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### Context in political communication : measurement and effects on political behavior

van Kempen, H.M.A.

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## Chapter 1

### Media-party parallelism and its effects

A cross-national comparative study\*



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## **Abstract**

In 1974, Seymour-Ure introduced the concept of press-party parallelism into mass media studies. Many agree on the importance of this concept for describing media systems, but thus far, little systematic comparative research of press-party parallelism and its possible effects has been conducted. The concept remained mainly theoretical. To overcome this lacuna, the paper introduces a measure of the extent of media-party parallelism in the 15 countries of the European Union in 1999. The study employs survey data from the European Election Study 1999, and shows that media-party parallelism varies considerably between countries and that it structures citizens' political behavior such as electoral participation. The paper shows that media-party parallelism mobilizes citizens to vote, especially those who are not politically interested.

## Introduction

In the study of political communication and its consequences, scholars have mainly stressed individual-level media exposure effects on political attitudes and behavior. In most studies, the media context has not been included, even though scholars seem to agree that this context is important because it may structure individual behavior (Semetko, 1996).

This paper seeks to contribute to the field of political communication by exploring one specific feature of the media context, namely the extent to which media-party parallelism is present. This concept was introduced by Seymour-Ure (1974), but it has not appeared in many comparative studies of political communication. The paper proposes a method of measuring media-party parallelism (MPP) and it estimates the effect of MPP on individual political behavior.

According to Seymour-Ure, press-party parallelism is present if ties exist between newspapers and political parties. It exists in its strongest form when each newspaper supports a party, which is highly visible in the leader columns and in the editorial parts of newspapers – but sometimes also in the news items themselves. In the 1970s when Seymour-Ure developed the concept, parallelism existed mainly for the written press and not for TV news, which aimed at large audiences. Nowadays, with the emergence of more (public and private) TV channels, this situation might have changed. For this reason, the paper looks into parallelism for press and television news, which will be referred to as “media-party parallelism” (MPP).

Moreover, the paper investigates the consequences of media-party parallelism for political behavior in a cross-national comparative setting. Exposure to partisan information may strengthen existing party-political preferences, thereby elevating the probability to vote for that party (Brynin & Newton, 2003; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1944; Newton & Brynin, 2001). Consequently, turnout levels are expected to be higher in systems where media-party parallelism is strong. Before moving to the analyses, however, I will first elaborate on the concept of media-party parallelism. Subsequently, I will discuss its consequences for electoral participation.

## Media-party parallelism and its consequences

In many West-European countries, press-party parallelism is a major feature of the media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), but in some countries much more so than in others. For example, a high level of parallelism characterizes the Greek press system, as Greek newspapers are rooted in passionate ideological divisions, which is reflected in the strong partisan slant of the newspaper contents (Dimitras, 1997; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In these circumstances, close ties exist between newspapers and political parties. In other situations, rather general bonds exist between papers and parties or ideologies (Voltmer, 2000). This is the case in The Netherlands after the age of pillarization (Brants & Van Kempen, 2002). In other countries, such as Ireland, press-party parallelism is virtually

absent. In Ireland political neutrality is the typical reporting style of newspapers, avoiding clear political stances (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

In their cross-national comparative study, Hallin & Mancini (2004) distinguish three sorts of media systems on the basis of four variables, one of which is press-party parallelism. They argue that press-party parallelism is strongest in the Mediterranean systems (Greece, Portugal, Spain, Italy, and France) and the Northern / Central European systems (Austria, Denmark, Belgium, Finland, Germany, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland). In these countries, many of the newspapers are associated with particular parties or with general political tendencies. Contrarily, press-party parallelism is virtually absent in the North Atlantic media systems (US, Ireland, and Canada, with Britain as an exception: in this country, press-party parallelism is traditionally very strong). In these countries, catch-all newspapers predominate, indicating that these papers try to appeal to a wide public across social divisions. Institutional ties to political parties are avoided and papers attempt to maintain balance and neutrality in their contents (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Within this dichotomy of countries (the North Atlantic countries on the one hand, and the Mediterranean and Central/North European countries on the other), however, the nuances are missing. It is likely that press-party parallelism also varies between countries that belong to the same category in the dichotomy. This is what I will examine in the first part of this paper.

The development of (partisanship in) a press system is strongly associated with the party system. Seymour-Ure (1974, p.159) explains this relationship as follows: 'The same social forces that find expression in a party or parties of a political system tend to find expression also through the press'. This clarifies why press-party parallelism is weak in countries such as the USA and Canada, where majoritarianism has resulted in catch-all parties with vague ideological identities (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This 'catch-all-ism' is also reflected in the media contexts of these countries, with low levels of party parallelism. In most European countries, however, press-party parallelism is stronger (except for Ireland, where catch-all parties as well as catch-all media predominate), influenced by the political system: a multiparty system typically coincides with strong partisanship of the press (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

In general, one might expect a decrease of partisanship in the press, as in most cases the institutional bonds with political parties have vanished. Nevertheless, many bigger and smaller papers still apply an ideological slant, which is most visible in newspaper editorials. As bias seems to be the rule in editorial pages, partisanship as such will not easily disappear, despite of the fact that voters are getting more and more party-politically de-aligned.

As opposed to newspapers, television in Western Europe has typically developed autonomously from political parties (Semetko, 1996). This is partly due to political rules and regulations about impartiality in broadcasting, and for another part to technological and economic constraints. With only one or two channels per country, television news programs mainly applied a catch-all format, aiming at a large audience that was not confined by distinct party-political preferences. The appearance of more (commercial) channels in all European countries does not seem to have changed that tendency: the

availability of more channels seems in most countries not to have resulted in diversification on party-political grounds.

However, there are few exceptions. In Italy, for example, the three public television networks have developed into three partisan channels from the end of the 1970s (Roncarolo, 2002). Such may be the case in other countries as well, and therefore, I consider television news-party parallelism alongside press-party parallelism. This results in a broadening of the original concept by Seymour-Ure (1974) into media-party parallelism (MPP). Television news and papers do not capture the whole media spectrum; however, they are by far the most important news sources for most citizens.

What are the possible consequences of media-party parallelism? The partisan press, or more generally, partisan media, can be instruments of political mobilization, which is expressed in stronger party-political attitudes and higher participation levels. Rokkan & Torsvik (1970) argued on the basis of a Norwegian study that exposure to the partisan press involves a process of two-way enforcement. On the one hand, a pronounced orientation towards a specific party results in a strong motivation to keep papers in the household that promote that party. On the other hand, regular exposure to such papers will provide arguments for maintaining the orientation and strengthen the commitment to the party. Hallin & Mancini (2004) similarly argue that exposure to the partisan press strengthens the bonds between citizens and parties. In other words, regular exposure to partisan news may reinforce party attachment and reduce ambiguity of political opinion building (Miller, 1991; Newton & Brynin, 2001; Norris, Curtice, Sanders, Scammell, & Semetko, 1999; Patterson, 1998; Voltmer, 2000).

This is in line with findings from early American studies, which found that people are inclined to read and listen to information that corresponds with their own political views, and that this information helps to crystallize and reinforce the vote choice (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954; Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). As a result, citizens exposed to information that reinforces previously held party-political beliefs may be more likely to turn out. Newton & Brynin (2001) observed a strong relationship between party voting and reading a (specific type of) newspaper. They found that exposure to a paper of the own party outlook reinforces existing partisan attitudes and increases the likelihood to vote for that specific party. They found the same logic applies to voting turnout: those who read a newspaper that matches their party-political preferences turn out in larger numbers (Brynin & Newton, 2003).

I do not only expect this phenomenon of reinforcement to take place at the individual level, but also at the aggregate (contextual) level. A strong partisan media context may well affect also those who do not read a newspaper with links to their party, or those who do not read a paper (or watch television news) at all. Most people have a social network of friends and relatives, and through interpersonal communication newspapers do not only affect their own readers, but non-readers as well, through two-step flow processes (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). By these two-step flow phenomena, an effect that may appear at first sight at the individual level may turn into a contextual effect. In that case, everybody benefits from the party-political information in the news media, independent of their exposure to it. This notion is supported by findings of a follow-up study which is

reported in Chapter 2, that shows that the effect of parallelism is the same for everybody, irrespective of the amount of attention one pays to political news<sup>6</sup>. Hence, I expect higher participation levels if media-party parallelism is strong, irrespective of media exposure. This results in the following hypothesis.

*H1: Media-party parallelism has a positive effect on the level of voter turnout.*

The effect of MPP is not necessarily the same for different groups. The cognitive hypothesis predicts that those who are not so much involved or interested in politics, and are not highly educated, are most susceptible to media effects (Ha, 2004; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar, Peters, & Kinder, 1982; Krosnick & Kinder, 1990; McLeod, Becker, & Byrnes, 1974). Their argument repertoire (Cappella, Price, & Nir, 2002) is smaller, which makes them more susceptible to new information. Contrarily, people who are much more involved into politics, develop more resistance mechanisms by the information they have already obtained in the past. This indicates that a person who is highly informed and has strong predispositions, is better able to decide whether or not to accept new information. The studies mentioned above focus on agenda setting and priming effects, but the cognitive hypothesis may also apply to the effect of partisan news on participation. Exposure to partisan news may increase identification and the likelihood to turn out especially for those, who are not so much interested or involved into politics. I expect those who have high levels of political interest to be least susceptible to partisan news, whereas those with low levels of interest may be more prone to accept partisan news<sup>7</sup>. This leads me to expect the following.

*H2: For persons with low levels of political interest, MPP has a larger effect on participation in elections than for persons with high levels of interest.*

This hypothesis indicates a negative interaction effect of MPP and interest on turnout.

As argued before, MPP consists of press-party parallelism (PPP) and television news-party parallelism (TPP). Nevertheless, I expect differences in the level of PPP and TPP. Due to the partisan tradition of newspapers on the one hand, and the catch-all tradition of television news (e.g., Semetko, 1996), I expect PPP in general to be higher than TPP. I summarized this in H3a.

*H3a: The level of press-party parallelism is higher than the level of television news-party parallelism.*

What are the implications of H3a for the effect of PPP and TPP on participation? The reinforcement effect is likely to be stronger for newspapers than television, as newspapers in general will apply a stronger partisan slant. This is supported by a study by Schönbach

<sup>6</sup> This study focuses on press-party parallelism and the effects on participation in Sweden, 1979-2002.

<sup>7</sup> I will focus on political interest since that variable offers the best comparable measure in this dataset.

(1983), who found evidence that in Germany, the press has greater potential than television to stimulate political participation. In addition, it is easier for people to stick to their newspaper than to a TV news program (Kleinnijenhuis, 1990) – especially in case of subscriptions. Repeated exposure to partisan contents – which is more likely to occur in the case of newspapers – will result in a larger reinforcement effect, leading to higher electoral participation. Therefore, I expect the effect of PPP on participation to be larger than the effect of TPP, which results in the following hypothesis.

*H3b: Press-party parallelism has a stronger effect on voter turnout than television news-party parallelism.*

### Measuring media-party parallelism

There are four manifestations of media-party parallelism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Seymour-Ure, 1974). It is discernible in the media contents, in the ownership of the news media, in the affiliations of journalists, owners, and managers, and in readership patterns. Studying the media contents may be the most obvious thing to do when one is interested in the extent to which media-party parallelism is present. However, to do such in a cross-national comparative setting is very time-consuming and costly, and large-scale comparative data on political affiliations of owners and journalists are lacking. Nevertheless, these data are available for media publics. Partisan bias in media contents is also expressed by newspaper readership. This is supported by British, Dutch, and Swedish studies, which show a strong relationship between political preferences of readers and those of their newspapers (Kleinnijenhuis, 1990; Seymour-Ure, 1974; Weibull, 1995). Therefore, this paper looks at readership patterns in order to indicate the extent to which media-party parallelism is present. It investigates the relationship between media exposure and party-political preferences. By doing that, I left the three other indicators of media-party parallelism out of consideration. One has to bear in mind that my operationalization is just one out of four possibilities. By studying the other three indicators one might come to (slightly) different conclusions. To simplify matters, I speak in this article about MPP, but one has to reckon with the fact that it is one out of four possible operationalizations of the concept.

In order to calculate the MPP system variable, I regress party preference scores on newspaper- and television news exposure<sup>8</sup>. Party preference scores are measured by asking respondents to indicate for each party the probability of ever voting for it on a scale from 1 ('not at all probable') to 10 ('very probable'). For exposure to newspapers and TV news – the independent variables, dummies are included for regular exposure<sup>9</sup> to

8 Party preferences are treated as dependent variables in this study, while media exposure is treated as independent. This does not imply that I have expectations about the causality of the two variables. I am just interested in the multiple relationship between these variables and take  $R^2$  as a valid indicator for that. For this purpose, I could also have treated media exposure as dependent and party preferences as independent variables, which would yield about the same results.

9 Regular exposure: once a week or more.

each of the national newspapers and TV news programs<sup>10</sup>. A score of one indicates regular exposure; zero indicates no (regular) exposure. Only those newspapers and TV news programs that have a substantial audience<sup>11</sup> in the sample are included in the analysis<sup>12</sup>. The calculation of the MPP variable is inspired by the measure for the strength of socio-political cleavages used by Franklin (1992). He calculated a weighted mean of explained variances for party preference scales on variables of social structure.

Party preference scores are regressed on media exposure variables for each party in every political system. After doing this for all parties, I calculate a weighted mean of adjusted explained variances in proportion to each party's strength (measured by electoral success).<sup>13</sup> I weighted the mean in order to avoid that a small, communist party for example (for which the preference may be quite strongly correlated with media use) weighs as much in the MPP measure as a broad, liberal party. Not weighting would result in bias caused by small parties and news media that are not very broadly used. By averaging the MPP scores of all parties, we ensure that the values of MPP are not dependent upon the number of parties in each country. Since the values now range between zero<sup>14</sup> (no media-party parallelism) and one hundred (maximum media-party parallelism), in each country, the values can be compared. In practice, a value of 100 is not possible to obtain, since media audiences are overlapping. Appendix C describes the whole procedure using Austria as an example.

### Research method and data

To investigate the hypotheses presented above, the study compares relatively similar political systems, namely the 15 states that were members of the EU in 1999. Participation in the European Parliament elections of 1999 indicates the level of voter turnout, the dependent variable in this study. These are elections to the same institution, held in the same week in all member states. This makes the data comparable. Nevertheless, turnout levels vary from a low 24% in the UK to 90% in Belgium. In addition, it is known that other factors play an important role in turnout to the European elections. The most important one is the perception that the EU is a 'good thing' (e.g., Niedermayer, 1990). Moreover, at the aggregate level, the coincidence of local, regional or general elections, as

<sup>10</sup> Scale variables would yield more specific information; unfortunately, this information was not available in the dataset.

<sup>11</sup> Substantial audience: 5% of the sample or more.

<sup>12</sup> Regional and local newspapers and TV news broadcasts are not included, for they do not have a substantial reach in the samples. Excluding these media, however, is not likely to harm the results for there is evidence that local or regional newspapers usually have less partisan contents because they usually try to maximize their audiences (Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt, 1998; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This is also likely to be true for local TV news.

<sup>13</sup> Weighting is done according to the percentage of votes obtained at national parliament elections because this is people's major frame of reference with respect to the party system (Oppenhuis, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> Practically, it may even take a value below zero if the relationship between media use and party preferences is smaller than one would expect on the basis of chance.

well as the presence of a compulsory voting law, increase participation levels at European elections (Niedermayer, 1990; Oppenhuis, 1995; Van der Eijk & Franklin, 1996). To avoid misspecifying the model, I included these variables in my study as controls.

All analyses are based on data from the European Election Study 1999. This large-scale telephone survey includes citizens of age 18 and over in all EU-member states within three and a half weeks after the election to the European Parliament. The data set contains information on political attitudes and preferences, electoral behavior, media use, and socio-demographic characteristics. The dataset yields 13,549 respondents<sup>15</sup> in the 15 EU-member states<sup>16</sup>. General information on the dataset, including non-response, can be found in Appendix A. Question wordings of the variables used in this study can be found in Appendix B.

To answer the three hypotheses stated above, the study applies multiple regression analyses explaining turnout at two levels<sup>17</sup>. Firstly, the study connects aggregate levels of participation to the MPP variable for the EU elections in 1999. This is an N=16 analysis (the 15 EU member states, and Belgium is divided into two separate political/media-systems<sup>18</sup>), explaining turnout levels. Secondly, the study explains self-reported participation in the EU elections in 1999 by the MPP variable ( $n = 13,549$ ). By adding variables that are known to affect voting participation, I control for possible misattributions of explanatory power to the MPP variable. Moreover, at the individual level of analysis, I can test the interaction effect of hypothesis 2.

In order to test the validity of the MPP variable and the model, I will conduct several tests that I describe below. I will conduct these tests to avoid misinterpretation of the results, and to exclude rivaling interpretations.

First, I conduct a jack-knife test, in order to conclude whether results are dependent on one specific outlying country. In such a test, the model is estimated sixteen times, each time leaving one country out. If the findings are robust, the same results should be found each time a single country is left out. If this will be the case, the findings are robust to a significant extent.

Second, I control for habitual voting. The MPP effect on participation might be spurious, caused by habitual voting. In other words: reading a specific newspaper is a habit, which is associated with the habit of voting for a specific party, but it has nothing to do with any media effect. In order to test for this, I calculated the relationship between the strength of party identification and the party sympathy score for those who voted for this

15  $n =$  approx. 500 for the smaller countries;  $n =$  approx. 1000 for the bigger countries. Exception: Italy ( $n = 3708$ ).

16 Data are weighted so that it generates a turnout and distribution of party choice that is identical to the actual results of the June 1999 European election in the respective countries. Subsequently, all country samples are weighted to an equal size so that the effective number of cases is equal for each of the systems (see also Appendix H).

17 One might object to this that there is a form of circularity in the analyses: people who don't vote will score low on the 'probability to vote'-questions, and they will score '0' for participation. However, there is no such a circularity problem in this case as the 'probability to vote'-questions are used for calculating the aggregate variable of MPP (which is the same for everybody in one country).

18 Due to a lack of cases, Northern Ireland is missing in the results.

party, in a similar way MPP was calculated<sup>19</sup>. This resulted in a contextual measure based on adjusted explained variances, for each political system. This variable is then used in analyses to control for habitual voting.

Third, another rivaling interpretation could be that MPP manifests the strength of socio-political cleavages in a country, an argument also made by Hallin & Mancini (2004) and Kleinnijenhuis & Scholten (1989). The existence of strong socio-political cleavages may on the one hand lead to strong media-party parallelism, and on the other hand it may enhance participation levels. Conversely, the existence of weak socio-political cleavages may weaken MPP and turnout levels. In order to control for this, I calculated a variable indicating the strength of socio-political cleavages, in a similar way MPP was calculated<sup>20</sup> (see also Franklin, 1992, for a similar application of explained variances for calculating socio-political cleavages). I will control the MPP effects for the socio-political cleavages variable. If the MPP effects hold after inclusion of this variable, the explanation of MPP being a manifestation of cleavages, is eliminated.

Fourth, the interaction effect of parallelism and interest might be due to an aggregation artefact. It is possible that the interaction effect is due to different distributions of the MPP variable among subgroups. This would also indicate that MPP is not a system-level variable. In order to test whether this were to be the case, I calculated MPP values per system, for each level of interest separately. In order to conclude whether results are due to an aggregation artefact, the original MPP variable will be calculated for each level of interest separately. These results should be similar to the results of the aggregate MPP measure. In other words, no large fluctuations per group should appear. In addition, I will replace the MPP variable in the multivariate analysis of participation by the MPP per level. If results of this analysis are comparable to the original results, indications of an aggregation artefact are eliminated.

## Results

Table 1 describes the level of media-party parallelism for each system. It also indicates the level of press-party parallelism and of television-party parallelism. The table shows a considerable range of values: from a low MPP value of 1.0 for Germany, which indicates that parallelism is almost nil, to a high value of 19.9 for Greece, denoting that in this country, there exists strong parallelism between media use and party preferences. On average, MPP is 7.1; the median is 6.5. The results indicate that the dichotomy used by Hallin & Mancini (2004) can be nuanced. There are large differences between countries that fall into the same category in their study.

<sup>19</sup> The party preference score is regressed on the strength of party attachment, for those who voted for this party at the last national parliamentary election. This is successively done for each party. The adjusted explained variances are weighted according to the size of the party in question at the last national parliamentary elections.

<sup>20</sup> 4 dummies for self-reported social class, 2 dummies for urbanization, 4 dummies for religion, 4 dummies for religion, 4 dummies for attendance of religious services, 1 dummy for membership of trade union.

**Table 1** Press-Party Parallelism (PPP), Television-Party Parallelism (TPP), and Media-Party Parallelism (MPP) per system, 1999

Political system	PPP	TPP	MPP
Greece	16.6	6.0	19.9
Italy	7.2	8.0	14.4
Spain	8.0	3.5	10.5
Flanders	4.3	6.9	10.0
Denmark	8.3	0.6	9.1
France	5.4	3.2	7.5
Britain	6.9	0.5	7.1
Sweden	6.0	0.6	6.8
Portugal	1.9	3.0	6.2
Netherlands	5.2	0.8	5.7
Austria	4.4	1.0	5.3
Luxembourg	3.2	1.5	4.5
Wallonia	2.2	-0.7	2.4
Finland	1.9	-0.0	1.8
Ireland	1.4	0.1	1.6
Germany	0.7	0.2	1.0
<b>Mean</b>	5.2	2.2	7.1
<b>Median</b>	5.3	0.9	6.5

0 = no parallelism  
 100 = maximum parallelism

Media-party parallelism in Greece is very high, compared to other systems. The findings are in line with previous studies (Dimitras, 1997; Hallin & Mancini, 2004). In Germany, Finland, and Ireland, there is nearly no media-party parallelism. The finding for Ireland is according to expectations. In this country, political neutrality has come to be the typical stance of newspapers which are best described as catch-all media, cutting across the principal lines of division between the established political forces in society (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). For Finland, the findings are not surprising, either. In the mid-1990s, less than ten percent of circulation shares can be credited to the party press, which has mainly lost its role of political mobilization. Moreover, the party press tends to be read by a politically amorphous group (Salokangas, 1999). The findings for Germany, however, are somewhat more unexpected. Although the bivariate associations between media exposure and party preferences<sup>21</sup> are conform expectations – readers of ‘left-wing’ newspapers are significantly more likely to vote for leftist parties; readers of ‘right-wing’ papers are significantly more likely to do so for rightist parties (for studies on party-political leanings of German newspapers, see, e.g., Patterson & Donsbach, 1993) – these associations are weak and do not add up in large explained variances. For example, a German

<sup>21</sup> Tables with regression coefficients explaining party preferences by media use are not printed here. Tables are obtainable from the author on request.

newspaper such as *Bild* is known for its clear politically rightist contents, but in terms of party preferences its readers are not significantly different from the other respondents in the sample<sup>22</sup>. Evidently, German media audiences are relatively amorphous groups in party-political terms. The MPP values of the other systems are situated somewhere in between the strong level of parallelism in Greece and the weak level in Germany.

In general, press-party parallelism (mean = 5.2) is stronger than television news-party parallelism (mean = 2.2), as expected (H3a). In the majority of countries, television-party parallelism is nearly absent. The exceptions are Italy, Greece, and Flanders, where a quite distinct association exists between exposure to specific TV news programs on the one hand, and party preferences on the other. In general, however, the weak associations indicate that television news programs try to appeal to broader publics – in party-political terms – than newspapers. PPP is strongest in Greece, Italy, Spain, and Denmark, and the least apparent in Germany, Portugal, Finland and Ireland.

The second step in the analysis is to look at the relationship between parallelism and electoral participation. According to expectations, the first model (see Table 2) indicates that MPP affects turnout levels positively<sup>23</sup>. Subsequently, turnout will be regressed on MPP, controlling for two variables that have a considerable impact on turnout levels in European elections. These two factors are the presence of compulsory voting laws (in Belgium and Luxembourg) and the concurrence of European elections with national, regional, or local elections (in Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg and Spain) (Niedermayer, 1990). Not considering these factors might result in a misattribution of explanatory power to the MPP variable.

**Table 2** OLS regression of electoral participation on systemic characteristics, EP elections 1999

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	S.E.	b	S.E.
MPP	1.240	1.124	1.593**	.443
Concurrent national elections			17.334**	5.565
Compulsory voting			32.333**	6.978
Constant	45.566**	9.654	30.498**	4.092
Variance explained (R <sup>2</sup> / adjusted R <sup>2</sup> )	.080 / .014		.882 / .853	
N	16		16	

\* p<.05

\*\* p<.01

<sup>22</sup> This is so, except for the beta-coefficients of reading *Bild* on the preference of the Green party (-.098, significant at 1% level) and that of the extreme right party Republikaner (.124, significant at 1% level). However, due to the relatively small sizes of these parties (respectively 6.7 and 1.8% of the votes at the last national parliamentary election), the effects do not elevate the (weighted) measure of MPP much.

<sup>23</sup> The effect is not significant. However, we deal not with a sample but with the whole population in the analyses of Table 2, which makes statistical significance redundant.

The second model represented in Table 2 presents a regression analysis for electoral participation, controlling for these two variables. It shows that MPP still has a significant positive effect on voting turnout levels. The *b* of 1.59 indicates that on average, turnout will rise with 1.59% if the MPP variable increases one percent. As expected, concurrent national elections and the presence of compulsory voting laws have a positive impact on turnout. The three variables explain 88% of the variation in turnout.

By modeling electoral participation at the individual level, one can control for factors such as media use and political attitudes. Modeling participation at the individual level also allows testing the hypothesized interaction effect of MPP with political interest. Table 3 presents the results of a logistic regression for electoral participation. This model controls for variables at the individual level, and at the contextual level for compulsory voting and concurrent national elections. This model includes MPP and other contextual characteristics along with socio-demographics, attitudinal, and media use variables, which I inserted as controls. The strength of parallelism affects participation positively and significantly, as expected. In systems with strong media-party parallelism, citizens are – *ceteris paribus* – more inclined to turn out and vote than in systems with weak levels of MPP. The positive, significant parameter of political interest indicates that participation increases as interest rises. The (negative) effect for the interaction of MPP and interest, however, implies that the effects of MPP diminish as interest increases. The effects of MPP are largest for low levels of interest.

Concerning the controls, age and attendance of religious services have a positive significant effect on participation, as could be expected (Oppenhuis, 1995). Three other variables, political interest (e.g., Brady, 1995), party attachment (e.g., Schmitt, 1990) and internal political efficacy (e.g., Almond, 1963; McLeod, 1999), affect participation positively, according to expectations. Persons, who think the EU is a ‘good thing’, also turn out in larger numbers, compared to the rest. This latter variable is important to control for, as former studies have shown that pro-European attitudes can increase participation at European elections (e.g., Niedermayer, 1990). The findings in this study support his conclusion. The positive, significant parameter of the variable indicates that people with pro-European attitudes are more prone to vote.

The results also indicate that compulsory voting and concurrent national elections affect participation positively, which is in conformity with the results in Table 2. The model explains 27.0% of individual-level variation in participation. The model without the main and interaction-effect of parallelism accounts for 23.7% of the variance in participation. This implies a non-negligible increase in explanatory power when adding the main and interaction-effect of parallelism to more traditional explanatory variables. In conclusion, media-party parallelism has a positive and significant effect on voter turnout (H1). For persons with low levels of political interest, MPP has a larger effect on electoral participation than for persons with high levels of interest.

**Table 3** Logistic regression of electoral participation on individual and systemic characteristics, EP elections 1999

Independent variables	b (S.E.)
Socio-demographic variables	
Age	.018 (.002)**
Attend religious services	.207 (.025)**
Attitudinal and media exposure- variables	
Individual media exposure	3.714 (.246)**
Political interest	.487 (.037)**
Party attachment	.305 (.031)**
Internal efficacy	-.358 (.033)**
EU good thing	.264 (.057)**
MPP and other contextual variables	
MPP	.116 (.007)**
MPP*interest	-.028 (.009)**
Compulsory voting	2.761 (.166)**
Concurrent national elections	.956 (.074)**
Constant	34.553 (3.883)**
Variance explained (McFadden pseudo R <sup>2</sup> )	0.270
Variance explained without MPP and MPP*interest	0.237
n	8988

\* p&lt;.05

\*\* p&lt;.01

A variable that includes the effects of all newspaper and television news programs that one is regularly exposed to<sup>24</sup> is included in the model. It serves as a control for the parallelism (interaction-) effects, by avoiding the misattribution of explanatory power to the contextual (MPP-) variable that in reality belongs to individual media exposure-variables. The effect of the individual-level media exposure variable by itself is not of interest for this paper, and it does not tell us anything about any effects of specific media exposure on voter participation, but having used it as a control was required to arrive at a well-specified model.

How much of the MPP effect is due to television and how much of it is due to the press? I replicated the analyses of Table 3 with the main and interaction effect of parallelism separately for television and press, based on the values of TPP and PPP reported in

<sup>24</sup> A pairwise regression per system is conducted for electoral participation on regular exposure to different newspaper titles and television news programs. For each case an unstandardized predicted value ( $\hat{y}$ ) is calculated. Subsequently, the mean of the  $\hat{y}$ -hats (per system) is subtracted from the unstandardized predicted value. This results in a variable with a mean of zero.

Table 1. For press-party parallelism (PPP), this resulted in a pseudo  $R^2$  of .26<sup>25</sup>. The effects of the parameters were nearly identical to those in Table 3. Moreover, the effects of PPP and interest\*PPP on participation were exceedingly similar: .11 (S.E.=.01;  $p < .01$ ) and -.04 (S.E.=.01;  $p < .01$ ) respectively.

To test the effect of TPP, I estimated the same model of Table 3 with the values of TPP. The results are quite contrary to expectations (H3b): pseudo  $R^2$  is .28, and the effect of TPP is rather strong, namely .35 (S.E.=.02;  $p < .01$ ). The interaction effect with interest is not significant ( $b = -.03$ ; S.E.=.02). According to these results, it seems that parallelism in the television news environment is just as important for getting out the vote as press-party parallelism. Although the extent to which television-party parallelism exists is small in many countries, its effect on voter participation is positive and significant. The interaction with political interest, however, is not significant<sup>26</sup>.

### Robustness tests and validating analyses

#### JACK-KNIFE TEST

In order to eliminate the chance that the results are solely dependent on specific (outlying) media systems, I conducted a jack-knife test on the model in Table 3. This model was estimated 16 times, each time excluding one country from the analyses. The results are similar in all cases; pseudo  $R^2$ 's are similar, the size and direction of MPP, and the size and direction of the interaction effect of interest\*MPP. The interaction effect loses significance when either Germany or Greece were left out of the analysis ( $t = -.90$  if Germany is left out and  $-1.10$  if Greece is left out). However, the direction of the effect remains the same. The results indicate that not any specific (outlying) system distorts the coefficients. The overall conclusion is that the effects presented in Table 3 are highly robust.

#### HABITUAL VOTING

The results might partly represent differences in the role that habits play in the act of voting, as explained above. In contexts where MPP is high, party preferences might be stable on the basis of a routine or tradition. Instead of an MPP-effect, it might be this routine factor that impacts participation positively. In order to test for such a spurious habitual voting effect, I calculated a variable indicating the strength of habitual voting per context. Weighted explained variances for this variable – which is calculated as the association between party preference scores and party attachments for each party separately – vary from 3.05 percent in Wallonia to 13.25 percent in Denmark. If the variable

25 For expressing the quality of prediction in logistic models no single canonical measure exists. A number of pseudo  $R^2$  measures exists (as a 'real'  $R^2$  is undefined), all leading to different numerical results (Judge, Griffiths, Hill, Lütkepohl, & Lee, 1985). In all logistic analyses throughout this dissertation, I applied McFadden pseudo- $R^2$  coefficient, as it is the one most frequently used in the literature. It is calculated as  $1 - L1/L0$ , or, in words, one minus ((the log likelihood of the full model) divided by (the log likelihood of the "constant-only" model)) (McFadden, 1973).

26 This may be due to lacking power for this variable, as the variation in the TPP variable is very small.

is included in the regression equation in Table 2, the MPP effects are not affected. This result indicates that the MPP effect is not spuriously caused by habitual voting.

#### SOCIO-POLITICAL CLEAVAGES

Adding to the regression equation in Table 2 a variable that measures the strength of socio-political cleavages yields a significant effect ( $t_{\text{socio-political cleavages}}=2.28$ ;  $p<.05$ ). However, the main effect of MPP and the interaction effect of MPP and interest are not altered substantially by adding this contextual variable ( $t_{\text{MPP}}=17.60$  ( $p<.01$ );  $t_{\text{MPP*interest}}=-3.17$  ( $p<.01$ );  $R^2=.270$ ). This finding indicates that media-party parallelism is a contextual characteristic that cannot be reduced to other social or political cleavages in a country.

#### AGGREGATION ARTEFACT

MPP distributions between levels of interest do not differ significantly, indicating that there is no aggregation artefact and that MPP is a truly aggregate-level (contextual) variable. A replication of the analysis supports this: the model reported in Table 3 is re-estimated with MPP measured for different level of political interest, instead of the aggregate MPP variable. When MPP in the logit model in Table 3 is replaced by the 'MPP per interest level', the results do not differ much from those reported in Table 3. Explained variance of that model is .26 and the model estimates do not deviate much from the estimates of Table 3. More importantly, the main effect and interaction effect of MPP are nearly the same as reported in Table 3. The b's and standard errors are respectively .10 and .01 ( $p<.01$ ) for the main effect and -.03 and .01 ( $p<.01$ ) for the interaction effect. The fact that the results do not differ when MPP is measured for each group separately supports the notion of MPP being a system characteristic, and not an aggregation artefact.

#### Conclusion

This paper broadened the concept of press-party parallelism (Seymour-Ure, 1974) to media-party parallelism (MPP), and introduced a way to measure it. The measure reflects the extent to which party preferences can be explained by media usage. The results showed a considerable degree of variation between countries. In general, the association between newspaper reading and party preferences (press-party parallelism) is stronger than the relationship between TV news viewing and party preferences (television-party parallelism). H3a is accepted. Television news programs try to appeal to a broad public, whereas newspapers are more likely to focus to narrower groups, at least in some countries.

Media-party parallelism has a considerable positive impact on electoral participation, in line with expectations (H1). This effect is even stronger for those who are not interested in politics. These findings support H2. Levels of party-parallelism are, in most systems, much lower for television news than for newspapers, but the effect on participation is significant for both. H3b is rejected. This indicates that – contrary to expectations (e.g., (Schönbach, 1983) – television news is just as important as newspapers to mobilize citizens to take part in an election in contexts where news programs reflect partisan

leanings. Television news does matter for political participation, although there is no evidence that such an effect is stronger for the less politically involved persons.

According to Hallin & Mancini (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), journalistic practice in many European countries tends to change towards 'Anglo Saxon' and non-partisan styles. This would involve a strong separation of news and commentary and a diminished emphasis on partisan ideas and ideals and increased emphasis on neutral information and nonpartisan entertainment. There seems to be a trend towards catch-all-ism, favoring internal diversity over external (Hadenius & Weibull, 1999). Newspapers tend to blur their ideological identities and connections in order to appeal to as broad an audience as possible (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). The existence of such trends would diminish the partisanship of newspapers, which in turn tends to depress voter participation.

At the same time, voting patterns seem to become more volatile with an increasing number of floating voters. A process of cognitive mobilization makes that the functional need for partisan cues to guide voting behavior and to mobilize political involvement decreases (Dalton, 1996). Short-term election campaigns are getting more important than long-term partisan endorsements for getting out the vote (Dalton, McAllister, & Wattenberg, 2000; Lilleker, 2006). However, long-term partisan endorsements remain important for mobilizing citizens who are not politically interested, as was demonstrated in Table 3. Therefore, a decline of partisan leanings of newspapers (and media in general) may have detrimental effects on participation rates of the least-connected citizens, thus increasing the already existing gap between strong and weak interested segments of society.

