

# Loss of Parliamentary Control Due to Mediatization and Internationalization

A Longitudinal and Cross-sectional Analysis of Agenda-building  
in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands

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## **Abstract**

The central question in this study is whether the power of the media agenda over the political agenda has recently increased. The agenda-building dynamics are established using cross-country time series data on four issues, covering fifteen and eight years respectively of British and Dutch parliamentary debates and newspaper articles. Structural Equation Models show that the parliamentary agenda is more influenced by the media agenda than the other way around, and that the power balance has shifted even more in favour of the media. We additionally find that media power is especially associated with issues within the European domain. Our study contributes empirically to the 'mediatization' debate in an EU context, which is largely limited to the realm of theoretical speculation.

## Introduction

The reciprocity between the agenda of politicians and public opinion is a major theme in political science. Research results indicate that political parties adjust their policies to public opinion,<sup>1</sup> at least when public opinion is shifting away from the party's policy positions.<sup>2</sup> Conversely, public opinion is sensitive to events in the political arena, especially to statements by popular leaders,<sup>3</sup> at least when the issue at hand is considered to be important.<sup>4</sup>

It has long been recognized that the mass media play a vital role in forging the links between politicians and citizens in democratic societies.<sup>5</sup> Politicians, who are often ignorant of public preferences,<sup>6</sup> may scrutinize the media to obtain a proxy measure of the public mood. Citizens would hardly be

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Budge, 'A New Theory of Party Competition: Uncertainty, Ideology and Policy Equilibria Viewed Comparatively and Temporally'; *British Journal of Political Science*, 24 (1994), pp. 443-67; James A. Stimson, *Tides of Consent: How Opinion Movements Shape American Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> James Adams, Michael Clark, Lawrence Ezrow and Garrett Glasgow, 'Understanding Change and Stability in Party Ideologies: Do Parties Respond to Public Opinion or to Past Election Results?'; *British Journal of Political Science*, 34 (2004), pp. 589-610.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin I. Page, Robert Y. Shapiro and Gerald R. Dempsey, 'What Moves Public Opinion?'; *American Political Science Review*, 81 (1987), pp. 23-43.

<sup>4</sup> Mark N. Franklin and Christopher Wlezien, 'The Responsive Public: Issue Salience, Policy Change, and Preferences for European Unification'; *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 9 (1997), pp. 347-63.

<sup>5</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la Démocratie en Amérique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1840, 8th édition 1951).

<sup>6</sup> Paul Dekker and Peter Ester, 'Cognitieve Responsiviteit van de Politieke Elite in Nederland'; *Acta Politica*, 23 (1988), pp. 404-36.

aware of political policies and political performance were it not for the media,<sup>7</sup> with the exception of some highly obtrusive issues such as inflation and personal income. Freedom of the press ensures that citizens are allowed to use the media to express their agenda, but politicians will still use the media to promote their agenda. The media, however, do not act as a neutral transmitter but exert an autonomous influence, even with respect to social and economic facts<sup>8</sup>.

The first research question to be addressed in this article is who is leading whom in the dance between politicians and journalists. The next question concerns the change in this power play, also known as the 'mediatization' question. Research results suggest that politicians are increasingly losing their grip on the media, not only in terms of the negative and cynical tone of the news<sup>9</sup>, but also in terms of the issues that are worthy of public attention. <sup>10</sup> As will be illustrated in the literature review below, the empirical evidence regarding the first question on agenda-building is still inconclusive, whereas to our knowledge the second question about the change in the balance of power has not been addressed earlier with time series data. In general, agenda-building

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<sup>7</sup> Doris A. Graber, *Processing the news: How People Tame the Information Tide* (New York: Longman, 1988); Michael Delli Carpini and Scott Keeter, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> Marc J. Hetherington, 'The Media's Role in Forming Voters' National Economic Evaluations in 1992'; *American Journal of Political Science*, 40 (1996), pp. 372-95.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas E. Patterson, *Out of Order* (New York: Knopf, 1993); Joseph L. Cappella and Kathleen H. Jamieson, *Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> George C. Edwards III and B. Dan Wood, 'Who Influences Whom? The President, Congress and the Media'; *American Political Science Review*, 93 (1999), pp. 327-44.

studies have been confined to national settings, with most of these pertaining to the United States.

### **Agenda-setting and agenda-building**

Agenda-setting and agenda-building is about influencing the topics of the discussions, the agenda, of other actors.<sup>11</sup> The majority of agenda-setting studies have aimed at clarifying when, how and to what degree the agenda of the mass media influences the agenda of citizens.<sup>12</sup> In addition to early studies showing that the media agenda 'primes' issues that are used by citizens to evaluate political candidates,<sup>13</sup> much work has been done recently to tackle the question of how the media agenda moderates the effects of social and economic cues on

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, 'The Agenda-setting Function of Mass Media'; *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36 (1972), pp. 176-87; Stephen Ansolabehere and Shanto Iyengar, 'Riding the Wave and Claiming Ownership over Issues: the Joint Effects of Advertising and News Coverage in Campaigns'; *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 58 (1994), pp. 335-57; James Dearing and Everett Rogers, *Agenda-Setting* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996); Jeffrey Peake, 'Presidential Agenda Setting in Foreign Policy'; *Political research quarterly*, 5 (2001), pp. 69-86; Stuart Soroka, 'Issue Attributes and Agenda-setting by Media, the Public and Policymakers in Canada'; *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 14(2002), pp. 264-85.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher J. Anderson and Jun Ishii, 'The Political Economy of Election Outcomes in Japan'; *British Journal of Political Science*, 27 (1997), pp. 619-59; André Blais, Mathieu Turgeon, Elisabeth Gidengil, Neil Nevitte and Richard Nadeau, 'Which Matters Most? Comparing the Impact of Issues and the Economy in American, British and Canadian Elections'; *British Journal of Political Science*, 34 (2004), pp. 555-63.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Jon Krosnick and Don Kinder, 'Altering the Foundations of Support for the President through Priming'; *American Political Science Review*, 84 (1990), pp. 497-512.

public preferences and retrospective voting<sup>14</sup>. The sub-area of studies directly linking the political agenda and the media agenda is commonly referred to as agenda-building.<sup>15</sup> Quoting Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester: ‘... a crucial dimension of power is the ability to create public events. And since access to media is an essential ingredient in creating and sustaining the realities of publics, a study of such access is simultaneously a study of power relationships’.<sup>16</sup> We will continue by presenting an inventory of agenda-building literature to understand how these power relationships are perceived to be distributed. Arguments and studies will be compared that either favour politically controlled agenda-building relations or leave room for a powerful media agenda.

#### THE CASE FOR TOP-DOWN AGENDA-BUILDING

There are sound reasons for expecting that the political agenda will dominate the media agenda, which may be labelled as top-down agenda-building.

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, Dhavan V. Shah, Mark D. Watts, David Domke, David P. Fan and Michael Fibison, ‘News Coverage, Economic Cues, and the Public’s Presidential Preferences, 1984-1996’; *The Journal of Politics*, 61 (1999), pp. 914-43.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Roger Cobb, Jenny Ross and Marc Ross, ‘Agenda Building as a Comparative Political Process’; *The American Political Science Review*, 70 (1976), pp. 126-38; Kurt Lang and Gladys E. Lang, ‘Watergate: an Exploration of the Agenda-Building Process’, in G. Cleveland Wilhoit and Harold De Bock, eds, *Mass Communication Review Yearbook* (Beverly Hills (CA): SAGE Publications, 1981), pp. 447-68; Rainer Mathes and Barbara Pfetsch, ‘The Role of the Alternative Press in the Agenda-building Process: Spill-over Effects and Media Opinion Leadership’; *European Journal of Communication*, 6 (1991), pp. 33-62.

<sup>16</sup> Harvey Molotch and Marilyn Lester, ‘Accidental News: The Great Oil Spill as Local Occurrence and National Event’; *The American Journal of Sociology*, 81 (1975), pp. 235-60.

Firstly, political leaders of national or even international allure are newsworthy.<sup>17</sup> This is explained by Galtung and Ruge: ‘The more threatening or beneficial the consequences that their actions may have for citizens, and the greater number of citizens likely to be affected, the more ‘relevant’ they are’.<sup>18</sup> Commitment to the routines of objective reporting will result in top-down agenda-building as the natural state of affairs.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, journalists consider it part of their democratic task to favour the viewpoints of the political elite, who are, after all, the people’s representatives.<sup>20</sup> On a more practical level, democratic institutions provide an efficient and constant source of information, since officials have learned to anticipate media’s demands and to be available.<sup>21</sup>

Secondly, political elites often prefer secrecy when little popular credit can be gained. This aspect is tackled in Bachrach’s and Baratz’s analysis of the

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<sup>17</sup> See, for example, David L. Altheide and Robert P. Snow, *Media Logic* (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1979); W. Lance Bennett, ‘Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States’; *Journal of Communication*, 40 (1990), pp. 103-125; W. Lance Bennett, ‘Cracking the News Code: Some Rules That Journalists Live By’, in Shanto Iyengar and Richard Reeves, eds, *Do The Media Govern? Politicians, Voters, and Reporters in America* (Thousand Oaks (CA): SAGE Publications Inc, 1997), pp. 103-17.

<sup>18</sup> Johan Galtung and Mari H. Ruge, ‘The Structure of Foreign News: the Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers’; *Journal of Peace Research*, 2 (1965), pp. 64-91.

<sup>19</sup> Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content* (New York: Longman, 1991); Daniel Hallin, *We Keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>20</sup> Bennett, ‘Toward a Theory of Press-State Relations in the United States’.

<sup>21</sup> Shoemaker and Reese, *Mediating the Message: Theories of Influences on Mass Media Content*.

non-decision.<sup>22</sup> Power is exercised just as much by succeeding in deliberately failing to act upon an issue forwarded by others, as it is by introducing an active policy on other issues.

Research results to back up this top-down relationship are easily found.<sup>23</sup> John Kingdon<sup>24</sup> sees the process as cyclic, with the media in the most dependent position. A study by Kleinnijenhuis and Rietberg<sup>25</sup> shows an unchallenged political agenda on economical issues in the Netherlands from the early 1980s. Flemming, Wood and Bohte<sup>26</sup> found dominance of the US institutional agenda, especially of Congress. Time series analysis of interactions between parties and media during electoral campaigns in the UK<sup>27</sup> and the Netherlands<sup>28</sup> reveal that, in the final count, parties set the media agenda.

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Bachrach and Morton S. Baratz, *Power and Poverty: Theory and Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

<sup>23</sup> See also, Dearing and Rogers, *Agenda-Setting*.

<sup>24</sup> John W. Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Ewald Rietberg and Jan Kleinnijenhuis, 'Parties, Media, the Public and the Economy: Patterns of Societal Agenda-setting'; *European Journal of Political Research*, 28 (1995), pp. 95-118.

<sup>26</sup> Roy B. Flemming, B. Dan Wood and John Bohte, 'Attention to Issues in a System of Separated Powers: The Macrodynamics of American Policy Agendas'; *The Journal of Politics*, 61 (1999), pp. 76-108.

<sup>27</sup> Heinz Brandenburg, 'Who follows Whom? The Impact of Parties on Media Agenda Formation in the 1997 British General Election Campaign', *Harvard Journal of Press and Politics*, 7 (2002), pp. 34-54

<sup>28</sup> Jan Kleinnijenhuis, 'Het Publiek Volgt Media die de Politiek Volgen', in: Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, *Medialogica* (Den Haag: SDU, 2003), pp. 151-212.

## THE CASE FOR MEDIACRATIC AGENDA-BUILDING

Good reasons can be found for expecting the media agenda to affect the policy agenda as well, which may be labelled as 'mediacrat' agenda-building.

Firstly, politicians are urged to pay court to the media because they need favourable attention and the media have superior access to mass audiences. Politicians are forced to react to issues that arise in the media, because they risk being accused of inaction if they fail to deliver solutions quickly.<sup>29</sup> Instead, politicians aim at taking the lead in public discussion,<sup>30</sup> which means defining the terms through which the issue is understood. Politicians are eager to withhold this instrument of power from their opponents, as well as from 'investigative' journalists. Paradoxically, the wish to take the lead results in adjusting issue priorities to the taste of the media for conflict, drama and horse race.<sup>31</sup>

Secondly, media's reliance on their own values of news production makes for choices and interpretations that are not always in the politician's best interest. Since political actors often disagree about the priorities of issues, the media are

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<sup>29</sup> Timothy Cook, *Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Yanovitzky, 'Effects of News Coverage on Policy Attention and Actions: A Closer Look Into the Media-Policy Connection'.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Ian Budge and Dennis Farlie, 'Party Competition-Selective Emphasis or Direct Confrontation? An Alternative View with Data', in Hans Daalder and Peter Mair, eds, *West European Party Systems: Continuity & Change* (London: Sage, 1983), pp. 276-305; Guy Peters, 'Agenda-setting in the European Union', in Jeffery Richardson, eds, *European Union: Power and Policy-making* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 61-75; Christiane Eilders, 'Conflict and Consonance in Media Opinion: Political Positions of Five German Quality Newspapers'; *European Journal of Communication*, 17 (2002), 25-63.

<sup>31</sup> Cobb, Ross and Ross, 'Agenda Building as a Comparative Political Process'.

enabled to focus on controversial issues that are expected to deliver a continuing stream of political conflicts and political drama.

Empirical support for media's hold over the political agenda can already be found in Kurt and Gladys Lang's Watergate study, where they address the role of obtrusive, controversial and continuous issues.<sup>32</sup> Studies by Wood and Peake, Edwards and Wood, and Soroka all establish, by means of time series analysis, a dominant media agenda for unobtrusive issues that contain an element of drama, often within the domain of foreign policy.<sup>33</sup> For other examples, we refer to Baumgartner, Jones and Leech<sup>34</sup>, and also Yanovitzky<sup>35</sup>.

#### THE BALANCE OF POWER

The bottom line of the close link between journalists and officials is the mutual affirmation of their 'raison-d'être'. The privileges of officials in the media are a repetitive symbolic reinforcement of the legitimacy of their authority'.<sup>36</sup> Likewise, officials' authority rubs off on the credibility of a story. In the words of Gadi

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<sup>32</sup> Lang and Lang, 'Watergate: an Exploration of the Agenda-Building Process'.

<sup>33</sup> B. Dan Wood and Jeffrey Peake, 'The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Agenda Setting'; *American Political Science Review*, 92 (1998), pp. 173-84; Edwards III and Wood, 'Who Influences Whom? The President, Congress, and the Media'; Soroka, 'Issue attributes and agenda-setting by media, the public and policymakers in Canada'; Stuart N. Soroka, 'Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy'; *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 8 (2003), pp. 27-48.

<sup>34</sup> Baumgartner, Jones and Leech, 'Media Attention and the Congressional Agenda'.

<sup>35</sup> Yanovitzky, 'Effects of News Coverage on Policy Attention and Actions: A Closer Look Into the Media-Policy Connection'.

<sup>36</sup> Hallin, *We keep America on Top of the World: Television Journalism and the Public Sphere*.

Wolfsfeld: 'Power is a question of relative dependence: who needs whom more at the time of transaction?'<sup>37</sup>

When drawing up the balance on the basis of agenda-building literature, with arguments and evidence either in favour of parliamentary control or making media influence also plausible, the debate about the distribution of power turns out to be inconclusive. It suggests that within the agenda-building process, there is room for influence from the media agenda, beside parliamentary control, thus giving rise to hypothesis one.

H1 Not only does the parliamentary agenda influence the media agenda, but the parliamentary agenda is also influenced by the media agenda.

### **Mediatization**

Mediatization of political debate implies both politicians' increased responsiveness to media's caprices and politicians' loss of monopoly over news coverage. It can easily be expressed in terms of agenda-building.

H2 The influence of the media agenda on the parliamentary agenda has increased relative to the influence in the reverse direction.

Speculations on the mediatization of politics are widespread<sup>38</sup>. Three groups of arguments will be discussed here.

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<sup>37</sup> Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Gianpietro Mazzoleni and Winfried Schulz, 'Mediatization' of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?'; *Political Communication*, 16 (1999), pp. 247-61; Tamir Sheafer, 'Charismatic Skill and Media Legitimacy: an Actor-centered Approach to Understanding the Political Communication Competition'; *Communication Research*, 28 (2001), pp. 711-36; Hans

Firstly, the ICT-revolution of the last decades has led to rapid expansion of communication equipment, ranging from satellite television to the Blackberry, resulting in scoops and deadlines almost hourly. The news turns into old hat sooner, tempting politicians to give up their own agenda and to link up with the media agenda of the day so as to remain newsworthy.

Secondly, with the emergence of liberalized and highly competitive news markets, journalists' party loyalty gave way to a media logic.<sup>39</sup> No longer can news organisations spend the lion's share of their resources on tiresome and complicated politics. According to Blumler & Gurevitch and De Vreese<sup>40</sup> the sacerdotal style of reporting that prevailed in the 1980s, has been replaced by a pragmatic one in recent decades. Prudence, respect and integral reporting typified journalists' 'sacerdotal' approach to politicians.<sup>41</sup> The political agenda was the central point of reference for the daily news agenda.<sup>42</sup> According to the pragmatic approach, only the criteria of news selection determine whether an

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M. Kepplinger, 'Mediatization of Politics: Theory and Data'; *Journal of Communication*, 52 (2002), pp. 972-86.

<sup>39</sup> Altheide and Snow, *Media Logic*; Mazzoleni and Schulz, 'Mediatization of Politics: A Challenge for Democracy?'

<sup>40</sup> Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, *The Crisis of Public Communication* (London: Routledge, 1995); Claes H. De Vreese, 'Election Coverage – New Directions for Public Broadcasting: The Netherlands and Beyond'; *European Journal of Communication*, 16 (2001), pp. 155-80.

<sup>41</sup> Ralph Negrine, 'Parliaments and the Media: a Changing Relationship?' *European Journal of Communication*, 14 (1999), pp. 325-52; Thomas E. Patterson, 'Bad News, Bad Governance'; *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 546 (1996), pp. 97-108.

<sup>42</sup> Kent Asp, 'The Struggle for the Agenda: Party Agenda, Media Agenda, and Voter Agenda in the 1979 Swedish Election Campaign'; *Communication Research*, 10 (1983), pp. 333-35.

event deserves a story. This means less attention enjoyed by politicians and more journalistic commentary.<sup>43</sup> To ensure the attention of the public, while posing as a critical watchdog, journalists dwell on scandals and conflicts.<sup>44</sup>

Thirdly, institutional changes that weaken the formal power of national politicians, such as European integration, will decrease the efficacy with which they can build the national media agenda. If the EU decides on an issue, national politicians may make less of an effort to build the media agenda. Likewise, journalists will consider them less often as a relevant source, just as Bennett argues with his 'trail of power', '... when decisive actors emerge outside of domestic political institutions, journalists can be expected to bring their voices and views into the stories'.<sup>45</sup> Empirical studies support this link between weakened domestic leadership concerning foreign policy issues and a stronger media agenda.<sup>46</sup> According to Wood and Peake '... the foreign policy agenda operates in the context of a continually unfolding international drama. The drama depends on the media for production and interpretation. The president [... ] has no script and often must respond in impromptu fashion to media interpretations'.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Negrine, 'Parliaments and the Media'; De Vreese, 'Election Coverage – New Directions for Public Broadcasting: The Netherlands and Beyond'.

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Patterson, ; Bad News, Bad Governance'.

<sup>45</sup> Bennett, 'Cracking the News Code: Some Rules That Journalists Live By', pp. 114.

<sup>46</sup> Wood and Peake, 'The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Agenda Setting'; Edwards III and Wood, 'Who Influences Whom? The President, Congress, and the Media'; Soroka, 'Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy'.

<sup>47</sup> Wood and Peake, 'The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Agenda Setting', pp. 182.

This third line of reasoning leads to an issue-specific hypothesis. But the obvious assumption to address first is whether European integration matters at all to agenda-building. If so, we expect politicians to increasingly be dealing with identical problems, as well as greater convergence of the agendas of European media.

H3 A greater convergence of the national political agendas as well as of the national media agendas will emerge in EU member states.

The notion that especially politicians who are fully in charge feel entitled to press hard to build the media agenda, whereas journalists are easily convinced to follow, will become manifest in different distributions of power across different issues.

H4 Especially for issues with a strong European dimension, media agenda-building power increases *vis-à-vis* parliamentary agenda-building power.

Note that we do not expect a total eradication of the national political agenda.

The EU still suffers from an information deficit.<sup>48</sup> European decision-making is very complex and technocratic, rendering EU stories hardly appealing to the editors back home. It takes a long period of socialization before EU correspondents understand the proceedings themselves and become insiders.<sup>49</sup> Thus, less power of national politicians will not primarily result in less

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<sup>48</sup> Jürgen Gerhards, 'Westeuropäische Integration und die Schwierigkeiten der Entstehung einer europäischen Öffentlichkeit'; *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 22 (1993), pp. 96-110; Christoph Meyer, 'Political Legitimacy and the Invisibility of Politics: Exploring the European Union's Communication Deficit'; *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 37 (1999), pp. 617-39; Olivier Baisnée, 'The Rise and Fall of the European Commission as an Information Source'; Paper presented at the ECPR workshops (Grenoble, 2001).

<sup>49</sup> Baisnée, 'The Rise and Fall of the European Commission as an Information Source'.

appearance in the news, as one would expect<sup>50</sup>, but in increased responsiveness to the national media agenda.

## **Method**

### SELECTION OF NATIONS, ISSUES, POLITICAL ACTORS AND MEDIA

The United Kingdom and the Netherlands will be compared, being European states at different ends of the scale with respect to the transfer of decision-making power to the EU. The UK, which is still one of Europe's most influential nations, entered the EU only in 1973. Reluctance towards further integration is still manifest.<sup>51</sup> The Netherlands has supported the European cause all along the line. The question of whether or not to go along with new EU initiatives has never unleashed real political or public discussion<sup>52</sup> until the EU referendum in 2005.

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<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Galtung and Ruge, 'The Structure of Foreign News: the Presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in Four Norwegian Newspapers'; Jenny Kitzinger and Jacquie Reilly, 'The Rise and Fall of Risk Reporting: media coverage of human genetic research, 'False Memory Syndrome' and 'Mad Cow Disease''; *European Journal of Communication*, 12 (1997), pp. 319-50; Klaus Schönbach, Jan de Ridder and Edmund Lauf, 'Politicians on TV news: Getting attention in Dutch and German election campaigns'; *European Journal of Political Research*, 39 (2001), pp. 519-31.

<sup>51</sup> Andrew Geddes, *The European Union and British Politics* (Basingstoke [etc], Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

<sup>52</sup> Claes de Vreese, *Framing Europe: Television News and European Integration* (Amsterdam: Aksant, 2003); Jochen Peter, *Why European TV news matters: a cross-nationally comparative analysis of TV news about the European Union and its effects* (University of Amsterdam (UvA): Amsterdam, 2003).

The choice for the four issue domains is based on the extent to which the decision-making power has been transferred to the European level.<sup>53</sup> Two issues are typically EU-based: agriculture and environment (pillar one of the EU). Drugs policy is still dealt with on a national level. Immigration is stuck somewhat in between national and European decision-making. It is classed in pillar three of the EU and steps towards a common policy have been taken with the Schengen agreements (1990). We consider this an issue 'in transition'.

We use parliamentary debates to measure the political agenda. Parliamentary activity is generally considered a good approximation of the political agenda, since Parliament is the place where current problems are debated and where ministers are held accountable.<sup>54</sup> British debates were collected from 22-11-1988 to 31-12-2003.<sup>55</sup> Data on the media agenda was retrieved during the same period from three national quality newspapers with high circulation and different political orientation: the Times (conservative), the Guardian (progressive) and the Independent (progressive, liberal democrat).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Liesbeth Hooghe and Gary Marks, *Multi-Level Governance and European integration* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, inc., 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Baumgartner, Jones and Leech, 'Media Attention and the Congressional Agenda'; Edwards III and Wood, 'Who Influences Whom? The President, Congress, and the Media'.

<sup>55</sup> Downloaded from the *Hansard* internet site, the official report of both British Houses.

<sup>56</sup> Downloaded from Lexis Nexis. The Independent and Independent on Sunday start in 1989 and 1990 respectively. To deal with the non-simultaneous start of the three newspapers and two Sunday-editions, a weight of 1,5 was appointed to media hits in years with two newspapers, so as to prevent an artificial increase in the amount of publications. Likewise, hits for the Times and the Independent were multiplied with 6/7 as soon as their Sunday-editions were introduced.

Dutch parliamentary debates<sup>57</sup> and newspaper articles<sup>58</sup> were gathered from 1995 to 2003, from three high-circulation quality papers: NRC Handelsblad (liberal), Algemeen Dagblad (popular), De Volkskrant (social democrat). Document selection is based on whether several rather broad issue-specific search terms figure within the text as a whole, followed by several checks for relevance.<sup>59</sup> In total, 260,363 British and 140,778 Dutch newspaper articles were analyzed. Since debates do not naturally consist of comparable sections, the number of days on which one of the issues was discussed is a more meaningful unit: 2,349 days of British debates and 333 days of Dutch debates were included<sup>60</sup>.

#### INFORMATION EXTRACTION BY MEANS OF AUTOMATED CONTENT ANALYSIS

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<sup>57</sup> Dutch parliamentary debates were obtained from the publishing house for government documentation, SDU.

<sup>58</sup> Downloaded from Lexis Nexis.

<sup>59</sup> British debates were integrally downloaded. Dutch debates were selected according to the SDU classification system based on policy domains. Relevance was established afterwards by checking for the presence of the same search terms. Afterwards all documents were checked by including extra restrictions on keywords that appeared too ambiguous (filter 1), and another filter in case of media data that throws out unwanted articles, for example sports and entertainment (filter 2).

<sup>60</sup> The clear difference between the number of British and Dutch debates is due to the fact that the publishing house SDU selected only debates in which an issue was the primary subject, while British debates were selected when one of the keywords was mentioned. The British debates include more peripheral hits, which we could have excluded, thereby reducing the number of British debates. Since data inspection suggested that this would matter little for the results, we chose not to do so.

We conceptualize an agenda as the amount of attention paid to an issue within one time unit. To define the issues, an elaborate and hierarchical list of keywords was drawn up. The number of keywords per issue varies between 43 and 78.<sup>61</sup>

Attention is made operative as the number of times a keyword figures in the texts. In the case of newspapers, the sum of the number of hits in the article's body and twice the number of hits in the headline or leader is calculated.<sup>62</sup> Due to the lack of comparable structure in the debates, every hit is treated equally. The square roots of the scores were used to decrease the influence of outliers on statistical tests and to render variables with a more 'normal' distribution.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> To avoid wrongful occurrences in the scores of attention, keywords were linked to conditions. A hit is only included in the score if its condition is met. Examples are: 'keyword *not within 5 words of* ...', 'keyword *and (... or...)*'. The list is available from the authors.

<sup>62</sup> This decision is based on the assumption that a keyword in a headline or leader indicates special devotion to this issue. Such a hit is assigned a greater weight than a hit in the sidelines.

<sup>63</sup> Both the data on the media agenda and the political agenda are skewed: a few months of extreme attention for an issue are accompanied by many months of virtually no attention. One of the usual solutions to handle skewed data is taking logs. The hypotheses that were tested in this paper are also upheld with a log-transformation ( $x' = \log(x+1)/\log(2)$ ), except for significance of a few separate parameters. Actually, a log transformation reduces the skewness too much. Box-Cox-tests, which rest on the transformation  $x' = \log(x^{\lambda} - 1) / \lambda$  showed that the optimal  $\lambda$  is  $\lambda = .02$  and  $\lambda = .19$  for the political agenda in the UK and the Netherlands respectively, and  $\lambda = .43$  and  $\lambda = .19$  for the media agenda in these countries. A log transformation assumes that  $\lambda = 0$ . Moreover, a log transformation considers the difference between only one article and no article as being just as important as a news wave that doubles the attention when attention is already high. This means that taking logs reformulates the agenda-building question as the question of whether politicians and journalists are silent at the same time. We opted for the same square root transformation ( $\lambda = 0.5$ ) of the political agenda and the media agenda, which results in almost optimal normal distributions.

## MODELLING STRATEGY

Because comparisons between agenda-building models for different nations, issues and periods are required to test the hypotheses, the separate models should be parsimonious. Therefore, we will present structural equation models rather than more inductive models – e.g. vector autoregression (VAR) models - with large numbers of parameters to fit the peculiarities of the data. A further advantage of structural equation models over inductive models is that the latter are less well suited to incorporate instantaneous causation, whereas politicians and media often influence each other within the duration of one time unit. However, the specification of the ultimate structural equation models was based on diagnostic tests and inductive models, notably VAR models.<sup>64</sup>

Augmented Dickey-Fuller tests were performed to test whether the media agenda and the political agenda for each of the four issues in each of the two countries are stationary (see Table 1).

Table 1 about here

With monthly data (one time lag) the null hypothesis of a unit root in the agendas was consistently rejected, almost always at the 1% level of significance (once at the 5% level). Therefore, it was unnecessary to difference the data to render them stationary. A further conclusion is that VAR models rather than vector error correction models would be appropriate to obtain an informed opinion about the specification of the structural equation models.

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<sup>64</sup> Lütkepohl and Krätzig, *Applied Time Series Econometrics*, chapter 5.

A thorny question is whether the interactions between the agendas of media and politicians should be modelled with daily, weekly, monthly or even yearly data. Although politicians and journalists interact on a daily basis, they are not always able to respond immediately to each other, due to a variety of constraints such as hot news on other issues. VAR models were tested for monthly and weekly data, with the media and the political agenda as dependent variables and their prior values as independent variables.<sup>65</sup> The models with weekly data, with lags of one to twelve weeks and yearly lags of 48 to 56 weeks, exhibit a quite chaotic pattern of significant lagged mutual influences.<sup>66</sup> But these models also demonstrate that most significant influences are located within a time span of eight weeks, and in a zone from 50 to 54 weeks. The latter indicates a yearly pattern in both agendas, due to holidays and the vested rhythm of the parliamentary year (e.g. speeches from the throne). Monthly VAR models largely corresponded to the weekly results, since most effects from the previous month and the year before were significant.<sup>67</sup> Hence, a monthly time-unit was chosen.

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<sup>65</sup> The results from the Vector Autoregression Models are available from the authors.

<sup>66</sup> Lütkepohl and Krätzig, *Applied Time Series Econometrics*, pp. 159.

<sup>67</sup> This 'qualitative' argument to prefer monthly over weekly data is easily supported with diagnostic tests. The residuals of VAR-models based on weekly and monthly data were compared on remaining serial correlation (Breusch-Godfrey) and autoregressive conditional heteroscedasticity (Engle's ARCH). We compared weekly and monthly data both with one lag and a yearly seasonal lag (of 52 weeks, or 12 months). Moving from weekly to monthly data reduced the number of series (issue x agenda) with negative serial autocorrelation in the residuals. Also ARCH disappears in all but two of the series with monthly data. Serial autocorrelation and heteroscedasticity in the residuals decrease the efficiency of parameter estimates (see, for example, Paul Pennings, Hans Keman and Jan Kleinnijenhuis, *Doing Research in Political Science*, London/New York: Sage, 2005 (second ed.). The results are available from the authors.

Granger causality tests on weekly and monthly data confirmed the hypothesis that the agendas influenced each other in many cases.

With monthly data, the instantaneous correlation between the agendas was always larger than the cross-lagged correlations between the agendas, indicating causation within one month, which is not modelled in VAR models. Informed by the VAR models and the high instantaneous correlations between the agendas, a parsimonious structural equation model is easily given:

$$\text{parl}(t) = a \text{ med}(t) + b \text{ parl}(t-1) + c \text{ parl}(t-12)$$

$$\text{med}(t) = d \text{ parl}(t) + e \text{ med}(t-1) + f \text{ med}(t-12)$$

In these equations 'parl' indicates the parliamentary agenda, 'med' is the media agenda, '(t)' at present time, '(t-1)' with a lag of one month, '(t-12)' with a lag of 12 months. We used the program LISREL 8 to provide maximum likelihood estimates of the parameters. To test whether the actual variance-covariance matrices could have been expected from the estimated parameters of the model, Absolute Fit Indices chi-square and RMSEA will be presented, as well as Comparative Fit Indices (CFI)<sup>68</sup>. It should be noted that this pair of equations entails that the cross-lagged influences of the agendas on each other are completely mediated by the present values of the agendas. If these equations do not fit the data, then cross-lagged influences of one month are added to the model.<sup>69</sup> Statistically insignificant coefficients were dropped when retesting the models, so as to increase the parsimony of the presented models even further.

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<sup>68</sup> See, for example, Anne Boomsma, 'Reporting Analyses of Covariance Structures'; *Structural Equation Modelling*, 7 (2000), pp. 461-83.

<sup>69</sup> A model with all cross-lagged influences in addition to the instantaneous influences would be unidentified. Only significant cross-lagged influences will be added to the basic model, while deleting insignificant influences. This modelling strategy always converged in one model.

The UK data cover 182 months per issue (728 in total). Dutch data cover 99 months per issue (396 in total). The Dutch data were split into two equal parts to compare the flows of influence through time. The British data were split into three parts, of which the two most recent periods are equal to the Dutch periods.

## **Results**

### CHRONOLOGY

To obtain a better understanding of the news and political discussion, and whether their focus is international or domestic, we start with a brief description of the events that caused the most noticeable peaks on the agendas.<sup>70</sup> Figures 1 and 2 show media (top lines) and parliamentary attention (bottom lines) for each of the issues, with the Dutch issues directly below the British equivalents. The letters above the lines indicate the events described below. Visual inspection immediately reveals the interconnectedness of Parliament and the media, with the peaks on both agendas roughly coinciding on many occasions. We deduce the many (notably summer) holidays of the Parliaments from the recurring absence of debates. Comparing the graphs vertically offers an initial illustration of convergence between countries, relevant to H3, while comparing horizontally demonstrates the different developments of the issues (H5).

Figure 1 about here

*British Agriculture* - In February 1990 (a) newspapers and Parliament discuss ways to compensate farmers affected by Mad Cow Disease, one of which is the devaluation of the European Community's (EC) green pound. March 1996 (b)

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<sup>70</sup> For a more extensive overview, see Lonneke van Noije, 2006 (Forthcoming).

marks the beginning of public hysteria and the British beef ban by the EC, when the link between BSE and Variant Creutzfeld Jacob Disease is established. In March 2001 (c) Foot-and-Mouth Disease has spread across the country.

*Dutch Agriculture* - February 1997 (d) is about the outbreak of swine fever.

November 2000 (e) sees a revival of public fear for beef, with new BSE cases in France and one in the Netherlands. Fear that British Foot-and-Mouth will reach the continent rages across Europe and becomes reality in late March 2001 (f).

Note that these crises in agriculture may have affected national territories, but were fundamentally European events, with EU-wide discussions, policies and even disputes (e.g. French rejection of British beef). To a lesser extent, we will also find a European/international element in the environmental events hereafter, appearing both on the British and on the Dutch agendas.

*British Environment* – Both the media and Parliament discuss plans to privatize electricity and water in July 1989 (a), as well Thatcher's input at the G7 summit in Paris. In May 1992 (b) the press anticipates the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro held on June 1, discussed in Parliament in June. News in December 1997 (c) is devoted to the UN Conference on Climate Change in Kyoto. In October and November 2000 (d) the southeast of the UK faces outbreaks of severe flooding.

*Dutch Environment* – In December 1997 (e) the Kyoto conference is on the media's agenda only. A parliamentary committee is formed in October 1998 (f) to investigate mysteries surrounding an airplane crash 'de Bijlmerramp' in 1992. Both Parliament and the press show interest in the The Hague Climate Summit in November 2000 (g). In November 2002 Parliament deals with the liberalization of the electricity market and the fate of the nuclear power plant Borssele.

Figure 2 about here

*British Drugs* – The summer of 1989 (a) marks the US ‘War on Drugs’ in Colombia, in which the UK is personally involved with British servicemen accused of training Colombian hitmen. British politicians fear a ‘crack explosion’ in Britain. The Panama crisis explains the parliamentary peak in December 1989 (b). In June 1996 (c) Parliament debates strategies for fighting drugs misuse. A discussion on the reclassification of cannabis hits the news in July 2001 (d), while only appearing in the House of Commons with the official announcement by Minister Blunkett in November 2001 (e).

*Dutch Drugs* – In April 1996 (f) the conclusions of a parliamentary investigation of dubious police methods to fight drugs networks, reached both agendas. November 1996 (g) marks an escalation of the French-Dutch soft drugs dispute. In February 2002 (h) politics fights ‘cocaine swallowers’ from the Antilles.

*British Immigration* – In November 1991 (a) media and Parliament focus on Vietnamese boat people in Hong Kong. Institutional racism figures high on both agendas in February 1999 (b) after the murder of teenager Stephen Lawrence. News and debate in September 2001 (c) is first devoted to tension between the UK and France about illegal immigration via the Eurotunnel, but shortly afterwards it is all about the terrorist attacks in New York.

*Dutch Immigration* – In September 1997 (d) ‘white illegals’ figure high on both agendas, when the Turkish tailor Gümüs is forced to leave the country. The imprisonment of PKK leader Öcalan in Turkey and subsequent protests by Kurdish immigrants explain peaks in February 1999 (e). In April 2002 (f) the national elections in May are being organized, in which right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn has pushed the immigration issue to prominence on the campaign

agenda and is controversially successful. On May 6 (g) Pim Fortuyn is murdered, causing unprecedented national outrage.

#### RESULTS OF THE STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELS

A first general finding is that the parliamentary agenda shows a clear yearly pattern, while the media agenda shows a stronger short-term autoregression. To put it differently, politicians behave like old watchdogs that return to their homes, whereas the media resemble a pack of hounds that briefly follow their current interests. In this results section we will concentrate on the question of who influences whom, rather than on the time variant structure of the influence process. Overall, the fit of the models is very satisfactory in all cases with CFI near 1, RMSEA smaller than 0.05 and p-value much higher than 0.05 (see Table 2). Moreover, the differences from one model to another are significant.<sup>71</sup>

*Overall agenda-building (H1)* - On account of our first hypothesis that agenda-building involves both parliamentary and media control, figures 3 and 4 visualize the overall British and Dutch agenda-building processes respectively, tested over the whole research period, taking the four issues together.

Figure 3 about here

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<sup>71</sup> The Chi<sup>2</sup>-test to compare subpopulations (in Lisrel) rejects the null-hypothesis that the models are essentially equal. The difference between the coefficients through time and across issues is statistically significant (UK period one versus period three: Chi<sup>2</sup>=59.83, p=0.00, RMSEA=0.16, CFI=0.91/UK all issues: Chi<sup>2</sup>=172.52, p=0.00, RMSEA=0.19, CFI=0.74/NL period one versus period two: Chi<sup>2</sup>= 18.17, p=0.03, RMSEA=0.07, CFI=0.98/NL all issues: Chi<sup>2</sup>=90.85, p=0.00, RMSEA=0.17, CFI=0.55). Note that this test requires the p-value to be smaller than 0.05, whereas a p-value greater than 0.05 indicates a satisfactory fit of a single model.

Figure 4 about here

In both countries, Parliament and the press do not appear to treat each other as an ultimate source for their agendas, as the modest crossover coefficients suggest. But despite the fair degree of independence displayed by both actors, as is also underlined by the strong autoregressive component, in both countries there is still room for significant flows of crossover influence. These flows are indeed bi-directional in the United Kingdom, with a dominant media agenda. In the Netherlands there is no question of a balance of power in which both parties are represented. The media agenda is the only agenda that seems to matter. The models already indicate the independence and power (or rather the lack thereof) of the British and Dutch national democratic institutions, which at the same time touches on an inherent agenda-building question; which agenda is the dominant one? In both countries the answer should be the media agenda.

*Agenda-building in time (H2)* - Has mediatization also left its traces in agenda-building? We move on to assess whether the balance of power is stable over time or whether British and Dutch media have tightened their grip on the parliamentary agenda.

Table 2 about here

In Table 2 the results for the British agenda-building process in periods one, two and three can be found. In the early days, we already see a considerable media influence on the parliamentary agenda ( $B_{media}=0.15$ ,  $p=0.53$ ,  $rmsea=0.00$ ), with no parliamentary influence at all. In the second period media dominance has

increased ( $B_{media}=0.19$ ,  $p=0.67$ ,  $rmsea=0.00$ ), which is reinforced in period three. Significant parliamentary influence is absent in all models. British MPs seem highly and increasingly sensitive to the daily whims of the media, while journalists take no notice of the interests of these politicians.

Turning to the Dutch situation, the trend points in the same direction, although the shift is more drastic. The years 1995 up to 1999, period one, present a picture in which Parliament and the media manifest no interest in one another whatsoever (Table 2). From 2000 onwards, the media have seized power over Parliament, while the reverse influence remains absent. Parliament has become highly responsive to events that appear in the news. This trend both in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands makes one think that in these democracies, the collective interests of the people have come to be promoted by their political representatives only to the extent that they happen to coincide with news values. Hypothesis two is supported: British and Dutch media have strengthened their control over the parliamentary agenda.

*Agenda convergence (H3)* - In order to test whether politics and the news in Europe have indeed come to face shared concerns, the correlations between the British and Dutch political agendas and media agendas in period two and period three were compared. The parliamentary agendas have become more alike, with the correlation coefficient rising from 0.28 ( $n=196$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) to 0.47 ( $n=200$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). An even stronger indication of an emerging European public sphere is the increased convergence of British and Dutch media agendas, with the correlation increasing from 0.46 ( $n=196$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) in period two to 0.65 ( $n=200$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) in period three. Both shifts towards agenda convergence are significant (? parl:  $p=0.03$ , ? media:  $p=0.01$ ). Media appear at least equally sensitive to the European setting of politics as Parliaments do.

*Agenda-building across issues (H4)* - On account of H4, we test the agenda-building model for each issue separately (Table 2). In both countries, the results for the issues agriculture and drugs confirm our expectations that the media have less grip on the political agenda of domestic issues than on the political agenda of European issues. In the UK, both EU issues (agriculture and environment) display strong media dominance, whereas every trace of influence disappears for the drugs issue. Still, British Parliament fails to set the media agenda on this domestic issue. The Dutch media largely instigate public discussion on agriculture. In contrast, Parliament convincingly initiates public discussion on drugs.

The results concerning Dutch environment are not in line with hypothesis four. Since it is a European issue, we would expect a strong media agenda compared to the parliament agenda. However, parliamentary influence is exceptionally strong. Inspection of the data on this issue suggests that high-key events largely concerned domestic matters, such as the parliamentary enquiry (1998/1999) into the medical consequences of the Bijlmer air crash. Even during the UN Climate Conference of 2001, an international event, an authoritative news source was safeguarded at the national level: the Dutch minister of Environment was president of the UN forum on climate change. So, while formally speaking environment should be classified as a European issue, it may well have been the national reality of the events that made the difference.

We defined immigration as an issue in transition, transcending the boundaries of domestic or European politics. We expect the media agenda to be less dominant than in the cases of agriculture or environment, but to be more influential than in the case of drugs. It is true, for both countries, that media's position is stronger for the immigration issue than for the drugs issue. In fact,

media's position is surprisingly strong. Apparently, solely focussing on the formal, national level of decision-making of this issue underestimates the news dynamics at play. It is very likely that the issue triggers strong media dominance, because of the exceptional human-interest value and public involvement associated with immigration and integration affairs. The media give the public what it desires, adopting a proactive attitude in search of news stories. Politicians, who are not in a position to ignore strong public feelings, may find it very hard not to adjust to insistent journalists. However, it is also possible that the attempts at the EU level to internationalize this policy area, already incorporated in EU' pillar three, were enough to breach media's reliance on familiar sources back home. Worries about immigration policies or sentiments in neighbouring countries have often become the centre of European-wide debate. We only have to think of international the reactions evoked by the political successes of Jörg Haider in Austria, of Jean-Marie Le Pen in France and of Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands.

## **Discussion**

Much literature is devoted to the omnipresence of the media in modern society and the possible trivialization of politics. In this study we bring a uniquely extensive dataset to the fore to empirically tackle the question of whether media control over politics has indeed expanded in recent times. These data comprise parliamentary debates and newspaper articles on the issues of agriculture, environment, drugs and immigration, covering a period of fifteen years for the United Kingdom and eight years for the Netherlands. While many agenda-building studies are theoretical assessments, and empirical studies use longitudinal data to reconstruct agenda-building as a 'once and for all' model, we

applied longitudinal and cross-sectional data to also assess shifts in the balance of power through time, and differences across countries and issues.

Our first hypothesis states that in British and Dutch agenda-building not only the parliamentary agenda but also the news media agenda succeeds in influencing the other. While the agendas exert a mutual influence in the UK, the Dutch media agenda does not undergo influence from the Parliamentary agenda. Thus, media influence on the parliamentary agenda is undeniable.

Next, we hypothesized that the power balance has shifted in favour of the media agenda (H2). This was convincingly confirmed in both countries. Both British and Dutch media gained considerable control over the parliamentary agenda, while parliamentary influence remains absent.

Hypothesis three predicts increased convergence among the political agendas and the media agendas in European countries as an outcome of the processes of mediatization and internationalization. This was backed up for the British and Dutch parliamentary agendas, as well as for both media agendas. This is a first indication that European integration makes a difference to agenda-building and that a European public sphere may be emerging after all.

Proceeding with the argument of possible EU impact, we expected a stronger media agenda or a weaker parliamentary agenda when decisions are made at the European level (H4). This was confirmed for all issues except for Dutch environment. Here, Parliament clearly dominated the media agenda. Furthermore, the level of media power in the case of immigration, the 'issue in transition', was stronger than anticipated. This reminds us that news selection criteria other than the level of national autonomy can still make the Dutch press turn to or turn away from the national Parliament.

At this point we may ask ourselves why certain recent studies did find a strong influence from the British and Dutch Parliaments on the media agenda?<sup>72</sup> First of all, the analyses were based on much shorter time periods. Media are less restrained in responding quickly to events than members of Parliament are. Longer time series allow us to also capture the delayed reaction from Parliament to the media agenda, while shorter designs are only sensitive to instant media reaction, thereby overestimating parliamentary dominance. Second, their focus was on agenda-building during elections. It is likely that elections trigger very different dynamics. Elections assure media attention. Since politicians have a lot at stake, their efforts to influence the media agenda may be more insistent than during the slack season. Distinguishing between election times and politics as usual may be fruitful for a full understanding of the agenda-building dynamics.

Our findings directly add to knowledge on the power play between media and politics, and the convergence of their agendas in a European context. However, agenda-setting studies are not designed to reveal underlying mechanisms empowering one or the other. This would be an interesting subject for follow-up research. Agenda-building literature has already indicated possible explanatory factors. In 1974 Molotch and Lester<sup>73</sup> suggested that accidents and scandals open the road for third parties to initiate publicity that is unwanted by the political elite. Others agree that the media dominance is enabled when

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<sup>72</sup> Heinz Brandenburg, 'Who follows Whom? The Impact of Parties on Media Agenda Formation in the 1997 British General Election Campaign', *Harvard Journal of Press and Politics*, 7 (2002), pp. 34-54; Jan Kleinnijenhuis, 'Het Publiek Volgt Media die de Politiek Volgen', in: Raad voor Maatschappelijke Ontwikkeling, *Medialogica* (Den Haag: SDU, 2003), pp. 151-212.

<sup>73</sup> Molotch and Lester, 'News as Purposive Behavior: on the strategic use of routine events, accidents, and scandals'.

political elites lose their grip on the situation, especially in the case of conflicts.<sup>74</sup> The latter is clearly proclaimed by Bennett's 'Indexing Hypothesis' and Hallin's 'Sphere of legitimate controversy'.<sup>75</sup> Our suggestion would be to focus on the role of conflict and drama in the empowerment of media in European countries, as may be derived from the work of Bennett, Wood and Peake and Soroka.<sup>76</sup>

Another suggestion would be to extend the analysis to more countries within the European Union. If our results were to hold for other countries, with their own parliamentary peculiarities and attitude towards the EU, this would be an important check on the robustness of the conclusions, although the limited availability of digitalised data, especially before 1995, poses a serious problem.

We should be aware that we used parliamentary debates rather than statements from government representatives outside Parliament as a measure of the political agenda. Therefore, we can not be sure that media have not become increasingly responsive to the government agenda. Since national executives are more involved in European politics, the convergence between the agendas of European media may be less a result of media's independent choice for a more international outlook, than of stronger government influence on the national

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<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Lang and Lang, 'Watergate: an Exploration of the Agenda-Building Process'; Edwards III and Wood, 'Who Influences Whom? The President, Congress, and the Media'; Piers Robinson, 'Theorizing the Influence of Media on World Politics: Models of Media Influence on Foreign Policy'; *European Journal of Communication*, 16 (2001), 523-44; Soroka, 'Issue attributes and agenda-setting by media, the public and policymakers in Canada'.

<sup>75</sup> Hallin, *We keep America on Top of the World: television journalism and the public sphere*; Bennett, 'Cracking the News Code: Some Rules That Journalists Live'.

<sup>76</sup> Bennett, 'Cracking the News Code: Some Rules That Journalists Live By'; Wood and Peake, 'The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Agenda Setting'; Soroka, 'Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy'.

media agenda. However, from this perspective our conclusion should be that Parliaments who ought to scrutinize our governments are not only under the spell of the media, but are also failing to control the national executives.

In conclusion, in this study it is established that national Parliaments exert remarkably little control over the national public debate. The media even seem to be pulling the strings increasingly. The media seem especially in control of the parliamentary agenda when decision-making authority moves away from the domestic level towards the European Union. Apparently, the media are prepared to follow national politicians with great power, but inclined to take the lead when politics becomes merely symbolic.

Table 1: Augmented Dickey-Fuller tests on stationarity of the time series

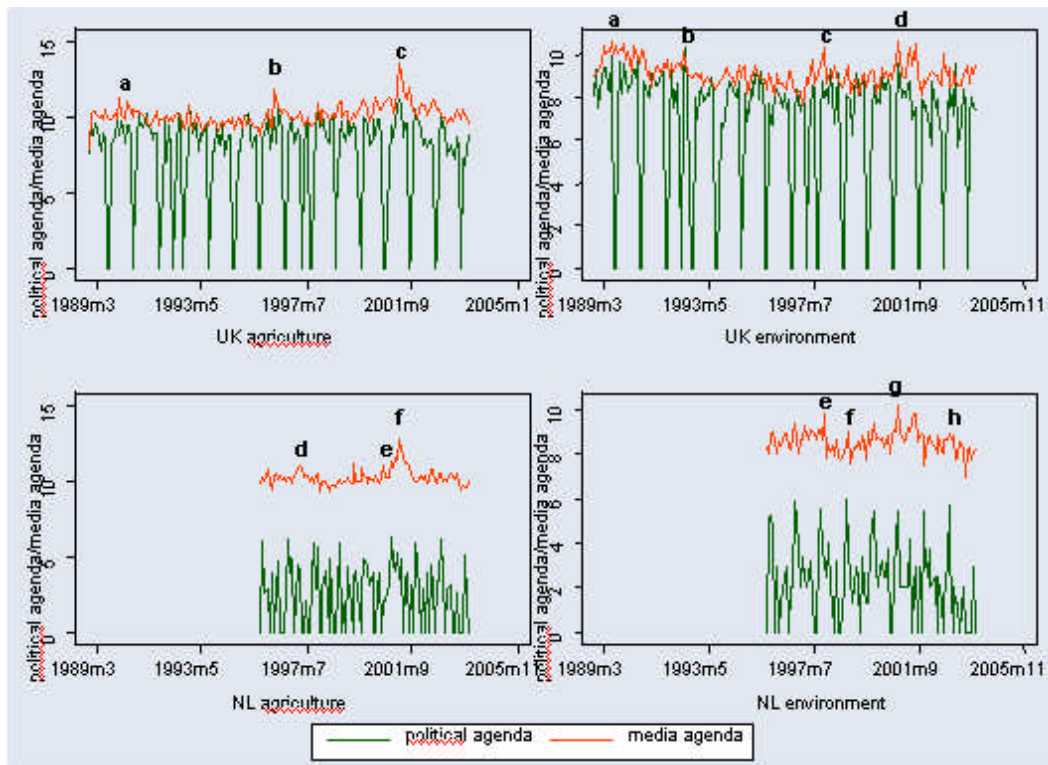
Test statistic (adf) in levels		
<i>United Kingdom</i> (N=182)	political agenda	media agenda
Agriculture	-9.942***	-5.606***
Environment	-10.555***	-4.799***
Drugs	-9.701***	-5.091***
Immigration	-9.155***	-6.430***
<i>Netherlands</i> (N=99)	political agenda	media agenda
Agriculture	-6.951***	-3.278**
Environment	-6.820***	-4.938***
Drugs	-6.329***	-4.105***
Immigration	-6.862***	-4.796***

Notes: Cells contain results from the augmented Dickey Fuller tests, with a constant and no trend.

\*\*: $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*:  $p < 0.01$ . Critical values (5%/1%): -2.885/-3.483 (UK) and -2.892/-3.514 (NL)

STATA 8.0 was used for unit root tests.

Figure 1: Time series of parliamentary and media attention for Agriculture and Environment



Note s: To improve the legibility of the graphs, they were based on a log transformation of the original time series.

Figure 2: Time series of parliamentary and media attention for Drugs and Immigration

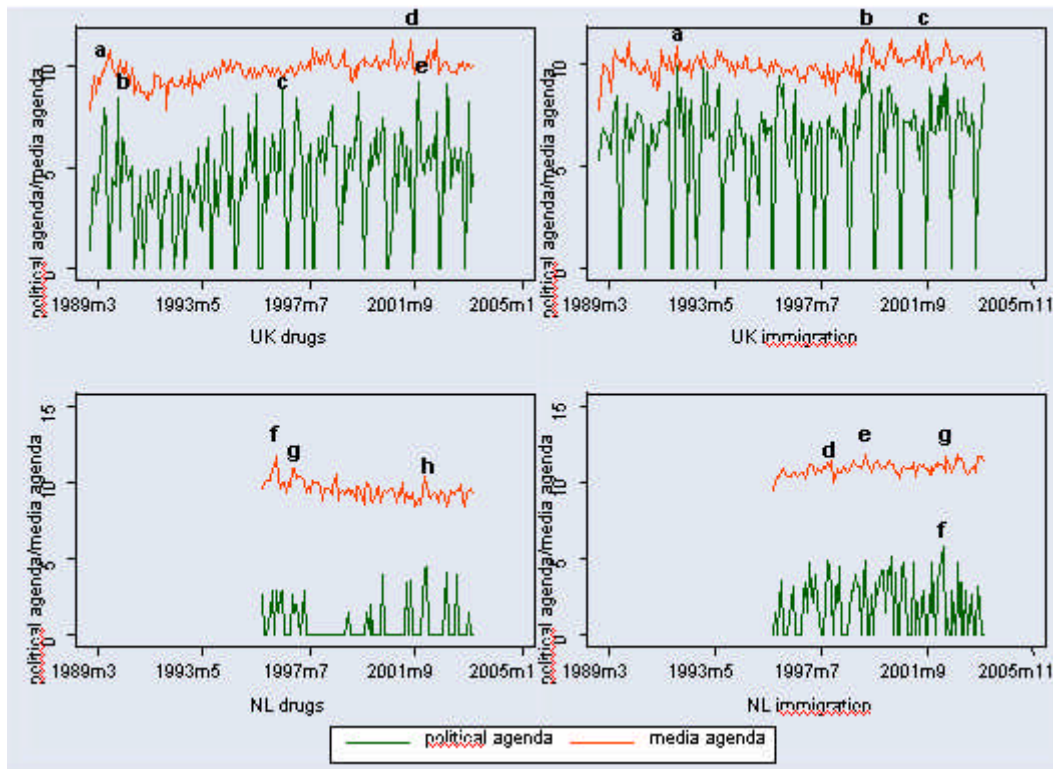
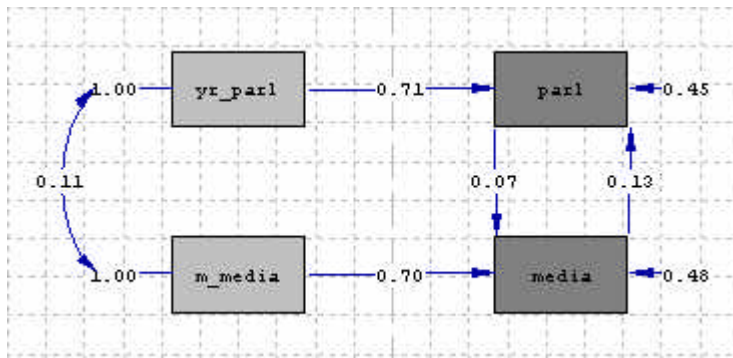
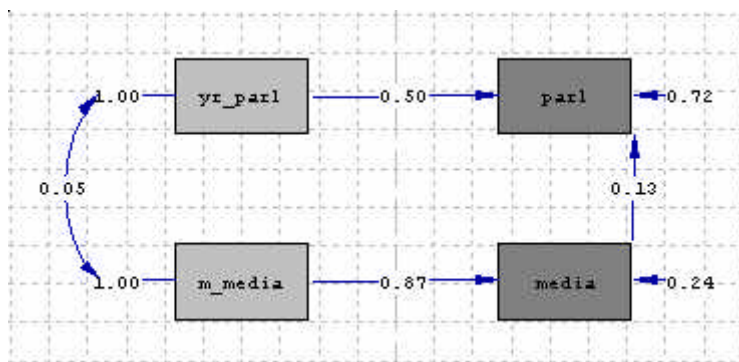


Figure 3: *British Agenda-building, whole period, all issues*



Notes: 'parl': the parliamentary agenda at time t; 'media': the media agenda at time t; 'yr\_parl': the parliamentary agenda with a lag of twelve months ( $\text{parl}(t-12)$ ); 'm\_media': the media agenda with a lag of one month ( $\text{media}(t-1)$ ).

Figure 4: Dutch Agenda-building, whole period, all issues



**Table 2: Structural Equation models with lags of one month and 12 months**

	Crossover influence		Autoregressive influence				Model Fit								
	P <sub>t</sub> ? b <sub>1</sub>	M <sub>t</sub> b <sub>2</sub>	M <sub>t-1</sub> ? b <sub>2</sub>	P <sub>t</sub>	P <sub>t-1/12</sub> ? a <sub>1</sub>	P <sub>t</sub>	M <sub>t-1/12</sub> ? a <sub>2</sub>	M <sub>t</sub>	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>p</sub>	R <sup>2</sup> <sub>m</sub>	χ <sup>2</sup>	p	df	rmsea	cfi
<i>United Kingdom</i>															
overall	0.07*		0.13*		0.71* (t-12)		0.70* (t-1)		0.55	0.52	0.01	0.92	1	0.00	1.00
1988-1995	-		0.15*		0.75* (t-12)		0.57* (t-1)		0.60	0.32	1.29	0.53	2	0.00	1.00
1995-1999	-		0.19*		0.72* (t-12)		0.67* (t-1)		0.56	0.46	0.79	0.67	2	0.00	1.00
2000-2003	-		0.20*		0.66* (t-12)		0.75* (t-1)		0.50	0.57	1.45	0.48	2	0.00	1.00
Agriculture	-		0.23*		0.66* (t-12)		0.69* (t-1)		0.50	0.48	2.27	0.32	2	0.03	1.00
Environment			0.14*		0.71* (t-12)		0.60* (t-1)		0.53	0.52	1.50	0.47	2	0.00	1.00
Drugs					0.37* (t-12)		0.49* (t-1)								
	-		-		0.14* (t-1)		0.27* (t-12)		0.17	0.39	6.73	0.24	5	0.04	0.99
Immigration	-		0.25*		0.46* (t-12)		0.48* (t-1)		0.28	0.23	0.39	0.82	2	0.00	1.00
<i>Netherlands</i>															
overall	-		0.13*		0.50* (t-12)		0.87* (t-1)		0.28	0.76	2.94	0.23	2	0.04	1.00
1995-1999	-		-		0.64* (t-12)		0.84* (t-1)		0.41	0.71	2.95	0.40	3	0.00	1.00
2000-2003			0.20*		0.38* (t-12)		0.89* (t-1)		0.20	0.79	1.79	0.41	2	0.00	1.00
Agriculture	-		0.24*		0.49* (t-12)		0.69* (t-1)		0.29	0.47	0.32	0.85	2	0.00	1.00
Environment					0.66* (t-12)										
	0.35*		-		0.16* (t-1)		0.26* (t-1)		0.50	0.21	0.58	0.90	3	0.00	1.00
Drugs	0.22*						0.55* (t-1)		-	0.39	0.00	1.00	0	0.00	1.00
Immigration			0.22*		0.22* (t-12)		0.48* (t-1)		0.10	0.23	0.63	0.73	2	0.00	1.00

Notes: 'P' and 'M' are the parliamentary and media agenda respectively. The brackets behind the coefficients indicate the lag which is responsible for the coefficients (t-1 or t-12). \* indicates statistical significance at p<.05 (one-sided, t>1.65).

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