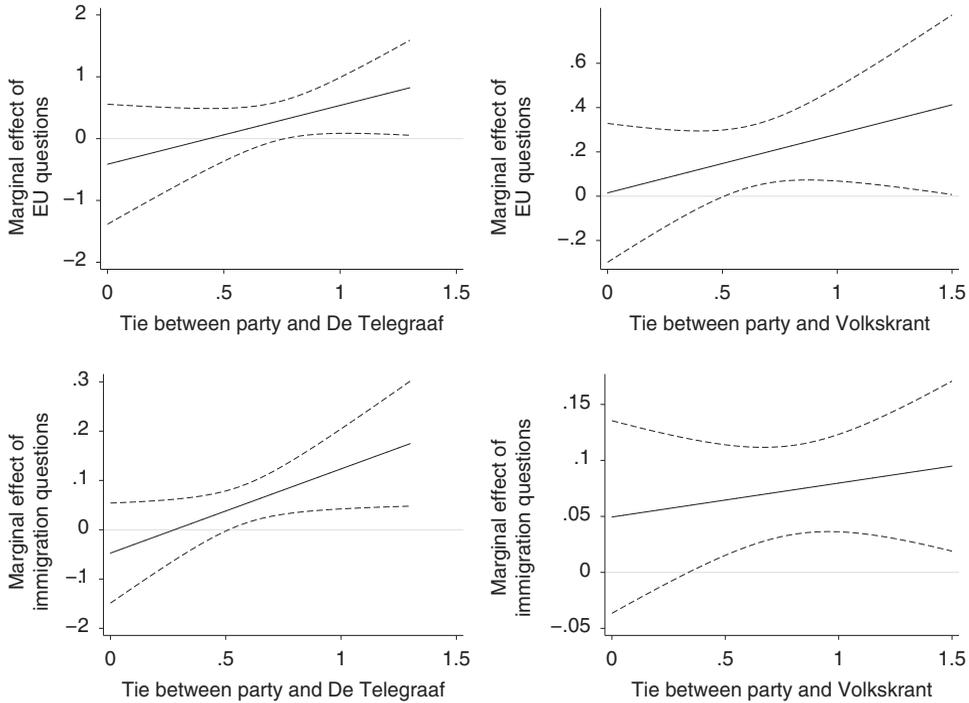


Figure 3. Marginal effect on issue attention in newspapers (95% CI).

Table 4

Predicted incidence rate increase in media issue visibility after PQ on issue

Tie between party and newspaper	EU issue in <i>De Telegraaf</i>	EU issue in <i>De Volkskrant</i>	Immigration issue in <i>De Telegraaf</i>	Immigration issue in <i>De Volkskrant</i>
Minimum	0.66	1.02	0.95	1.05
Midpoint	1.28	1.22	1.07	1.07
Maximum	2.38	1.52	1.20	1.10

Notes. The minimum and the maximum are the lowest and highest observed values of the party-newspaper tie variable. For party tie with *De Telegraaf* the values are 0 and 1.68, for *De Volkskrant* 0 and 1.53. The midpoint of the tie variable is defined as the value when party voters are neither underrepresented nor overrepresented among the newspaper readers, which is at $\ln(2) \approx 0.69$. Bold entries indicate a significant effect at $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

Conclusion

Our analyses in the Netherlands showed not only that political parties and newspapers influence each other in the selection of topics that they address, but also that there is a clear bias in this mutual relationship. Political parties respond especially to the topics reported in the newspapers that their voters read. Newspapers report on the topics addressed by parties supported by their readers but not on topics addressed by parties that are less popular among their readership. A large body of research exists on the

reciprocal causal relationship between the agendas of parties and the media (see e.g., Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). This body of research points to fact that this relationship is contingent upon many factors, but the moderating effect of political parallelism has so far hardly been investigated. By showing the way in which the causal links between the agendas of parties and newspapers are biased toward ideological allies, this study contributes to our understanding of the relationship between parties and the media. Thus, next to factors that deal either with party characteristics (i.e., opposition or government party; e.g., Vliegthart & Walgrave, 2011) and media characteristics (type of media outlet, or specific content characteristics; e.g., Thesen, 2013), capturing the ties that exist between the party on the one hand and the outlet on the other hand helps to understand the presence and size of political agenda-setting effects.

This article looked at two issues to reach these conclusions: the issue of European integration and the issue of immigration. In Dutch politics, these two issues have received widely varying degrees of attention in the years 1995–2010, with immigration being high on the agenda from the early 2000s onward, and the EU receiving little attention aside from a small peak around the EU referendum in 2005. Also, the media paid divergent amounts of attention to the two issues (see online Appendix B). But differences aside, both issues are part of the “new politics” dimension. We think, therefore, that the results could be further strengthened in future research by applying the same analysis to a wider set of issues, to inspect whether political parallelism matters equally, for example, for more traditional “bread-and-butter” issues.

Since the Netherlands are a strongly de-aligned country with journalists who are seen to conform highly to professional journalistic standards (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), this country can be seen as a *least likely case* for finding moderating effects of media-party parallelism. It is a striking finding that political parallelism has a moderating effect even in this context. Even though the findings cannot be automatically translated to different countries, we see no sound theoretical reasons why political parallelism would not play a similar—and in many instances larger—role in other West European countries as well. Over the past half-century, the relation 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 considered as a force influencing politics, rather than the other way around. In this process, the links between media elites and political elites weakened, but our study demonstrates that political parallelism is still present and relevant to consider. It is particularly important to notice that political parallelism matters for agenda-setting in both directions, as this is another illustration of how entwined and mutually dependent politicians and journalists are (Van Aelst & Vliegthart, 2014). Both kinds of actors benefit from the mutual linkage: politicians as they are granted space for the dissemination of their issues in the media to an audience that might vote for them in upcoming elections, and journalists as their reports are legitimized by the adoption of parliamentarians. As the linkages are beneficial to both, they are likely to remain intact. There is thus good reason to expect that political parallelism will continue to matter in the future.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed on the publisher’s website at <http://tandfonline.com/upcp>

Notes

1. The concept is used, by Seymour-Ure (1974) and by Hallin and Mancini (2004), to denote a parallelism between a single newspaper and party as well as parallelism of the party/media system as a whole (Mancini, 2012, p. 263). In the current article, we are interested in the first type of parallelism, between one party and a newspaper.
2. We analyze two newspapers, *De Telegraaf* and *De Volkskrant*. *De Telegraaf* is only available in the LexisNexis database from 1999 onward, so analyses on this newspaper span 11 years, and those on *De Volkskrant* span 15 years.
3. The items that are used are, from the merged 1971–2006 dataset: V2_4 “Daily newspaper—*De Telegraaf*”, V2_6 “Daily newspaper—*De Volkskrant*”, and V15_2 “Party voted for in [current] parliamentary elections”. Voting data on the Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV) are drawn separately from the 2006 data set, as these were not included in the merged data set.
4. In supplemental Appendix B, further information on this measure can be found. It shows that the tie between newspapers and parties is relatively stable over time, and describes a validation of the measure.
5. The data were provided by Maarten Marx and the PoliticalMashup project. Speeches by non-parliamentarians such as ministers were excluded.
6. The validity of the issue search strings was inspected—besides checks of face validity—in the following way. A sample of newspaper articles from both newspapers containing hits from the search strings were read by a set of Dutch native speakers, and it was marked whether the article was indeed about this supposed issue. Of the 933 article samples with a hit of the EU search string, 866 (93%) were considered by the coders to be about the EU. Of the 1,144 article samples with a hit on the immigration search string, 868 (76%) were considered by the coders to be about immigration. In addition, Van Klingeren, Boomgaarden, Vliegthart, and de Vreese (2014; supplemental Appendix A2) show that salience based on these search strings covaries in the expected way with real-world developments.
7. 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.
8. Note that the variables Tie to *Telegraaf* and Tie to *Volkskrant* vary over time (hence the subscript t), but only per electoral term, as they are based on the most recent election survey.
9. The analyses were done in Stata 12 using the `xtgee` command and specifying the options `family(nbinomial α)`, `correlation(ar10)`, `vce(robust)`, and `force`. The last option is necessary because the data set is unbalanced as some parties were not in parliament throughout the whole period. As described by Hilbe (2011), `xtgee` cannot estimate the dispersion parameter α simultaneously with the model, so following the recommendations of Hilbe, this parameter was first estimated in a negative binomial regression (using `nbreg`) and then inserted in the command.
10. The number of observations differs for each model, for a two reasons. First, for *De Telegraaf*, data only go back to 1999, while for *De Volkskrant* they go back as far as 1995. Second, for the immigration models less observations are available, as for every party a variable for the duration since the last PQ on the issue is included, and this creates missing observations in the beginning of the research period.
11. Prior research has found that issue owners react more strongly to the media agenda in parliament than other parties (i.e., the effect of issue salience in the media on issue attention in parliament is moderated by issue ownership; Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Vliegthart & Walgrave, 2011). We have therefore included ownership as a control variable, but this leads to similar results. The analyses are available from the authors.

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